

THE PROMISE
◆◆◆ OF ◆◆◆
POLITICS

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Edited and with an Introduction
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INTRODUCTION INTO POLITICS

I

What Is Politics?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

II

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

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

**Denktagebuch*, August 1950.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Prejudice and Judgment

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

What Is the Meaning of Politics?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Meaning of Politics

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Whatever we may say about such hypothetical possibilities and

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Question of War

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

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

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

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

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