

# PART I

## PHENOMENOLOGY

### POLITICAL ACTION AND THE DIALECTIC OF POWER AND VIOLENCE



# 1

## SELECTIONS FROM *THE HUMAN CONDITION*

Hannah Arendt

### Action

*All sorrows can be borne if you put them into a story or tell a story about them.*

ISAK DINESEN

Nam in omni actione principaliter intenditur ab agente, sive necessitate naturae sive voluntarie agat, propriam similitudinem explicare; unde fit quod omne agens, in quantum huiusmodi, delectatur, quia, cum omne quod est appetatum esse, ac in agendo agentis esse modammodo ampliatur, sequitur de necessitate delectatio. . . . Nihil igitur agit nisi tale existens quale patiens fieri debet.

*(For in every action what is primarily intended by the doer, whether he acts from natural necessity or out of free will, is the disclosure of his own image. Hence it comes about that every doer, in so far as he does, takes delight in doing; since everything that desires its own being, and since in action the being of the doer is somehow intensified, delight necessarily follows. . . . Thus, nothing acts unless [by acting] it makes patent its latent self.)*

DANTE

### 24 The Disclosure of the Agent in Speech and Action

Human plurality, the basic condition of both action and speech, has the twofold character of equality and distinction. If men were not equal, they could neither understand each other and those who came before them nor plan for the future and foresee the needs of those who will come after them. If men were not distinct, each human being distinguished from any other who is, was, or will ever be, they would need neither speech nor action to make themselves understood. Signs and sounds to communicate immediate, identical needs and wants would be enough.

Human distinctness is not the same as otherness – the curious quality of *alteritas* possessed by everything that is and therefore, in medieval philosophy, one of the four basic, universal characteristics of Being, transcending every particular quality. Otherness,

it is true, is an important aspect of plurality, the reason why all our definitions are distinctions, why we are unable to say what anything is without distinguishing it from something else. Otherness in its most abstract form is found only in the sheer multiplication of inorganic objects, whereas all organic life already shows variations and distinctions, even between specimens of the same species. But only man can express this distinction and distinguish himself, and only he can communicate himself and not merely something – thirst or hunger, affection or hostility or fear. In man, otherness, which he shares with everything that is, and distinctness, which he shares with everything alive, become uniqueness, and human plurality is the paradoxical plurality of unique beings.

Speech and action reveal this unique distinctness. Through them, men distinguish themselves instead of being merely distinct; they are the modes in which human beings appear to each other, not indeed as physical objects, but *qua* men. This appearance, as distinguished from mere bodily existence, rests on initiative, but it is an initiative from which no human being can refrain and still be human. This is true of no other activity in the *vita activa*. Men can very well live without laboring, they can force others to labor for them, and they can very well decide merely to use and enjoy the world of things without themselves adding a single useful object to it; the life of an exploiter or slaveholder and the life of a parasite may be unjust, but they certainly are human. A life without speech and without action, on the other hand – and this is the only way of life that in earnest has renounced all appearance and all vanity in the biblical sense of the word – is literally dead to the world; it has ceased to be a human life because it is no longer lived among men.

With word and deed we insert ourselves into the human world and this insertion is like a second birth, in which we confirm and take upon ourselves the naked fact of our original physical appearance. This insertion is not forced upon us by necessity, like labor, and it is not prompted by utility, like work. It may be stimulated by the presence of others whose company we may wish to join, but it is never conditioned by them; its impulse springs from the beginning which came into the world when we were born and to which we respond by beginning something new on our own initiative.<sup>1</sup> To act, in its most general sense, means to take an initiative, to begin (as the Greek word *archein*, “to begin,” “to lead,” and eventually “to rule,” indicates), to set something into motion (which is the original meaning of the Latin *agere*). Because they are *initium*, newcomers and beginners by virtue of birth, men take initiative, are prompted into action. [*Initium*] *ergo ut esset, creatus est homo, ante quem nullus fuit* (“that there be a beginning, man was created before whom there was nobody”), said Augustine in his political philosophy.<sup>2</sup> This beginning is not the same as the beginning of the world;<sup>3</sup> it is not the beginning of something but of somebody, who is a beginner himself. With the creation of man, the principle of beginning came into the world itself, which, of course, is only another way of saying that the principle of freedom was created when man was created but not before.

It is in the nature of beginning that something new is started which cannot be expected from whatever may have happened before. This character of startling unexpectedness is inherent in all beginnings and in all origins. Thus, the origin of life from inorganic matter is an infinite improbability of inorganic processes, as is the coming into being of the earth viewed from the standpoint of processes in the universe, or the evolution of human out of animal life. The new always happens against the overwhelming odds of statistical laws and their probability, which for all practical, everyday

purposes amounts to certainty; the new therefore always appears in the guise of a miracle. The fact that man is capable of action means that the unexpected can be expected from him, that he is able to perform what is infinitely improbable. And this again is possible only because each man is unique, so that with each birth something uniquely new comes into the world. With respect to this somebody who is unique it can be truly said that nobody was there before. If action as beginning corresponds to the fact of birth, if it is the actualization of the human condition of natality, then speech corresponds to the fact of distinctness and is the actualization of the human condition of plurality, that is, of living as a distinct and unique being among equals.

Action and speech are so closely related because the primordial and specifically human act must at the same time contain the answer to the question asked of every newcomer: "Who are you?" This disclosure of who somebody is, is implicit in both his words and his deeds; yet obviously the affinity between speech and revelation is much closer than that between action and revelation,<sup>4</sup> just as the affinity between action and beginning is closer than that between speech and beginning, although many, and even most acts, are performed in the manner of speech. Without the accompaniment of speech, at any rate, action would not only lose its revelatory character, but, and by the same token, it would lose its subject, as it were; not acting men but performing robots would achieve what, humanly speaking, would remain incomprehensible. Speechless action would no longer be action because there would no longer be an actor, and the actor, the doer of deeds, is possible only if he is at the same time the speaker of words. The action he begins is humanly disclosed by the word, and though his deed can be perceived in its brute physical appearance without verbal accompaniment, it becomes relevant only through the spoken word in which he identifies himself as the actor, announcing what he does, has done, and intends to do.

No other human performance requires speech to the same extent as action. In all other performances speech plays a subordinate role, as a means of communication or a mere accompaniment to something that could also be achieved in silence. It is true that speech is extremely useful as a means of communication and information, but as such it could be replaced by a sign language, which then might prove to be even more useful and expedient to convey certain meanings, as in mathematics and other scientific disciplines or in certain forms of teamwork. Thus, it is also true that man's capacity to act, and especially to act in concert, is extremely useful for purposes of self-defense or of pursuit of interests; but if nothing more were at stake here than to use action as a means to an end, it is obvious that the same end could be much more easily attained in mute violence, so that action seems a not very efficient substitute for violence, just as speech, from the viewpoint of sheer utility, seems an awkward substitute for sign language.

In acting and speaking, men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world, while their physical identities appear without any activity of their own in the unique shape of the body and sound of the voice. This disclosure of "who" in contradistinction to "what" somebody is – his qualities, gifts, talents, and shortcomings, which he may display or hide – is implicit in everything somebody says and does. It can be hidden only in complete silence and perfect passivity, but its disclosure can almost never be achieved as a wilful purpose, as though one possessed and could dispose of this "who" in the same manner he has and can dispose of his qualities. On the contrary, it is more than likely that the

“who,” which appears so clearly and unmistakably to others, remains hidden from the person himself, like the *daimōn* in Greek religion which accompanies each man throughout his life, always looking over his shoulder from behind and thus visible only to those he encounters.

This revelatory quality of speech and action comes to the fore where people are *with* others and neither for nor against them – that is, in sheer human togetherness. Although nobody knows whom he reveals when he discloses himself in deed or word, he must be willing to risk the disclosure, and this neither the doer of good works, who must be without self and preserve complete anonymity, nor the criminal, who must hide himself from others, can take upon themselves. Both are lonely figures, the one being for, the other against, all men; they, therefore, remain outside the pale of human intercourse and are, politically, marginal figures who usually enter the historical scene in times of corruption, disintegration, and political bankruptcy. Because of its inherent tendency to disclose the agent together with the act, action needs for its full appearance the shining brightness we once called glory, and which is possible only in the public realm.

Without the disclosure of the agent in the act, action loses its specific character and becomes one form of achievement among others. It is then indeed no less a means to an end than making is a means to produce an object. This happens whenever human togetherness is lost, that is, when people are only for or against other people, as for instance in modern warfare, where men go into action and use means of violence in order to achieve certain objectives for their own side and against the enemy. In these instances, which of course have always existed, speech becomes indeed “mere talk,” simply one more means toward the end, whether it serves to deceive the enemy or to dazzle everybody with propaganda; here words reveal nothing, disclosure comes only from the deed itself, and this achievement, like all other achievements, cannot disclose the “who,” the unique and distinct identity of the agent.

In these instances action has lost the quality through which it transcends mere productive activity, which, from the humble making of use objects to the inspired creation of art works, has no more meaning than is revealed in the finished product and does not intend to show more than is plainly visible at the end of the production process. Action without a name, a “who” attached to it, is meaningless, whereas an art work retains its relevance whether or not we know the master’s name. The monuments to the “Unknown Soldier” after World War I bear testimony to the then still existing need for glorification, for finding a “who,” an identifiable somebody whom four years of mass slaughter should have revealed. The frustration of this wish and the unwillingness to resign oneself to the brutal fact that the agent of the war was actually nobody inspired the erection of the monuments to the “unknown,” to all those whom the war had failed to make known and had robbed thereby, not of their achievement, but of their human dignity . . .

## 26 The Frailty of Human Affairs

Action, as distinguished from fabrication, is never possible in isolation; to be isolated is to be deprived of the capacity to act. Action and speech need the surrounding presence of nature for its material, and of a world in which to place the finished product.

Fabrication is surrounded by and in constant contact with the world: action and speech are surrounded by and in constant contact with the web of the acts and words of other men. The popular belief in a “strong man” who, isolated against others, owes his strength to his being alone is either sheer superstition, based on the delusion that we can “make” something in the realm of human affairs – “make” institutions or laws, for instance, as we make tables and chairs, or make men “better” or “worse”<sup>5</sup> – or it is conscious despair of all action, political and non-political, coupled with the utopian hope that it may be possible to treat men as one treats other “material.”<sup>6</sup> The strength the individual needs for every process of production becomes altogether worthless when action is at stake, regardless of whether this strength is intellectual or a matter of purely material force. History is full of examples of the impotence of the strong and superior man who does not know how to enlist the help, the co-acting of his fellow men. His failure is frequently blamed upon the fatal inferiority of the many and the resentment every outstanding person inspires in those who are mediocre. Yet true as such observations are bound to be, they do not touch the heart of the matter.

In order to illustrate what is at stake here we may remember that Greek and Latin, unlike the modern languages, contain two altogether different and yet interrelated words with which to designate the verb “to act.” To the two Greek verbs *archein* (“to begin,” “to lead,” finally “to rule”) and *prattein* (“to pass through,” “to achieve,” “to finish”) correspond the two Latin verbs *agere* (“to set into motion,” “to lead”) and *gerere* (whose original meaning is “to bear”).<sup>7</sup> Here it seems as though each action were divided into two parts, the beginning made by a single person and the achievement in which many join by “bearing” and “finishing” the enterprise, by seeing it through. Not only are the words interrelated in a similar manner, the history of their usage is very similar too. In both cases the word that originally designated only the second part of action, its achievement – *prattein* and *gerere* – became the accepted word for action in general, whereas the words designating the beginning of action became specialized in meaning, at least in political language. *Archein* came to mean chiefly “to rule” and “to lead” when it was specifically used, and *agere* came to mean “to lead” rather than “to set into motion.”

Thus the role of the beginner and leader, who was a *primus inter pares* (in the case of Homer, a king among kings), changed into that of a ruler; the original interdependence of action, the dependence of the beginner and leader upon others for help and the dependence of his followers upon him for an occasion to act themselves, split into two altogether different functions: the function of giving commands, which became the prerogative of the ruler, and the function of executing them, which became the duty of his subjects. This ruler is alone, isolated against others by his force, just as the beginner was isolated through his initiative at the start, before he had found others to join him. Yet the strength of the beginner and leader shows itself only in his initiative and the risk he takes, not in the actual achievement. In the case of the successful ruler, he may claim for himself what actually is the achievement of many – something that Agamemnon, who was a king but no ruler, would never have been permitted. Through this claim, the ruler monopolizes, so to speak, the strength of those without whose help he would never be able to achieve anything. Thus, the delusion of extraordinary strength arises and with it the fallacy of the strong man who is powerful because he is alone.

Because the actor always moves among and in relation to other acting beings, he is never merely a “doer” but always and at the same time a sufferer. To do and to suffer are like opposite sides of the same coin, and the story that an act starts is composed of its consequent deeds and sufferings. These consequences are boundless, because action, though it may proceed from nowhere, so to speak, acts into a medium where every reaction becomes a chain reaction and where every process is the cause of new processes. Since action acts upon beings who are capable of their own actions, reaction, apart from being a response, is always a new action that strikes out on its own and affects others. Thus action and reaction among men never move in a closed circle and can never be reliably confined to two partners. This boundlessness is characteristic not of political action alone, in the narrower sense of the word, as though the boundlessness of human interrelatedness were only the result of the boundless multitude of people involved, which could be escaped by resigning oneself to action within a limited, graspable framework of circumstances; the smallest act in the most limited circumstances bears the seed of the same boundlessness, because one deed, and sometimes one word, suffices to change every constellation.

Action, moreover, no matter what its specific content, always establishes relationships and therefore has an inherent tendency to force open all limitations and cut across all boundaries.<sup>8</sup> Limitations and boundaries exist within the realm of human affairs, but they never offer a framework that can reliably withstand the onslaught with which each new generation must insert itself. The frailty of human institutions and laws and, generally, of all matters pertaining to men’s living together, arises from the human condition of natality and is quite independent of the frailty of human nature. The fences inclosing private property and insuring the limitations of each household, the territorial boundaries which protect and make possible the physical identity of a people, and the laws which protect and make possible its political existence, are of such great importance to the stability of human affairs precisely because no such limiting and protecting principles rise out of the activities going on in the realm of human affairs itself. The limitations of the law are never entirely reliable safeguards against action from within the body politic, just as the boundaries of the territory are never entirely reliable safeguards against action from without. The boundlessness of action is only the other side of its tremendous capacity for establishing relationships, that is, its specific productivity; this is why the old virtue of moderation, of keeping within bounds, is indeed one of the political virtues *par excellence*, just as the political temptation *par excellence* is indeed *hubris* (as the Greeks, fully experienced in the potentialities of action, knew so well) and not the will to power, as we are inclined to believe.

Yet while the various limitations and boundaries we find in every body politic may offer some protection against the inherent boundlessness of action, they are altogether helpless to offset its second outstanding character: its inherent unpredictability. This is not simply a question of inability to foretell all the logical consequences of a particular act, in which case an electronic computer would be able to foretell the future, but arises directly out of the story which, as the result of action, begins and establishes itself as soon as the fleeting moment of the deed is past. The trouble is that whatever the character and content of the subsequent story may be, whether it is played in private or public life, whether it involves many or few actors, its full meaning can reveal itself only when it has ended. In contradistinction to fabrication, where the light by which to judge the



finished product is provided by the image or model perceived beforehand by the craftsman's eye, the light that illuminates processes of action, and therefore all historical processes, appears only at their end, frequently when all the participants are dead. Action reveals itself fully only to the storyteller, that is, to the backward glance of the historian, who indeed always knows better what it was all about than the participants. All accounts told by the actors themselves, though they may in rare cases give an entirely trustworthy statement of intentions, aims, and motives, become mere useful source material in the historian's hands and can never match his story in significance and truthfulness. What the storyteller narrates must necessarily be hidden from the actor himself, at least as long as he is in the act or caught in its consequences, because to him the meaningfulness of his act is not in the story that follows. Even though stories are the inevitable results of action, it is not the actor but the storyteller who perceives and "makes" the story. . . .

## 28 Power and the Space of Appearance

The space of appearance comes into being wherever men are together in the manner of speech and action, and therefore predates and precedes all formal constitution of the public realm and the various forms of government, that is, the various forms in which the public realm can be organized. Its peculiarity is that, unlike the spaces which are the work of our hands, it does not survive the actuality of the movement which brought it into being, but disappears not only with the dispersal of men – as in the case of great catastrophes when the body politic of a people is destroyed – but with the disappearance or arrest of the activities themselves. Wherever people gather together, it is potentially there, but only potentially, not necessarily and not forever. That civilizations can rise and fall, that mighty empires and great cultures can decline and pass away without external catastrophes – and more often than not such external "causes" are preceded by a less visible internal decay that invites disaster – is due to this peculiarity of the public realm, which, because it ultimately resides on action and speech, never altogether loses its potential character. What first undermines and then kills political communities is loss of power and final impotence; and power cannot be stored up and kept in reserve for emergencies, like the instruments of violence, but exists only in its actualization. Where power is not actualized, it passes away, and history is full of examples that the greatest material riches cannot compensate for this loss. Power is actualized only where word and deed have not parted company, where words are not empty and deeds not brutal, where words are not used to veil intentions but to disclose realities, and deeds are not used to violate and destroy but to establish relations and create new realities.

Power is what keeps the public realm, the potential space of appearance between acting and speaking men, in existence. The word itself, its Greek equivalent *dynamics*, like the Latin *potentia* with its various modern derivatives or the German *Macht* (which derives from *mögen* and *möglich*, not from *machen*), indicates its "potential" character. Power is always, as we would say, a power potential and not an unchangeable, measurable, and reliable entity like force or strength. While strength is the natural quality of an individual seen in isolation, power springs up between men when they act

together and vanishes the moment they disperse. Because of this peculiarity, which power shares with all potentialities that can only be actualized but never fully materialized, power is to an astonishing degree independent of material factors, either of numbers or means. A comparatively small but well-organized group of men can rule almost indefinitely over large and populous empires, and it is not infrequent in history that small and poor countries get the better of great and rich nations. (The story of David and Goliath is only metaphorically true; the power of a few can be greater than the power of many, but in a contest between two men not power but strength decides, and cleverness, that is, brain power, contributes materially to the outcome on the same level as muscular force.) Popular revolt against materially strong rulers, on the other hand, may engender an almost irresistible power even if it foregoes the use of violence in the face of materially vastly superior forces. To call this "passive resistance" is certainly an ironic idea; it is one of the most active and efficient ways of action ever devised, because it cannot be countered by fighting, where there may be defeat or victory, but only by mass slaughter in which even the victor is defeated, cheated of his prize, since nobody can rule over dead men.

The only indispensable material factor in the generation of power is the living together of people. Only where men live so close together that the potentialities of action are always present can power remain with them, and the foundation of cities, which as city-states have remained paradigmatic for all Western political organization, is therefore indeed the most important material prerequisite for power. What keeps people together after the fleeting moment of action has passed (what we today call "organization") and what, at the same time, they keep alive through remaining together is power. And whoever, for whatever reasons, isolates himself and does not partake in such being together, forfeits power and becomes impotent, no matter how great his strength and how valid his reasons.

If power were more than this potentiality in being together, if it could be possessed like strength or applied like force instead of being dependent upon the unreliable and only temporary agreement of many wills and intentions, omnipotence would be a concrete human possibility. For power, like action, is boundless; it has no physical limitation in human nature, in the bodily existence of man, like strength. Its only limitation is the existence of other people, but this limitation is not accidental, because human power corresponds to the condition of plurality to begin with. For the same reason, power can be divided without decreasing it, and the interplay of powers with their checks and balances is even liable to generate more power, so long, at least, as the interplay is alive and has not resulted in a stalemate. Strength, on the contrary, is indivisible, and while it, too, is checked and balanced by the presence of others, the interplay of plurality in this case spells a definite limitation on the strength of the individual, which is kept in bounds and may be overpowered by the power potential of the many. An identification of the strength necessary for the production of things with the power necessary for action is conceivable only as the divine attribute of one god. Omnipotence therefore is never an attribute of gods in polytheism, no matter how superior the strength of the gods may be to the forces of men. Conversely, aspiration toward omnipotence always implies – apart from its utopian *hubris* – the destruction of plurality.

Under the conditions of human life, the only alternative to power is not strength – which is helpless against power – but force, which indeed one man alone can exert

against his fellow men and of which one or a few can possess a monopoly by acquiring the means of violence. But while violence can destroy power, it can never become a substitute for it. From this results the by no means infrequent political combination of force and powerlessness, an array of impotent forces that spend themselves, often spectacularly and vehemently but in utter futility, leaving behind neither monuments nor stories, hardly enough memory to enter into history at all. In historical experience and traditional theory, this combination, even if it is not recognized as such, is known as tyranny, and the time-honored fear of this form of government is not exclusively inspired by its cruelty, which – as the long series of benevolent tyrants and enlightened despots attests – is not among its inevitable features, but by the impotence and futility to which it condemns the rulers as well as the ruled.

More important is a discovery made, as far as I know, only by Montesquieu, the last political thinker to concern himself seriously with the problem of forms of government. Montesquieu realized that the outstanding characteristic of tyranny was that it rested on isolation – on the isolation of the tyrant from his subjects and the isolation of the subjects from each other through mutual fear and suspicion – and hence that tyranny was not one form of government among others but contradicted the essential human condition of plurality, the acting and speaking together, which is the condition of all forms of political organization. Tyranny prevents the development of power, not only in a particular segment of the public realm but in its entirety; it generates, in other words, impotence as naturally as other bodies politic generate power. This, in Montesquieu's interpretation, makes it necessary to assign it a special position in the theory of political bodies: it alone is unable to develop enough power to remain at all in the space of appearance, the public realm; on the contrary, it develops the germs of its own destruction the moment it comes into existence.<sup>9</sup>

Violence, curiously enough, can destroy power more easily than it can destroy strength, and while a tyranny is always characterized by the impotence of its subjects, who have lost their human capacity to act and speak together, it is not necessarily characterized by weakness and sterility; on the contrary, the crafts and arts may flourish under these conditions if the ruler is "benevolent" enough to leave his subjects alone in their isolation. Strength, on the other hand, nature's gift to the individual which cannot be shared with others, can cope with violence more successfully than with power – either heroically, by consenting to fight and die, or stoically, by accepting suffering and challenging all affliction through self-sufficiency and withdrawal from the world; in either case, the integrity of the individual and his strength remain intact. Strength can actually be ruined only by power and is therefore always in danger from the combined force of the many. Power corrupts indeed when the weak band together in order to ruin the strong, but not before. The will to power, as the modern age from Hobbes to Nietzsche understood it in glorification or denunciation, far from being a characteristic of the strong, is, like envy and greed, among the vices of the weak, and possibly even their most dangerous one.

If tyranny can be described as the always abortive attempt to substitute violence for power, ochlocracy, or mob rule, which is its exact counterpart, can be characterized by the much more promising attempt to substitute power for strength. Power indeed can ruin all strength and we know that where the main public realm is society, there is always the danger that, through a perverted form of "acting together" – by pull and

pressure and the tricks of cliques – those are brought to the fore who know nothing and can do nothing. The vehement yearning for violence, so characteristic of some of the best modern creative artists, thinkers, scholars, and craftsmen, is a natural reaction of those whom society has tried to cheat of their strength.<sup>10</sup>

Power preserves the public realm and the space of appearance, and as such it is also the lifeblood of the human artifice, which, unless it is the scene of action and speech, of the web of human affairs and relationships and the stories engendered by them, lacks its ultimate *raison d'être*. Without being talked about by men and without housing them, the world would not be a human artifice but a heap of unrelated things to which each isolated individual was at liberty to add one more object; without the human artifice to house them, human affairs would be as floating, as futile and vain, as the wanderings of nomad tribes. The melancholy wisdom of *Ecclesiastes* – “Vanity of vanities; all is vanity. . . . There is no new thing under the sun, . . . there is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after” – does not necessarily arise from specifically religious experience; but it is certainly unavoidable wherever and whenever trust in the world as a place fit for human appearance, for action and speech, is gone. Without action to bring into the play of the world the new beginning of which each man is capable by virtue of being born, “there is no new thing under the sun”; without speech to materialize and memorialize, however, tentatively, the “new things” that appear and shine forth, “there is no remembrance”; without the enduring permanence of a human artifact, there cannot “be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after.” And without power, the space of appearance brought forth through action and speech in public will fade away as rapidly as the living deed and the living word.

Perhaps nothing in our history has been so short-lived as trust in power, nothing more lasting than the Platonic and Christian distrust of the splendor attending its space of appearance, nothing – finally in the modern age – more common than the conviction that “power corrupts.” The words of Pericles, as Thucydides reports them, are perhaps unique in their supreme confidence that men can enact *and* save their greatness at the same time and, as it were, by one and the same gesture, and that the performance as such will be enough to generate *dynamis* and not need the transforming reification of *homo faber* to keep it in reality.<sup>11</sup> Pericles’ speech, though it certainly corresponded to and articulated the innermost convictions of the people of Athens, has always been read with the sad wisdom of hindsight by men who knew that his words were spoken at the beginning of the end. Yet short-lived as this faith in *dynamis* (and consequently in politics) may have been – and it had already come to an end when the first political philosophies were formulated – its bare existence has sufficed to elevate action to the highest rank in the hierarchy of the *vita activa* and to single out speech as the decisive distinction between human and animal life, both of which bestowed upon politics a dignity which even today has not altogether disappeared.

What is outstandingly clear in Pericles’ formulations – and, incidentally, no less transparent in Homer’s poems – is that the innermost meaning of the acted deed and the spoken word is independent of victory and defeat and must remain untouched by any eventual outcome, by their consequences for better or worse. Unlike human behavior – which the Greeks, like all civilized people, judged according to “moral standards,” taking into account motives and intentions on the one hand and aims and

consequences on the other – action can be judged only by the criterion of greatness because it is in its nature to break through the commonly accepted and reach into the extraordinary, where whatever is true in common and everyday life no longer applies because everything that exists is unique and *sui generis*.<sup>12</sup> Thucydides, or Pericles, knew full well that he had broken with the normal standards for everyday behavior when he found the glory of Athens in having left behind “everywhere everlasting remembrance [*mne meia aidia*] of their good and their evil deeds.” The art of politics teaches men how to bring forth what is great and radiant – *tamegala kai lampra*, in the words of Democritus; as long as the *polis* is there to inspire men to dare the extraordinary, all things are safe; if it perishes, everything is lost.<sup>13</sup> Motives and aims, no matter how pure or how grandiose, are never unique; like psychological qualities, they are typical, characteristic of different types of persons. Greatness, therefore, or the specific meaning of each deed, can lie only in the performance itself and neither in its motivation nor its achievement.

It is this insistence on the living deed and the spoken word as the greatest achievements of which human beings are capable that was conceptualized in Aristotle’s notion of *energeia* (“actuality”), with which he designated all activities that do not pursue an end (are *ateleis*) and leave no work behind (no *par’ autas erga*), but exhaust their full meaning in the performance itself.<sup>14</sup> It is from the experience of this full actuality that the paradoxical “end in itself” derives its original meaning; for in these instances of action and speech<sup>15</sup> the end (*telos*) is not pursued but lies in the activity itself which therefore becomes an *entelecheia*, and the work is not what follows and extinguishes the process but is imbedded in it; the performance is the work, is *energeia*.<sup>16</sup> Aristotle, in his political philosophy, is still well aware of what is at stake in politics, namely, no less than the *ergon tou anthrōpou*<sup>17</sup> (the “work of man” *qua* man), and if he defined this “work” as “to live well” (*eu zēn*), he clearly meant that “work” here is no work product but exists only in sheer actuality. This specifically human achievement lies altogether outside the category of means and ends; the “work of man” is no end because the means to achieve it – the virtues, or *aretai* – are not qualities which may or may not be actualized, but are themselves “actualities.” In other words, the means to achieve the end would already be the end; and this “end,” conversely, cannot be considered a means in some other respect, because there is nothing higher to attain than this actuality itself.

It is like a feeble echo of the prephilosophical Greek experience of action and speech as sheer actuality to read time and again in political philosophy since Democritus and Plato that politics is a *technē*, belongs among the arts, and can be likened to such activities as healing or navigation, where, as in the performance of the dancer or play-actor, the “product” is identical with the performing act itself. But we may gauge what has happened to action and speech, which are only in actuality, and therefore the highest activities in the political realm, when we hear what modern society, with the peculiar and uncompromising consistency that characterized it in its early stages, had to say about them. For this all-important degradation of action and speech is implied when Adam Smith classifies all occupations which rest essentially on performance – such as the military profession, “churchmen, lawyers, physicians and opera-singers” – together with “menial services,” the lowest and most unproductive “labour.”<sup>18</sup> It was precisely these occupations – healing, flute-playing, play-acting – which furnished ancient thinking with examples for the highest and greatest activities of man.

## 29 *Homo Faber and the Space of Appearance*

The root of the ancient estimation of politics is the conviction that man *qua* man, each individual in his unique distinctness, appears and confirms himself in speech and action, and that these activities, despite their material futility, possess an enduring quality of their own because they create their own remembrance.<sup>19</sup> The public realm, the space within the world which men need in order to appear at all, is therefore more specifically “the work of man” than is the work of his hands or the labor of his body.

The conviction that the greatest that man can achieve is his own appearance and actualization is by no means a matter of course. Against it stands the conviction of *homo faber* that a man’s products may be more – and not only more lasting – than he is himself, as well as the *animal laborans*’ firm belief that life is the highest of all goods. Both, therefore, are, strictly speaking, unpolitical, and will incline to denounce action and speech as idleness, idle busybodyness and idle talk, and generally will judge public activities in terms of their usefulness to supposedly higher ends – to make the world more useful and more beautiful in the case of *homo faber*, to make life easier and longer in the case of the *animal laborans*. This, however, is not to say that they are free to dispense with a public realm altogether, for without a space of appearance and without trusting in action and speech as a mode of being together, neither the reality of one’s self, of one’s own identity, nor the reality of the surrounding world can be established beyond doubt. The human sense of reality demands that men actualize the sheer passive givenness of their being, not in order to change it but in order to make articulate and call into full existence what otherwise they would have to suffer passively anyhow.<sup>20</sup> This actualization resides and comes to pass in those activities that exist only in sheer actuality.

The only character of the world by which to gauge its reality is its being common to us all, and common sense occupies such a high rank in the hierarchy of political qualities because it is the one sense that fits into reality as a whole our five strictly individual senses and the strictly particular data they perceive. It is by virtue of common sense that the other sense perceptions are known to disclose reality and are not merely felt as irritations of our nerves or resistance sensations of our bodies. A noticeable decrease in common sense in any given community and a noticeable increase in superstition and gullibility are therefore almost infallible signs of alienation from the world.

This alienation – the atrophy of the space of appearance and the withering of common sense – is, of course, carried to a much greater extreme in the case of a laboring society than in the case of a society of producers. In his isolation, not only undisturbed by others but also not seen and heard and confirmed by them, *homo faber* is together not only with the product he makes but also with the world of things to which he will add his own products; in this, albeit indirect, way, he is still together with others who made the world and who also are fabricators of things. We have already mentioned the exchange market on which the craftsmen meet their peers and which represents to them a common public realm in so far as each of them has contributed something to it. Yet while the public realm as exchange market corresponds most adequately to the activity of fabrication, exchange itself already belongs in the field of action and is by no means a mere prolongation of production; it is even less a mere function of automatic

processes, as the buying of food and other means of consumption is necessarily incidental to laboring. Marx's contention that economic laws are like natural laws, that they are not made by man to regulate the free acts of exchange but are functions of the productive conditions of society as a whole, is correct only in a laboring society, where all activities are leveled down to the human body's metabolism with nature and where no exchange exists but only consumption.

However, the people who meet on the exchange market are primarily not persons but producers of products, and what they show there is never themselves, not even their skills and qualities as in the "conspicuous production" of the Middle Ages, but their products. The impulse that drives the fabricator to the public market place is the desire for products, not for people, and the power that holds this market together and in existence is not the potentiality which springs up between people when they come together in action and speech, but a combined "power of exchange" (Adam Smith) which each of the participants acquired in isolation. It is this lack of relatedness to others and this primary concern with exchangeable commodities which Marx denounced as the dehumanization and self-alienation of commercial society, which indeed excludes men *qua* men and demands, in striking reversal of the ancient relationship between private and public, that men show themselves only in the privacy of their families or the intimacy of their friends.

The frustration of the human person inherent in a community of producers and even more in commercial society is perhaps best illustrated by the phenomenon of genius, in which, from the Renaissance to the end of the nineteenth century, the modern age saw its highest ideal. (Creative genius as the quintessential expression of human greatness was quite unknown to antiquity or the Middle Ages.) It is only with the beginning of our century that great artists in surprising unanimity have protested against being called "geniuses" and have insisted on craftsmanship, competence, and the close relationships between art and handicraft. This protest, to be sure, is partly no more than a reaction against the vulgarization and commercialization of the notion of genius; but it is also due to the more recent rise of a laboring society, for which productivity or creativity is no ideal and which lacks all experiences from which the very notion of greatness can spring. What is important in our context is that the work of genius, as distinguished from the product of the craftsman, appears to have absorbed those elements of distinctness and uniqueness which find their immediate expression only in action and speech. The modern age's obsession with the unique signature of each artist, its unprecedented sensitivity to style, shows a preoccupation with those features by which the artist transcends his skill and workmanship in a way similar to the way each person's uniqueness transcends the sum total of his qualities. Because of this transcendence, which indeed distinguishes the great work of art from all other products of human hands, the phenomenon of the creative genius seemed like the highest legitimation for the conviction of *homo faber* that a man's products may be more and essentially greater than himself.

However, the great reverence the modern age so willingly paid to genius, so frequently bordering on idolatry, could hardly change the elementary fact that the essence of who somebody is cannot be reified by himself. When it appears "objectively" – in the style of an art work or in ordinary handwriting – it manifests the identity of a person and therefore serves to identify authorship, but it remains mute itself and escapes

us if we try to interpret it as the mirror of a living person. In other words, the idolization of genius harbors the same degradation of the human person as the other tenets prevalent in commercial society.

It is an indispensable element of human pride to believe that who somebody is transcends in greatness and importance anything he can do and produce. "Let physicians and confectioners and the servants of the great houses be judged by what they have done, and even by what they have meant to do; the great people themselves are judged by what they are."<sup>21</sup> Only the vulgar will condescend to derive their pride from what they have done; they will, by this condescension, become the "slaves and prisoners" of their own faculties and will find out, should anything more be left in them than sheer stupid vanity, that to be one's own slave and prisoner is no less bitter and perhaps even more shameful than to be the servant of somebody else. It is not the glory but the predicament of the creative genius that in his case the superiority of man to his work seems indeed inverted, so that he, the living creator, finds himself in competition with his creations which he outlives, although they may survive him eventually. The saving grace of all really great gifts is that the persons who bear their burden remain superior to what they have done, at least as long as the source of creativity is alive; for this source springs indeed from *who* they are and remains outside the actual work process as well as independent of *what* they may achieve. That the predicament of genius is nevertheless a real one becomes quite apparent in the case of the *literati*, where the inverted order between man and his product is in fact consummated; what is so outrageous in their case, and incidentally incites popular hatred even more than spurious intellectual superiority, is that even their worst product is likely to be better than they are themselves. It is the hallmark of the "intellectual" that he remains quite undisturbed by "the terrible humiliation" under which the true artist or writer labors, which is "to feel that he becomes the son of his work," in which he is condemned to see himself "as in a mirror, limited, such and such." . . .

### 31 The Traditional Substitution of Making for Acting

The modern age, in its early concern with tangible products and demonstrable profits or its later obsession with smooth functioning and sociability, was not the first to denounce the idle uselessness of action and speech in particular and of politics in general.<sup>22</sup> Exasperation with the threefold frustration of action – the unpredictability of its outcome, the irreversibility of the process, and the anonymity of its authors – is almost as old as recorded history. It has always been a great temptation, for men of action no less than for men of thought, to find a substitute for action in the hope that the realm of human affairs may escape the haphazardness and moral irresponsibility inherent in a plurality of agents. The remarkable monotony of the proposed solutions throughout our recorded history testifies to the elemental simplicity of the matter. Generally speaking, they always amount to seeking shelter from action's calamities in an activity where one man, isolated from all others, remains master of his doings from beginning to end. This attempt to replace acting with making is manifest in the whole body of argument against "democracy," which, the more consistently and better reasoned it is, will turn into an argument against the essentials of politics.



The calamities of action all arise from the human condition of plurality, which is the condition *sine qua non* for that space of appearance which is the public realm. Hence the attempt to do away with this plurality is always tantamount to the abolition of the public realm itself. The most obvious salvation from the dangers of plurality is mon-archy, or one-man-rule, in its many varieties, from outright tyranny of one against all to benevolent despotism and to those forms of democracy in which the many form a collective body so that the people “is many in one” and constitute themselves as a “monarch.”<sup>23</sup> Plato’s solution of the philosopher-king, whose “wisdom” solves the perplexities of action as though they were solvable problems of cognition, is only one – and by no means the least tyrannical – variety of one-man rule. The trouble with these forms of government is not that they are cruel, which often they are not, but rather that they work too well. Tyrants, if they know their business, may well be “kindly and mild in everything,” like Peisistratus, whose rule even in antiquity was compared to “the Golden Age of Cronos”;<sup>24</sup> their measures may sound very “untyrannical” and beneficial to modern ears, especially when we hear that the only – albeit unsuccessful – attempt to abolish slavery in antiquity was made by Periandros, tyrant of Corinth.<sup>25</sup> But they all have in common the banishment of the citizens from the public realm and the insistence that they mind their private business while only “the ruler should attend to public affairs.”<sup>26</sup> This, to be sure, was tantamount to furthering private industry and industriousness, but the citizens could see in this policy nothing but the attempt to deprive them of the time necessary for participation in common matters. It is the obvious short-range advantages of tyranny, the advantages of stability, security, and productivity, that one should beware, if only because they pave the way to an inevitable loss of power, even though the actual disaster may occur in a relatively distant future.

Escape from the frailty of human affairs into the solidity of quiet and order has in fact so much to recommend it that the greater part of political philosophy since Plato could easily be interpreted as various attempts to find theoretical foundations and practical ways for an escape from politics altogether. The hallmark of all such escapes is the concept of rule, that is, the notion that men can lawfully and politically live together only when some are entitled to command and the others forced to obey. The commonplace notion already to be found in Plato and Aristotle that every political community consists of those who rule and those who are ruled (on which assumption in turn are based the current definitions of forms of government – rule by one or monarchy, rule by few or oligarchy, rule by many or democracy) rests on a suspicion of action rather than on a contempt for men, and arose from the earnest desire to find a substitute for action rather than from any irresponsible or tyrannical will to power.

Theoretically, the most brief and most fundamental version of the escape from action into rule occurs in the *Statesman*, where Plato opens a gulf between the two modes of action, *archein* and *prattein* (“beginning” and “achieving”), which according to Greek understanding were interconnected. The problem, as Plato saw it, was to make sure that the beginner would remain the complete master of what he had begun, not needing the help of others to carry it through. In the realm of action, this isolated mastership can be achieved only if the others are no longer needed to join the enterprise of their own accord, with their own motives and aims, but are used to execute orders, and if, on the other hand, the beginner who took the initiative does not permit himself to get involved in the action itself. To begin (*archein*) and to act (*prattein*) thus can become

two altogether different activities, and the beginner has become a ruler (an *archōn* in the twofold sense of the word) who “does not have to act at all (*prattein*), but rules (*archein*) over those who are capable of execution.” Under these circumstances, the essence of politics is “to know how to begin and to rule in the gravest matters with regard to timeliness and untimeliness”; action as such is entirely eliminated and has become the mere “execution of orders.”<sup>27</sup> Plato was the first to introduce the division between those who know and do not act and those who act and do not know, instead of the old articulation of action into beginning and achieving, so that knowing what to do and doing it became two altogether different performances.

Since Plato himself immediately identified the dividing line between thought and action with the gulf which separates the rulers from those over whom they rule, it is obvious that the experiences on which the Platonic division rests are those of the household, where nothing would ever be done if the master did not know what to do and did not give orders to the slaves who executed them without knowing. Here indeed, he who knows does not have to do and he who does needs no thought or knowledge. Plato was still quite aware that he proposed a revolutionary transformation of the *polis* when he applied to its administration the currently recognized maxims for a well-ordered household.<sup>28</sup> (It is a common error to interpret Plato as though he wanted to abolish the family and the household; he wanted, on the contrary, to extend this type of life until one family embraced every citizen. In other words, he wanted to eliminate from the household community its private character, and it is for this purpose that he recommended the abolition of private property and individual marital status.)<sup>29</sup> According to Greek understanding, the relationship between ruling and being ruled, between command and obedience, was by definition identical with the relationship between master and slaves and therefore precluded all possibility of action. Plato’s contention, therefore, that the rules of behavior in public matters should be derived from the master–slave relationship in a well-ordered household actually meant that action should not play any part in human affairs.

It is obvious that Plato’s scheme offers much greater chances for a permanent order in human affairs than the tyrant’s efforts to eliminate everybody but himself from the public realm. Although each citizen would retain some part in the handling of public affairs, they would indeed “act” like one man without even the possibility of internal dissension, let alone factional strife: through rule, “the many become one in every respect” except bodily appearance.<sup>30</sup> Historically, the concept of rule, though originating in the household and family realm, has played its most decisive part in the organization of public matters and is for us invariably connected with politics. This should not make us overlook the fact that for Plato it was a much more general category. He saw in it the chief device for ordering and judging human affairs in every respect. This is not only evident from his insistence that the city-state must be considered to be “man writ large” and from his construction of a psychological order which actually follows the public order of his utopian city, but is even more manifest in the grandiose consistency with which he introduced the principle of domination into the intercourse of man with himself. The supreme criterion of fitness for ruling others is, in Plato and in the aristocratic tradition of the West, the capacity to rule one’s self. Just as the philosopher-king commands the city, the soul commands the body and reason commands the passions. In Plato himself, the legitimacy of this tyranny in everything pertaining to

man, his conduct toward himself no less than his conduct toward others, is still firmly rooted in the equivocal significance of the word *archein*, which means both beginning and ruling; it is decisive for Plato, as he says expressly at the end of the *Laws*, that only the beginning (*arche*) is entitled to rule (*archein*). In the tradition of Platonic thought, this original, linguistically predetermined identity of ruling and beginning had the consequence that all beginning was understood as the legitimation for rulership, until, finally, the element of beginning disappeared altogether from the concept of rulership. With it the most elementary and authentic understanding of human freedom disappeared from political philosophy.

The Platonic separation of knowing and doing has remained at the root of all theories of domination which are not mere justifications of an irreducible and irresponsible will to power. By sheer force of conceptualization and philosophical clarification, the Platonic identification of knowledge with command and rulership and of action with obedience and execution overruled all earlier experiences and articulations in the political realm and became authoritative for the whole tradition of political thought, even after the roots of experience from which Plato derived his concepts had long been forgotten. Apart from the unique Platonic mixture of depth and beauty, whose weight was bound to carry his thoughts through the centuries, the reason for the longevity of this particular part of his work is that he strengthened his substitution of rulership for action through an even more plausible interpretation in terms of making and fabrication. It is indeed true – and Plato, who had taken the key word of his philosophy, the term “idea,” from experiences in the realm of fabrication, must have been the first to notice it – that the division between knowing and doing, so alien to the realm of action, whose validity and meaningfulness are destroyed the moment thought and action part company, is an everyday experience in fabrication, whose processes obviously fall into two parts: first, perceiving the image or shape (*eidōs*) of the product-to-be, and then organizing the means and starting the execution.

The Platonic wish to substitute making for acting in order to bestow upon the realm of human affairs the solidity inherent in work and fabrication becomes most apparent where it touches the very center of his philosophy, the doctrine of ideas. When Plato was not concerned with political philosophy (as in the *Symposium* and elsewhere), he describes the ideas as what “shines forth most” (*ekphanestaton*) and therefore as variations of the beautiful. Only in the *Republic* were the ideas transformed into standards, measurements, and rules of behavior, all of which are variations or derivations of the idea of the “good” in the Greek sense of the word, that is, of the “good for” or of fitness.<sup>31</sup> This transformation was necessary to apply the doctrine of ideas to politics, and it is essentially for a political purpose, the purpose of eliminating the character of frailty from human affairs, that Plato found it necessary to declare the good, and not the beautiful, to be the highest idea. But this idea of the good is not the highest idea of the philosopher, who wishes to contemplate the true essence of Being and therefore leaves the dark cave of human affairs for the bright sky of ideas; even in the *Republic*, the philosopher is still defined as a lover of beauty, not of goodness. The good is the highest idea of the philosopher-king, who wishes to be the ruler of human affairs because he must spend his life among men and cannot dwell forever under the sky of ideas. It is only when he returns to the dark cave of human affairs to live once more with his fellow men that he needs the ideas for guidance as standards and rules by which to measure and

under which to subsume the varied multitude of human deeds and words with the same absolute, “objective” certainty with which the craftsman can be guided in making and the layman in judging individual beds by using the unwavering ever-present model, the “idea” of bed in general.<sup>32</sup>

Technically, the greatest advantage of this transformation and application of the doctrine of ideas to the political realm lay in the elimination of the personal element in the Platonic notion of ideal rulership. Plato knew quite well that his favorite analogies taken from household life, such as the master–slave or the shepherd–flock relationship, would demand a quasi-divine quality in the ruler of men to distinguish him as sharply from his subjects as the slaves are distinguished from the master or the sheep from the shepherd.<sup>33</sup> The construction of the public space in the image of a fabricated object, on the contrary, carried with it only the implication of ordinary mastership, experience in the art of politics as in all other arts, where the compelling factor lies not in the person of the artist or craftsman but in the impersonal object of his art or craft. In the *Republic*, the philosopher-king applies the ideas as the craftsman applies his rules and standards; he “makes” his City as the sculptor makes a statue;<sup>34</sup> and in the final Platonic work these same ideas have even become laws which need only be executed.<sup>35</sup>

Within this frame of reference, the emergence of a utopian political system which could be construed in accordance with a model by somebody who has mastered the techniques of human affairs becomes almost a matter of course; Plato, who was the first to design a blueprint for the making of political bodies, has remained the inspiration of all later utopias. And although none of these utopias ever came to play any noticeable role in history – for in the few instances where utopian schemes were realized, they broke down quickly under the weight of reality, not so much the reality of exterior circumstances as of the real human relationships they could not control – they were among the most efficient vehicles to conserve and develop a tradition of political thinking in which, consciously or unconsciously, the concept of action was interpreted in terms of making and fabrication.

One thing, however, is noteworthy in the development of this tradition. It is true that violence, without which no fabrication could ever come to pass, has always played an important role in political schemes and thinking based upon an interpretation of action in terms of making; but up to the modern age, this element of violence remained strictly instrumental, a means that needed an end to justify and limit it, so that glorifications of violence as such are entirely absent from the tradition of political thought prior to the modern age. Generally speaking, they were impossible as long as contemplation and reason were supposed to be the highest capacities of man, because under this assumption all articulations of the *vita activa*, fabrication no less than action and let alone labor, remained themselves secondary and instrumental. Within the narrower sphere of political theory, the consequence was that the notion of rule and the concomitant questions of legitimacy and rightful authority played a much more decisive role than the understanding and interpretations of action itself. Only the modern age’s conviction that man can know only what he makes, that his allegedly higher capacities depend upon making and that he therefore is primarily *homo faber* and not an *animal rationale*, brought forth the much older implications of violence inherent in all interpretations of the realm of human affairs as a sphere of making. This has been particularly striking in the series of revolutions, characteristic of the modern age, all of

which – with the exception of the American Revolution – show the same combination of the old Roman enthusiasm for the foundation of a new body politic with the glorification of violence as the only means for “making” it. Marx’s dictum that “violence is the midwife of every old society pregnant with a new one,” that is, of all change in history and politics,<sup>36</sup> only sums up the conviction of the whole modern age and draws the consequences of its innermost belief that history is “made” by men as nature is “made” by God.

How persistent and successful the transformation of action into a mode of making has been is easily attested by the whole terminology of political theory and political thought, which indeed makes it almost impossible to discuss these matters without using the category of means and ends and thinking in terms of instrumentality. Perhaps even more convincing is the unanimity with which popular proverbs in all modern languages advise us that “he who wants an end must also want the means” and that “you can’t make an omelette without breaking eggs.” We are perhaps the first generation which has become fully aware of the murderous consequences inherent in a line of thought that forces one to admit that all means, provided that they are efficient, are permissible and justified to pursue something defined as an end. However, in order to escape these beaten paths of thought it is not enough to add some qualifications, such as that not all means are permissible or that under certain circumstances means may be more important than ends; these qualifications either take for granted a moral system which, as the very exhortations demonstrate, can hardly be taken for granted, or they are overpowered by the very language and analogies they use. For to make a statement about ends that do not justify all means is to speak in paradoxes, the definition of an end being precisely the justification of the means; and paradoxes always indicate perplexities, they do not solve them and hence are never convincing. As long as we believe that we deal with ends and means in the political realm, we shall not be able to prevent anybody’s using all means to pursue recognized ends.

The substitution of making for acting and the concomitant degradation of politics into a means to obtain an allegedly “higher” end – in antiquity the protection of the good men from the rule of the bad in general, and the safety of the philosopher in particular,<sup>37</sup> in the Middle Ages the salvation of souls, in the modern age the productivity and progress of society – is as old as the tradition of political philosophy. It is true that only the modern age defined man primarily as *homo faber*, a toolmaker and producer of things, and therefore could overcome the deep-seated contempt and suspicion in which the tradition had held the whole sphere of fabrication. Yet, this same tradition, in so far as it also had turned against action – less openly, to be sure, but no less effectively – had been forced to interpret acting in terms of making, and thereby, its suspicion and contempt notwithstanding, had introduced into political philosophy certain trends and patterns of thought upon which the modern age could fall back. In this respect, the modern age did not reverse the tradition but rather liberated it from the “prejudices” which had prevented it from declaring openly that the work of the craftsman should rank higher than the “idle” opinions and doings which constitute the realm of human affairs. The point is that Plato and, to a lesser degree, Aristotle, who thought craftsmen not even worthy of full-fledged citizenship, were the first to propose handling political matters and ruling political bodies in the mode of fabrication. This seeming contradiction clearly indicates the depth of the authentic perplexities inherent in the human

capacity for action and the strength of the temptation to eliminate its risks and dangers by introducing into the web of human relationships the much more reliable and solid categories inherent in activities with which we confront nature and build the world of the human artifice.

### 32 The Process Character of Action

The instrumentalization of action and the degradation of politics into a means for something else has of course never really succeeded in eliminating action, in preventing its being one of the decisive human experiences, or in destroying the realm of human affairs altogether. We saw before that in our world the seeming elimination of labor, as the painful effort to which all human life is bound, had first of all the consequence that work is now performed in the mode of laboring, and the products of work, objects for use, are consumed as though they were mere consumer goods. Similarly, the attempt to eliminate action because of its uncertainty and to save human affairs from their frailty by dealing with them as though they were or could become the planned products of human making has first of all resulted in channeling the human capacity for action, for beginning new and spontaneous processes which without men never would come into existence, into an attitude toward nature which up to the latest stage of the modern age had been one of exploring natural laws and fabricating objects out of natural material. To what an extent we have begun to act into nature, in the literal sense of the word, is perhaps best illustrated by a recent, casual remark of a scientist who quite seriously suggested that “basic research is when I am doing what I don’t know what I am doing.”<sup>38</sup>

This started harmlessly enough with the experiment in which men were no longer content to observe, to register, and contemplate whatever nature was willing to yield in her own appearance, but began to prescribe conditions and to provoke natural processes. What then developed into an ever-increasing skill in unchaining elemental processes, which, without the interference of men, would have lain dormant and perhaps never have come to pass, has finally ended in a veritable art of “making” nature, that is, of creating “natural” processes which without men would never exist and which earthly nature by herself seems incapable of accomplishing, although similar or identical processes may be commonplace phenomena in the universe surrounding the earth. Through the introduction of the experiment, in which we prescribed man-thought conditions to natural processes and forced them to fall into man-made patterns, we eventually learned how to “repeat the process that goes on in the sun,” that is, how to win from natural processes on the earth those energies which without us develop only in the universe.

The very fact that natural sciences have become exclusively sciences of process and, in their last stage, sciences of potentially irreversible, irremediable “processes of no return” is a clear indication that, whatever the brain power necessary to start them, the actual underlying human capacity which alone could bring about this development is no “theoretical” capacity, neither contemplation nor reason, but the human ability to act – to start new unprecedented processes whose outcome remains uncertain and unpredictable whether they are let loose in the human or the natural realm.

In this aspect of action – all-important to the modern age, to its enormous enlargement of human capabilities as well as to its unprecedented concept and consciousness of history – processes are started whose outcome is unpredictable, so that uncertainty rather than frailty becomes the decisive character of human affairs. This property of action had escaped the attention of antiquity, by and large, and had, to say the least, hardly found adequate articulation in ancient philosophy, to which the very concept of history as we know it is altogether alien. The central concept of the two entirely new sciences of the modern age, natural science no less than historical, is the concept of process, and the actual human experience underlying it is action. Only because we are capable of acting, of starting processes of our own, can we conceive of both nature and history as systems of processes. It is true that this character of modern thinking first came to the fore in the science of history, which, since Vico, has been consciously presented as a “new science,” while the natural sciences needed several centuries before they were forced by the very results of their triumphal achievements to exchange an obsolete conceptual framework for a vocabulary that is strikingly similar to the one used in the historical sciences.

However that may be, only under certain historical circumstances does frailty appear to be the chief characteristic of human affairs. The Greeks measured them against the ever-presence or eternal recurrence of all natural things, and the chief Greek concern was to measure up to and become worthy of an immortality which surrounds men but which mortals do not possess. To people who are not possessed by this concern with immortality, the realm of human affairs is bound to show an altogether different, even somehow contradictory aspect, namely, an extraordinary resiliency whose force of persistence and continuity in time is far superior to the stable durability of the solid world of things. Whereas men have always been capable of destroying whatever was the product of human hands and have become capable today even of the potential destruction of what man did not make – the earth and earthly nature – men never have been and never will be able to undo or even to control reliably any of the processes they start through action. Not even oblivion and confusion, which can cover up so efficiently the origin and the responsibility for every single deed, are able to undo a deed or prevent its consequences. And this incapacity to undo what has been done is matched by an almost equally complete incapacity to foretell the consequences of any deed or even to have reliable knowledge of its motives.<sup>39</sup>

While the strength of the production process is entirely absorbed in and exhausted by the end product, the strength of the action process is never exhausted in a single deed but, on the contrary, can grow while its consequences multiply; what endures in the realm of human affairs are these processes, and their endurance is as unlimited, as independent of the perishability of material and the mortality of men as the endurance of humanity itself. The reason why we are never able to foretell with certainty the outcome and end of any action is simply that action has no end. The process of a single deed can quite literally endure throughout time until mankind itself has come to an end.

That deeds possess such an enormous capacity for endurance, superior to every other man-made product, could be a matter of pride if men were able to bear its burden, the burden of irreversibility and unpredictability, from which the action process draws its very strength. That this is impossible, men have always known. They have known that he who acts never quite knows that he is doing, that he always becomes “guilty” of

consequences he never intended or even foresaw, that no matter how disastrous and unexpected the consequences of his deed he can never undo it, that the process he starts is never consummated unequivocally in one single deed or event, and that its very meaning never discloses itself to the actor but only to the backward glance of the historian who himself does not act. All this is reason enough to turn away with despair from the realm of human affairs and to hold in contempt the human capacity for freedom, which, by producing the web of human relationships, seems to entangle its producer to such an extent that he appears much more the victim and the sufferer than the author and doer of what he has done. Nowhere, in other words, neither in labor, subject to the necessity of life, nor in fabrication, dependent upon given material, does man appear to be less free than in those capacities whose very essence is freedom and in that realm which owes its existence to nobody and nothing but man.

It is in accordance with the great tradition of Western thought to think along these lines: to accuse freedom of luring man into necessity, to condemn action, the spontaneous beginning of something new, because its results fall into a predetermined net of relationships, invariably dragging the agent with them, who seems to forfeit his freedom the very moment he makes use of it. The only salvation from this kind of freedom seems to lie in non-acting, in abstention from the whole realm of human affairs as the only means to safeguard one's sovereignty and integrity as a person. If we leave aside the disastrous consequences of these recommendations (which materialized into a consistent system of human behavior only in Stoicism), their basic error seems to lie in that identification of sovereignty with freedom which has always been taken for granted by political as well as philosophic thought. If it were true that sovereignty and freedom are the same, then indeed no man could be free, because sovereignty, the ideal of uncompromising self-sufficiency and mastership, is contradictory to the very condition of plurality. No man can be sovereign because not one man, but men, inhabit the earth – and not, as the tradition since Plato holds, because of man's limited strength, which makes him depend upon the help of others. All the recommendations the tradition has to offer to overcome the condition of non-sovereignty and win an untouchable integrity of the human person amount to a compensation for the intrinsic "weakness" of plurality. Yet, if these recommendations were followed and this attempt to overcome the consequences of plurality were successful, the result would be not so much sovereign domination of one's self as arbitrary domination of all others, or, as in Stoicism, the exchange of the real world for an imaginary one where these others would simply not exist.

In other words, the issue here is not strength or weakness in the sense of self-sufficiency. In polytheist systems, for instance, even a god, no matter how powerful, cannot be sovereign; only under the assumption of one god ("One is one and all alone and evermore shall be so") can sovereignty and freedom be the same. Under all other circumstances, sovereignty is possible only in imagination, paid for by the price of reality. Just as Epicureanism rests on the illusion of happiness when one is roasted alive in the Phaleric Bull, Stoicism rests on the illusion of freedom when one is enslaved. Both illusions testify to the psychological power of imagination, but this power can exert itself only as long as the reality of the world and the living, where one is and appears to be either happy or unhappy, either free or slave, are eliminated to such an extent that they are not even admitted as spectators to the spectacle of self-delusion.



If we look upon freedom with the eyes of the tradition, identifying freedom with sovereignty, the simultaneous presence of freedom and non-sovereignty, of being able to begin something new and of not being able to control or even foretell its consequences, seems almost to force us to the conclusion that human existence is absurd.<sup>40</sup> In view of human reality and its phenomenal evidence, it is indeed as spurious to deny human freedom to act because the actor never remains the master of his acts as it is to maintain that human sovereignty is possible because of the incontestable fact of human freedom.<sup>41</sup> The question which then arises is whether our notion that freedom and non-sovereignty are mutually exclusive is not defeated by reality, or to put it another way, whether the capacity for action does not harbor within itself certain potentialities which enable it to survive the disabilities of non-sovereignty. . . .

### 34 Unpredictability and the Power of Promise

In contrast to forgiving, which – perhaps because of its religious context, perhaps because of the connection with love attending its discovery – has always been deemed unrealistic and inadmissible in the public realm, the power of stabilization inherent in the faculty of making promises has been known throughout our tradition. We may trace it back to the Roman legal system, the inviolability of agreements and treaties (*pacta sunt servanda*); or we may see its discoverer in Abraham, the man from Ur, whose whole story, as the Bible tells it, shows such a passionate drive toward making covenants that it is as though he departed from his country for no other reason than to try out the power of mutual promise in the wilderness of the world, until eventually God himself agreed to make a Covenant with him. At any rate, the great variety of contract theories since the Romans attests to the fact that the power of making promises has occupied the center of political thought over the centuries.

The unpredictability which the act of making promises at least partially dispels is of a twofold nature: it arises simultaneously out of the “darkness of the human heart,” that is, the basic unreliability of men who never can guarantee today who they will be tomorrow, and out of the impossibility of foretelling the consequences of an act within a community of equals where everybody has the same capacity to act. Man’s inability to rely upon himself or to have complete faith in himself (which is the same thing) is the price human beings pay for freedom; and the impossibility of remaining unique masters of what they do, of knowing its consequences and relying upon the future, is the price they pay for plurality and reality, for the joy of inhabiting together with others a world whose reality is guaranteed for each by the presence of all.

The function of the faculty of promising is to master this twofold darkness of human affairs and is, as such, the only alternative to a mastery which relies on domination of one’s self and rule over others; it corresponds exactly to the existence of a freedom which was given under the condition of non-sovereignty. The danger and the advantage inherent in all bodies politic that rely on contracts and treaties is that they, unlike those that rely on rule and sovereignty, leave the unpredictability of human affairs and the unreliability of men as they are, using them merely as the medium, as it were, into which certain islands of predictability are thrown and in which certain guideposts of reliability are erected. The moment promises lose their character as isolated islands of

certainty in an ocean of uncertainty, that is, when this faculty is misused to cover the whole ground of the future and to map out a path secured in all directions, they lose their binding power and the whole enterprise becomes self-defeating.

We mentioned before the power generated when people gather together and “act in concert,” which disappears the moment they depart. The force that keeps them together, as distinguished from the space of appearances in which they gather and the power which keeps this public space in existence, is the force of mutual promise or contract. Sovereignty, which is always spurious if claimed by an isolated single entity, be it the individual entity of the person or the collective entity of a nation, assumes, in the case of many men mutually bound by promises, a certain limited reality. The sovereignty resides in the resulting, limited independence from the incalculability of the future, and its limits are the same as those inherent in the faculty itself of making and keeping promises. The sovereignty of a body of people bound and kept together, not by an identical will which somehow magically inspires them all, but by an agreed purpose for which alone the promises are valid and binding, shows itself quite clearly in its unquestioned superiority over those who are completely free, unbound by any promises and unkept by any purpose. This superiority derives from the capacity to dispose of the future as though it were the present, that is, the enormous and truly miraculous enlargement of the very dimension in which power can be effective. Nietzsche, in his extraordinary sensibility to moral phenomena, and despite his modern prejudice to see the source of all power in the will power of the isolated individual, saw in the faculty of promises (the “memory of the will,” as he called it) the very distinction which marks off human from animal life.<sup>42</sup> If sovereignty is in the realm of action and human affairs what mastership is in the realm of making and the world of things, then their chief distinction is that the one can only be achieved by the many bound together, whereas the other is conceivable only in isolation.

In so far as morality is more than the sum total of *mores*, of customs and standards of behavior solidified through tradition and valid on the ground of agreements, both of which change with time, it has, at least politically, no more to support itself than the good will to counter the enormous risks of action by readiness to forgive and to be forgiven, to make promises and to keep them. These moral precepts are the only ones that are not applied to action from the outside, from some supposedly higher faculty or from experiences outside action's own reach. They arise, on the contrary, directly out of the will to live together with others in the mode of acting and speaking, and thus they are like control mechanisms built into the very faculty to start new and unending processes. If without action and speech, without the articulation of natality, we would be doomed to swing forever in the ever-recurring cycle of becoming, then without the faculty to undo what we have done and to control at least partially the processes we have let loose, we would be the victims of an automatic necessity bearing all the marks of the inexorable laws which, according to the natural sciences before our time, were supposed to constitute the outstanding characteristic of natural processes. We have seen before that to mortal beings this natural fatality, though it swings in itself and may be eternal, can only spell doom. If it were true that fatality is the inalienable mark of historical processes, then it would indeed be equally true that everything done in history is doomed.

And to a certain extent this is true. If left to themselves, human affairs can only follow the law of mortality, which is the most certain and the only reliable law of a life spent

between birth and death. It is the faculty of action that interferes with this law because it interrupts the inexorable automatic course of daily life, which in its turn, as we saw, interrupted and interfered with the cycle of the biological life process. The life-span of man running toward death would inevitably carry everything human to ruin and destruction if it were not for the faculty of interrupting it and beginning something new, a faculty which is inherent in action like an ever-present reminder that men, though they must die, are not born in order to die but in order to begin. Yet just as, from the standpoint of nature, the rectilinear movement of man's life-span between birth and death looks like a peculiar deviation from the common natural rule of cyclical movement, thus action, seen from the viewpoint of the automatic processes which seem to determine the course of the world, looks like a miracle. In the language of natural science, it is the "infinite improbability which occurs regularly." Action is, in fact, the one miracle-working faculty of man, as Jesus of Nazareth, whose insights into this faculty can be compared in their originality and unprecedentedness with Socrates' insights into the possibilities of thought, must have known very well when he likened the power to forgive to the more general power of performing miracles, putting both on the same level and within the reach of man.<sup>43</sup>

The miracle that saves the world, the realm of human affairs, from its normal, "natural" ruin is ultimately the fact of natality, in which the faculty of action is ontologically rooted. It is, in other words, the birth of new men and the new beginning, the action they are capable of by virtue of being born. Only the full experience of this capacity can bestow upon human affairs faith and hope, those two essential characteristics of human existence which Greek antiquity ignored altogether, discounting the keeping of faith as a very uncommon and not too important virtue and counting hope among the evils of illusion in Pandora's box. It is this faith in and hope for the world that found perhaps its most glorious and most succinct expression in the few words with which the Gospels announced their "glad tidings": "A child has been born unto us."

### Notes

- 1 This description is supported by recent findings in psychology and biology which also stress the inner affinity between speech and action, their spontaneity and practical purposelessness. See especially Arnold Gehlen, *Der Mensch: Seine Natur und seine Stellung in der Welt* (1955), which gives an excellent summary of the results and interpretations of current scientific research and contains a wealth of valuable insights. That Gehlen, like the scientists upon whose results he bases his own theories, believes that these specifically human capabilities are also a "biological necessity," that is, necessary for a biologically weak and ill-fitted organism such as man, is another matter and need not concern us here.
- 2 *De civitate Dei* xii. 20.
- 3 According to Augustine, the two were so different that he used a different word to indicate the beginning which is man (*initium*), designating the beginning of the world by *principium*, which is the standard translation for the first Bible verse. As can be seen from *De civitate Dei* xi. 32, the word *principium* carried for Augustine a much less radical meaning; the beginning of the world "does not mean that nothing was made before (for the angels were)," whereas he adds explicitly in the phrase quoted above with reference to man that nobody was before him.

- 4 This is the reason why Plato says that *lexis* (“speech”) adheres more closely to truth than *praxis*.
- 5 Plato already reproached Pericles because he did not “make the citizen better” and because the Athenians were even worse at the end of his career than before (*Gorgias* 515).
- 6 Recent political history is full of examples indicating that the term “human material” is no harmless metaphor, and the same is true for a whole host of modern scientific experiments in social engineering, biochemistry, brain surgery, etc., all of which tend to treat and change human material like other matter. This mechanistic approach is typical of the modern age; antiquity, when it pursued similar aims, was inclined to think of men in terms of savage animals who need be tamed and domesticated. The only possible achievement in either case is to kill man, not indeed necessarily as a living organism, but *qua* man.
- 7 For *archein* and *prattein* see especially their use in Homer (cf. C. Capelle, *Wörterbuch des Homeros und der Homeriden* [1889]).
- 8 It is interesting to note that Montesquieu, whose concern was not with laws but with the actions their spirit would inspire, defines laws as *rappports* subsisting between different beings (*Esprit des lois*, Book I, ch. 1; cf. Book XXVI, ch. 1). This definition is surprising because laws had always been defined in terms of boundaries and limitations. The reason for it is that Montesquieu was less interested in what he called the “nature of government” – whether it was a republic or a monarchy, for instance – than in its “principle . . . by which it is made to act, . . . the human passions which set it in motion” (Book III, ch. 1).
- 9 In the words of Montesquieu, who ignores the difference between tyranny and despotism: “Le principe du gouvernement despotique se corrompt sans cesse, parcequ’il est corrompu par sa nature. Les autres gouvernements périssent, parceque des accidents particuliers en violent le principe: celui-ci périt par son vice intérieur, lorsque quelques causes accidentelles n’empêchent point son principe de se corrompre” (*op. cit.*, Book VIII, ch. 10).
- 10 The extent to which Nietzsche’s glorification of the will to power was inspired by such experiences of the modern intellectual may be surmised from the following side remark: “Denn die Ohnmacht gegen Menschen, nicht die Ohnmacht gegen die Natur, erzeugt die desperatete Verbitterung gegen das Dasein” (*Wille zur Macht*, No. 55).
- 11 In the above-mentioned paragraph in the Funeral Oration Pericles deliberately contrasts the *dynamis* of the *polis* with the craftsmanship of the poets.
- 12 The reason why Aristotle in his *Poetics* finds that greatness (*megethos*) is a prerequisite of the dramatic plot is that the drama imitates acting and acting is judged by greatness, by its distinction from the commonplace (1450b25). The same, incidentally, is true for the beautiful, which resides in greatness and *taxis*, the joining together of the parts (1450b34 ff.).
- 13 See fragment B157 of Democritus in Diels, *op. cit.*
- 14 For the concept of *energeia* see *Nicomachean Ethics* 1094a1–5; *Physics* 201b31; *On the Soul* 417a16, 431a6. The examples most frequently used are seeing and flute-playing.
- 15 It is of no importance in our context that Aristotle saw the highest possibility of “actuality” not in action and speech, but in contemplation and thought, in *theōria* and *nous*.
- 16 The two Aristotelian concepts, *energeia* and *entelecheia*, are closely interrelated (*energeia* . . . *synteinei pros tēn entelecheian*): full actuality (*energeia*) effects and produces nothing besides itself, and full reality (*entelecheia*) has no other end besides itself (see *Metaphysics* 1050a22–35).
- 17 *Nicomachean Ethics* 1097b22.
- 18 *Wealth of Nations* (Everyman’s edn.), II, 295.
- 19 This is a decisive feature of the Greek, though perhaps not of the Roman, concept of “virtue”: where *aretē* is, oblivion cannot occur (cf. Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* 1100b12–17).
- 20 This is the meaning of the last sentence of the Dante quotation at the head of this chapter; the sentence, though quite clear and simple in the Latin original, defies translation (*De monarchia* i. 13).

- 21 I use here Isak Dinesen's wonderful story "The Dreamers," in *Seven Gothic Tales* (Modern Library edn.), especially pp. 340ff.
- 22 The classic author on this matter is still Adam Smith, to whom the only legitimate function of government is "the defence of the rich against the poor, or of those who have some property against those who have none at all" (*op. cit.*, II, 198ff.; for the quotation see II, 203).
- 23 This is the Aristotelian interpretation of tyranny in the form of a democracy (*Politics* 1292a16 ff.). Kingship, however, does not belong among the tyrannical forms of government, nor can it be defined as one-man rule or monarchy. While the terms "tyranny" and "monarchy" could be used interchangeably, the words "tyrant" and *basileus* ("king") are used as opposites (see, for instance, Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* 1160b3; Plato *Republic* 576D). Generally speaking, one-man rule is praised in antiquity only for household matters or for warfare, and it is usually in some military or "economic" context that the famous line from the *Iliad*, *ouk agathon polykoiranīē; heis koiranos estō, heis basileus* – "the rule by many is not good; one should be master, one be king" (ii. 204) – is quoted. (Aristotle, who applies Homer's saying in his *Metaphysics* [1076a3 ff.] to political community life [*politeuesthai*] in a metaphorical sense, is an exception. In *Politics* 1292a13, where he quotes the Homeric line again, he takes a stand against the many having the power "not as individuals, but collectively," and states that this is only a disguised form of one-man rule, or tyranny.) Conversely, the rule of the many, later called *polyarkhia*, is used disparagingly to mean confusion of command in warfare (see, for instance, Thucydides vi. 72; cf. Xenophon *Anabasis* vi. 1. 18).
- 24 Aristotle *Athenian Constitution* xvi. 2, 7.
- 25 See Fritz Heichelheim, *Wirtschaftsgeschichte des Altertums* (1938), I, 258.
- 26 Aristotle (*Athenian Constitution* xv. 5) reports this of Peisistratus.
- 27 *Statesman* 305.
- 28 It is the decisive contention of the *Statesman* that no difference existed between the constitution of a large household and that of the *polis* (see 259), so that the same science would cover political and "economic" or household matters.
- 29 This is particularly manifest in those passages of the fifth book of the *Republic* in which Plato describes how the fear lest one attack his own son, brother, or father would further general peace in his utopian republic. Because of the community of women, nobody would know who his blood relatives were (see esp. 463C and 465B).
- 30 *Republic* 443E.
- 31 The word *ekphanestaton* occurs in the *Phaedrus* (250) as the chief quality of the beautiful. In the *Republic* (518) a similar quality is claimed for the idea of the good, which is called *phanotaton*. Both words derive from *phainesthai* ("to appear" and "shine forth"), and in both cases the superlative is used. Obviously, the quality of shining brightness applies to the beautiful much more than to the good.
- 32 Werner Jaeger's statement (*Paideia* [1945], II, 416 n.), "The idea that there is a supreme art of measurement and that the philosopher's knowledge of value (*phronēsis*) is the ability to measure, runs through all Plato's work right down to the end," is true only for Plato's political philosophy, where the idea of the good replaces the idea of the beautiful. The parable of the Cave, as told in the *Republic*, is the very center of Plato's political philosophy, but the doctrine of ideas as presented there must be understood as its application to politics, not as the original, purely philosophical development, which we cannot discuss here. Jaeger's characterization of the "philosopher's knowledge of values" as *phronēsis* indicates, in fact, the political and non-philosophical nature of this knowledge; for the very word *phronesis* characterizes in Plato and Aristotle the insight of the statesman rather than the vision of the philosopher.

- 33 In the *Statesman*, where Plato chiefly pursues this line of thought, he concludes ironically: Looking for someone who would be as fit to rule over man as the shepherd is to rule over his flock, we found “a god instead of a mortal man” (275).
- 34 *Republic* 420.
- 35 It may be interesting to note the following development in Plato’s political theory: In the *Republic*, his division between rulers and ruled is guided by the relationship between expert and layman; in the *Statesman*, he takes his bearings from the relation between knowing and doing; and in the *Laws*, the execution of unchangeable laws is all that is left to the statesman or necessary for the functioning of the public realm. What is most striking in this development is the progressive shrinkage of faculties needed for the mastering of politics.
- 36 The quote is from *Capital* (Modern Library edn.), p. 824. Other passages in Marx show that he does not restrict his remark to the manifestation of social or economic forces. For example: “In actual history it is notorious that conquest, enslavement, robbery, murder, briefly violence, play the great part” (ibid., 785).
- 37 Compare Plato’s statement that the wish of the philosopher to become a ruler of men can spring only from the fear of being ruled by those who are worse (*Republic* 347) with Augustine’s statement that the function of government is to enable “the good” to live more quietly among “the bad” (*Epistole* 153. 6).
- 38 Quoted from an interview with Wernher von Braun, as reported in the *New York Times*, December 16, 1957.
- 39 “Man weiss die Herkunft nicht, man weiss die Folgen nicht . . . [der Wert der Handlung ist] unbekannt,” as Nietzsche once put it (*Wille zur Macht*, No. 291), hardly aware that he only echoed the age-old suspicion of the philosopher against action.
- 40 This “existentialist” conclusion is much less due to an authentic revision of traditional concepts and standards than it appears to be; actually, it still operates within the tradition and with traditional concepts, though in a certain spirit of rebellion. The most consistent result of this rebellion is therefore a return to “religious values” which, however, have no root any longer in authentic religious experiences or faith, but are like all modern spiritual “values,” exchange values, obtained in this case for the discarded “values” of despair.
- 41 Where human pride is still intact, it is tragedy rather than absurdity which is taken to be the hallmark of human existence. Its greatest representative is Kant, to whom the spontaneity of acting, and the concomitant faculties of practical reason, including force of judgment, remain the outstanding qualities of man, even though his action falls into the determinism of natural laws and his judgment cannot penetrate the secret of absolute reality (the *Ding an sich*). Kant had the courage to acquit man from the consequences of his deed, insisting solely on the purity of his motives, and this saved him from losing faith in man and his potential greatness.
- 42 Nietzsche saw with unequaled clarity the connection between human sovereignty and the faculty of making promises, which led him to a unique insight into the relatedness of human pride and human conscience. Unfortunately, both insights remained unrelated with and without effect upon his chief concept, the “will to power,” and therefore are frequently overlooked even by Nietzsche scholars. They are to be found in the first two aphorisms of the second treatise in *Zur Genealogie der Moral*.
- 43 Jesus himself saw the human root of this power to perform miracles in faith – which we leave out of our considerations. In our context, the only point that matters is that the power to perform miracles is not considered to be divine – faith will move mountains and faith will forgive; the one is no less a miracle than the other, and the reply of the apostles when Jesus demanded of them to forgive seven times in a day was: “Lord, increase our faith.”

# ON VIOLENCE

## I

These reflections were provoked by the events and debates of the last few years as seen against the background of the twentieth century, which has become indeed, as Lenin predicted, a century of wars and revolutions, hence a century of that violence which is currently believed to be their common denominator. . . .

Since violence – as distinct from power, force, or strength – always needs *implements* (as Engels pointed out long ago),<sup>1</sup> the revolution of technology, a revolution in tool-making, was especially marked in warfare. The very substance of violent action is ruled by the means–end category, whose chief characteristic, if applied to human affairs, has always been that the end is in danger of being overwhelmed by the means which it justifies and which are needed to reach it. Since the end of human action, as distinct from the end products of fabrication, can never be reliably predicted, the means used to achieve political goals are more often than not of greater relevance to the future world than the intended goals. . . .

The chief reason warfare is still with us is neither a secret death wish of the human species, nor an irrepressible instinct of aggression, nor, finally and more plausibly, the serious economic and social dangers inherent in disarmament, but the simple fact that no substitute for this final arbiter in international affairs has yet appeared on the political scene. Was not Hobbes right when he said: “Covenants, without the sword, are but words”?

Nor is a substitute likely to appear so long as national independence, namely, freedom from foreign rule, and the sovereignty of the state, namely, the claim to unchecked and unlimited power in foreign affairs, are identified. (The United States of America is among the few countries where a proper separation of freedom and sovereignty is at least theoretically possible insofar as the very foundations of the American republic would not be threatened by it. Foreign treaties, according to the Constitution, are part and parcel of the law of the land, and – as Justice James Wilson remarked in 1793 – “to the Constitution of the United States the term sovereignty is totally unknown.” But the times of such clearheaded and proud separation from the traditional language and conceptual political frame of the European nation-state are long past; the heritage of the American Revolution is forgotten, and the American government, for better and for worse, has entered into the heritage of Europe as though it were its patrimony – unaware, alas, of the fact that Europe’s declining power was preceded and accompanied by political bankruptcy, the bankruptcy of the nation-state and its concept of sovereignty.) . . .

The more dubious and uncertain an instrument violence has become in international relations, the more it has gained in reputation and appeal in domestic affairs, specifically in the matter of revolution. The strong Marxist rhetoric of the New Left coincides with the steady growth of the entirely non-Marxian conviction, proclaimed by Mao Tse-tung, that “Power grows out of the barrel of a gun.” To be sure, Marx was aware of the

role of violence in history, but this role was to him secondary; not violence but the contradictions inherent in the old society brought about its end. The emergence of a new society was preceded, but not caused, by violent outbreaks, which he likened to the labor pangs that precede, but of course do not cause, the event of organic birth. In the same vein he regarded the state as an instrument of violence in the command of the ruling class; but the actual power of the ruling class did not consist of or rely on violence. It was defined by the role the ruling class played in society, or, more exactly, by its role in the process of production. It has often been noticed, and sometimes deplored, that the revolutionary Left under the influence of Marx's teachings ruled out the use of violent means; the "dictatorship of the proletariat" – openly repressive in Marx's writings – came after the revolution and was meant, like the Roman dictatorship, to last a strictly limited period. . . .

On the level of theory there were a few exceptions. Georges Sorel, who at the beginning of the century tried to combine Marxism with Bergson's philosophy of life – the result, though on a much lower level of sophistication, is oddly similar to Sartre's current amalgamation of existentialism and Marxism – thought of class struggle in military terms; yet he ended by proposing nothing more violent than the famous myth of the general strike, a form of action which we today would think of as belonging rather to the arsenal of nonviolent politics. Fifty years ago even this modest proposal earned him the reputation of being a fascist, notwithstanding his enthusiastic approval of Lenin and the Russian Revolution. Sartre, who in his preface to Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* goes much farther in his glorification of violence than Sorel in his famous *Reflections on Violence* – farther than Fanon himself, whose argument he wishes to bring to its conclusion – still mentions "Sorel's fascist utterances." This shows to what extent Sartre is unaware of his basic disagreement with Marx on the question of violence, especially when he states that "irrepressible violence . . . is man recreating himself," that it is through "mad fury" that "the wretched of the earth" can "become men." These notions are all the more remarkable because the idea of man creating himself is strictly in the tradition of Hegelian and Marxian thinking; it is the very basis of all leftist humanism. But according to Hegel man "produces" himself through thought, whereas for Marx, who turned Hegel's "idealism" upside down, it was labor, the human form of metabolism with nature, that fulfilled this function. . . .

I quoted Sartre in order to show that this new shift toward violence in the thinking of revolutionaries can remain unnoticed even by one of their most representative and articulate spokesmen,<sup>2</sup> and it is all the more noteworthy for evidently not being an abstract notion in the history of ideas. . . .

The student rebellion is a global phenomenon, but its manifestations vary, of course, greatly from country to country, often from university to university. This is especially true of the practice of violence. Violence has remained mostly a matter of theory and rhetoric where the clash between generations did not coincide with a clash of tangible group interests. This was notably so in Germany, where the tenured faculty had a vested interest in overcrowded lectures and seminars. In America, the student movement has been seriously radicalized wherever police and police brutality intervened in essentially nonviolent demonstrations: occupations of administration buildings, sit-ins, et cetera. Serious violence entered the scene only with the appearance of the Black Power movement on the campuses. Negro students, the majority of them admitted without



academic qualification, regarded and organized themselves as an interest group, the representatives of the black community. Their interest was to lower academic standards. They were more cautious than the white rebels, but it was clear from the beginning (even before the incidents at Cornell University and City College in New York) that violence with them was not a matter of theory and rhetoric. . . .

The new undeniable glorification of violence by the student movement has a curious peculiarity. While the rhetoric of the new militants is clearly inspired by Fanon, their theoretical arguments contain usually nothing but a hodgepodge of all kinds of Marxist leftovers. . . . Sartre with his great felicity with words has given expression to the new faith. "Violence," he now believes, on the strength of Fanon's book, "like Achilles' lance, can heal the wounds it has inflicted." If this were true, revenge would be the cure-all for most of our ills. . . . The rarity of slave rebellions and of uprisings among the disinherited and downtrodden is notorious; on the few occasions when they occurred it was precisely "mad fury" that turned dreams into nightmares for everybody. In no case, as far as I know, was the force of these "volcanic" outbursts, in Sartre's words, "equal to that of the pressure put on them." To identify the national liberation movements with such outbursts is to prophesy their doom – quite apart from the fact that the unlikely victory would not result in changing the world (or the system), but only its personnel. To think, finally, that there is such a thing as a "Unity of the Third World," to which one could address the new slogan in the era of decolonization "Natives of all underdeveloped countries unite!" (Sartre) is to repeat Marx's worst illusions on a greatly enlarged scale and with considerably less justification. The Third World is not a reality but an ideology<sup>3</sup> . . .

The one positive political slogan the new movement has put forth, the claim for "participatory democracy" that has echoed around the globe and constitutes the most significant common denominator of the rebellions in the East and the West, derives from the best in the revolutionary tradition – the council system, the always defeated but only authentic outgrowth of every revolution since the eighteenth century. But no reference to this goal either in word or substance can be found in the teachings of Marx and Lenin, both of whom aimed on the contrary at a society in which the need for public action and participation in public affairs would have "withered away,"<sup>4</sup> together with the state. Because of a curious timidity in theoretical matters, contrasting oddly with its bold courage in practice, the slogan of the New Left has remained in a declamatory stage, to be invoked rather inarticulately against Western representative democracy (which is about to lose even its merely representative function to the huge party machines that "represent" not the party membership but its functionaries) and against the Eastern one-party bureaucracies, which rule out participation on principle. . . .

## II

If we turn to discussions of the phenomenon of power, we soon find that there exists a consensus among political theorists from Left to Right to the effect that violence is nothing more than the most flagrant manifestation of power. "All politics is a struggle for power; the ultimate kind of power is violence," said C. Wright Mills, echoing, as it

were, Max Weber's definition of the state as "the rule of men over men based on the means of legitimate, that is allegedly legitimate, violence."<sup>5</sup> The consensus is very strange; for to equate political power with "the organization of violence" makes sense only if one follows Marx's estimate of the state as an instrument of oppression in the hands of the ruling class . . .

In terms of our traditions of political thought, these definitions have much to recommend them. Not only do they derive from the old notion of absolute power that accompanied the rise of the sovereign European nation-state, whose earliest and still greatest spokesmen were Jean Bodin, in sixteenth-century France, and Thomas Hobbes, in seventeenth-century England; they also coincide with the terms used since Greek antiquity to define the forms of government as the rule of man over man – of one or the few in monarchy and oligarchy, of the best or the many in aristocracy and democracy. Today we ought to add the latest and perhaps most formidable form of such dominion: bureaucracy or the rule of an intricate system of bureaus in which no men, neither one nor the best, neither the few nor the many, can be held responsible, and which could be properly called rule by Nobody. (If, in accord with traditional political thought, we identify tyranny as government that is not held to give account of itself, rule by Nobody is clearly the most tyrannical of all, since there is no one left who could even be asked to answer for what is being done. It is this state of affairs, making it impossible to localize responsibility and to identify the enemy, that is among the most potent causes of the current world-wide rebellious unrest, its chaotic nature, and its dangerous tendency to get out of control and to run amuck.) . . .

However, there exists another tradition and another vocabulary no less old and time-honored. When the Athenian city-state called its constitution an isonomy, or the Romans spoke of the *civitas* as their form of government, they had in mind a concept of power and law whose essence did not rely on the command–obedience relationship and which did not identify power and rule or law and command. It was to these examples that the men of the eighteenth-century revolutions turned when they ransacked the archives of antiquity and constituted a form of government, a republic, where the rule of law, resting on the power of the people, would put an end to the rule of man over man, which they thought was a "government fit for slaves." They too, unhappily, still talked about obedience – obedience to laws instead of men; but what they actually meant was support of the laws to which the citizenry had given its consent. Such support is never unquestioning, and as far as reliability is concerned it cannot match the indeed "unquestioning obedience" that an act of violence can exact – the obedience every criminal can count on when he snatches my pocketbook with the help of a knife or robs a bank with the help of a gun. It is the people's support that lends power to the institutions of a country, and this support is but the continuation of the consent that brought the laws into existence to begin with. Under conditions of representative government the people are supposed to rule those who govern them. All political institutions are manifestations and materializations of power; they petrify and decay as soon as the living power of the people ceases to uphold them. This is what Madison meant when he said "all governments rest on opinion," a word no less true for the various forms of monarchy than for democracies. ("To suppose that majority rule functions only in democracy is a fantastic illusion," as Jouvenel points out: "The king,

who is but one solitary individual, stands far more in need of the general support of Society than any other form of government.”<sup>6</sup> Even the tyrant, the One who rules against all, needs helpers in the business of violence, though their number may be rather restricted.) However, the strength of opinion, that is, the power of the government, depends on numbers; it is “in proportion to the number with which it is associated,”<sup>7</sup> and tyranny, as Montesquieu discovered, is therefore the most violent and least powerful of forms of government. Indeed one of the most obvious distinctions between power and violence is that power always stands in need of numbers, whereas violence up to a point can manage without them because it relies on implements. A legally unrestricted majority rule, that is, a democracy without a constitution, can be very formidable in the suppression of the rights of minorities and very effective in the suffocation of dissent without any use of violence. But that does not mean that violence and power are the same. . . .

It is, I think, a rather sad reflection on the present state of political science that our terminology does not distinguish among such key words as “power,” “strength,” “force,” “authority,” and, finally, “violence” – all of which refer to distinct, different phenomena and would hardly exist unless they did. (In the words of d’Entrèves, “might, power, authority: these are all words to whose exact implications no great weight is attached in current speech; even the greatest thinkers sometimes use them at random. Yet it is fair to presume that they refer to different properties, and their meaning should therefore be carefully assessed and examined. . . . The correct use of these words is a question not only of logical grammar, but of historical perspective.”)<sup>8</sup> To use them as synonyms not only indicates a certain deafness to linguistic meanings, which would be serious enough, but it has also resulted in a kind of blindness to the realities they correspond to. In such a situation it is always tempting to introduce new definitions, but – though I shall briefly yield to temptation – what is involved is not simply a matter of careless speech. Behind the apparent confusion is a firm conviction in whose light all distinctions would be, at best, of minor importance: the conviction that the most crucial political issue is, and always has been, the question of Who rules Whom? Power, strength, force, authority, violence – these are but words to indicate the means by which man rules over man; they are held to be synonyms because they have the same function. It is only after one ceases to reduce public affairs to the business of dominion that the original data in the realm of human affairs will appear, or, rather, reappear, in their authentic diversity.

These data, in our context, may be enumerated as follows:

*Power* corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert. Power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together. When we say of somebody that he is “in power” we actually refer to his being empowered by a certain number of people to act in their name. The moment the group, from which the power originated to begin with (*potestas in populo*, without a people or group there is no power), disappears, “his power” also vanishes. In current usage, when we speak of a “powerful man” or a “powerful personality,” we already use the word “power” metaphorically; what we refer to without metaphor is “strength.”

*Strength* unequivocally designates something in the singular, an individual entity; it is the property inherent in an object or person and belongs to its character, which may

prove itself in relation to other things or persons, but is essentially independent of them. The strength of even the strongest individual can always be overpowered by the many, who often will combine for no other purpose than to ruin strength precisely because of its peculiar independence. The almost instinctive hostility of the many toward the one has always, from Plato to Nietzsche, been ascribed to resentment, to the envy of the weak for the strong, but this psychological interpretation misses the point. It is in the nature of a group and its power to turn against independence, the property of individual strength.

*Force*, which we often use in daily speech as a synonym for violence, especially if violence serves as a means of coercion, should be reserved, in terminological language, for the “forces of nature” or the “force of circumstances” (*la force des choses*), that is, to indicate the energy released by physical or social movements.

*Authority*, relating to the most elusive of these phenomena and therefore, as a term, most frequently abused,<sup>9</sup> can be vested in persons – there is such a thing as personal authority, as, for instance, in the relation between parent and child, between teacher and pupil – or it can be vested in offices, as, for instance, in the Roman senate (*auctoritas in senatu*) or in the hierarchical offices of the Church (a priest can grant valid absolution even though he is drunk). Its hallmark is unquestioning recognition by those who are asked to obey; neither coercion nor persuasion is needed. (A father can lose his authority either by beating his child or by starting to argue with him, that is, either by behaving to him like a tyrant or by treating him as an equal.) To remain in authority requires respect for the person or the office. The greatest enemy of authority, therefore, is contempt, and the surest way to undermine it is laughter.<sup>10</sup>

*Violence*, finally, as I have said, is distinguished by its instrumental character. Phenomenologically, it is close to strength, since the implements of violence, like all other tools, are designed and used for the purpose of multiplying natural strength until, in the last stage of their development, they can substitute for it.

It is perhaps not superfluous to add that these distinctions, though by no means arbitrary, hardly ever correspond to watertight compartments in the real world, from which nevertheless they are drawn. Thus institutionalized power in organized communities often appears in the guise of authority, demanding instant, unquestioning recognition; no society could function without it. . . .

Moreover, nothing, as we shall see, is more common than the combination of violence and power, nothing less frequent than to find them in their pure and therefore extreme form. From this, it does not follow that authority, power, and violence are all the same.

Still it must be admitted that it is particularly tempting to think of power in terms of command and obedience, and hence to equate power with violence, in a discussion of what actually is only one of power’s special cases – namely, the power of government. Since in foreign relations as well as domestic affairs violence appears as a last resort to keep the power structure intact against individual challengers – the foreign enemy, the native criminal – it looks indeed as though violence were the prerequisite of power and power nothing but a facade, the velvet glove which either conceals the iron hand or will turn out to belong to a paper tiger. On closer inspection, though, this notion loses much of its plausibility. For our purpose, the gap between theory and reality is perhaps best illustrated by the phenomenon of revolution. . . .

Where commands are no longer obeyed, the means of violence are of no use; and the question of this obedience is not decided by the command–obedience relation but by opinion, and, of course, by the number of those who share it. Everything depends on the power behind the violence. The sudden dramatic breakdown of power that ushers in revolutions reveals in a flash how civil obedience – to laws, to rulers, to institutions – is but the outward manifestation of support and consent. . . .

No government exclusively based on the means of violence has ever existed. Even the totalitarian ruler, whose chief instrument of rule is torture, needs a power basis – the secret police and its net of informers. Only the development of robot soldiers, which, as previously mentioned, would eliminate the human factor completely and, conceivably, permit one man with a push button to destroy whomever he pleased, could change this fundamental ascendancy of power over violence. Even the most despotic domination we know of, the rule of master over slaves, who always outnumbered him, did not rest on superior means of coercion as such, but on a superior organization of power – that is, on the organized solidarity of the masters.<sup>11</sup> . . .

To switch for a moment to conceptual language: Power is indeed of the essence of all government, but violence is not. Violence is by nature instrumental; like all means, it always stands in need of guidance and justification through the end it pursues. And what needs justification by something else cannot be the essence of anything. The end of war – end taken in its twofold meaning – is peace or victory; but to the question And what is the end of peace? there is no answer. Peace is an absolute, even though in recorded history periods of warfare have nearly always outlasted periods of peace. Power is in the same category; it is, as they say, “an end in itself.” (This, of course, is not to deny that governments pursue policies and employ their power to achieve prescribed goals. But the power structure itself precedes and outlasts all aims, so that power, far from being the means to an end, is actually the very condition enabling a group of people to think and act in terms of the means–end category.) And since government is essentially organized and institutionalized power, the current question What is the end of government? does not make much sense either. The answer will be either question-begging – to enable men to live together – or dangerously utopian – to promote happiness or to realize a classless society or some other nonpolitical ideal, which if tried out in earnest cannot but end in some kind of tyranny.

Power needs no justification, being inherent in the very existence of political communities; what it does need is legitimacy. The common treatment of these two words as synonyms is no less misleading and confusing than the current equation of obedience and support. Power springs up whenever people get together and act in concert, but it derives its legitimacy from the initial getting together rather than from any action that then may follow. Legitimacy, when challenged, bases itself on an appeal to the past, while justification relates to an end that lies in the future. Violence can be justifiable, but it never will be legitimate. Its justification loses in plausibility the farther its intended end recedes into the future. No one questions the use of violence in self-defense, because the danger is not only clear but also present, and the end justifying the means is immediate.

Power and violence, though they are distinct phenomena, usually appear together. Wherever they are combined, power, we have found, is the primary and predominant factor. The situation, however, is entirely different when we deal with them in their

pure states – as, for instance, with foreign invasion and occupation. We saw that the current equation of violence with power rests on government's being understood as domination of man over man by means of violence. If a foreign conqueror is confronted by an impotent government and by a nation unused to the exercise of political power, it is easy for him to achieve such domination. In all other cases the difficulties are great indeed, and the occupying invader will try immediately to establish Quisling governments, that is, to find a native power base to support his dominion. . . .

To substitute violence for power can bring victory, but the price is very high; for it is not only paid by the vanquished, it is also paid by the victor in terms of his own power. This is especially true when the victor happens to enjoy domestically the blessings of constitutional government. Henry Steele Commager is entirely right: "If we subvert world order and destroy world peace we must inevitably subvert and destroy our own political institutions first."<sup>12</sup> The much-feared boomerang effect of the "government of subject races" (Lord Cromer) on the home government during the imperialist era meant that rule by violence in faraway lands would end by affecting the government of England, that the last "subject race" would be the English themselves. The recent gas attack on the campus at Berkeley, where not just tear gas but also another gas, "outlawed by the Geneva Convention and used by the Army to flush out guerrillas in Vietnam," was laid down while gas-masked Guardsmen stopped anybody and everybody "from fleeing the gassed area," is an excellent example of this "back-lash" phenomenon. It has often been said that impotence breeds violence, and psychologically this is quite true, at least of persons possessing natural strength, moral or physical. Politically speaking, the point is that loss of power becomes a temptation to substitute violence for power – in 1968 during the Democratic convention in Chicago we could watch this process on television<sup>13</sup> – and that violence itself results in impotence. Where violence is no longer backed and restrained by power, the well-known reversal in reckoning with means and ends has taken place. The means, the means of destruction, now determine the end – with the consequence that the end will be the destruction of all power.

Nowhere is the self-defeating factor in the victory of violence over power more evident than in the use of terror to maintain domination, about whose weird successes and eventual failures we know perhaps more than any generation before us. Terror is not the same as violence; it is, rather, the form of government that comes into being when violence, having destroyed all power, does not abdicate but, on the contrary, remains in full control. It has often been noticed that the effectiveness of terror depends almost entirely on the degree of social atomization. Every kind of organized opposition must disappear before the full force of terror can be let loose. . . .

To sum up: politically speaking, it is insufficient to say that power and violence are not the same. Power and violence are opposites; where the one rules absolutely, the other is absent. Violence appears where power is in jeopardy, but left to its own course it ends in power's disappearance. This implies that it is not correct to think of the opposite of violence as nonviolence; to speak of nonviolent power is actually redundant. Violence can destroy power; it is utterly incapable of creating it. Hegel's and Marx's great trust in the dialectical "power of negation," by virtue of which opposites do not destroy but smoothly develop into each other because contradictions promote and do not paralyze development, rests on a much older philosophical prejudice: that evil is

no more than a privative *modus* of the good, that good can come out of evil; that, in short, evil is but a temporary manifestation of a still-hidden good. Such time-honored opinions have become dangerous. They are shared by many who have never heard of Hegel or Marx, for the simple reason that they inspire hope and dispel fear – a treacherous hope used to dispel legitimate fear. By this, I do not mean to equate violence with evil; I only want to stress that violence cannot be derived from its opposite, which is power, and that in order to understand it for what it is, we shall have to examine its roots and nature.

### III

... To act with *deliberate* speed goes against the grain of rage and violence, but this does not make them irrational. On the contrary, in private as well as public life there are situations in which the very swiftness of a violent act may be the only appropriate remedy. The point is not that this permits us to let off steam – which indeed can be equally well done by pounding the table or slamming the door. The point is that under certain circumstances violence – acting without argument or speech and without counting the consequences – is the only way to set the scales of justice right again. (Billy Budd, striking dead the man who bore false witness against him, is the classical example.) In this sense, rage and the violence that sometimes – not always – goes with it belong among the “natural” *human* emotions, and to cure man of them would mean nothing less than to dehumanize or emasculate him. That such acts, in which men take the law into their own hands for justice’s sake, are in conflict with the constitutions of civilized communities is undeniable; but their antipolitical character, so manifest in Melville’s great story, does not mean that they are inhuman or “merely” emotional. . . .

Not many authors of rank glorified violence for violence’s sake; but these few – Sorel, Pareto, Fanon – were motivated by a much deeper hatred of bourgeois society and were led to a much more radical break with its moral standards than the conventional Left, which was chiefly inspired by compassion and a burning desire for justice. To tear the mask of hypocrisy from the face of the enemy, to unmask him and the devious machinations and manipulations that permit him to rule without using violent means, that is, to provoke action even at the risk of annihilation so that the truth may come out – these are still among the strongest motives in today’s violence on the campuses and in the streets.<sup>14</sup> And this violence again is not irrational. Since men live in a world of appearances and, in their dealing with it, depend on manifestation, hypocrisy’s conceits – as distinguished from expedient ruses, followed by disclosure in due time – cannot be met by so-called reasonable behavior. Words can be relied on only if one is sure that their function is to reveal and not to conceal. It is the semblance of rationality, much more than the interests behind it, that provokes rage. To use reason when reason is used as a trap is not “rational”; just as to use a gun in self-defense is not “irrational.” This violent reaction against hypocrisy, however justifiable in its own terms, loses its *raison d’être* when it tries to develop a strategy of its own with specific goals; it becomes “irrational” the moment it is “rationalized,” that is, the moment the re-action in the course of a contest turns into an action, and the hunt for suspects, accompanied by the psychological hunt for ulterior motives, begins.

Although the effectiveness of violence, as I remarked before, does not depend on numbers – one machine gunner can hold hundreds of well-organized people at bay – nonetheless in collective violence its most dangerously attractive features come to the fore, and this by no means because there is safety in numbers. It is perfectly true that in military as well as revolutionary action “individualism is the first [value] to disappear”;<sup>15</sup> in its stead, we find a kind of group coherence which is more intensely felt and proves to be a much stronger, though less lasting, bond than all the varieties of friendship, civil or private.<sup>16</sup> To be sure, in all illegal enterprises, criminal or political, the group, for the sake of its own safety, will require “that each individual perform an irrevocable action” in order to burn his bridges to respectable society before he is admitted into the community of violence. But once a man is admitted, he will fall under the intoxicating spell of “the practice of violence [which] binds men together as a whole, since each individual forms a violent link in the great chain, a part of the great organism of violence which has surged upward.”<sup>17</sup> . . .

Violence in interracial struggle is always murderous, but it is not “irrational”; it is the logical and rational consequence of racism, by which I do not mean some rather vague prejudices on either side, but an explicit ideological system. Under the pressure of power, prejudices, as distinguished from both interests and ideologies, may yield – as we saw happen with the highly successful civil-rights movement, which was entirely nonviolent. (“By 1964 . . . most Americans were convinced that subordination and, to a lesser degree, segregation were wrong.”)<sup>18</sup> But while boycotts, sit-ins, and demonstrations were successful in eliminating discriminatory laws and ordinances in the South, they proved utter failures and became counterproductive when they encountered the social conditions in the large urban centers – the stark needs of the black ghettos on one side, the overriding interests of white lower-income groups in respect to housing and education on the other. All this mode of action could do, and indeed did, was to bring these conditions into the open, into the street, where the basic irreconcilability of interests was dangerously exposed. . . .

Finally – to come back to Sorel’s and Pareto’s earlier denunciation of the system as such – the greater the bureaucratization of public life, the greater will be the attraction of violence. In a fully developed bureaucracy there is nobody left with whom one can argue, to whom one can present grievances, on whom the pressures of power can be exerted. Bureaucracy is the form of government in which everybody is deprived of political freedom, of the power to for the rule by Nobody is not no-rule, and where all are equally powerless we have a tyranny without a tyrant. . . .

What makes man a political being is his faculty of action; it enables him to get together with his peers, to act in concert, and to reach out for goals and enterprises that would never enter his mind, let alone the desires of his heart, had he not been given this gift – to embark on something new. Philosophically speaking, to act is the human answer to the condition of natality. Since we all come into the world by virtue of birth, as newcomers and beginnings, we are able to start something new; without the fact of birth we would not even know what novelty is, all “action” would be either mere behavior or preservation. No other faculty except language, neither reason nor consciousness, distinguishes us so radically from all animal species. To act and to begin are not the same, but they are closely interconnected.



None of the properties of creativity is adequately expressed in metaphors drawn from the life process. To beget and to give birth are no more creative than to die is annihilating; they are but different phases of the same, ever-recurring cycle in which all living things are held as though they were spellbound. Neither violence nor power is a natural phenomenon, that is, a manifestation of the life process; they belong to the political realm of human affairs whose essentially human quality is guaranteed by man's faculty of action, the ability to begin something new. And I think it can be shown that no other human ability has suffered to such an extent from the progress of the modern age, for progress, as we have come to understand it, means growth, the relentless process of more and more, of bigger and bigger. The bigger a country becomes in terms of population, of objects, and of possessions, the greater will be the need for administration and with it the anonymous power of the administrators. . . .

Moreover, there is the recent rise of a curious new brand of nationalism, usually understood as a swing to the Right, but more probably an indication of a growing, world-wide resentment against "bigness" as such. While national feelings formerly tended to unite various ethnic groups by focusing their political sentiments on the nation as a whole, we now watch how an ethnic "nationalism" begins to threaten with dissolution the oldest and best-established nation-states. . . .

Whatever the administrative advantages and disadvantages of centralization may be, its political result is always the same: monopolization of power causes the drying up or oozing away of all authentic power sources in the country. In the United States, based on a great plurality of powers and their mutual checks and balances, we are confronted not merely with the disintegration of power structures, but with power, seemingly still intact and free to manifest itself, losing its grip and becoming ineffective. . . .

Because of the enormous effectiveness of teamwork in the sciences, which is perhaps the outstanding American contribution to modern science, we can control the most complicated processes with a precision that makes trips to the moon less dangerous than ordinary weekend excursions; but the allegedly "greatest power on earth" is helpless to end a war, clearly disastrous for all concerned, in one of the earth's smallest countries. It is as though we have fallen under a fairyland spell which permits us to do the "impossible" on the condition that we lose the capacity of doing the possible, to achieve fantastically extraordinary feats on the condition of no longer being able to attend properly to our everyday needs. If power has anything to do with the *we-will-and-we-can*, as distinguished from the mere *we-can*, then we have to admit that our power has become impotent. The progresses made by science have nothing to do with the *I-will*; they follow their own inexorable laws, compelling us to do whatever we can, regardless of consequences. Have the *I-will* and the *I-can* parted company? Was Valéry right when he said fifty years ago: "*On peut dire que tout ce que nous savons, c'est-à-dire tout ce que nous pouvons, a fini par s'opposer à ce que nous sommes*"? ("One can say that all we know, that is, all we have the power to do, has finally turned against what we are.")

Again, we do not know where these developments will lead us, but we know, or should know, that every decrease in power is an open invitation to violence – if only because those who hold power and feel it slipping from their hands, be they the government or be they the governed, have always found it difficult to resist the temptation to substitute violence for it.

## Appendices

### II, page 74, note 2

The New Left's unconscious drifting away from Marxism has been duly noticed. See especially recent comments on the student movement by Leonard Schapiro in the *New York Review of Books* (December 5, 1968) and by Raymond Aron in *La Révolution introuvable*, Paris, 1968. Both consider the new emphasis on violence to be a kind of backsliding either to pre-Marxian utopian socialism (Aron) or to the Russian anarchism of Nechaev and Bakunin (Schapiro), who "had much to say about the importance of violence as a factor of unity, as the binding force in a society or group, a century before the same ideas emerged in the works of Jean-Paul Sartre and Frantz Fanon." Aron writes in the same vein: "*Les chantres de la révolution de mai croient dépasser le marxisme . . . ils oublient un siècle d'histoire*" (p. 14). To a non-Marxist such a reversion would of course hardly be an argument; but for Sartre, who, for instance, writes "*Un prétendu 'dépassement' du marxisme ne sera au pis qu'un retour au prémarxisme, au mieux que la redécouverte d'une pensée déjà contenue dans la philosophie qu'on a cru dépasser*" ("Question de Méthode" in *Critique de la raison dialectique*, Paris, 1960, p. 17), it must constitute a formidable objection. (That Sartre and Aron, though political opponents, are in full agreement on this point is noteworthy. It shows to what an extent Hegel's concept of history dominates the thought of Marxists and non-Marxists alike.)

Sartre himself, in his *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, gives a kind of Hegelian explanation for his espousal of violence. His point of departure is that "need and scarcity determined the Manicheistic basis of action and morals" in present history, "whose truth is based on scarcity [and] must manifest itself in an antagonistic reciprocity between classes." Aggression is the consequence of need in a world where "there is not enough for all." Under such circumstances, violence is no longer a marginal phenomenon. "Violence and counter-violence are perhaps contingencies, but they are contingent necessities, and the imperative consequence of any attempt to destroy this inhumanity is that in destroying in the adversary the inhumanity of the contraman, I can only destroy in him the humanity of man, and realize in me his inhumanity. Whether kill, torture, enslave . . . my aim is to suppress his freedom – it is an alien force, *de trop*." His model for a condition in which "each one is one too many . . . Each is *redundant* for the other" is a bus queue, the members of which obviously "take no notice of each other except as a number in a quantitative series." He concludes, "They reciprocally deny any link between each of their inner worlds." From this, it follows that praxis "is the negation of alterity, which is itself a negation" – a highly welcome conclusion, since the negation of a negation is an affirmation.

The flaw in the argument seems to me obvious. There is all the difference in the world between "not taking notice" and "denying," between "denying any link" with somebody and "negating" his otherness; and for a sane person there is still a considerable distance to travel from this theoretical "negation" to killing, torturing, and enslaving.

Most of the above quotations are drawn from R. D. Laing and D. G. Cooper, *Reason and Violence. A Decade of Sartre's Philosophy, 1950–1960*, London, 1964. Part Three. This seems legitimate because Sartre in his foreword says: "*J'ai lu attentivement l'ouvrage que vous avez bien voulu me confier et j'ai eu le grand plaisir d'y trouver un exposé très clair et très fidèle de ma pensée.*"

### XIII, page 80, note, 13

It would be interesting to know if, and to what an extent, the alarming rate of unsolved crimes is matched not only by the well-known spectacular rise in criminal offenses but also by a definite increase in police brutality. The recently published *Uniform Crime Report for the United States*, by J. Edgar Hoover (Federal Bureau of Investigation, United States Department of Justice, 1967),

gives no indication how many crimes are actually solved – as distinguished from “cleared by arrest” – but does mention in the Summary that police solutions of serious crimes declined in 1967 by 8 percent. Only 21.7 percent (or 21.9 percent of all crimes are “cleared by arrest,” and of these only 75 percent could be turned over to the courts, where only about 60 percent of the indicted were found guilty! Hence, the odds in favor of the criminal are so high that the constant rise in criminal offenses seems only natural. Whatever the causes for the spectacular decline of police efficiency, the decline of police power is evident, and with it the likelihood of brutality increases. Students and other demonstrators are like sitting ducks for police who have become used to hardly ever catching a criminal.

A comparison of the situation with that of other countries is difficult because of the different statistical methods employed. Still, it appears that, though the rise of undetected crime seems to be a fairly general problem, it has nowhere reached such alarming proportions as in America. In Paris, for instance, the rate of solved crimes declined from 62 percent in 1967 to 56 percent in 1968, in Germany from 73.4 percent in 1954 to 52.2 percent in 1967, and in Sweden 41 percent of crimes were solved in 1967. (See “Deutsche Polizei,” in *Der Spiegel*, April 7, 1967.)

### Notes

- 1 *Herrn Eugen Dührings Umwälzung der Wissenschaft* (1878), Part II, ch. 3.
- 2 See appendix II, p. 84.
- 3 The students caught between the two superpowers and equally disillusioned by East and West, “inevitably pursue some third ideology, from Mao’s China or Castro’s Cuba.” (Spender, *op. cit.*, p. 92.) Their calls for Mao, Castro, Che Guevara, and Ho Chi Minh are like pseudo-religious incantations for saviors from another world; they would also call for Tito if only Yugoslavia were farther away and less approachable. The case is different with the Black Power movement; its ideological commitment to the nonexistent “Unity of the Third World” is not sheer romantic nonsense. They have an obvious interest in a black–white dichotomy; this too is of course mere escapism – an escape into a dream world in which Negroes would constitute an overwhelming majority of the world’s population.
- 4 It seems as though a similar inconsistency could be charged to Marx and Lenin. Did not Marx glorify the Paris Commune of 1871, and did not Lenin want to give “all power to the *soviets*”? But for Marx the Commune was no more than a transitory organ of revolutionary action, “a lever for uprooting the economical foundations of . . . class rule,” which Engels rightly identified with the likewise transitory “dictatorship of the Proletariat.” (See *The Civil War in France*, in Karl Marx and F. Engels, *Selected Works*, London, 1950, Vol. I, pp. 474 and 440, respectively.) The case of Lenin is more complicated. Still, it was Lenin who emasculated the *soviets* and gave all power to the party.
- 5 *The Power Elite*, New York, 1956, p. 171; Max Weber in the first paragraphs of *Politics as a Vocation* (1921). Weber seems to have been aware of his agreement with the Left. He quotes in the context Trotsky’s remark in Brest-Litovsk, “Every state is based on violence,” and adds, “This is indeed true.”
- 6 Bertrand de Jouvenel, *Power: The Natural History of Its Growth* (1945), London, 1952, p. 98.
- 7 *The Federalist*. No. 49.
- 8 Passerin d’Entrèves, *The Notion of the State: An Introduction to Political Theory*, Oxford, 1967, p. 7. Cf. also p. 171, where, discussing the exact meaning of the words “nation” and “nationality,” he rightly insists that “the only competent guides in the jungle of so many different meanings are the linguists and the historians. It is to them that we must turn for help.” And in distinguishing authority and power, he turns to Cicero’s *potestas in populo, auctoritas in senatu*.

- 9 There is such a thing as authoritarian government, but it certainly has nothing in common with tyranny, dictatorship, or totalitarian rule. For a discussion of the historical background and political significance of the term, see my "What is Authority?" in *Between Past and Future: Exercises in Political Thought*, New York, 1968, and Part I of Karl-Heinz Lübke's valuable study, *Auctoritas bei Augustin*, Stuttgart, 1968, with extensive bibliography.
- 10 Sheldon Wolin and John Schaar, in "Berkeley: The Battle of People's Park," *New York Review of Books*, June 9, 1969, are entirely right: "The rules are being broken because University authorities, administrators and faculty alike, have lost the respect of many of the students." They then conclude, "When authority leaves, power enters." This too is true, but, I am afraid, not quite in the sense they meant it. What entered first at Berkeley was student power, obviously the strongest power on every campus simply because of the students' superior numbers. It was in order to break this power that authorities resorted to violence, and it is precisely because the university is essentially an institution based on authority, and therefore in need of respect, that it finds it so difficult to deal with power in nonviolent terms. The university today calls upon the police for protection exactly as the Catholic church used to do before the separation of state and church forced it to rely on authority alone. It is perhaps more than an oddity that the severest crisis of the church as an institution should coincide with the severest crisis in the history of the university, the only secular institution still based on authority. Both may indeed be ascribed to "the progressing explosion of the atom 'obedience' whose stability was allegedly eternal," as Heinrich Böll remarked of the crisis in the churches. See "Es wird immer später," in *Antwort an Sacharow*, Zürich, 1969.
- 11 In ancient Greece, such an organization of power was the polis, whose chief merit, according to Xenophon, was that it permitted the "citizens to act as bodyguards to one another against slaves and criminals so that none of the citizens may die a violent death." (*Hiero*, IV, 3.)
- 12 "Can We Limit Presidential Power?" in *The New Republic*, April 6, 1968.
- 13 See appendix XIII, p. 84.
- 14 "If one reads the SDS publications one sees that they have frequently recommended provocations of the police as a strategy for 'unmasking' the violence of the authorities." Spender (*op. cit.*, p. 92) comments that this kind of violence "leads to doubletalk in which the provocateur is playing at one and the same time the role of assailant and victim." The war on hypocrisy harbors a number of great dangers, some of which I examined briefly in *On Revolution*, New York, 1963, pp. 91-101.
- 15 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Grove Press, 1968, p. 47.
- 16 J. Glenn Gray, *The Warriors* (New York, 1959; now available in paperback), is most perceptive and instructive on this point. It should be read by everyone interested in the practice of violence.
- 17 Fanon, *op. cit.*, pp. 85 and 93, respectively.
- 18 Robert M. Fogelson, "Violence as Protest," in *Urban Riots: Violence and Social Change*, Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science, Columbia University, 1968.