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BETWEEN PAST AND FUTURE

*Six Exercises in
Political Thought*

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THE CONCEPT OF HISTORY

Ancient and Modern

I: History and Nature

LET us begin with Herodotus, whom Cicero called *pater historiae* and who has remained father of Western history.¹ He tells us in the first sentence of the Persian Wars that the purpose of his enterprise is to preserve that which owes its existence to men, τὰ γεγόμενα ἐξ ἀνθρώπων, lest it be obliterated by time, and to bestow upon the glorious, wondrous deeds of Greeks and barbarians sufficient praise to assure their remembrance by posterity and thus make their glory shine through the centuries.

This tells us a great deal and yet does not tell us enough. For us, concern with immortality is not a matter of course, and Herodotus, since this was a matter of course to him, does not tell us much about it. His understanding of the task of history—to save human deeds from the futility that comes from oblivion—was rooted in the Greek concept and experience of nature, which comprehended all things

that come into being by themselves without assistance from men or gods—the Olympian gods did not claim to have created the world²—and therefore are immortal. Since the things of nature are ever-present, they are not likely to be overlooked or forgotten; and since they are forever, they do not need human remembrance for their further existence. All living creatures, man not excepted, are contained in this realm of being-forever, and Aristotle explicitly assures us that man, insofar as he is a natural being and belongs to the species of mankind, possesses immortality; through the recurrent cycle of life, nature assures the same kind of being-forever to things that are born and die as to things that are and do not change. “Being for living creatures is Life,” and being-forever (*ἀεὶ εἶναι*) corresponds to *ἀειγενές*, procreation.³

No doubt this eternal recurrence “is the closest possible approximation of a world of becoming to that of being,”⁴ but it does not, of course, make individual men immortal; on the contrary, embedded in a cosmos in which everything was immortal, it was mortality which became the hallmark of human existence. Men are “the mortals,” the only mortal things there are, for animals exist only as members of their species and not as individuals. The mortality of man lies in the fact that individual life, a *βίος* with a recognizable life-story from birth to death, rises out of biological life, *ζωή*. This individual life is distinguished from all other things by the rectilinear course of its movement, which, so to speak, cuts through the circular movements of biological life. This is mortality: to move along a rectilinear line in a universe where everything, if it moves at all, moves in a cyclical order. Whenever men pursue their purposes, tilling the effortless earth, forcing the free-flowing wind into their sails, crossing the ever-rolling waves, they cut across a movement which is purposeless and turning within itself. When Sophocles (in the famous chorus of *Antigone*) says that there is nothing more awe-inspiring than man, he goes on to exemplify this by evoking purposeful human activities which do violence to nature because they disturb what, in the absence of mortals, would be the eternal quiet of being-forever that rests or swings within itself.

What is difficult for us to realize is that the great deeds and works

of which mortals are capable, and which become the topic of historical narrative, are not seen as parts of either an encompassing whole or a process; on the contrary, the stress is always on single instances and single gestures. These single instances, deeds or events, interrupt the circular movement of daily life in the same sense that the rectilinear *βίος* of the mortals interrupts the circular movement of biological life. The subject matter of history is these interruptions—the extraordinary, in other words.

When in late antiquity speculations began about the nature of history in the sense of a historical process and about the historical fate of nations, their rise and fall, where the particular actions and events were engulfed in a whole, it was at once assumed that these processes must be circular. The historical movement began to be construed in the image of biological life. In terms of ancient philosophy, this could mean that the world of history had been reintegrated into the world of nature, the world of the mortals into the universe that is forever. But in terms of ancient poetry and historiography it meant that the earlier sense of the greatness of mortals, as distinguished from the undoubtedly higher greatness of the gods and nature, had been lost.

In the beginning of Western history the distinction between the mortality of men and the immortality of nature, between man-made things and things which come into being by themselves, was the tacit assumption of historiography. All things that owe their existence to men, such as works, deeds, and words, are perishable, infected, as it were, by the mortality of their authors. However, if mortals succeeded in endowing their works, deeds, and words with some permanence and in arresting their perishability, then these things would, to a degree at least, enter and be at home in the world of everlastingness, and the mortals themselves would find their place in the cosmos, where everything is immortal except men. The human capacity to achieve this was remembrance, *Mnemosyne*, who therefore was regarded as the mother of all the other muses.

In order to understand quickly and with some measure of clarity how far we today are removed from this Greek understanding of the relationship between nature and history, between the cosmos

and men, we may be permitted to quote four lines from Rilke and leave them in their original language; their perfection seems to defy translation.

Berge ruhn, von Sternen überprächtigt;
 aber auch in ihnen flimmert Zeit.
 Ach, in meinem wilden Herzen nächtigt
 obdachlos die Unvergänglichkeit.⁵

Here even the mountains only seem to rest under the light of the stars; they are slowly, secretly devoured by time; nothing is forever, immortality has fled the world to find an uncertain abode in the darkness of the human heart that still has the capacity to remember and to say: forever. Immortality or imperishability, if and when it occurs at all, is homeless. If one looks upon these lines through Greek eyes it is almost as though the poet had tried consciously to reverse the Greek relationships: everything has become perishable, except perhaps the human heart; immortality is no longer the medium in which mortals move, but has taken its homeless refuge in the very heart of mortality; immortal things, works and deeds, events and even words, though men might still be able to externalize, reify as it were, the remembrance of their hearts, have lost their home in the world; since the world, since nature is perishable and since man-made things, once they have come into being, share the fate of all being—they begin to perish the moment they have come into existence.

With Herodotus words and deeds and events—that is, those things that owe their existence exclusively to men—became the subject matter of history. Of all man-made things, these are the most futile. The works of human hands owe part of their existence to the material nature provides and therefore carry within themselves some measure of permanence, borrowed, as it were, from the being-forever of nature. But what goes on between mortals directly, the spoken word and all the actions and deeds which the Greeks called *πράξεις* or *πράγματα*, as distinguished from *ποίησις*, fabrication, can never outlast the moment of their realization, would never leave any trace without the help of remembrance. The task of the poet and

historiographer (both of whom Aristotle still puts in the same category because their subject is *πραξις*)⁶ consists in making something lasting out of remembrance. They do this by translating *πραξις* and *λέξις*, action and speech, into that kind of *ποίησις* or fabrication which eventually becomes the written word.

History as a category of human existence is of course older than the written word, older than Herodotus, older even than Homer. Not historically but poetically speaking, its beginning lies rather in the moment when Ulysses, at the court of the king of the Phaeacians, listened to the story of his own deeds and sufferings, to the story of his life, now a thing outside himself, an "object" for all to see and to hear. What had been sheer occurrence now became "history." But the transformation of single events and occurrences into history was essentially the same "imitation of action" in words which was later employed in Greek tragedy,⁷ where, as Burckhardt once remarked, "external action is hidden from the eye" through the reports of messengers, even though there was no objection at all to showing the horrible.⁸ The scene where Ulysses listens to the story of his own life is paradigmatic for both history and poetry; the "reconciliation with reality," the catharsis, which, according to Aristotle, was the essence of tragedy, and, according to Hegel, was the ultimate purpose of history, came about through the tears of remembrance. The deepest human motive for history and poetry appears here in unparalleled purity: since listener, actor, and sufferer are the same person, all motives of sheer curiosity and lust for new information, which, of course, have always played a large role in both historical inquiry and aesthetic pleasure, are naturally absent in Ulysses himself, who would have been bored rather than moved if history were only news and poetry only entertainment.

Such distinctions and reflections may seem commonplace to modern ears. Implied in them, however, is one great and painful paradox which contributed (perhaps more than any other single factor) to the tragic aspect of Greek culture in its greatest manifestations. The paradox is that, on the one hand, everything was seen and measured against the background of the things that are forever, while, on the other, true human greatness was understood, at least by the pre-

Platonic Greeks, to reside in deeds and words, and was rather represented by Achilles, "the doer of great deeds and the speaker of great words," than by the maker and fabricator, even the poet and writer. This paradox, that greatness was understood in terms of permanence while human greatness was seen in precisely the most futile and least lasting activities of men, has haunted Greek poetry and historiography as it has perturbed the quiet of the philosophers.

The early Greek solution of the paradox was poetic and non-philosophical. It consisted in the immortal fame which the poets could bestow upon word and deed to make them outlast not only the futile moment of speech and action but even the mortal life of their agent. Prior to the Socratic school—with the possible exception of Hesiod—we encounter no real criticism of immortal fame; even Heraclitus thought that it was the greatest of all human aspirations, and while he denounced with violent bitterness the political conditions in his native Ephesus, it never would have occurred to him to condemn the realm of human affairs as such or doubt its potential greatness.

The change, prepared by Parmenides, came about with Socrates and reached its culmination in Plato's philosophy, whose teaching regarding a potential immortality of mortal men became authoritative for all philosophy schools in antiquity. To be sure, Plato was still confronted with the same paradox and he seems to have been the first who considered "the desire to become famous and not to lie in the end without a name" on the same level as the natural desire for children through which nature secures the immortality of the species, though not the *ἀθανασία* of the individual person. In his political philosophy, therefore, he proposed to substitute the latter for the former, as though the desire for immortality through fame could as well be fulfilled when men "are immortal because they leave children's children behind them, and partake of immortality through the unity of a sempiternal becoming"; when he declared the begetting of children to be a law he obviously hoped this would be sufficient for the "common man's" natural yearning for deathlessness. For neither Plato nor Aristotle any longer believed that mortal men could "immortalize" (*ἀθανατίζειν*, in the Aristotelian

terminology, an activity whose object is by no means necessarily one's own self, the immortal fame of the name, but includes a variety of occupations with immortal things in general) through great deeds and words.⁹ They had discovered, in the activity of thought itself, a hidden human capacity for turning away from the whole realm of human affairs which should not be taken too seriously by men (Plato) because it was patently absurd to think that man is the highest being there is (Aristotle). While begetting might be enough for the many, to "immortalize" meant for the philosopher to dwell in the neighborhood of those things which are forever, to be there and present in a state of active attention, but without doing anything, without performance of deeds or achievement of works. Thus the proper attitude of mortals, once they had reached the neighborhood of the immortal, was actionless and even speechless contemplation: the Aristotelian *νοῦς*, the highest and most human capacity of pure vision, cannot translate into words what it beholds,¹⁰ and the ultimate truth which the vision of ideas disclosed to Plato is likewise an *ἄρρητον*, something which cannot be caught in words.¹¹ Hence the old paradox was resolved by the philosophers by denying to man not the capacity to "immortalize," but the capability of measuring himself and his own deeds against the everlasting greatness of the cosmos, of matching, as it were, the immortality of nature and the gods with an immortal greatness of his own. The solution clearly comes about at the expense of "the doer of great deeds and the speaker of great words."

The distinction between the poets and historians on one side and the philosophers on the other was that the former simply accepted the common Greek concept of greatness. Praise, from which came glory and eventually everlasting fame, could be bestowed only upon things already "great," that is, things that possessed an emerging, shining quality which distinguished them from all others and made glory possible. The great was that which deserved immortality, that which should be admitted to the company of things that lasted forever, surrounding the futility of mortals with their unsurpassable majesty. Through history men almost became the equals of nature, and only those events, deeds, or words that rose by themselves to

the ever-present challenge of the natural universe were what we would call historical. Not only the poet Homer and not only the storyteller Herodotus, but even Thucydides, who in a much more sober mood was the first to set standards for historiography, tells us explicitly in the beginning of the *Peloponnesian War* that he wrote his work because of the war's "greatness," because "this was the greatest movement yet known in history, not only of the Hellenes, but of a large part of the barbarian world . . . almost mankind."

The concern with greatness, so prominent in Greek poetry and historiography, is based on the most intimate connection between the concepts of nature and history. Their common denominator is immortality. Immortality is what nature possesses without effort and without anybody's assistance, and immortality is what the mortals therefore must try to achieve if they want to live up to the world into which they were born, to live up to the things which surround them and to whose company they are admitted for a short while. The connection between history and nature is therefore by no means an opposition. History receives into its remembrance those mortals who through deed and word have proved themselves worthy of nature, and their everlasting fame means that they, despite their mortality, may remain in the company of the things that last forever.

Our modern concept of history is no less intimately connected with our modern concept of nature than the corresponding and very different concepts which stand at the beginning of our history. They too can be seen in their full significance only if their common root is discovered. The nineteenth-century opposition of the natural and historical sciences, together with the allegedly absolute objectivity and precision of the natural scientists, is today a thing of the past. The natural sciences now admit that with the experiment, testing natural processes under prescribed conditions, and with the observer, who in watching the experiment becomes one of its conditions, a "subjective" factor is introduced into the "objective" processes of nature.

The most important new result of nuclear physics was the recognition of the possibility of applying quite different types

of natural laws, without contradiction, to one and the same physical event. This is due to the fact that within a system of laws which are based on certain fundamental ideas only certain quite definite ways of asking questions make sense, and thus, that such a system is separated from others which allow different questions to be put.¹²

In other words, the experiment "being a question put before nature" (Galileo),¹³ the answers of science will always remain replies to questions asked by men; the confusion in the issue of "objectivity" was to assume that there could be answers without questions and results independent of a question-asking being. Physics, we know today, is no less a man-centered inquiry into what is than historical research. The old quarrel, therefore, between the "subjectivity" of historiography and the "objectivity" of physics has lost much of its relevance.¹⁴

The modern historian as a rule is not yet aware of the fact that the natural scientist, against whom he had to defend his own "scientific standards" for so many decades, finds himself in the same position, and he is quite likely to state and restate in new, seemingly more scientific terms the old distinction between a science of nature and a science of history. The reason is that the problem of objectivity in the historical sciences is more than a mere technical, scientific perplexity. Objectivity, the "extinction of the self" as the condition of "pure vision" (*das reine Sehen der Dinge*—Ranke) meant the historian's abstention from bestowing either praise or blame, together with an attitude of perfect distance with which he would follow the course of events as they were revealed in his documentary sources. To him the only limitation of this attitude, which Droysen once denounced as "eunuchic objectivity,"¹⁵ lay in the necessity of selecting material from a mass of facts which, compared with the limited capacity of the human mind and the limited time of human life, appeared infinite. Objectivity, in other words, meant noninterference as well as nondiscrimination. Of these two, nondiscrimination, abstention from praise and blame, was obviously much easier to achieve than noninterference; every selection of material in a sense interferes with history, and all criteria for selection put the

historical course of events under certain man-made conditions, which are quite similar to the conditions the natural scientist prescribes to natural processes in the experiment.

We have stated here the problem of objectivity in modern terms, as it arose during the modern age, which believed it had discovered in history a "new science" which then would have to comply to the standards of the "older" science of nature. This, however, was a self-misunderstanding. Modern natural science developed quickly into an even "newer" science than history, and both sprang, as we shall see, from exactly the same set of "new" experiences with the exploration of the universe, made at the beginning of the modern age. The curious and still confusing point about the historical sciences was that they did not take their standards from the natural sciences of their own age, but harked back to the scientific and, in the last analysis, philosophical attitude which the modern age had just begun to liquidate. Their scientific standards, culminating in the "extinction of the self," had their roots in Aristotelian and medieval natural science, which consisted mainly in observing and cataloguing observed facts. Before the rise of the modern age it was a matter of course that quiet, actionless, and selfless contemplation of the miracle of being, or of the wonder of God's creation, should also be the proper attitude for the scientist, whose curiosity about the particular had not yet parted company with the wonder before the general from which, according to the ancients, sprang philosophy.

With the modern age this objectivity lost its fundament and therefore was constantly on the lookout for new justifications. For the historical sciences the old standard of objectivity could make sense only if the historian believed that history in its entirety was either a cyclical phenomenon which could be grasped as a whole through contemplation (and Vico, following the theories of late antiquity, was still of this opinion) or that it was guided by some divine providence for the salvation of mankind, whose plan was revealed, whose beginnings and ends were known, and therefore could be again contemplated as a whole. Both these concepts, however, were actually quite alien to the new consciousness of history in the modern age; they were only the old traditional framework into which

the new experiences were pressed and from which the new science had risen. The problem of scientific objectivity, as the nineteenth century posed it, owed so much to historical self-misunderstanding and philosophical confusion that the real issue at stake, the issue of impartiality, which is indeed decisive not only for the "science" of history but for all historiography from poetry and storytelling onward, has become difficult to recognize.

Impartiality, and with it all true historiography, came into the world when Homer decided to sing the deeds of the Trojans no less than those of the Achaeans, and to praise the glory of Hector no less than the greatness of Achilles. This Homeric impartiality, as it is echoed by Herodotus, who set out to prevent "the great and wonderful actions of the Greeks *and* the barbarians from losing their due meed of glory," is still the highest type of objectivity we know. Not only does it leave behind the common interest in one's own side and one's own people which, up to our own days, characterizes almost all national historiography, but it also discards the alternative of victory or defeat, which moderns have felt expresses the "objective" judgment of history itself, and does not permit it to interfere with what is judged to be worthy of immortalizing praise. Somewhat later, and most magnificently expressed in Thucydides, there appears in Greek historiography still another powerful element that contributes to historical objectivity. It could come to the foreground only after long experience in polis-life, which to an incredibly large extent consisted of citizens talking with one another. In this incessant talk the Greeks discovered that the world we have in common is usually regarded from an infinite number of different standpoints, to which correspond the most diverse points of view. In a sheer inexhaustible flow of arguments, as the Sophists presented them to the citizenry of Athens, the Greek learned to exchange his own viewpoint, his own "opinion"—the way the world appeared and opened up to him (*δοκεῖ μοι*, "it appears to me," from which comes *δόξα*, or "opinion")—with those of his fellow citizens. Greeks learned to *understand*—not to understand one another as individual persons, but to look upon the same world from one another's standpoint, to see the same in very different and frequently opposing aspects. The

speeches in which Thucydides makes articulate the standpoints and interests of the warring parties are still a living testimony to the extraordinary degree of this objectivity.

What has obscured the modern discussion of objectivity in the historical sciences and prevented its ever touching the fundamental issues involved seems to be the fact that none of the conditions of either Homeric impartiality or Thucydidean objectivity are present in the modern age. Homeric impartiality rested upon the assumption that great things are self-evident, shine by themselves; that the poet (or later the historiographer) has only to preserve their glory, which is essentially futile, and that he would destroy, instead of preserving, if he were to forget the glory that was Hector's. For the short duration of their existence great deeds and great words were, in their greatness, as real as a stone or a house, there to be seen and heard by everybody present. Greatness was easily recognizable as that which by itself aspired to immortality—that is, negatively speaking, as a heroic contempt for all that merely comes and passes away, for all individual life, one's own included. This sense of greatness could not possibly survive intact into the Christian era for the very simple reason that, according to Christian teachings, the relationship between life and world is the exact opposite to that in Greek and Latin antiquity: in Christianity neither the world nor the ever-recurring cycle of life is immortal, only the single living individual. It is the world that will pass away; men will live forever. The Christian reversal is based, in its turn, upon the altogether different teachings of the Hebrews, who always held that life itself is sacred, more sacred than anything else in the world, and that man is the supreme being on earth.

Connected with this inner conviction of the sacredness of life as such, which has remained with us even after security of the Christian faith in life after death has passed away, is the stress on the all-importance of self-interest, still so prominent in all modern political philosophy. In our context this means that the Thucydidean type of objectivity, no matter how much it may be admired, no longer has any basis in real political life. Since we have made life our supreme and foremost concern, we have no room left for an activity

based on contempt for one's own life-interest. Selflessness may still be a religious or a moral virtue; it can hardly be a political one. Under these conditions objectivity lost its validity in experience, was divorced from real life, and became that "lifeless" academic affair which Droysen rightly denounced as being eunuchic.

Moreover, the birth of the modern idea of history not only coincided with but was powerfully stimulated by the modern age's doubt of the reality of an outer world "objectively" given to human perception as an unchanged and unchangeable object. In our context the most important consequence of this doubt was the emphasis on sensation *qua* sensation as more "real" than the "sensed" object and, at any rate, the only safe ground of experience. Against this subjectivization, which is but one aspect of the still growing world-alienation of man in the modern age, no judgments could hold out: they were all reduced to the level of sensations and ended on the level of the lowest of all sensations, the sensation of taste. Our vocabulary is a telling testimony to this degradation. All judgments not inspired by moral principle (which is felt to be old-fashioned) or not dictated by some self-interest are considered matters of "taste," and this in hardly a different sense from what we mean by saying that the preference for clam chowder over pea soup is a matter of taste. This conviction, the vulgarity of its defenders on the theoretical level notwithstanding, has disturbed the conscience of the historian much more deeply because it has much deeper roots in the general spirit of the modern age than the allegedly superior scientific standards of his colleagues in the natural sciences.

Unfortunately it is in the nature of academic quarrels that methodological problems are likely to overshadow more fundamental issues. The fundamental fact about the modern concept of history is that it arose in the same sixteenth and seventeenth centuries which ushered in the gigantic development of the natural sciences. Foremost among the characteristics of that age, which are still alive and present in our own world, is the world-alienation of man, which I mentioned before and which is so difficult to perceive as a basic condition of our whole life because out of it, and partly at least out of its despair, did arise the tremendous structure of the human

artifice we inhabit today, in whose framework we have even discovered the means of destroying it together with all non-man-made things on earth.

The shortest and most fundamental expression this world-alienation ever found is contained in Descartes' famous *de omnibus dubitandum est*, for this rule signifies something altogether different from the skepticism inherent in the self-doubt of all true thought. Descartes came to his rule because the then recent discoveries in the natural sciences had convinced him that man in his search for truth and knowledge can trust neither the given evidence of the senses, nor the "innate truth" of the mind, nor the "inner light of reason." This mistrust of the human capacities has been ever since one of the most elementary conditions of the modern age and the modern world; but it did not spring, as is usually assumed, from a sudden mysterious dwindling of faith in God, and its cause was originally not even a suspicion of reason as such. Its origin was simply the highly justified loss of confidence in the truth-revealing capacity of the senses. Reality no longer was disclosed as an outer phenomenon to human sensation, but had withdrawn, so to speak, into the sensing of the sensation itself. It now turned out that without confidence in the senses neither faith in God nor trust in reason could any longer be secure, because the revelation of both divine and rational truth had always been implicitly understood to follow the awe-inspiring simplicity of man's relationship with the world: I open my eyes and behold the vision, I listen and hear the sound, I move my body and touch the tangibility of the world. If we begin to doubt the fundamental truthfulness and reliability of this relationship, which of course does not exclude errors and illusions but, on the contrary, is the condition of their eventual correction, none of the traditional metaphors for suprasensual truth—be it the eyes of the mind which can see the sky of ideas or the voice of conscience listened to by the human heart—can any longer carry its meaning.

The fundamental experience underlying Cartesian doubt was the discovery that the earth, contrary to all direct sense experience, revolves around the sun. The modern age began when man, with

the help of the telescope, turned his bodily eyes toward the universe, about which he had speculated for a long time—seeing with the eyes of the mind, listening with the ears of the heart, and guided by the inner light of reason—and learned that his senses were not fitted for the universe, that his everyday experience, far from being able to constitute the model for the reception of truth and the acquisition of knowledge, was a constant source of error and delusion. After this deception—whose enormity we find difficult to realize because it was centuries before its full impact was felt everywhere and not only in the rather restricted milieu of scholars and philosophers—suspicions began to haunt modern man from all sides. But its most immediate consequence was the spectacular rise of natural science, which for a long time seemed to be liberated by the discovery that our senses by themselves do not tell the truth. Henceforth, sure of the unreliability of sensation and the resulting insufficiency of mere observation, the natural sciences turned toward the experiment, which, by directly interfering with nature, assured the development whose progress has ever since appeared to be limitless.

Descartes became the father of modern philosophy because he generalized the experience of the preceding as well as his own generation, developed it into a new method of thinking, and thus became the first thinker thoroughly trained in that “school of suspicion” which, according to Nietzsche, constitutes modern philosophy. Suspicion of the senses remained the core of scientific pride until in our time it has turned into a source of uneasiness. The trouble is that “we find nature behaving so differently from what we observe in the visible and palpable bodies of our surroundings that *no* model shaped after our large-scale experiences can ever be ‘true’ ”; at this point the indissoluble connection between our thinking and our sense perception takes its revenge, for a model that would leave sense experience altogether out of account and, therefore, be completely adequate to nature in the experiment is not only “practically inaccessible but not even thinkable.”¹⁶ The trouble, in other words, is not that the modern physical universe cannot be visualized, for this is a matter of course under the assumption that nature does not

reveal itself to the human senses; the uneasiness begins when nature turns out to be inconceivable, that is, unthinkable in terms of pure reasoning as well.

The dependence of modern thought upon factual discoveries of the natural sciences shows itself most clearly in the seventeenth century. It is not always admitted as readily as by Hobbes, who attributed his philosophy exclusively to the results of the work of Copernicus and Galileo, Kepler, Gassendi, and Mersenne, and who denounced all past philosophy as nonsense with a violence matched perhaps only by Luther's contempt for the "*stulti philosophi*." One does not need the radical extremism of Hobbes's conclusion, not that man may be evil by nature, but that a distinction between good and evil makes no sense, and that reason, far from being an inner light disclosing truth, is a mere "faculty of reckoning with consequences"; for the basic suspicion that man's earthbound experience presents a caricature of truth is no less present in Descartes' fear that an evil spirit may rule the world and withhold truth forever from the mind of a being so manifestly subject to error. In its most harmless form, it permeates English empiricism, where the meaningfulness of the sensibly given is dissolved into data of sense perception, disclosing their meaning only through habit and repeated experiences, so that in an extreme subjectivism man is ultimately imprisoned in a non-world of meaningless sensations that no reality and no truth can penetrate. Empiricism is only seemingly a vindication of the senses; actually it rests on the assumption that only common-sense arguing can give them meaning, and it always starts with a declaration of non-confidence in the truth- or reality-revealing capacity of the senses. Puritanism and empiricism, in fact, are only two sides of the same coin. The same fundamental suspicion finally inspired Kant's gigantic effort to re-examine the human faculties in such a way that the question of a *Ding an sich*, that is the truth-revealing faculty of experience in an absolute sense, could be left in abeyance.

Of much more immediate consequence for our concept of history was the positive version of subjectivism which arose from the same predicament: Although it seems that man is unable to recognize

the given world which he has not made himself, he nevertheless must be capable of knowing at least what he made himself. This pragmatic attitude is already the fully articulated reason why Vico turned his attention to history and thus became one of the fathers of modern historical consciousness. He said: *Geometrica demonstramus quia facimus; si physica demonstrare possemus, faceremus*.¹⁷ ("Mathematical matters we can prove because we ourselves make them; to prove the physical, we would have to make it.") Vico turned to the sphere of history only because he still believed it impossible "to make nature." No so-called humanist considerations inspired his turning away from nature, but solely the belief that history is "made" by men just as nature is "made" by God; hence historical truth can be known by men, the makers of history, but physical truth is reserved for the Maker of the universe.

It has frequently been asserted that modern science was born when attention shifted from the search after the "what" to the investigation of "how." This shift of emphasis is almost a matter of course if one assumes that man can know only what he has made himself, insofar as this assumption in turn implies that I "know" a thing whenever I understand how it has come into being. By the same token, and for the same reasons, the emphasis shifted from interest in things to interest in processes, of which things were soon to become almost accidental by-products. Vico lost interest in nature because he assumed that to penetrate the mystery of Creation it would be necessary to understand the creative process, whereas all previous ages had taken it for granted that one can very well understand the universe without ever knowing how God created it, or, in the Greek version, how the things that are by themselves came into being. Since the seventeenth century the chief preoccupation of all scientific inquiry, natural as well as historical, has been with processes; but only modern technology (and no mere science, no matter how highly developed), which began with substituting mechanical processes for human activities—laboring and working—and ended with starting new natural processes, would have been wholly adequate to Vico's ideal of knowledge. Vico, who is regarded by many as the father of modern history, would hardly have turned to history

under modern conditions. He would have turned to technology; for our technology does indeed what Vico thought divine action did in the realm of nature and human action in the realm of history.

In the modern age history emerged as something it never had been before. It was no longer composed of the deeds and sufferings of men, and it no longer told the story of events affecting the lives of men; it became a man-made process, the only all-comprehending process which owed its existence exclusively to the human race. Today this quality which distinguished history from nature is also a thing of the past. We know today that though we cannot "make" nature in the sense of creation, we are quite capable of starting new natural processes, and that in a sense therefore we "make nature," to the extent, that is, that we "make history." It is true we have reached this stage only with the nuclear discoveries, where natural forces are let loose, unchained, so to speak, and where the natural processes which take place would never have existed without direct interference of human action. This stage goes far beyond not only the pre-modern age, when wind and water were used to substitute for and multiply human forces, but also the industrial age, with its steam engine and internal-combustion motor, where natural forces were imitated and utilized as man-made means of production.

The contemporary decline of interest in the humanities, and especially in the study of history, which seems inevitable in all completely modernized countries, is quite in accord with the first impulses that led to modern historical science. What is definitely out of place today is the resignation which led Vico into the study of history. We can do in the natural-physical realm what he thought we could do only in the realm of history. We have begun to act into nature as we used to act into history. If it is merely a question of processes, it has turned out that man is as capable of starting natural processes which would not have come about without human interference as he is of starting something new in the field of human affairs.

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, technology has emerged as the meeting ground of the natural and historical sciences, and although hardly a single great scientific discovery has ever been

made for pragmatic, technical, or practical purposes (pragmatism in the vulgar sense of the word stands refuted by the factual record of scientific development), this final outcome is in perfect accord with the innermost intentions of modern science. The comparatively new social sciences, which so quickly became to history what technology had been to physics, may use the experiment in a much cruder and less reliable way than do the natural sciences, but the method is the same: they too prescribe conditions, conditions to human behavior, as modern physics prescribes conditions to natural processes. If their vocabulary is repulsive and their hope to close the alleged gap between our scientific mastery of nature and our deplored impotence to "manage" human affairs through an engineering science of human relations sounds frightening, it is only because they have decided to treat man as an entirely natural being whose life process can be handled the same way as all other processes.

In this context, however, it is important to be aware how decisively the technological world we live in, or perhaps begin to live in, differs from the mechanized world as it arose with the Industrial Revolution. This difference corresponds essentially to the difference between action and fabrication. Industrialization still consisted primarily of the mechanization of work processes, the improvement in the making of objects, and man's attitude to nature still remained that of *homo faber*, to whom nature gives the material out of which the human artifice is erected. The world we have now come to live in, however, is much more determined by man acting into nature, creating natural processes and directing them into the human artifice and the realm of human affairs, than by building and preserving the human artifice as a relatively permanent entity.

Fabrication is distinguished from action in that it has a definite beginning and a predictable end: it comes to an end with its end product, which not only outlasts the activity of fabrication but from then on has a kind of "life" of its own. Action, on the contrary, as the Greeks were the first to discover, is in and by itself utterly futile; it never leaves an end product behind itself. If it has any consequences at all, they consist in principle in an endless new chain of

happenings whose eventual outcome the actor is utterly incapable of knowing or controlling beforehand. The most he may be able to do is to force things into a certain direction, and even of this he can never be sure. None of these characteristics is present in fabrication. Compared with the futility and fragility of human action, the world fabrication erects is of lasting permanence and tremendous solidity. Only insofar as the end product of fabrication is incorporated into the human world, where its use and eventual "history" can never be entirely predicted, does even fabrication start a process whose outcome cannot be entirely foreseen and is therefore beyond the control of its author. This means only that man is never exclusively *homo faber*, that even the fabricator remains at the same time an acting being, who starts processes wherever he goes and with whatever he does.

Up to our own age human action with its man-made processes was confined to the human world, whereas man's chief preoccupation with regard to nature was to use its material in fabrication, to build with it the human artifice and defend it against the overwhelming force of the elements. The moment we started natural processes of our own—and splitting the atom is precisely such a man-made natural process—we not only increased our power over nature, or became more aggressive in our dealings with the given forces of the earth, but for the first time have taken nature into the human world as such and obliterated the defensive boundaries between natural elements and the human artifice by which all previous civilizations were hedged in.¹⁸

The dangers of this acting into nature are obvious if we assume that the aforementioned characteristics of human action are part and parcel of the human condition. Unpredictability is not lack of foresight, and no engineering management of human affairs will ever be able to eliminate it, just as no training in prudence can ever lead to the wisdom of knowing what one does. Only total conditioning, that is, the total abolition of action, can ever hope to cope with unpredictability. And even the predictability of human behavior which political terror can enforce for relatively long periods of time is hardly able to change the very essence of human affairs once and

for all; it can never be sure of its own future. Human action, like all strictly political phenomena, is bound up with human plurality, which is one of the fundamental conditions of human life insofar as it rests on the fact of natality, through which the human world is constantly invaded by strangers, newcomers whose actions and reactions cannot be foreseen by those who are already there and are going to leave in a short while. If, therefore, by starting natural processes, we have begun to act *into* nature, we have manifestly begun to carry our own unpredictability into that realm which we used to think of as ruled by inexorable laws. The "iron law" of history was always only a metaphor borrowed from nature; and the fact is that this metaphor no longer convinces us because it has turned out that natural science can by no means be sure of an unchallengeable rule of law in nature as soon as men, scientists and technicians, or simply builders of the human artifice, decide to interfere and no longer leave nature to herself.

Technology, the ground on which the two realms of history and nature have met and interpenetrated each other in our time, points back to the connection between the concepts of nature and history as they appeared with the rise of the modern age in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The connection lies in the concept of process: both imply that we think and consider everything in terms of processes and are not concerned with single entities or individual occurrences and their special separate causes. The key words of modern historiography—"development" and "progress"—were, in the nineteenth century, also the key words of the then new branches of natural science, particularly biology and geology, one dealing with animal life and the other even with non-organic matter in terms of historical processes. Technology, in the modern sense, was preceded by the various sciences of natural history, the history of biological life, of the earth, of the universe. A mutual adjustment of terminology of the two branches of scientific inquiry had taken place before the quarrel between the natural and historical sciences preoccupied the scholarly world to such an extent that it confused the fundamental issues.

Nothing seems more likely to dispel this confusion than the latest

developments in the natural sciences. They have brought us back to the common origin of both nature and history in the modern age and demonstrate that their common denominator lies indeed in the concept of process—no less than the common denominator of nature and history in antiquity lay in the concept of immortality. But the experience which underlies the modern age's notion of process, unlike the experience underlying the ancient notion of immortality, is by no means primarily an experience which man made in the world surrounding him; on the contrary, it sprang from the despair of ever experiencing and knowing adequately all that is given to man and not made by him. Against this despair modern man summoned up the full measure of his own capacities; despairing of ever finding truth through mere contemplation, he began to try out his capacities for action, and by doing so he could not help becoming aware that wherever man acts he starts processes. The notion of process does not denote an objective quality of either history or nature; it is the inevitable result of human action. The first result of men's acting into history is that history becomes a process, and the most cogent argument for men's acting into nature in the guise of scientific inquiry is that today, in Whitehead's formulation, "nature is a process."

To act into nature, to carry human unpredictability into a realm where we are confronted with elemental forces which we shall perhaps never be able to control reliably, is dangerous enough. Even more dangerous would it be to ignore that for the first time in our history the human capacity for action has begun to dominate all others—the capacity for wonder and thought in contemplation no less than the capacities of *homo faber* and the human *animal laborans*. This, of course, does not mean that men from now on will no longer be able to fabricate things or to think or to labor. Not the capabilities of man, but the constellation which orders their mutual relationships can and does change historically. Such changes can best be observed in the changing self-interpretations of man throughout history, which, though they may be quite irrelevant for the ultimate "what" of human nature, are still the briefest and most succinct witnesses to the spirit of whole epochs. Thus, schematically

speaking, Greek classic antiquity agreed that the highest form of human life was spent in a polis and that the supreme human capacity was speech—ζῶον πολιτικόν and ζῶον λόγον ἔχον, in Aristotle's famous twofold definition; Rome and medieval philosophy defined man as the *animal rationale*; in the initial stages of the modern age, man was thought of primarily as *homo faber*, until, in the nineteenth century, man was interpreted as an *animal laborans* whose metabolism with nature would yield the highest productivity of which human life is capable. Against the background of these schematic definitions, it would be adequate for the world we have come to live in to define man as a being capable of action; for this capacity seems to have become the center of all other human capabilities.

It is beyond doubt that the capacity to act is the most dangerous of all human abilities and possibilities, and it is also beyond doubt that the self-created risks mankind faces today have never been faced before. Considerations like these are not at all meant to offer solutions or to give advice. At best, they might encourage sustained and closer reflection on the nature and the intrinsic potentialities of action, which never before has revealed its greatness and its dangers so openly.

II: History and Earthly Immortality

The modern concept of process pervading history and nature alike separates the modern age from the past more profoundly than any other single idea. To our modern way of thinking nothing is meaningful in and by itself, not even history or nature taken each as a whole, and certainly not particular occurrences in the physical order or specific historical events. There is a fateful enormity in this state of affairs. Invisible processes have engulfed every tangible thing, every individual entity that is visible to us, degrading them into functions of an over-all process. The enormity of this change is likely to escape us if we allow ourselves to be misled by such generalities as the disenchantment of the world or the alienation of man, generalities that often involve a romanticized notion of the

past. What the concept of process implies is that the concrete and the general, the single thing or event and the universal meaning, have parted company. The process, which alone makes meaningful whatever it happens to carry along, has thus acquired a monopoly of universality and significance.

Certainly nothing more sharply distinguishes the modern concept of history from that of antiquity. For this distinction does not hinge on whether or not antiquity had a concept of world history or an idea of mankind as a whole. What is much more relevant is that Greek and Roman historiography, much as they differ from each other, both take it for granted that the meaning or, as the Romans would say, the lesson of each event, deed, or occurrence is revealed in and by itself. This, to be sure, does not exclude either causality or the context in which something occurs; antiquity was as aware of these as we are. But causality and context were seen in a light provided by the event itself, illuminating a specific segment of human affairs; they were not envisaged as having an independent existence of which the event would be only the more or less accidental though adequate expression. Everything that was done or happened contained and disclosed its share of "general" meaning within the confines of its individual shape and did not need a developing and engulfing process to become significant. Herodotus wanted "to say what is" (*λέγειν τὰ ἔόντα*) because saying and writing stabilize the futile and perishable, "fabricate a memory" for it, in the Greek idiom: *μνήμην ποιείσθαι*; yet he never would have doubted that each thing that is or was carries its meaning within itself and needs only the word to make it manifest (*λόγοις δηλοῦν*, "to disclose through words"), to "display the great deeds in public," *ἀπόδειξις ἔργων μεγάλων*. The flux of his narrative is sufficiently loose to leave room for many stories, but there is nothing in this flux indicative that the general bestows meaning and significance on the particular.

For this shift of emphasis it is immaterial whether Greek poetry and historiography saw the meaning of the event in some surpassing greatness justifying its remembrance by posterity, or whether the Romans conceived of history as a storehouse of examples taken from actual political behavior, demonstrating what tradition, the

authority of ancestors, demanded from each generation and what the past had accumulated for the benefit of the present. Our notion of historical process overrules both concepts, bestowing upon mere time-sequence an importance and dignity it never had before.

Because of this modern emphasis upon time and time-sequence, it has often been maintained that the origin of our historical consciousness lies in the Hebrew-Christian tradition, with its rectilinear time-concept and its idea of a divine providence giving to the whole of man's historical time the unity of a plan of salvation—an idea which indeed stands as much in contrast to the insistence on individual events and occurrences of classical antiquity as to the cyclical time-speculations of late antiquity. A great deal of evidence has been cited in support of the thesis that the modern historical consciousness has a Christian religious origin and came into being through a secularization of originally theological categories. Only our religious tradition, it is said, knows of a beginning and, in the Christian version, an end of the world; if human life on earth follows a divine plan of salvation, then its mere sequence must harbor a significance independent of and transcending all single occurrences. Therefore, the argument runs, a "well-defined outline of world history" did not appear prior to Christianity, and the first philosophy of history is presented in Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*. And it is true that in Augustine we find the notion that history itself, namely that which has meaning and makes sense, can be separated from the single historical events related in chronological narrative. He states explicitly that "although the past institutions of men are related in historical narrative, history itself is not to be counted among human institutions."¹⁹

This similarity between the Christian and the modern concept of history is deceptive, however. It rests on a comparison with the cyclical history-speculations of late antiquity and overlooks the classical history-concepts of Greece and Rome. The comparison is supported by the fact that Augustine himself, when he refuted pagan time-speculations, was primarily concerned with the cyclical time-theories of his own era, which indeed no Christian could accept because of the absolute uniqueness of Christ's life and death on

earth: "Once Christ died for our sins; and rising from the dead, he dieth no more." ²⁰ What modern interpreters are liable to forget is that Augustine claimed this uniqueness of event, which sounds so familiar to our ears, for this one event only—the supreme event in human history, when eternity, as it were, broke into the course of earthly mortality; he never claimed such uniqueness, as we do, for ordinary secular events. The simple fact that the problem of history arose in Christian thought only with Augustine should make us doubt its Christian origin, and this all the more as it arose, in terms of Augustine's own philosophy and theology, because of an accident. The fall of Rome, occurring in his lifetime, was interpreted by Christians and pagans alike as a decisive event, and it was to the refutation of this belief that Augustine devoted thirteen years of his life. The point, as he saw it, was that no purely secular event could or should ever be of central import to man. His lack of interest in what we call history was so great that he devoted only one book of the *Civitas Dei* to secular events; and in commissioning his friend and pupil Orosius to write a "world history" he had no more in mind than a "true compilation of the evils of the world." ²¹

Augustine's attitude toward secular history is essentially no different from that of the Romans, albeit the emphasis is inverted: history remains a storehouse of examples, and the location of events in time within the secular course of history remains without importance. Secular history repeats itself, and the only story in which unique and unrepeatable events take place begins with Adam and ends with the birth and death of Christ. Thereafter secular powers rise and fall as in the past and will rise and fall until the world's end, but no fundamentally new truth will ever again be revealed by such mundane events, and Christians are not supposed to attach particular significance to them. In all truly Christian philosophy man is a "pilgrim on earth," and this fact alone separates it from our own historical consciousness. To the Christian, as to the Roman, the significance of secular events lay in their having the character of examples likely to repeat themselves, so that action could follow certain standardized patterns. (This, incidentally, is also very far removed from the Greek notion of the heroic deed, related by poets

and historians, which serves as a kind of yardstick with which to measure one's own capacities for greatness. The difference between the faithful following of a recognized example and the attempt to measure oneself against it is the difference between Roman-Christian morality and what has been called the Greek agonal spirit, which did not know any "moral" considerations but only an *ἀεὶ ἀριστεύειν*, an unceasing effort always to be the best of all.) For us, on the other hand, history stands and falls on the assumption that the process in its very secularity tells a story of its own and that, strictly speaking, repetitions cannot occur.

Even more alien to the modern concept of history is the Christian notion that mankind has a beginning and an end, that the world was created in time and will ultimately perish, like all things temporal. Historical consciousness did not arise when the creation of the world was taken as the starting point for chronological enumeration, by the Jews in the Middle Ages; nor did it arise in the sixth century when Dionysius Exiguus began counting time from the birth of Christ. We know of similar schemes of chronology in Oriental civilization, and the Christian calendar imitated the Roman practice of counting time from the year of the foundation of Rome. In stark contrast stands the modern computation of historical dates, introduced only at the end of the eighteenth century, that takes the birth of Christ as a turning point from which to count time both backward and forward. This chronological reform is presented in the textbooks as a mere technical improvement, needed for scholarly purposes to facilitate the exact fixing of dates in ancient history without referring to a maze of different time-reckonings. In more recent times, Hegel inspired an interpretation which sees in the modern time system a truly Christian chronology because the birth of Christ now seems to have become the turning point of world history.²²

Neither of these explanations is satisfactory. Chronological reforms for scholarly purposes have occurred many times in the past without being accepted in everyday life, precisely because they were invented for scholarly convenience only and did not correspond to any changed time-concept in society at large. The decisive thing

in our system is not that the birth of Christ now appears as the turning point of world history, for it had been recognized as such and with greater force many centuries before without any similar effect upon our chronology, but rather that now, for the first time, the history of mankind reaches back into an infinite past to which we can add at will and into which we can inquire further as it stretches ahead into an infinite future. This twofold infinity of past and future eliminates all notions of beginning and end, establishing mankind in a potential earthly immortality. What at first glance looks like a Christianization of world history in fact eliminates all religious time-speculations from secular history. So far as secular history is concerned we live in a process which knows no beginning and no end and which thus does not permit us to entertain eschatological expectations. Nothing could be more alien to Christian thought than this concept of an earthly immortality of mankind.

The great impact of the notion of history upon the consciousness of the modern age came relatively late, not before the last third of the eighteenth century, finding with relative quickness its climactic consummation in Hegel's philosophy. The central concept of Hegelian metaphysics is history. This alone places it in the sharpest possible opposition to all previous metaphysics, which, since Plato, had looked for truth and the revelation of eternal Being everywhere except in the realm of human affairs—*τὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων πράγματα*—of which Plato speaks with such contempt precisely because no permanence could be found in it and therefore it could not be expected to disclose truth. To think, with Hegel, that truth resides and reveals itself in the time-process itself is characteristic of all modern historical consciousness, however it expresses itself, in specifically Hegelian terms or not. The rise of the humanities in the nineteenth century was inspired by the same feeling for history and is hence clearly distinguished from the recurrent revivals of antiquity that took place in previous periods. Men now began to read, as Meinecke pointed out, as nobody had ever read before. They "read in order to force from history the ultimate truth it could offer to God-seeking people"; but this ultimate truth was no longer supposed to reside

in a single book, whether the Bible or some substitute for it. History itself was considered such a book, the book "of the human soul in times and nations," as Herder defined it.²³

Recent historical research has shed much new light on the transitional period between the Middle Ages and modern times, with the result that the modern age, previously assumed to have begun with the Renaissance, has been traced back into the very heart of the Middle Ages. This greater insistence on an unbroken continuity, valuable though it is, has one drawback, that by trying to bridge the gulf separating a religious culture from the secular world we live in, it bypasses, rather than solves, the great riddle of the sudden undeniable rise of the secular. If by "secularization" one means no more than the rise of the secular and the concomitant eclipse of a transcendent world, then it is undeniable that modern historical consciousness is very intimately connected with it. This, however, in no way implies the doubtful transformation of religious and transcendent categories into immanent earthly aims and standards on which the historians of ideas have recently insisted. Secularization means first of all simply the separation of religion and politics, and this affected both sides so fundamentally that nothing is less likely to have taken place than the gradual transformation of religious categories into secular concepts which the defenders of unbroken continuity try to establish. The reason they can succeed to some extent in convincing us lies in the nature of ideas in general rather than in the period with which they deal; the moment one separates an idea entirely from its basis in real experience, it is not difficult to establish a connection between it and almost any other idea. In other words, if we assume that something like an independent realm of pure ideas exists, all notions and concepts cannot but be inter-related, because then they all owe their origin to the same source: a human mind seen in its extreme subjectivity, forever playing with its own images, unaffected by experience and with no relationship to the world, whether the world is conceived as nature or as history.

However, if we understand by secularization an event that can be dated in historical time rather than a change of ideas, then the question is not whether Hegel's "cunning of reason" was a secular-

ization of divine providence or whether Marx's classless society represents a secularization of the Messianic Age. The fact is that the separation of church and state occurred, eliminating religion from public life, removing all religious sanctions from politics, and causing religion to lose that political element it had acquired in the centuries when the Roman Catholic Church acted as the heir of the Roman Empire. (It does not follow that this separation converted religion into an entirely "private affair." This type of privacy in religion comes about when a tyrannical regime prohibits the public functioning of churches, denying the believer the public space in which he can appear with others and be seen by them. The public-secular domain, or the political sphere, properly speaking, comprehends and has room for the public-religious sphere. A believer can be a member of a church and at the same time act as a citizen in the larger unit constituted by all belonging to the City.) This secularization was frequently brought about by men who did not doubt in the least the truth of traditional religious teaching (even Hobbes died in mortal fear of "hell-fire," and Descartes prayed to the Holy Virgin) and nothing in the sources justifies us in considering all those who prepared or helped to establish a new independent secular sphere as secret or unconscious atheists. All that we can say is that, whatever their faith or lack of it, it was without influence on the secular. Thus the political theorists of the seventeenth century accomplished secularization by separating political thinking from theology, and by insisting that the rules of natural law provided a basis for the body politic even if God did not exist. It was the same thought which made Grotius say that "even God cannot cause two times two not to make four." The point was not to deny the existence of God but to discover in the secular realm an independent, immanent meaning which even God could not alter.

It has been pointed out before that the most important consequence of the rise of the secular realm in the modern age was that belief in individual immortality—whether it be the immortality of the soul or, more importantly, the resurrection of the body—lost its politically binding force. Now indeed "it was inevitable that earthly posterity should once again become the principal substance

of hope," but it does not follow from this that a secularization of the belief in a hereafter occurred or that the new attitude was essentially nothing but "a redistribution of the Christian ideas which it seeks to displace."²⁴ What actually happened was that the problem of politics regained that grave and decisive relevance for the existence of men which it had been lacking since antiquity because it was irreconcilable with a strictly Christian understanding of the secular. For Greeks and Romans alike, all differences notwithstanding, the foundation of a body politic was brought about by man's need to overcome the mortality of human life and the futility of human deeds. Outside the body politic, man's life was not only and not even primarily insecure, i.e., exposed to the violence of others; it was without meaning and dignity because under no circumstances could it leave any traces behind it. That was the reason for the curse laid by Greek thinking on the whole sphere of private life, the "idiocy" of which consisted in its being concerned solely with survival, just as it was the reason for Cicero's contention that only through building and preserving political communities could human virtue attain to the ways of the gods.²⁵ In other words, the secularization of the modern age once more brought to the fore that activity which Aristotle had called *ἀθανατίζειν*, a term for which we have no ready equivalent in our living languages. The reason I mention this word again is that it points to an activity of "immortalizing" rather than to the object which is to become immortal. To strive for immortality can mean, as it certainly did in early Greece, the immortalization of oneself through famous deeds and the acquisition of immortal fame; it can also mean the addition to the human artifice of something more permanent than we are ourselves; and it can mean, as it did with the philosophers, the spending of one's life with things immortal. In any event, the word designated an activity and not a belief, and what the activity required was an imperishable space guaranteeing that "immortalizing" would not be in vain.²⁶

To us, who have been accustomed to the idea of immortality only through the lasting appeal of works of art and perhaps through the relative permanence we ascribe to all great civilizations, it may appear implausible that the drive toward immortality should lie at

the foundation of political communities.²⁷ To the Greeks, however, the latter might very well have been much more taken for granted than the former. Did not Pericles think that the highest praise he could bestow upon Athens was to claim that it no longer needed "a Homer or others of his craft," but that, thanks to the polis, Athenians everywhere would leave "imperishable monuments" behind them?²⁸ What Homer had done was to immortalize human deeds,²⁹ and the polis could dispense with the service of "others of his craft" because it offered each of its citizens that public-political space that it assumed would confer immortality upon his acts. The growing apolitism of the philosophers after Socrates' death, their demand to be freed from political activities and their insistence on performing a nonpractical, purely theoretical *ἀθανατίζειν* outside the sphere of political life had philosophical as well as political causes, but among the political ones was certainly the increasing decay of polis life, making even the permanence, let alone immortality, of this particular body politic more and more doubtful.

The apolitism of ancient philosophy foreshadowed the much more radical anti-political attitude of early Christianity, which, however, in its very extremism survived only so long as the Roman Empire provided a stable body politic for all nations and all religions. During these early centuries of our era the conviction that things earthly are perishable remained a religious matter and was the belief of those who wanted to have nothing to do with political affairs. This changed decisively with the crucial experience of the fall of Rome, the sacking of the Eternal City, after which no age ever again believed that any human product, least of all a political structure, could endure forever. As far as Christian thought was concerned, this was a mere reaffirmation of its beliefs. It was of no great relevance, as Augustine pointed out. To Christians only individual men were immortal, but nothing else of this world, neither mankind as a whole nor the earth itself, least of all the human artifice. Only by transcending this world could immortalizing activities be performed, and the only institution that could be justified within the secular realm was the Church, the *Civitas Dei* on earth, to which had fallen the burden of political responsibility and into which all genuinely

political impulses could be drawn. That this transformation of Christianity and its earlier anti-political impulses into a great and stable political institution was possible at all without complete perversion of the Gospel is almost wholly due to Augustine, who, though hardly the father of our concept of history, is probably the spiritual author and certainly the greatest theorist of Christian politics. What was decisive in this respect was that he, still firmly rooted in the Roman tradition, could add to the Christian notion of an everlasting life the idea of a future *civitas*, a *Civitas Dei*, where men even in the hereafter would continue to live in a community. Without this reformulation of Christian thoughts through Augustine, Christian politics might have remained what they had been in the early centuries, a contradiction in terms. Augustine could solve the dilemma because the language itself came to his help: in Latin the word "to live" had always coincided with *inter homines esse*, "to be in the company of men," so that an everlasting life in Roman interpretation was bound to mean that no man would ever have to part from human company even though in death he had to leave the earth. Thus the fact of the plurality of men, one of the fundamental prerequisites of political life, bound human "nature" even under the conditions of individual immortality, and was not among the characteristics which this "nature" had acquired after Adam's fall and which made politics in the mere secular sense a necessity for the sinful life on earth. Augustine's conviction that some kind of political life must exist even under conditions of sinlessness, and indeed sanctity, he summed up in one sentence: *Socialis est vita sanctorum*, even the life of the saints is a life together with other men.³⁰

If the insight into the perishability of all human creations had no great relevance for Christian thought and could even in its greatest thinker be in accord with a conception of politics beyond the secular realm, it became very troublesome in the modern age when the secular sphere of human life had emancipated itself from religion. The separation of religion and politics meant that no matter what an individual might believe as a member of a church, as a citizen he acted and behaved on the assumption of human mortality. Hobbes's

fear of hell-fire did not influence in the least his construction of government as the Leviathan, a mortal god to overawe all men. Politically speaking, within the secular realm itself secularization meant nothing more or less than that men once more had become mortals. If this led them to a rediscovery of antiquity, which we call humanism, and in which Greek and Roman sources spoke again a much more familiar language corresponding to experiences much more similar to their own, it certainly did not allow them in practice to mold their behavior in accordance with either the Greek or the Roman example. The ancient trust in the world's being more permanent than individual men and in political structures as a guarantee of earthly survival after death did not return, so that the ancient opposition of a mortal life to a more or less immortal world failed them. Now both life and world had become perishable, mortal, and futile.

Today we find it difficult to grasp that this situation of absolute mortality could be unbearable to men. However, looking back upon the development of the modern age up to the beginning of our own, the modern world, we see that centuries passed before we became accustomed to the notion of absolute mortality, so that the thought of it no longer bothers us and the old alternative between an individual immortal life in a mortal world and a mortal life in an immortal world has ceased to be meaningful. In this respect, however, as in many others, we differ from all previous ages. Our concept of history, though essentially a concept of the modern age, owes its existence to the transition period when religious confidence in immortal life had lost its influence upon the secular and the new indifference toward the question of immortality had not yet been born.

If we leave aside the new indifference and stay within the limits of the traditional alternative, bestowing immortality either upon life or upon the world, then it is obvious that *ἀθανατίζειν*, immortalizing, as an activity of mortal men, can be meaningful only if there is no guarantee of life in the hereafter. At that moment, however, it becomes almost a necessity as long as there is any concern with immortality whatsoever. It was therefore in the course of its search

for a strictly secular realm of enduring permanence that the modern age discovered the potential immortality of mankind. This is what is manifestly expressed in our calendar; it is the actual content of our concept of history. History, stretching into the twofold infinity of past and future, can guarantee immortality on earth in much the same way as the Greek polis or the Roman republic had guaranteed that human life and human deeds, insofar as they disclosed something essential and something great, would receive a strictly human and earthly permanence in this world. The great advantage of this concept has been that the twofold infinity of the historical process establishes a time-space in which the very notion of an end is virtually inconceivable, whereas its great disadvantage, compared with ancient political theory, seems to be that permanence is entrusted to a flowing process, as distinguished from a stable structure. At the same time the immortalizing process has become independent of cities, states, and nations; it encompasses the whole of mankind, whose history Hegel was consequently able to see as one uninterrupted development of the Spirit. Therewith mankind ceases to be only a species of nature, and what distinguishes man from the animals is no longer merely that he has speech (*λόγον ἔχων*), as in the Aristotelian definition, or that he has reason, as in the medieval definition (*animal rationale*): his very life now distinguishes him, the one thing that in the traditional definition he was supposed to share with the animals. In the words of Droysen, who was perhaps the most thoughtful of the nineteenth-century historians: "What their species is for animals and plants . . . that is history for human beings." ³¹

III: History and Politics

While it is obvious that our historical consciousness would never have been possible without the rise of the secular realm to a new dignity, it was not so obvious that the historical process would eventually be called upon to bestow the necessary new meaning and significance upon men's deeds and sufferings on earth. And indeed,

at the beginning of the modern age everything pointed to an elevation of political action and political life, and the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, so rich in new political philosophies, were still quite unaware of any special emphasis on history as such. Their concern, on the contrary, was to get rid of the past rather than to rehabilitate the historical process. The distinguishing trait of Hobbes's philosophy is his single-minded insistence on the future and the resulting teleological interpretation of thought as well as of action. The conviction of the modern age that man can know only that which he himself has made seems to be in accordance with a glorification of action rather than with the basically contemplative attitude of the historian and of historical consciousness in general.

Thus one of the reasons for Hobbes's break with traditional philosophy was that while all previous metaphysics had followed Aristotle in holding that the inquiry into the first causes of everything that is comprises the chief task of philosophy, it was Hobbes's contention that, on the contrary, the task of philosophy was to guide purposes and aims and to establish a reasonable teleology of action. So important was this point to Hobbes that he insisted that animals too are capable of discovering causes and that therefore this cannot be the true distinction between human and animal life; he found the distinction instead in the ability to reckon with "the effects of some present or past cause . . . of which I have not at any time seen any sign but in man only."³² The modern age not only produced at its very start a new and radical political philosophy—Hobbes is only one example, though perhaps the most interesting—it also produced for the first time philosophers willing to orient themselves according to the requirements of the political realm; and this new political orientation is present not only in Hobbes but, *mutatis mutandis*, in Locke and Hume as well. It can be said that Hegel's transformation of metaphysics into a philosophy of history was preceded by an attempt to get rid of metaphysics for the sake of a philosophy of politics.

In any consideration of the modern concept of history one of the crucial problems is to explain its sudden rise during the last third

of the eighteenth century and the concomitant decrease of interest in purely political thinking. (Vico must be said to be a forerunner whose influence was not felt until more than two generations after his death.) Where a genuine interest in political theory still survived it ended in despair, as in Tocqueville, or in the confusion of politics with history, as in Marx. For what else but despair could have inspired Tocqueville's assertion that "since the past has ceased to throw its light upon the future the mind of man wanders in obscurity"? This is actually the conclusion of the great work in which he had "delineated the society of the modern world" and in the introduction to which he had proclaimed that "a new science of politics is needed for a new world."³³ And what else but confusion—a merciful confusion for Marx himself and a fatal one for his followers—could have led to Marx's identification of action with "the making of history"?

Marx's notion of "making history" had an influence far beyond the circle of convinced Marxists or determined revolutionaries. Although it is closely connected with Vico's idea that history was made by man, as distinguished from "nature," which was made by God, the difference between them is still decisive. For Vico, as later for Hegel, the importance of the concept of history was primarily theoretical. It never occurred to either of them to apply this concept directly by using it as a principle of action. Truth they conceived of as being revealed to the contemplative, backward-directed glance of the historian, who, by being able to see the process as a whole, is in a position to overlook the "narrow aims" of acting men, concentrating instead on the "higher aims" that realize themselves behind their backs (Vico). Marx, on the other hand, combined this notion of history with the teleological political philosophies of the earlier stages of the modern age, so that in his thought the "higher aims"—which according to the philosophers of history revealed themselves only to the backward glance of the historian and philosopher—could become intended aims of political action. The point is that Marx's political philosophy was based not upon an analysis of action and acting men but, on the contrary, on the Hegelian con-

cern with history. It was the historian and the philosopher of history who were politicalized. By the same token, the age-old identification of action with making and fabricating was supplemented and perfected, as it were, through identifying the contemplative gaze of the historian with the contemplation of the model (the *εἶδος* or "shape" from which Plato had derived his "ideas") that guides the craftsmen and precedes all making. And the danger of these combinations did not lie in making immanent what was formerly transcendent, as is often alleged, as though Marx attempted to establish on earth a paradise formerly located in the hereafter. The danger of transforming the unknown and unknowable "higher aims" into planned and willed intentions was that meaning and meaningfulness were transformed into ends—which is what happened when Marx took the Hegelian meaning of all history—the progressive unfolding and actualization of the idea of Freedom—to be an end of human action, and when he furthermore, in accordance with tradition, viewed this ultimate "end" as the end-product of a manufacturing process. But neither freedom nor any other meaning can ever be the product of a human activity in the sense in which the table is clearly the end-product of the carpenter's activity.

The growing meaninglessness of the modern world is perhaps nowhere more clearly foreshadowed than in this identification of meaning and end. Meaning, which can never be the aim of action and yet, inevitably, will rise out of human deeds after the action itself has come to an end, was now pursued with the same machinery of intentions and of organized means as were the particular direct aims of concrete action—with the result that it was as though meaning itself had departed from the world of men and men were left with nothing but an unending chain of purposes in whose progress the meaningfulness of all past achievements was constantly canceled out by future goals and intentions. It is as though men were stricken suddenly blind to fundamental distinctions such as the distinction between meaning and end, between the general and the particular, or, grammatically speaking, the distinction between "for the sake of . . ." and "in order to . . ." (as though the carpenter, for in-

stance, forgot that only his particular acts in making a table are performed in the mode of "in order to," but that his whole life as a carpenter is ruled by something quite different, namely an encompassing notion "for the sake of" which he became a carpenter in the first place). And the moment such distinctions are forgotten and meanings are degraded into ends, it follows that ends themselves are no longer safe because the distinction between means and ends is no longer understood, so that finally all ends turn and are degraded into means.

In this version of deriving politics from history, or rather, political conscience from historical consciousness—by no means restricted to Marx in particular, or even to pragmatism in general—we can easily detect the age-old attempt to escape from the frustrations and fragility of human action by construing it in the image of making. What distinguishes Marx's own theory from all others in which the notion of "making history" has found a place is only that he alone realized that if one takes history to be the object of a process of fabrication or making, there must come a moment when this "object" is completed, and that if one imagines that one can "make history," one cannot escape the consequence that there will be an end to history. Whenever we hear of grandiose aims in politics, such as establishing a new society in which justice will be guaranteed forever, or fighting a war to end all wars or to make the whole world safe for democracy, we are moving in the realm of this kind of thinking.

In this context, it is important to see that here the process of history, as it shows itself in our calendar's stretching into the infinity of the past and the future, has been abandoned for the sake of an altogether different kind of process, that of making something which has a beginning as well as an end, whose laws of motion, therefore, can be determined (for instance as dialectical movement) and whose innermost content can be discovered (for instance as class struggle). This process, however, is incapable of guaranteeing men any kind of immortality because its end cancels out and makes unimportant whatever went before: in the classless society the best mankind can

do with history is to forget the whole unhappy affair, whose only purpose was to abolish itself. It cannot bestow meaning on particular occurrences either, because it has dissolved all of the particular into means whose meaningfulness ends the moment the end-product is finished: single events and deeds and sufferings have no more meaning here than hammer and nails have with respect to the finished table.

We know the curious ultimate meaninglessness arising from all the strictly utilitarian philosophies that were so common and so characteristic of the earlier industrial phase of the modern age, when men, fascinated by the new possibilities of manufacturing, thought of everything in terms of means and ends, i.e., categories whose validity had its source and justification in the experience of producing use-objects. The trouble lies in the nature of the categorical framework of ends and means, which changes every attained end immediately into the means to a new end, thereby, as it were, destroying meaning wherever it is applied, until in the midst of the seemingly unending utilitarian questioning, What is the use of . . . ? in the midst of the seemingly unending progress where the aim of today becomes the means of a better tomorrow, the one question arises which no utilitarian thinking can ever answer: "And what is the use of use?" as Lessing once succinctly put it.

This meaninglessness of all truly utilitarian philosophies could escape Marx's awareness because he thought that after Hegel in his dialectics had discovered the law of all movements, natural and historical, he himself had found the spring and content of this law in the historical realm and thereby the concrete meaning of the story history has to tell. Class struggle—to Marx this formula seemed to unlock all the secrets of history, just as the law of gravity had appeared to unlock all the secrets of nature. Today, after we have been treated to one such history-construction after another, to one such formula after another, the question for us is no longer whether this or that particular formula is correct. In all such attempts what is considered to be a meaning is in fact no more than a pattern, and within the limitations of utilitarian thought nothing but patterns can

make sense, because only patterns can be "made," whereas meanings cannot be, but, like truth, will only disclose or reveal themselves. Marx was only the first—and still the greatest, among historians—to mistake a pattern for a meaning, and he certainly could hardly have been expected to realize that there was almost no pattern into which the events of the past would not have fitted as neatly and consistently as they did into his own. Marx's pattern at least was based on one important historical insight; since then we have seen historians freely imposing upon the maze of past facts almost any pattern they wish, with the result that the ruin of the factual and particular through the seemingly higher validity of general "meanings" has even undermined the basic factual structure of all historical process, that is, chronology.

Moreover, Marx construed his pattern as he did because of his concern with action and impatience with history. He is the last of those thinkers who stand at the borderline between the modern age's earlier interest in politics and its later preoccupation with history. One might mark the point where the modern age abandoned its earlier attempts to establish a new political philosophy for its re-discovery of the secular by recalling the moment at which the French Revolutionary calendar was given up, after one decade, and the Revolution was reintegrated, as it were, into the historical process with its twofold extension toward infinity. It was as though it was conceded that not even the Revolution, which, along with the promulgation of the American Constitution, is still the greatest event in modern political history, contained sufficient independent meaning in itself to begin a new historical process. For the Republican calendar was abandoned not merely because of Napoleon's wish to rule an empire and to be considered the equal of the crowned heads of Europe. The abandonment also implied the refusal, despite the re-establishment of the secular, to accept the conviction of the ancients that political actions are meaningful regardless of their historical location, and especially a repudiation of the Roman faith in the sacredness of foundations with the accompanying custom of numbering time from the foundation date. Indeed, the French Revolu-

tion, which was inspired by the Roman spirit and appeared to the world, as Marx liked to say, in Roman dress, reversed itself in more than one sense.

An equally important landmark in the shift from the earlier concern with politics to the later concern with history is encountered in Kant's political philosophy. Kant, who had greeted in Rousseau "the Newton of the moral world," and had been greeted by his contemporaries as the theorist of the Rights of Man,³⁴ still had great difficulty in coping with the new idea of history, which had probably come to his attention in the writings of Herder. He is one of the last philosophers to complain in earnest about the "meaningless course of human affairs," the "melancholy haphazardness" of historical events and developments, this hopeless, senseless "mixture of error and violence," as Goethe once defined history. Yet Kant also saw what others had seen before him, that once you look at history in its entirety (*im Grossen*), rather than at single events and the ever-frustrated intentions of human agents, everything suddenly makes sense, because there is always at least a story to tell. The process as a whole appears to be guided by an "intention of nature" unknown to acting men but comprehensible to those who come after them. By pursuing their own aims without rhyme or reason men seem to be led by "the guiding thread of reason."³⁵

It is of some importance to notice that Kant, like Vico before him, was already aware of what Hegel later called "the cunning of reason" (Kant occasionally called it "the ruse of nature"). He even had some rudimentary insight into historical dialectics, as when he pointed out that nature pursues its over-all aims through "the antagonism of men in society . . . without which men, good-natured like the sheep they tend, would hardly know how to give a higher value to their own existence than is possessed by their cattle." This shows to what extent the very idea of history as a process suggests that in their actions men are led by something of which they are not necessarily conscious and which finds no direct expression in the action itself. Or, to put it another way, it shows how extremely useful the modern concept of history proved to be in giving the secular political realm a meaning which it otherwise seemed to be devoid of. In

Kant, in contrast to Hegel, the motive for the modern escape from politics into history is still quite clear. It is the escape into the "whole," and the escape is prompted by the meaninglessness of the particular. And since Kant's primary interest was still in the nature and principles of political (or, as he would say, moral) action, he was able to perceive the crucial drawback of the new approach, the one great stumbling block which no philosophy of history and no concept of progress can ever remove. In Kant's own words: "It will always remain bewildering . . . that the earlier generations seem to carry on their burdensome business only for the sake of the later . . . and that only the last should have the good fortune to dwell in the [completed] building." ³⁶

The bewildered regret and great diffidence with which Kant resigned himself to introducing a concept of history into his political philosophy indicates with rare precision the nature of the perplexities which caused the modern age to shift its emphasis from a theory of politics—apparently so much more appropriate to its belief in the superiority of action to contemplation—to an essentially contemplative philosophy of history. For Kant was perhaps the only great thinker to whom the question "What shall I do?" was not only as relevant as the two other questions of metaphysics, "What can I know?" and "What may I hope?" but formed the very center of his philosophy. Therefore he was not troubled, as even Marx and Nietzsche were still troubled, by the traditional hierarchy of contemplation over action, the *vita contemplativa* over the *vita activa*; his problem was rather another traditional hierarchy which, because it is hidden and rarely articulate, has proved much more difficult to overcome, the hierarchy within the *vita activa* itself, where the acting of the statesman occupies the highest position, the making of the craftsman and artist an intermediary, and the laboring which provides the necessities for the functioning of the human organism the lowest. (Marx was later to reverse this hierarchy too, although he wrote explicitly only about elevating action over contemplation and changing the world as against interpreting it. In the course of this reversal he had to upset the traditional hierarchy within the *vita activa* as well, by putting the lowest of human activities, the activity

of labor, into the highest place. Action now appeared to be no more than a function of "the productive relationships" of mankind brought about by labor.) It is true that traditional philosophy often pays only lip service to the estimate of action as the highest activity of man, preferring the so much more reliable activity of making, so that the hierarchy within the *vita activa* has hardly ever been fully articulated. It is a sign of the political rank of Kant's philosophy that the old perplexities inherent in action were brought to the fore again.

However that may be, Kant could not but become aware of the fact that action fulfilled neither of the two hopes the modern age was bound to expect from it. If the secularization of our world implies the revival of the old desire for some kind of earthly immortality, then human action, especially in its political aspect, must appear singularly inadequate to meet the demands of the new age. From the point of view of motivation, action appears to be the least interesting and most futile of all human pursuits: "Passions, private aims, and the satisfaction of selfish desires, are . . . the most effective springs of action,"³⁷ and "the facts of known history," taken by themselves, "possess neither a common basis nor continuity nor coherence" (Vico). From the viewpoint of achievement, on the other hand, action appears at once to be more futile and more frustrating than the activities of laboring and of producing objects. Human deeds, unless they are remembered, are the most futile and perishable things on earth; they hardly outlast the activity itself and certainly by themselves can never aspire to that permanence which even ordinary use-objects possess when they outlast their maker's life, not to mention works of art, which speak to us over the centuries. Human action, projected into a web of relationships where many and opposing ends are pursued, almost never fulfills its original intention; no act can ever be recognized by its author as his own with the same happy certainty with which a piece of work of any kind can be recognized by its maker. Whoever begins to act must know that he has started something whose end he can never foretell, if only because his own deed has already changed everything and made it even more unpredictable. That is what Kant had in mind when he spoke of the

"melancholy haphazardness" (*trostlose Ungefahr*) which is so striking in the record of political history. "Action: one does not know its origin, one does not know its consequences:—therefore, does action possess any value at all?"³⁸ Were not the old philosophers right, and was it not madness to expect any meaning to arise out of the realm of human affairs?

For a long time it seemed that these inadequacies and perplexities within the *vita activa* could be solved by ignoring the peculiarities of action and by insisting upon the "meaningfulness" of the process of history in its entirety, which seemed to give to the political sphere that dignity and final redemption from "melancholy haphazardness" so obviously required. History—based on the manifest assumption that no matter how haphazard single actions may appear in the present and in their singularity, they inevitably lead to a sequence of events forming a story that can be rendered through intelligible narrative the moment the events are removed into the past—became the great dimension in which men could become "reconciled" with reality (Hegel), the reality of human affairs, i.e., of things which owe their existence exclusively to men. Moreover, since history in its modern version was conceived primarily as a process, it showed a peculiar and inspiring affinity to action, which, indeed, in contrast to all other human activities, consists first of all of starting processes—a fact of which human experience has of course always been aware, even though the preoccupation of philosophy with making as the model of human activity has prevented the elaboration of an articulate terminology and precise description. The very notion of process, which is so highly characteristic of modern science, both natural and historical, probably had its origin in this fundamental experience of action, to which secularization lent an emphasis such as it had not known since the very early centuries of Greek culture, even before the rise of the polis and certainly before the victory of the Socratic school. History in its modern version could come to terms with this experience; and though it failed to save politics itself from the old disgrace, though the single deeds and acts constituting the realm of politics, properly speaking, were left in limbo, it has at least bestowed upon the record of past events that share of

earthly immortality to which the modern age necessarily aspired, but which its acting men no longer dared to claim from posterity.

Epilogue

Today the Kantian and Hegelian way of becoming reconciled to reality through understanding the innermost meaning of the entire historical process seems to be quite as much refuted by our experience as the simultaneous attempt of pragmatism and utilitarianism to "make history" and impose upon reality the preconceived meaning and law of man. While trouble throughout the modern age has as a rule started with the natural sciences and has been the consequence of experience gained in the attempt to know the universe, this time the refutation rises simultaneously out of the physical and political fields. The trouble is that almost every axiom seems to lend itself to consistent deductions and this to such an extent that it is as though men were in a position to prove almost any hypothesis they might choose to adopt, not only in the field of purely mental constructions like the various over-all interpretations of history which are all equally well supported by facts, but in the natural sciences as well.³⁹

As far as natural science is concerned, this brings us back to the previously quoted statement by Heisenberg (pp. 48-49), whose consequence he once formulated in a different context as the paradox that man, whenever he tries to learn about things which neither are himself nor owe their existence to him, will ultimately encounter nothing but himself, his own constructions, and the patterns of his own actions.⁴⁰ This is no longer a question of academic objectivity. It cannot be solved by the reflection that man as a question-asking being naturally can receive only answers to match his own questions. If nothing more was involved, then we would be satisfied that different questions put "to one and the same physical event" reveal different but objectively equally "true" aspects of the same phenomenon, just as the table around which a number of people have taken

their places is seen by each of them in a different aspect, without thereby ceasing to be the object common to all of them. One could even imagine that a theory of theories, like the old *mathesis universalis*, might eventually be able to determine how many such questions are possible or how many "different types of natural law" can be applied to the same natural universe without contradiction.

The matter would become somewhat more serious if it turned out that no question exists at all which does not lead to a consistent set of answers—a perplexity we mentioned earlier when we discussed the distinction between pattern and meaning. In this instance the very distinction between meaningful and meaningless questions would disappear together with absolute truth, and the consistency we would be left with could just as well be the consistency of an asylum for paranoiacs or the consistency of the current demonstrations of the existence of God. However, what is really undermining the whole modern notion that meaning is contained in the process as a whole, from which the particular occurrence derives its intelligibility, is that not only can we prove this, in the sense of consistent deduction, but we can take almost any hypothesis and *act* upon it, with a sequence of results in reality which not only make sense but *work*. This means quite literally that everything is possible not only in the realm of ideas but in the field of reality itself.

In my studies of totalitarianism I tried to show that the totalitarian phenomenon, with its striking anti-utilitarian traits and its strange disregard for factuality, is based in the last analysis on the conviction that everything is possible—and not just permitted, morally or otherwise, as was the case with early nihilism. The totalitarian systems tend to demonstrate that action can be based on any hypothesis and that, in the course of consistently guided action, the particular hypothesis will become true, will become actual, factual reality. The assumption which underlies consistent action can be as mad as it pleases; it will always end in producing facts which are then "objectively" true. What was originally nothing but a hypothesis, to be proved or disproved by actual facts, will in the course of consistent

action always turn into a fact, never to be disproved. In other words, the axiom from which the deduction is started does not need to be, as traditional metaphysics and logic supposed, a self-evident truth; it does not have to tally at all with the facts as given in the objective world at the moment the action starts; the process of action, if it is consistent, will proceed to create a world in which the assumption becomes axiomatic and self-evident.

The frightening arbitrariness with which we are confronted whenever we decide to embark upon this type of action, which is the exact counterpart of consistent logical processes, is even more obvious in the political than in the natural realm. But it is more difficult to convince people that this holds true for past history. The historian, by gazing backward into the historical process, has been so accustomed to discovering an "objective" meaning, independent of the aims and awareness of the actors, that he is liable to overlook what actually happened in his attempt to discern some objective trend. He will, for example, overlook the particular characteristics of Stalin's totalitarian dictatorship in favor of the industrialization of the Soviet empire or of the nationalistic aims of traditional Russian foreign policy.

Within the natural sciences things are not essentially different, but they appear more convincing because they are so far removed from the competence of the layman and his healthy, stubborn common sense, which refuses to see what it cannot understand. Here too, thinking in terms of processes, on the one hand, and the conviction, on the other, that I know only what I have myself made, has led to the complete meaninglessness inevitably resulting from the insight that I can choose to do whatever I want and some kind of "meaning" will always be the consequence. In both instances the perplexity is that the particular incident, the observable fact or single occurrence of nature, or the reported deed and event of history, have ceased to make sense without a universal process in which they are supposedly embedded; yet the moment man approaches this process in order to escape the haphazard character of the particular, in order to find meaning—order and necessity—his effort is rebutted by the answer from all sides: Any order, any necessity, any mean-

ing you wish to impose will do. This is the clearest possible demonstration that under these conditions there is neither necessity nor meaning. It is as though the "melancholy haphazardness" of the particular had now caught up with us and were pursuing us into the very region where the generations before us had fled in order to escape it. The decisive factor in this experience, both in nature and in history, is not the patterns with which we tried to "explain," and which in the social and historical sciences cancel each other out more quickly, because they can all be consistently proved, than they do in the natural sciences, where matters are more complex and for this technical reason less open to the irrelevant arbitrariness of irresponsible opinions. These opinions, to be sure, have an altogether different source, but are liable to becloud the very relevant issue of contingency, with which we are everywhere confronted today. What is decisive is that our technology, which nobody can accuse of not functioning, is based on these principles, and that our social techniques, whose real field of experimentation lies in the totalitarian countries, have only to overcome a certain time-lag to be able to do for the world of human relations and human affairs as much as has already been done for the world of human artifacts.

The modern age, with its growing world-alienation, has led to a situation where man, wherever he goes, encounters only himself. All the processes of the earth and the universe have revealed themselves either as man-made or as potentially man-made. These processes, after having devoured, as it were, the solid objectivity of the given, ended by rendering meaningless the one over-all process which originally was conceived in order to give meaning to them, and to act, so to speak, as the eternal time-space into which they could all flow and thus be rid of their mutual conflicts and exclusiveness. This is what happened to our concept of history, as it happened to our concept of nature. In the situation of radical world-alienation, neither history nor nature is at all conceivable. This twofold loss of the world—the loss of nature and the loss of human artifice in the widest sense, which would include all history—has left behind it a society of men who, without a common world which would at once relate and separate them, either live in desperate lonely separa-

tion or are pressed together into a mass. For a mass-society is nothing more than that kind of organized living which automatically establishes itself among human beings who are still related to one another but have lost the world once common to all of them.

Er hat zwei Gegner: Der erste bedrängt ihn von hinten, vom Ursprung her. Der zweite verwehrt ihm den Weg nach vorn. Er kämpft mit beiden. Eigentlich unterstützt ihn der erste im Kampf mit dem Zweiten, denn er will ihn nach vorn drängen und ebenso unterstützt ihn der zweite im Kampf mit dem Ersten; denn er treibt ihn doch zurück. So ist es aber nur theoretisch. Denn es sind ja nicht nur die zwei Gegner da, sondern auch noch er selbst, und wer kennt eigentlich seine Absichten? Immerhin ist es sein Traum, dass er einmal in einem unbewachten Augenblick—dazu gehört allerdings eine Nacht, so finster wie noch keine war—aus der Kampflinie ausspringt und wegen seiner Kampfeserfahrung zum Richter über seine miteinander kämpfenden Gegner erhoben wird.

1. Tradition and the Modern Age

1. *Laws* 775.
2. For Engels, see his *Anti-Dühring*, Zürich, 1934, p. 275. For Nietzsche, see *Morgenröte, Werke, München*, 1954, vol. I, aph. 179.
3. The statement occurs in Engels' essay on "The Part played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man," in Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, London, 1950, vol. II, p. 74. For similar formulations by Marx himself, see especially "Die heilige Familie" and "Nationalökonomie und Philosophie" in *Jugendschriften*, Stuttgart, 1953.
4. Quoted here from *Capital*, Modern Library Edition, p. 824.
5. See *Götzendämmerung*, ed. K. Schlechta, München, vol. II, p. 963.
6. In *Das Kapital*, Zürich, 1933, vol. III, p. 870.
7. I refer here to Heidegger's discovery that the Greek word for truth means literally "disclosure"—ἀ-λήθεια.
8. *Op. cit.*, Zürich, p. 689.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 697–698.
10. That "the Cave is comparable with Hades" is also suggested by F. M. Cornford in his annotated translation of *The Republic*, New York, 1956, p. 230.
11. See *Jugendschriften*, p. 274.

2. The Concept of History

1. Cicero, *De legibus* I, 5; *De oratore* II, 55. Herodotus, the first historian, did not yet have at his disposal a word for history. He used the

word *ιστορεῖν*, but not in the sense of "historical narrative." Like *εἰδέναι*, to know, the word *ιστορία* is derived from *ἰδ-*, to see, and *ἱστωρ* means originally "eyewitness," then the one who examines witnesses and obtains truth through inquiry. Hence, *ιστορεῖν* has a double meaning: to testify and to inquire. (See Max Pohlenz, *Herodot, der erste Geschichtsschreiber des Abendlandes*, Leipzig and Berlin, 1937, p. 44.) For recent discussion of Herodotus and our concept of history, see especially C. N. Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture*, New York, 1944, ch. 12, one of the most stimulating and interesting pieces in the literature on the subject. His chief thesis, that Herodotus must be regarded as belonging to the Ionian school of philosophy and a follower of Heraclitus, is not convincing. Contrary to ancient sources, Cochrane construes the science of history as being part of the Greek development of philosophy. See note 6, and also Karl Reinhardt, "Herodots Persegeschichten" in *Von Werken und Formen*, Godesberg, 1948.

2. "The Gods of most nations claim to have created the world. The Olympian gods make no such claim. The most they ever did was to conquer it" (Gilbert Murray, *Five Stages of Greek Religion*, Anchor edition, p. 45). Against this statement one sometimes argues that Plato in the *Timaeus* introduced a creator of the world. But Plato's god is no real creator; he is a demiurge, a world-builder who does not create out of nothing. Moreover, Plato tells his story in the form of a myth invented by himself, and this, like similar myths in his work, are not proposed as truth. That no god and no man ever created the cosmos is beautifully stated in Heraclitus, fragment 30 (Diels), for this cosmical order of all things "has always been and is and will be—an ever-living fire that blazes up in proportions and dies away in proportions."

3. *On the Soul*, 415b13. See also *Economics*, 1343b24: Nature fulfills the being-forever with respect to the species through recurrence (*περίοδος*) but cannot do this with respect to the individual. In our context, it is irrelevant that the treatise is not by Aristotle but by one of his pupils, for we find the same thought in the treatise *On Generation and Corruption* in the concept of Becoming, which moves in a cycle—*γένεσις ἐξ ἀλλήλων κύκλω*, 331a8. The same thought of an "immortal human species" occurs in Plato, *Laws*, 721. See note 9.

4. Nietzsche, *Wille zur Macht*, Nr. 617, Edition Kröner, 1930.

5. Rilke, *Aus dem Nachlass des Grafen C. W.*, first series, poem X. Although the poetry is untranslatable, the content of these verses might be expressed as follows: "Mountains rest beneath a splendor of stars, but even in them time flickers. Ah, unsheltered in my wild, darkling heart lies immortality." I owe this translation to Denver Lindley.

6. *Poetics*, 1448b25 and 1450a16–22. For a distinction between poetry and historiography, see *ibid.*, ch. 9.

7. For tragedy as an imitation of action, see *ibid.*, ch. 6, 1.

8. *Griechische Kulturgeschichte*, Edition Kröner, II, p. 289.

9. For Plato, see *Laws* 721, where he makes it quite clear that he thinks the human species only in a certain way to be immortal—namely insofar as its successive generations taken as a whole are “growing together” with the entirety of time; mankind as a succession of generations and time are coeval: γένος οὖν ἀνθρώπων ἐστὶ τι ξυμφυὲς τοῦ παντός χρόνον, ὃ διὰ τέλους αὐτῷ ξυνέπεται καὶ συνέψεται, τούτῳ τῷ τρόπῳ ἀθάνατον ὄν. In other words, it is mere deathlessness—ἀθανασία—in which the mortals partake by virtue of belonging to an immortal species; it is not the timeless being-forever—the αἰεὶ εἶναι—in whose neighborhood the philosopher is admitted even though he is but a mortal. For Aristotle, see *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1177b30–35 and further in what follows.

10. *Ibid.*, 1143a36.

11. *Seventh Letter*.

12. W. Heisenberg, *Philosophic Problems of Nuclear Science*, New York, 1952, p. 24.

13. Quoted from Alexandre Koyré, “An Experiment in Measurement,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, vol. 97, no. 2, 1953.

14. The same point was made more than twenty years ago by Edgar Wind in his essay “Some Points of Contact between History and Natural Sciences” (in *Philosophy and History, Essays Presented to Ernst Cassirer*, Oxford, 1939). Wind already showed that the latest developments of science which make it so much less “exact” lead to the raising of questions by scientists “that historians like to look upon as their own.” It seems strange that so fundamental and obvious an argument should have played no role in the subsequent methodological and other discussions of historical science.

15. Quoted in Friedrich Meinecke, *Vom geschichtlichen Sinn und vom Sinn der Geschichte*, Stuttgart, 1951.

16. Erwin Schrodinger, *Science and Humanism*, Cambridge, 1951, pp. 25–26.

17. *De nostri temporis studiorum ratione*, iv. Quoted from the bilingual edition by W. F. Otto, *Vom Wesen und Weg der geistigen Bildung*, Godesberg, 1947, p. 41.

18. No one can look at the remains of ancient or medieval towns without being struck by the finality with which their walls separated them from their natural surroundings, whether these were landscapes or wilderness. Modern city-building, on the contrary, aims at the landscaping and urbanization of whole areas, where the distinction between town and country becomes more and more obliterated. This trend could possibly lead to the disappearance of cities even as we know them today.

19. In *De doctrina Christiana*, 2, 28, 44.

20. *De Civitate Dei*, XII, 13.

21. See Theodor Mommsen, "St. Augustine and the Christian Idea of Progress," in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, June 1951. A close reading shows a striking discrepancy between the content of this excellent article and the thesis expressed in its title. The best defense of the Christian origin of the concept of history is found in C. N. Cochrane, op. cit., p. 474. He holds that ancient historiography came to an end because it had failed to establish "a principle of historical intelligibility" and that Augustine solved this problem by substituting "the *logos* of Christ for that of classicism as a principle of understanding."

22. Especially interesting is Oscar Cullman, *Christ and Time*, London, 1951. Also Erich Frank, "The Role of History in Christian Thought" in *Knowledge, Will and Belief, Collected Essays*, Zürich, 1955.

23. In *Die Entstehung des Historismus*, München and Berlin, 1936, p. 394.

24. John Baillie, *The Belief in Progress*, London, 1950.

25. *De Re Publica*, 1.7.

26. The word seems to have been rarely used even in Greek. It occurs in Herodotus (book IV, 93 and 94) in the active sense and applies to the rites performed by a tribe that does not believe in death. The point is that the word does not mean "to believe in immortality," but "to act in a certain way in order to assure the escape from dying." In the passive sense (*ἀθανατίζεσθαι*, "to be rendered immortal") the word also occurs in Polybius (book VI, 54, 2); it is used in the description of Roman funeral rites and applies to the funeral orations, which render immortal through "constantly making new the fame of good men." The Latin equivalent, *aeternare*, again applies to immortal fame. (Horace, *Carmines*, book IV, c. 14, 5.)

Clearly, Aristotle was the first and perhaps the last to use this word for the specifically philosophic "activity" of contemplation. The text reads as follows: οὐ χρὴ δὲ κατὰ τοὺς παραινοῦντας ἀνθρώπινα φρονεῖν, ἀνθρώπων ὄντα οὐδὲ θνητὰ τὸν θνητόν, ἀλλ' ἐφ' ὅσον ἐνδέχεται ἀθανατίζειν. . . . (*Nichomachean Ethics*, 1177b31). "One should not think as do those who recommend human things for those who are mortals, but immortalize as far as possible. . . ." The medieval Latin translation (Eth. X, Lectio XI) does not use the old Latin word *aeternare* but translates "immortalize" through *immortalem facere*—to make immortal, presumably one's self. (*Oportet autem non secundum suadentes humana hominem entem, neque mortalia mortalem; sed in quantum contingit immortalem facere*. . . .) Modern standard translations fall

into the same error (see for instance the translation by W. D. Ross, who translates: "we must . . . make ourselves immortal"). In the Greek text, the word ἀθανατίζειν, like the word φρονεῖν, is an intransitive verb, it has no direct object. (I owe the Greek and Latin references to the kind help of Professors John Herman Randall, Jr., and Paul Oscar Kristeller of Columbia University. Needless to say, they are not responsible for translation and interpretation.)

27. It is rather interesting to note that Nietzsche, who once used the term "eternize"—probably because he remembered the passage in Aristotle—applied it to the spheres of art and religion. In *Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben*, he speaks of the "aeternisierenden Mächten der Kunst und Religion."

28. Thucydides II, 41.

29. How the poet, and especially Homer, bestowed immortality upon mortal men and futile deeds, we can still read in Pindar's *Odes*—now rendered into English by Richmond Lattimore, Chicago, 1955. See, for instance, "Isthmia" IV: 60 ff.; "Nemea" IV: 10, and VI: 50–55.

30. *De Civitate Dei*, XIX, 5.

31. Johannes Gustav Droysen, *Historik* (1882), München and Berlin, 1937, para. 82: "Was den Tieren, den Pflanzen ihr Gattungsbegriff—denn die Gattung ist, ἵνα τοῦ ἀνὲρ καὶ τοῦ θεοῦ μετέχωσιν—das ist den Menschen die Geschichte." Droysen does not mention author or source of the quotation. It sounds Aristotelian.

32. *Leviathan*, book I, ch. 3.

33. *Democracy in America*, 2nd part, last chapter, and 1st part, "Author's Introduction," respectively.

34. The first to see Kant as the theorist of the French Revolution was Friedrich Gentz in his "Nachtrag zu dem Raisonement des Herrn Prof. Kant über das Verhältnis zwischen Theorie und Praxis" in *Berliner Monatsschrift*, December 1793.

35. *Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht*, Introduction.

36. Op. cit., Third Thesis.

37. Hegel in *The Philosophy of History*, London, 1905, p. 21.

38. Nietzsche, *Wille zur Macht*, no. 291.

39. Martin Heidegger once pointed to this weird fact in a public discussion in Zürich (published under the title: "Aussprache mit Martin Heidegger am 6. November 1951," Photodruck Jurisverlag, Zürich, 1952): ". . . der Satz: man kann alles beweisen [ist] nicht ein Freibrief, sondern ein Hinweis auf die Möglichkeit, dass dort, wo man beweist im Sinne der Deduktion aus Axiomen, dies jederzeit in gewissem Sinne möglich ist. Das ist das unheimlich Rätselhafte, dessen Geheimnis ich

bisher auch nicht an einem Zipfel aufzuheben vermochte, dass dieses Verfahren in der modernen Naturwissenschaft stimmt."

40. Werner Heisenberg in recent publications renders this same thought in a number of variations. See for example *Das Naturbild der heutigen Physik*, Hamburg, 1956.

3. What Is Authority?

1. The formulation is Lord Acton's in his "Inaugural Lecture on the 'Study of History,'" reprinted in *Essays on Freedom and Power*, New York, 1955, p. 35.

2. Only a detailed description and analysis of the very original organizational structure of totalitarian movements and the institutions of totalitarian government could justify the use of the onion image. I must refer to the chapter on "Totalitarian Organization" in my book *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 2nd edition, New York, 1958.

3. This was already noticed by the Greek historian Dio Cassius, who, when writing a history of Rome, found it impossible to translate the word *auctoritas*: ἐλληγίνσαι αὐτὸ καθάπαξ ἀδύνατον ἔστι. (Quoted from Theodor Mommsen, *Römisches Staatsrecht*, 3rd edition, 1888, vol. III, p. 952, n. 4.) Moreover, one need only compare the Roman Senate, the republic's specifically authoritarian institution, with Plato's nocturnal council in the *Laws*, which, being composed of the ten oldest guardians for the constant supervision of the State, superficially resembles it, to become aware of the impossibility of finding a true alternative for coercion and persuasion within the framework of Greek political experience.

4. πόλις γὰρ οὐκ ἔσθ' ἥτις ἀνδρὸς ἔσθ' ἐνός. Sophocles, *Antigone*, 737.

5. *Laws*, 715.

6. Theodor Mommsen, *Römische Geschichte*, book I, chap. 5.

7. H. Wallon, *Histoire de l'Esclavage dans l'Antiquité*, Paris, 1847, vol. III, where one still finds the best description of the gradual loss of Roman liberty under the Empire caused by the constant increase of power of the imperial household. Since it was the imperial household and not the emperor who gained in power, the "despotism" which always had been characteristic of the private household and family life began to dominate the public realm.

8. A fragment from the lost dialogue *On Kingship* states that "it was not only not necessary for a king to become a philosopher, but actu-