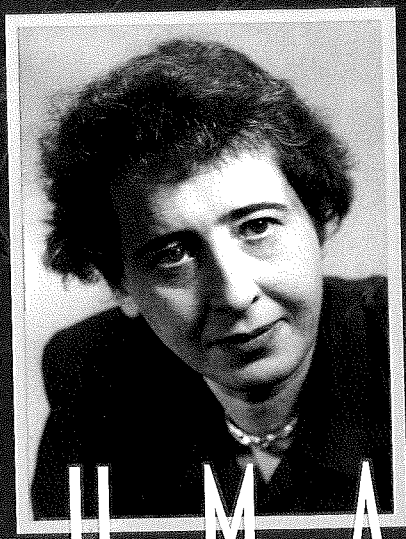
HANNAH ARENDT



THE HUMAN CONDITION

With an Introduction by Margaret Canovan

SECOND EDITION

A work of striking originality bursting with unexpected insights, *The Human Condition* is in many respects more relevant now than when it first appeared in 1958. In her study of the state of modern humanity, Hannah Arendt considers humankind from the perspective of the actions of which it is capable. The problems Arendt identified then—diminishing human agency and political freedom; the paradox that as human powers increase through technological and humanistic inquiry, we are less equipped to control the consequences of our actions—continue to confront us today.

This new edition, which coincides with the fortieth anniversary of its original publication, contains an improved and expanded index and a new introduction by noted Arendt scholar Margaret Canovan that incisively analyzes the book's argument and examines its present relevance. A classic in political and social theory, *The Human Condition* is a work that has proved both timeless and perpetually timely.

"[A] rare combination of tremendous intellectual power with great common sense. In the best of Miss Arendt's insights into history and politics seem both amazing and obvious."
—Mary McCarthy, *The New Yorker*

"[A] really superb work, one of the best interpretations of contemporary history that has appeared in years."
—William Barrett, *Partisan Review*

"*The Human Condition* is Arendt's most important philosophical work." —Richard Wollin, *The New Republic*

Hannah Arendt (1906–1975) was one of the leading social theorists in the United States. Her *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* and *Love and Saint Augustine* are also published by the University of Chicago Press.

Margaret Canovan is professor of political thought at Keele University, England. She is the author of *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of Her Thought*.

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Cover photograph: Hannah Arendt, ca. early 1950s. Courtesy of the Hannah Arendt Bluecher Literary Trust.

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BY HANNAH ARENDT

Second Edition

Introduction by
Margaret Canovan

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Introduction

Margaret Canovan

> With the creation of man, the principle of beginning came into the world. . . . It is in the nature of beginning that something new is started which cannot be expected. (Below, p. 177)

I

Hannah Arendt is preeminently the theorist of beginnings. All her books are tales of the unexpected (whether concerned with the novel horrors of totalitarianism or the new dawn of revolution), and reflections on the human capacity to start something new pervade her thinking. When she published *The Human Condition* in 1958, she herself sent something unexpected out into the world, and forty years later the book's originality is as striking as ever. Belonging to no genre, it has had no successful imitators, and its style and manner remain highly idiosyncratic. Although Arendt never tried to gather disciples and found a school of thought, she has been a great educator, opening her readers' eyes to new ways of looking at the world and at human affairs. Often the way she sheds light into neglected corners of experience is by making new distinctions, many of them threefold, as if conventional dichotomies were too constricting for her intellectual imagination. *The Human Condition* is crammed with distinctions: between labor, work, and action; between power, violence, and strength; between the earth and the world; between property and wealth; and many more, often established through etymological explorations. But these distinctions are linked to a more controversial way of challenging contemporary truisms. For (in what is surely the most unexpected feature of the book) she finds in ancient Greece an Archimedean point from which to cast a critical

eye on ways of thinking and behaving that we take for granted. Indeed, her calm assumption that we may be able to learn important lessons from the experience of people who lived two and a half millennia ago itself challenges the modern belief in progress. Continual references to the Greeks have added to the sense of bewilderment experienced by many readers of *The Human Condition*, who have found it hard to understand what is actually going on in the book. Here is a long, complex piece of writing that conforms to no established pattern, crammed with unexpected insights but lacking a clearly apparent argumentative structure. The most urgent question to be addressed by way of introduction is, therefore, what is Arendt actually *doing*?

Both the book's difficulty and its enduring fascination arise from the fact that she is doing a great many things at once. There are more intertwined strands of thought than can possibly be followed at first reading, and even repeated readings are liable to bring surprises. But one thing she is clearly *not* doing is writing political philosophy as conventionally understood: that is to say, offering political prescriptions backed up by philosophical arguments. Readers accustomed to that genre have tried to find something like it in *The Human Condition*, usually by stressing Arendt's account of the human capacity for action. Since the book is laced with criticism of modern society, it is tempting to suppose that she intended to present a utopia of political action, a kind of New Athens. Nor is this caricature entirely without foundation. Arendt was certainly drawn to participatory democracy, and was an enthusiastic observer of outbreaks of civic activity ranging from American demonstrations against the Vietnam War to the formation of grassroots citizens' "councils" during the short-lived Hungarian Revolution of 1956. Reminding us that the capacity to act is present even in unlikely circumstances was certainly one of her purposes. But she emphatically denied that her role as a political thinker was to propose a blueprint for the future or to tell anyone what to do. Repudiating the title of "political philosopher," she argued that the mistake made by all political philosophers since Plato has been to ignore the fundamental condition of politics: that it goes on among *plural* human

beings, each of whom can act and start something new. The results that emerge from such interaction are contingent and unpredictable, "matters of practical politics, subject to the agreement of many; they can never lie in theoretical considerations or the opinion of one person" (p. 5).

Not political philosophy, then; and, indeed, a good deal of the book does not on the face of it appear to be about politics at all. The long analyses of labor and work, and of the implications of modern science and economic growth, are concerned with the setting for politics rather than politics itself. Even the discussion of action is only partially related to specifically political acts. Shortly after the book's publication, Arendt herself described *The Human Condition* as "a kind of prolegomena" to a more systematic work of political theory which she planned (but never completed). Since "the central political activity is action," she explained, it had been necessary first to carry out a preliminary exercise in clarification "to separate action conceptually from other human activities with which it is usually confounded, such as labor and work."[1] And indeed the book's most obvious organizing principle lies in its phenomenological analysis of three forms of activity that are fundamental to the human condition: labor, which corresponds to the biological life of man as an animal; work, which corresponds to the artificial world of objects that human beings build upon the earth; and action, which corresponds to our plurality as distinct individuals. Arendt argues that these distinctions (and the hierarchy of activities implicit in them) have been ignored within an intellectual tradition shaped by philosophical and religious priorities. However, there is considerably more to the book than the phenomenological analysis, and more even than Arendt's critique of traditional political philosophy's misrepresentation of human activity. For those concerns are framed by her response to contemporary events. When she says in her prologue that she proposes "nothing more than

1. From a research proposal submitted to the Rockefeller Foundation after the publication of *The Human Condition*, probably in 1959. Correspondence with the Rockefeller Foundation, Library of Congress MSS Box 20, p. 013872.

to think what we are doing," she also makes clear that what she has in mind is not just a general analysis of human activity, but "a reconsideration of the human condition from the vantage point of our newest experiences and our most recent fears." *What* experiences and fears?

II

The prologue opens with reflections on one of those events that reveal the human capacity for making new beginnings: the launch of the first space satellite in 1957, which Arendt describes as an "event, second in importance to no other, not even to the splitting of the atom." Like the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, which also occurred while she was working on the book, this unexpected event led her to rearrange her ideas, but was at the same time a vindication of observations already made. For, noting that this amazing demonstration of human power was greeted on all sides not with pride or awe but rather as a sign that mankind might escape from the earth, she comments that this "rebellion against human existence as it has been given" had been under way for some time. By escaping from the earth into the skies, and through enterprises such as nuclear technology, human beings are successfully challenging natural limits, posing political questions made vastly more difficult by the inaccessibility of modern science to public discussion.

Arendt's prologue moves from this theme to "another no less threatening event" that seems at first sight strangely unconnected: the advent of automation. While liberating us from the burden of hard labor, automation is causing unemployment in a "society of laborers" where all occupations are conceived of as ways of making a living. Over the course of the book, framing the phenomenological analysis of human activities, a dialectical contrast between these two apparently unrelated topics is gradually developed. On the one hand, the dawn of the space age demonstrates that human beings literally transcend nature. As a result of modern science's "alienation from the *earth*," the human capacity to start new things calls all natural limits into question,

leaving the future alarmingly open. On the other hand, in a development Arendt traces to "alienation from the *world*," modern, automated societies engrossed by ever more efficient production and consumption encourage us to behave and think of ourselves simply as an animal species governed by natural laws.

Human animals unconscious of their capacities and responsibilities are not well fitted to take charge of earth-threatening powers. This conjunction echoes Arendt's earlier analysis of totalitarianism as a nihilistic process propelled by a paradoxical combination of convictions: on the one hand the belief that "everything is possible," and on the other that human beings are merely an animal species governed by laws of nature or history, in the service of which individuals are entirely dispensable. The echo is not surprising, for *The Human Condition* is organically linked to Arendt's work on totalitarianism, and the two together contain an original and striking diagnosis of the contemporary human predicament.

The book grew from the Charles R. Walgreen Foundation lectures which Arendt gave at the University of Chicago in April 1956, themselves an outgrowth of a much larger project on "Totalitarian Elements in Marxism." Arendt had embarked on this project after finishing *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, which contained a good deal about the antecedents of Nazi anti-Semitism and racism, but nothing about the Marxist background to Stalin's murderous version of class struggle. Her new enterprise was to consider what features of Marxist theory might have contributed to this disaster. In the event, her trawl brought up so rich and variegated a catch that the Marx book was never written, but many of the trains of thought involved found their way into *The Human Condition*, notably her conclusion that Marx had fatally misconceived political action in terms of a mixture of the other human activities she calls *work* and *labor*.

To understand political action as *making* something is in Arendt's view a dangerous mistake. Making—the activity she calls *work*—is something a craftsman does by forcing raw material to conform to his model. The raw material has no say in the process, and neither do human beings cast as raw material for an

attempt to create a new society or make history.[2] Talk of "Man" making his own history is misleading, for (as Arendt continually reminds us) there is no such person: "men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world." To conceive of politics as making is to ignore human plurality in theory and to coerce individuals in practice. Nonetheless, Arendt found that Marx had inherited this particular misconception of politics from the great tradition of Western political thought. Ever since Plato turned his back on the Athenian democracy and set out his scheme for an ideal city, political philosophers had been writing about politics in a way that systematically ignored the most salient political features of human beings—that they are plural, that each of them is capable of new perspectives and new actions, and that they will not fit a tidy, predictable model unless these political capacities are crushed. One of Arendt's main purposes in *The Human Condition* is therefore to challenge the entire tradition of political philosophy by recovering and bringing to light these neglected human capacities.

But this critique of political philosophy is not the only grand theme in the book that stems from her reflections on Marx. For although Marx spoke of *making*, using the terminology of craftsmanship, Arendt claims that he actually understood history in terms of processes of production and consumption much closer to animal life—labor, in fact. His vision of human history as a predictable process is a story not of unique, mortal individuals but of the collective life-process of a species. While he was in Arendt's view quite wrong to suppose that this process could lead through revolution to "the realm of freedom," she was struck by his picture of individuality submerged in the collective life of a human species, devoted to production and consumption and moving inexorably on its way. She found this a revealing representation of modern society, in which economic concerns have come to dominate both politics and human self-consciousness.

2. Arendt's point is illustrated by Mussolini's admiring comment on the Bolshevik revolution, "Lenin is an artist who has worked in men as others have worked in marble or metal," quoted by Alan Bullock in *Hitler and Stalin: Parallel Lives* (London: Fontana Press, 1993), page 374.

A second grand theme interwoven with Arendt's phenomenology of human activities is therefore her account of the rise of a "laborers' society."

This theme of "the social" remains one of the most baffling and contentious aspects of the book. Many readers have taken offense at Arendt's derogatory references to social concerns, and have also assumed that in criticizing the conformist materialism of modern society, Arendt intends to recommend a life of heroic action. But that reading misses the book's complexity, for another of its central themes concerns the *dangers* of action, which sets off new processes beyond the actors' control, including the very processes that have given rise to modern society. At the heart of her analysis of the human condition is the vital importance for civilized existence of a durable human world, built upon the earth to shield us against natural processes and provide a stable setting for our mortal lives. Like a table around which people are gathered, that world "relates and separates men at the same time" (p. 52). Only the experience of sharing a common human world with others who look at it from different perspectives can enable us to see reality in the round and to develop a shared common sense. Without it, we are each driven back on our own subjective experience, in which only our feelings, wants, and desires have reality.

The main threat to the human world has for several centuries been the economic modernization that (as Marx pointed out) destroyed all stability and set everything in motion. Unlike Marx, for whom this change was part of an inevitable historical process, Arendt traces it to the unintended effects of contingent human actions, notably the massive expropriation of ecclesiastical and peasant property carried out in the course of the Reformation. For property (in the sense of rights to land passed down through the generations) had always been the chief bastion of the civilized world, giving owners an interest in maintaining its stability. The great change set in motion by the expropriations of the sixteenth century was twofold. For one thing, peasants with a stake in the stability of the world were turned into day laborers entirely absorbed in the struggle to satisfy their bodily needs. For another, stable property was converted into fluid wealth—capital, in

fact—with the dynamic effects that Marx had described so well. Instead of inhabiting a stable world of objects made to last, human beings found themselves sucked into an accelerating process of production and consumption.

By the time that Arendt was reflecting on the implications of automation, this process of production and consumption had gone far beyond catering for natural needs; indeed the activities, methods, and consumer goods involved were all highly artificial. But she points out that this modern artificiality is quite unlike the stable worldly artifice inhabited by earlier civilizations. Objects, furniture, houses themselves have become items of consumption, while automatic production processes have taken on a quasi-natural rhythm to which human beings have had to adjust themselves. It is, she says, "as though we had forced open the distinguishing boundaries which protected the world, the human artifice, from nature, the biological process which goes on in its very midst as well as the natural cyclical processes which surround it, delivering and abandoning to them the always threatened stability of a human world" (p. 126). Elsewhere in *The Human Condition* she describes what has happened as an "unnatural growth of the natural" or a "liberation of the life process," for modernization has turned out to be extraordinarily good at increasing production, consumption, and procreation, giving rise to a vastly expanded human race which is producing and consuming more than ever before. Her contention is that since these economic concerns came to be the center of public attention and public policy (instead of being hidden away in the privacy of the household as in all previous civilizations), the costs have been devastation of the world and an ever-increasing tendency for human beings to conceive of themselves in terms of their desire to consume.

The implication of her argument is not, however, that all we need to do is to haul ourselves up out of our immersion in labor and take action. For this modern hegemony of laboring does not mean that human beings have ceased to act, to make new beginnings, or to start new processes—only that science and technology have become the arena for "action into nature." At the very same time when men were becoming more and more inclined to

think of themselves as an animal species, their ability to transcend such limits was being dramatically revealed by scientific inventions. For the counterpart of the "world-alienation" suffered by laborers was "earth-alienation" among scientists. While Archimedes had declared long ago that he would be able to move the earth if he could find a place to stand, Arendt argues that (from the time of Galileo to contemporary space engineers and nuclear scientists) men *have* found ways of looking at the earth from a cosmic perspective, and (exercising the human privilege of making new beginnings) have challenged natural limits to the point of threatening the future of life itself. According to her diagnosis of the contemporary predicament, Promethean powers—releasing processes with unfathomable consequences—are being exercised in a society of beings too absorbed in consumption to take any responsibility for the human world or to understand their political capacities. She observes in her prologue that "thoughtlessness" (itself related to the loss of the common human world) is "among the outstanding characteristics of our time," and her object in thinking aloud was surely to encourage thought in others.

III

In so far as Arendt's purpose was to provoke thought and discussion, she has been resoundingly successful. Like many of her writings, *The Human Condition* has been the subject of intense debate ever since its appearance. Indeed, few other works of modern political theory have had such a mixed press, regarded by some as a work of genius and by others as beneath refutation. Many academics have taken exception to the book's unorthodox style and manner. Paying no attention to mainstream debates, Arendt sets out her own analysis without defining her terms or engaging in conventional argumentation. Political controversies have also raged about the book. Its treatment of the *animal laborans* and its analysis of social concerns made its author unpopular with many on the left, but her account of action brought a message of hope and encouragement to other radicals, including some in the Civil Rights movement and behind the Iron Curtain.

During the students' movement of the 1960s *The Human Condition* was hailed as a textbook of participatory democracy, and association with that movement in turn alienated its critics.

In recent years, as Arendt's thought has attracted increased attention (partly for reasons she would not herself have welcomed, such as interest in her gender, her ethnicity, and her romantic relationship with Heidegger), the book's importance has come to be very widely recognized, but its meaning remains in dispute. Such is the complexity of its interwoven threads that there is scope for many different readings. Aristotelians, phenomenologists, Habermasians, postmodernists, feminists, and many others have found inspiration in different strands of its rich fabric, and the forty years since its publication are not nearly long enough to allow an assessment of its lasting significance. If we can extract a central theme from so complex a book, that theme must be its reminder of the vital importance of politics, and of properly understanding our political capacities and the dangers and opportunities they offer.

Arendt's account of the human condition reminds us that human beings are creatures who *act* in the sense of starting things and setting off trains of events. This is something we go on doing whether we understand the implications or not, with the result that both the human world and the earth itself have been devastated by our self-inflicted catastrophes. Looking at what she calls "the modern age" (from the seventeenth to the early twentieth century), she diagnoses a paradoxical situation in which radical economic processes were set off by human action, while those concerned increasingly thought of themselves as helpless flotsam on the currents of socioeconomic forces. Both trends, she believed, were linked with a new focusing of public attention on economic activities that had traditionally been private matters for the household. In her prologue, however, she observes that this "modern age" of which she writes has itself now passed away, for the advent of nuclear technology has begun a "new and yet unknown age" in the long interaction between human beings and their natural habitat. If she were alive today, she might point to a novel variation on the familiar theme of power and helplessness, again connected with the emergence into the public

realm of a natural function hitherto cloaked in privacy. On the one hand, the advent of genetic engineering (with its power to set off new processes that burst the bonds of nature) strikingly confirms human transcendence and what she called "a rebellion against human existence as it has been given" (p. 2). On the other hand, our self-understanding as animals has deepened into an unprecedented stress not just on production but on reproduction. Matters of sex, allowed only recently into the public arena, seem rapidly to be elbowing other topics out of public discourse, while neo-Darwinian scientists encourage us to believe that everything about us is determined by our genes.

Since the gap between power and responsibility seems wider than ever, her reminder of the human capacity for action and her attempt "to think what we are doing" are particularly timely. However, we need to listen carefully to what she is saying, for we can easily misunderstand her message as a call for humanity to rise from its torpor, take charge of events, and consciously make our own future. The trouble with that quasi-Marxist scenario is that there is no "humanity" that *could* take responsibility in this way. Human beings are plural and mortal, and it is these features of the human condition that give politics both its miraculous openness and its desperate contingency.

The most heartening message of *The Human Condition* is its reminder of human natality and the miracle of beginning. In sharp contrast to Heidegger's stress on our mortality, Arendt argues that faith and hope in human affairs come from the fact that new people are continually coming into the world, each of them unique, each capable of new initiatives that may interrupt or divert the chains of events set in motion by previous actions. She speaks of action as "the one miracle-working faculty of man" (p. 246), pointing out that in human affairs it is actually quite reasonable to expect the unexpected, and that new beginnings cannot be ruled out even when society seems locked in stagnation or set on an inexorable course. Since the book's publication, her observations on the unpredictability of politics have been strikingly confirmed, not least by the collapse of communism. The revolutions of 1989 were notably Arendtian, illustrating her account of how power can spring up as if from nowhere when

people begin to "act in concert," and can ebb away unexpectedly from apparently powerful regimes.

But if her analysis of action is a message of hope in dark times, it also carries warnings. For the other side of that miraculous unpredictability of action is lack of control over its effects. Action sets things in motion, and one cannot foresee even the effects of one's own initiatives, let alone control what happens when they are entangled with other people's initiatives in the public arena. Action is therefore deeply frustrating, for its results can turn out to be quite different from what the actor intended. It is because of this "haphazardness" of action amongst plural actors that political philosophers ever since Plato have tried to substitute for action a model of politics as *making* a work of art. Following the philosopher-king who sees the ideal model and molds his passive subjects to fit it, scheme after scheme has been elaborated for perfect societies in which everyone conforms to the author's blueprint. The curious sterility of utopias comes from the absence within them of any scope for initiative, any room for plurality. Although it is now forty years since Arendt made this point, mainstream political philosophy is still caught in the same trap, still unwilling to take action and plurality seriously, still searching for theoretical principles so rationally compelling that even generations yet unborn must accept them, thus making redundant the haphazard contingency of accommodations reached in actual political arenas.

Arendt observes that there are some remedies for the predicaments of action, but she stresses their limited reach. One is simply the permanent possibility of taking *further* action to interrupt apparently inexorable processes or set politics off on a different direction, but that in itself does nothing to cure the damage of the past or make safe the unpredictable future. Only the human capacities to forgive and to promise can deal with these problems, and then only in part. Faced (as so many contemporary polities are) with the wearisome sequence of revenge for past wrongs that only provokes further revenge, forgiveness *can* break that chain, and recent efforts at reconciliation between the races in South Africa offer an impressive illustration of Arendt's point. As she notes, however, no one can forgive himself:

only the unpredictable cooperation of others can do that, and some evils are beyond forgiveness. Furthermore, this way of breaking the chain of consequences set off by action works only for *human* consequences; there is no remedy through forgiveness for the "action into nature" that sets off nuclear reaction or causes the extinction of species.

Another way of coping with the unpredictable consequences of plural initiatives is the human capacity to make and keep promises. Promises made to oneself have no reliability, but when plural persons come together to bind themselves for the future, the covenants they create among themselves can throw "islands of predictability" into the "ocean of uncertainty," creating a new kind of assurance and enabling them to exercise power collectively. Contracts, treaties, and constitutions are all of this kind; they may be enormously strong and reliable, like the U.S. Constitution, or (like Hitler's Munich agreement) they may be not worth the paper they are written on. In other words they are utterly contingent, quite unlike the hypothetical agreements reached in philosophers' imaginations.

Arendt is well known for her celebration of action, particularly for the passages where she talks about the immortal fame earned by Athenian citizens when they engaged with their peers in the public realm. But *The Human Condition* is just as much concerned with action's dangers, and with the myriad processes set off by human initiative and now raging out of control. She reminds us, of course, that we are not helpless animals: we can engage in further action, take initiatives to interrupt such processes, and try to bring them under control through agreements. But apart from the physical difficulties of gaining control over processes thoughtlessly set off by action into nature, she also reminds us of the political problems caused by plurality itself. In principle, if we can all agree to work together we can exercise great power; but agreement between plural persons is hard to achieve, and never safe from the disruptive initiatives of further actors.

As we stand at the threshold of a new millennium, the one safe prediction we can make is that, despite the continuation of processes already in motion, the open future will become an arena for countless human initiatives that are beyond our present

imagination. Perhaps it is not too rash to make another prediction: that future readers will find food for thought and scope for debate in *The Human Condition*, picking up and developing different strands and themes in this extraordinary book. That would have suited Arendt very well. As she said toward the end of her life,

> Each time you write something and you send it out into the world and it becomes public, obviously everybody is free to do with it what he pleases, and this is as it should be. I do not have any quarrel with this. You should not try to hold your hand now on whatever may happen to what you have been thinking for yourself. You should rather try to learn from what other people do with it.[3]

3. Remarks to the American Society of Christian Ethics, 1973. Library of Congress MSS Box 70, p. 011828.

Prologue

In 1957, an earth-born object made by man was launched into the universe, where for some weeks it circled the earth according to the same laws of gravitation that swing and keep in motion the celestial bodies—the sun, the moon, and the stars. To be sure, the man-made satellite was no moon or star, no heavenly body which could follow its circling path for a time span that to us mortals, bound by earthly time, lasts from eternity to eternity. Yet, for a time it managed to stay in the skies; it dwelt and moved in the proximity of the heavenly bodies as though it had been admitted tentatively to their sublime company.

This event, second in importance to no other, not even to the splitting of the atom, would have been greeted with unmitigated joy if it had not been for the uncomfortable military and political circumstances attending it. But, curiously enough, this joy was not triumphal; it was not pride or awe at the tremendousness of human power and mastery which filled the hearts of men, who now, when they looked up from the earth toward the skies, could behold there a thing of their own making. The immediate reaction, expressed on the spur of the moment, was relief about the first "step toward escape from men's imprisonment to the earth." And this strange statement, far from being the accidental slip of some American reporter, unwittingly echoed the extraordinary line which, more than twenty years ago, had been carved on the funeral obelisk for one of Russia's great scientists: "Mankind will not remain bound to the earth forever."

Such feelings have been commonplace for some time. They show that men everywhere are by no means slow to catch up and adjust to scientific discoveries and technical developments, but that, on the contrary, they have outsped them by decades. Here, as in other

respects, science has realized and affirmed what men anticipated in dreams that were neither wild nor idle. What is new is only that one of this country's most respectable newspapers finally brought to its front page what up to then had been buried in the highly non-respectable literature of science fiction (to which, unfortunately, nobody yet has paid the attention it deserves as a vehicle of mass sentiments and mass desires). The banality of the statement should not make us overlook how extraordinary in fact it was; for although Christians have spoken of the earth as a vale of tears and philosophers have looked upon their body as a prison of mind or soul, nobody in the history of mankind has ever conceived of the earth as a prison for men's bodies or shown such eagerness to go literally from here to the moon. Should the emancipation and secularization of the modern age, which began with a turning-away, not necessarily from God, but from a god who was the Father of men in heaven, end with an even more fateful repudiation of an Earth who was the Mother of all living creatures under the sky?

The earth is the very quintessence of the human condition, and earthly nature, for all we know, may be unique in the universe in providing human beings with a habitat in which they can move and breathe without effort and without artifice. The human artifice of the world separates human existence from all mere animal environment, but life itself is outside this artificial world, and through life man remains related to all other living organisms. For some time now, a great many scientific endeavors have been directed toward making life also "artificial," toward cutting the last tie through which even man belongs among the children of nature. It is the same desire to escape from imprisonment to the earth that is manifest in the attempt to create life in the test tube, in the desire to mix "frozen germ plasm from people of demonstrated ability under the microscope to produce superior human beings" and "to alter [their] size, shape and function"; and the wish to escape the human condition, I suspect, also underlies the hope to extend man's life-span far beyond the hundred-year limit.

This future man, whom the scientists tell us they will produce in no more than a hundred years, seems to be possessed by a rebellion against human existence as it has been given, a free gift from

nowhere (secularly speaking), which he wishes to exchange, as it were, for something he has made himself. There is no reason to doubt our abilities to accomplish such an exchange, just as there is no reason to doubt our present ability to destroy all organic life on earth. The question is only whether we wish to use our new scientific and technical knowledge in this direction, and this question cannot be decided by scientific means; it is a political question of the first order and therefore can hardly be left to the decision of professional scientists or professional politicians.

While such possibilities still may lie in a distant future, the first boomerang effects of science's great triumphs have made themselves felt in a crisis within the natural sciences themselves. The trouble concerns the fact that the "truths" of the modern scientific world view, though they can be demonstrated in mathematical formulas and proved technologically, will no longer lend themselves to normal expression in speech and thought. The moment these "truths" are spoken of conceptually and coherently, the resulting statements will be "not perhaps as meaningless as a 'triangular circle,' but much more so than a 'winged lion' " (Erwin Schrödinger). We do not yet know whether this situation is final. But it could be that we, who are earth-bound creatures and have begun to act as though we were dwellers of the universe, will forever be unable to understand, that is, to think and speak about the things which nevertheless we are able to do. In this case, it would be as though our brain, which constitutes the physical, material condition of our thoughts, were unable to follow what we do, so that from now on we would indeed need artificial machines to do our thinking and speaking. If it should turn out to be true that knowledge (in the modern sense of know-how) and thought have parted company for good, then we would indeed become the helpless slaves, not so much of our machines as of our know-how, thoughtless creatures at the mercy of every gadget which is technically possible, no matter how murderous it is.

However, even apart from these last and yet uncertain consequences, the situation created by the sciences is of great political significance. Wherever the relevance of speech is at stake, matters become political by definition, for speech is what makes man a political being. If we would follow the advice, so frequently urged

upon us, to adjust our cultural attitudes to the present status of scientific achievement, we would in all earnest adopt a way of life in which speech is no longer meaningful. For the sciences today have been forced to adopt a "language" of mathematical symbols which, though it was originally meant only as an abbreviation for spoken statements, now contains statements that in no way can be translated back into speech. The reason why it may be wise to distrust the political judgment of scientists *qua* scientists is not primarily their lack of "character"—that they did not refuse to develop atomic weapons—or their naïveté—that they did not understand that once these weapons were developed they would be the last to be consulted about their use—but precisely the fact that they move in a world where speech has lost its power. And whatever men do or know or experience can make sense only to the extent that it can be spoken about. There may be truths beyond speech, and they may be of great relevance to man in the singular, that is, to man in so far as he is not a political being, whatever else he may be. Men in the plural, that is, men in so far as they live and move and act in this world, can experience meaningfulness only because they can talk with and make sense to each other and to themselves.

Closer at hand and perhaps equally decisive is another no less threatening event. This is the advent of automation, which in a few decades probably will empty the factories and liberate mankind from its oldest and most natural burden, the burden of laboring and the bondage to necessity. Here, too, a fundamental aspect of the human condition is at stake, but the rebellion against it, the wish to be liberated from labor's "toil and trouble," is not modern but as old as recorded history. Freedom from labor itself is not new; it once belonged among the most firmly established privileges of the few. In this instance, it seems as though scientific progress and technical developments had been only taken advantage of to achieve something about which all former ages dreamed but which none had been able to realize.

However, this is so only in appearance. The modern age has carried with it a theoretical glorification of labor and has resulted in a factual transformation of the whole of society into a laboring society. The fulfilment of the wish, therefore, like the fulfilment

of wishes in fairy tales, comes at a moment when it can only be self-defeating. It is a society of laborers which is about to be liberated from the fetters of labor, and this society does no longer know of those other higher and more meaningful activities for the sake of which this freedom would deserve to be won. Within this society, which is egalitarian because this is labor's way of making men live together, there is no class left, no aristocracy of either a political or spiritual nature from which a restoration of the other capacities of man could start anew. Even presidents, kings, and prime ministers think of their offices in terms of a job necessary for the life of society, and among the intellectuals, only solitary individuals are left who consider what they are doing in terms of work and not in terms of making a living. What we are confronted with is the prospect of a society of laborers without labor, that is, without the only activity left to them. Surely, nothing could be worse.

To these preoccupations and perplexities, this book does not offer an answer. Such answers are given every day, and they are matters of practical politics, subject to the agreement of many; they can never lie in theoretical considerations or the opinion of one person, as though we dealt here with problems for which only one solution is possible. What I propose in the following is a reconsideration of the human condition from the vantage point of our newest experiences and our most recent fears. This, obviously, is a matter of thought, and thoughtlessness—the heedless recklessness or hopeless confusion or complacent repetition of "truths" which have become trivial and empty—seems to me among the outstanding characteristics of our time. What I propose, therefore, is very simple: it is nothing more than to think what we are doing.

"What we are doing" is indeed the central theme of this book. It deals only with the most elementary articulations of the human condition, with those activities that traditionally, as well as according to current opinion, are within the range of every human being. For this and other reasons, the highest and perhaps purest activity of which men are capable, the activity of thinking, is left out of these present considerations. Systematically, therefore, the book is limited to a discussion of labor, work, and action, which forms its three central chapters. Historically, I deal in a last chap-

ter with the modern age, and throughout the book with the various constellations within the hierarchy of activities as we know them from Western history.

However, the modern age is not the same as the modern world. Scientifically, the modern age which began in the seventeenth century came to an end at the beginning of the twentieth century; politically, the modern world, in which we live today, was born with the first atomic explosions. I do not discuss this modern world, against whose background this book was written. I confine myself, on the one hand, to an analysis of those general human capacities which grow out of the human condition and are permanent, that is, which cannot be irretrievably lost so long as the human condition itself is not changed. The purpose of the historical analysis, on the other hand, is to trace back modern world alienation, its twofold flight from the earth into the universe and from the world into the self, to its origins, in order to arrive at an understanding of the nature of society as it had developed and presented itself at the very moment when it was overcome by the advent of a new and yet unknown age.

CHAPTER I

The Human Condition

I

Vita Activa AND THE HUMAN CONDITION

With the term *vita activa*, I propose to designate three fundamental human activities: labor, work, and action. They are fundamental because each corresponds to one of the basic conditions under which life on earth has been given to man.

Labor is the activity which corresponds to the biological process of the human body, whose spontaneous growth, metabolism, and eventual decay are bound to the vital necessities produced and fed into the life process by labor. The human condition of labor is life itself.

Work is the activity which corresponds to the unnaturalness of human existence, which is not imbedded in, and whose mortality is not compensated by, the species' ever-recurring life cycle. Work provides an "artificial" world of things, distinctly different from all natural surroundings. Within its borders each individual life is housed, while this world itself is meant to outlast and transcend them all. The human condition of work is worldliness.

Action, the only activity that goes on directly between men without the intermediary of things or matter, corresponds to the human condition of plurality, to the fact that men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world. While all aspects of the human condition are somehow related to politics, this plurality is specifically *the* condition—not only the *conditio sine qua non*, but the *conditio per quam*—of all political life. Thus the language of the Romans, perhaps the most political people we have known, used the words "to live" and "to be among men" (*inter homines esse*)

or "to die" and "to cease to be among men" (*inter homines esse desinere*) as synonyms. But in its most elementary form, the human condition of action is implicit even in Genesis ("Male and female created He *them*"), if we understand that this story of man's creation is distinguished in principle from the one according to which God originally created Man (*adam*), "him" and not "them," so that the multitude of human beings becomes the result of multiplication.[1] Action would be an unnecessary luxury, a capricious interference with general laws of behavior, if men were endlessly reproducible repetitions of the same model, whose nature or essence was the same for all and as predictable as the nature or essence of any other thing. Plurality is the condition of human action because we are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live.

All three activities and their corresponding conditions are intimately connected with the most general condition of human existence: birth and death, natality and mortality. Labor assures not only individual survival, but the life of the species. Work and its product, the human artifact, bestow a measure of permanence and durability upon the futility of mortal life and the fleeting character of human time. Action, in so far as it engages in founding and pre-

1. In the analysis of postclassical political thought, it is often quite illuminating to find out which of the two biblical versions of the creation story is cited. Thus it is highly characteristic of the difference between the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth and of Paul that Jesus, discussing the relationship between man and wife, refers to Genesis 1:27: "Have ye not read, that he which made *them* at the beginning made them male and female" (Matt. 19:4), whereas Paul on a similar occasion insists that the woman was created "of the man" and hence "for the man," even though he then somewhat attenuates the dependence: "neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man" (I Cor. 11:8–12). The difference indicates much more than a different attitude to the role of woman. For Jesus, faith was closely related to action (cf. § 33 below); for Paul, faith was primarily related to salvation. Especially interesting in this respect is Augustine (*De civitate Dei* xii. 21), who not only ignores Genesis 1:27 altogether but sees the difference between man and animal in that man was created *unum ac singulum*, whereas all animals were ordered "to come into being several at once" (*plura simul iussit exsistere*). To Augustine, the creation story offers a welcome opportunity to stress the species character of animal life as distinguished from the singularity of human existence.

serving political bodies, creates the condition for remembrance, that is, for history. Labor and work, as well as action, are also rooted in natality in so far as they have the task to provide and preserve the world for, to foresee and reckon with, the constant influx of newcomers who are born into the world as strangers. However, of the three, action has the closest connection with the human condition of natality; the new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something anew, that is, of acting. In this sense of initiative, an element of action, and therefore of natality, is inherent in all human activities. Moreover, since action is the political activity par excellence, natality, and not mortality, may be the central category of political, as distinguished from metaphysical, thought.

The human condition comprehends more than the conditions under which life has been given to man. Men are conditioned beings because everything they come in contact with turns immediately into a condition of their existence. The world in which the *vita activa* spends itself consists of things produced by human activities; but the things that owe their existence exclusively to men nevertheless constantly condition their human makers. In addition to the conditions under which life is given to man on earth, and partly out of them, men constantly create their own, self-made conditions, which, their human origin and their variability notwithstanding, possess the same conditioning power as natural things. Whatever touches or enters into a sustained relationship with human life immediately assumes the character of a condition of human existence. This is why men, no matter what they do, are always conditioned beings. Whatever enters the human world of its own accord or is drawn into it by human effort becomes part of the human condition. The impact of the world's reality upon human existence is felt and received as a conditioning force. The objectivity of the world—its object- or thing-character—and the human condition supplement each other; because human existence is conditioned existence, it would be impossible without things, and things would be a heap of unrelated articles, a non-world, if they were not the conditioners of human existence.

To avoid misunderstanding: the human condition is not the

same as human nature, and the sum total of human activities and capabilities which correspond to the human condition does not constitute anything like human nature. For neither those we discuss here nor those we leave out, like thought and reason, and not even the most meticulous enumeration of them all, constitute essential characteristics of human existence in the sense that without them this existence would no longer be human. The most radical change in the human condition we can imagine would be an emigration of men from the earth to some other planet. Such an event, no longer totally impossible, would imply that man would have to live under man-made conditions, radically different from those the earth offers him. Neither labor nor work nor action nor, indeed, thought as we know it would then make sense any longer. Yet even these hypothetical wanderers from the earth would still be human; but the only statement we could make regarding their "nature" is that they still are conditioned beings, even though their condition is now self-made to a considerable extent.

The problem of human nature, the Augustinian *quaestio mihi factus sum* ("a question have I become for myself"), seems unanswerable in both its individual psychological sense and its general philosophical sense. It is highly unlikely that we, who can know, determine, and define the natural essences of all things surrounding us, which we are not, should ever be able to do the same for ourselves—this would be like jumping over our own shadows. Moreover, nothing entitles us to assume that man has a nature or essence in the same sense as other things. In other words, if we have a nature or essence, then surely only a god could know and define it, and the first prerequisite would be that he be able to speak about a "who" as though it were a "what."[2] The perplexity

2. Augustine, who is usually credited with having been the first to raise the so-called anthropological question in philosophy, knew this quite well. He distinguishes between the questions of "Who am I?" and "What am I?" the first being directed by man at himself ("And I directed myself at myself and said to me: You, who are you? And I answered: A man"—*tu, quis es?* [*Confessiones* x. 6]) and the second being addressed to God ("What then am I, my God? What is my nature?"—*Quid ergo sum, Deus meus? Quae natura sum?* [x. 17]). For in the "great mystery," the *grande profundum*, which man is (iv. 14), there is "something of man [*aliquid hominis*] which the spirit of man which is in him itself

is that the modes of human cognition applicable to things with "natural" qualities, including ourselves to the limited extent that we are specimens of the most highly developed species of organic life, fail us when we raise the question: And *who* are we? This is why attempts to define human nature almost invariably end with some construction of a deity, that is, with the god of the philosophers, who, since Plato, has revealed himself upon closer inspection to be a kind of Platonic idea of man. Of course, to demask such philosophic concepts of the divine as conceptualizations of human capabilities and qualities is not a demonstration of, not even an argument for, the non-existence of God; but the fact that attempts to define the nature of man lead so easily into an idea which definitely strikes us as "superhuman" and therefore is identified with the divine may cast suspicion upon the very concept of "human nature."

On the other hand, the conditions of human existence—life itself, natality and mortality, worldliness, plurality, and the earth—can never "explain" what we are or answer the question of who we are for the simple reason that they never condition us absolutely. This has always been the opinion of philosophy, in distinction from the sciences—anthropology, psychology, biology, etc.—which also concern themselves with man. But today we may almost say that we have demonstrated even scientifically that, though we live now, and probably always will, under the earth's conditions, we are not mere earth-bound creatures. Modern natural science owes its great triumphs to having looked upon and treated earth-bound nature from a truly universal viewpoint, that is, from an Archimedean standpoint taken, wilfully and explicitly, outside the earth.

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knoweth not. But Thou, Lord, who has made him [*fecisti eum*] knowest everything of him [*eius omnia*]" (x. 5). Thus, the most familiar of these phrases which I quoted in the text, the *quaestio mihi factus sum*, is a question raised in the presence of God, "in whose eyes I have become a question for myself" (x. 33). In brief, the answer to the question "Who am I?" is simply: "You are a man—whatever that may be"; and the answer to the question "What am I?" can be given only by God who made man. The question about the nature of man is no less a theological question than the question about the nature of God; both can be settled only within the framework of a divinely revealed answer.

2

THE TERM *Vita Activa*

The term *vita activa* is loaded and overloaded with tradition. It is as old as (but not older than) our tradition of political thought. And this tradition, far from comprehending and conceptualizing all the political experiences of Western mankind, grew out of a specific historical constellation: the trial of Socrates and the conflict between the philosopher and the *polis*. It eliminated many experiences of an earlier past that were irrelevant to its immediate political purposes and proceeded until its end, in the work of Karl Marx, in a highly selective manner. The term itself, in medieval philosophy the standard translation of the Aristotelian *bios politikos*, already occurs in Augustine, where, as *vita negotiosa* or *actuosa*, it still reflects its original meaning: a life devoted to public-political matters.[3]

Aristotle distinguished three ways of life (*bioi*) which men might choose in freedom, that is, in full independence of the necessities of life and the relationships they originated. This prerequisite of freedom ruled out all ways of life chiefly devoted to keeping one's self alive—not only labor, which was the way of life of the slave, who was coerced by the necessity to stay alive and by the rule of his master, but also the working life of the free craftsman and the acquisitive life of the merchant. In short, it excluded everybody who involuntarily or voluntarily, for his whole life or temporarily, had lost the free disposition of his movements and activities.[4] The remaining three ways of life have in common that

3. See Augustine *De civitate Dei* xix. 2, 19.

4. William L. Westermann ("Between Slavery and Freedom," *American Historical Review*, Vol. L [1945]) holds that the "statement of Aristotle . . . that craftsmen live in a condition of limited slavery meant that the artisan, when he made a work contract, disposed of two of the four elements of his free status [viz., of freedom of economic activity and right of unrestricted movement], but by his own volition and for a temporary period"; evidence quoted by Westermann shows that freedom was then understood to consist of "status, personal inviolability, freedom of economic activity, right of unrestricted movement," and slavery consequently "was the lack of these four attributes." Aristotle, in his enumeration of "ways of life" in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (i. 5) and the *Eudemian Ethics* (1215a35 ff.), does not even mention a craftsman's way of life; to him it

they were concerned with the "beautiful," that is, with things neither necessary nor merely useful: the life of enjoying bodily pleasures in which the beautiful, as it is given, is consumed; the life devoted to the matters of the *polis*, in which excellence produces beautiful deeds; and the life of the philosopher devoted to inquiry into, and contemplation of, things eternal, whose everlasting beauty can neither be brought about through the producing interference of man nor be changed through his consumption of them.[5]

The chief difference between the Aristotelian and the later medieval use of the term is that the *bios politikos* denoted explicitly only the realm of human affairs, stressing the action, *praxis*, needed to establish and sustain it. Neither labor nor work was considered to possess sufficient dignity to constitute a *bios* at all, an autonomous and authentically human way of life; since they served and produced what was necessary and useful, they could not be free, independent of human needs and wants.[6] That the political way of life escaped this verdict is due to the Greek understanding of *polis* life, which to them denoted a very special and freely chosen form of political organization and by no means just any form of action necessary to keep men together in an orderly fashion. Not that the Greeks or Aristotle were ignorant of the fact that human life always demands some form of political organization and that ruling over subjects might constitute a distinct way of life; but the despot's way of life, because it was "merely" a necessity, could not be considered free and had no relationship with the *bios politikos*.[7]

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is obvious that a *banausos* is not free (cf. *Politics* 1337b5). He mentions, however, "the life of money-making" and rejects it because it too is "undertaken under compulsion" (*Nic. Eth.* 1096a5). That the criterion is freedom is stressed in the *Eudemian Ethics:* he enumerates only those lives that are chosen *ep' exousian.*

5. For the opposition of the beautiful to the necessary and the useful see *Politics* 1333a30 ff., 1332b32.

6. For the opposition of the free to the necessary and the useful see *ibid.* 1332b2.

7. See *ibid.* 1277b8 for the distinction between despotic rule and politics. For the argument that the life of the despot is not equal to the life of a free man because the former is concerned with "necessary things," see *ibid.* 1325a24.

With the disappearance of the ancient city-state—Augustine seems to have been the last to know at least what it once meant to be a citizen—the term *vita activa* lost its specifically political meaning and denoted all kinds of active engagement in the things of this world. To be sure, it does not follow that work and labor had risen in the hierarchy of human activities and were now equal in dignity with a life devoted to politics.[8] It was, rather, the other way round: action was now also reckoned among the necessities of earthly life, so that contemplation (the *bios theōrētikos*, translated into the *vita contemplativa*) was left as the only truly free way of life.[9]

However, the enormous superiority of contemplation over activity of any kind, action not excluded, is not Christian in origin. We find it in Plato's political philosophy, where the whole utopian reorganization of *polis* life is not only directed by the superior insight of the philosopher but has no aim other than to make possible the philosopher's way of life. Aristotle's very articulation of the different ways of life, in whose order the life of pleasure plays a minor role, is clearly guided by the ideal of contemplation (*theōria*). To the ancient freedom from the necessities of life and from compulsion by others, the philosophers added freedom and surcease from political activity (*skholē*),[10] so that the later Christian claim to be free from entanglement in worldly affairs, from all the busi-

8. On the widespread opinion that the modern estimate of labor is Christian in origin, see below, § 44.

9. See Aquinas *Summa theologica* ii. 2. 179, esp. art. 2, where the *vita activa* arises out of the *necessitas vitae praesentis*, and *Expositio in Psalmos* 45.3, where the body politic is assigned the task of finding all that is necessary for life: *in civitate oportet invenire omnia necessaria ad vitam.*

10. The Greek word *skholē*, like the Latin *otium*, means primarily freedom from political activity and not simply leisure time, although both words are also used to indicate freedom from labor and life's necessities. In any event, they always indicate a condition free from worries and cares. An excellent description of the everyday life of an ordinary Athenian citizen, who enjoys full freedom from labor and work, can be found in Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City* (Anchor ed.; 1956), pp. 334–36; it will convince everybody how time-consuming political activity was under the conditions of the city-state. One can easily guess how full of worry this ordinary political life was if one remembers that Athenian law did not permit remaining neutral and punished those who did not want to take sides in factional strife with loss of citizenship.

ness of this world, was preceded by and originated in the philosophic *apolitia* of late antiquity. What had been demanded only by the few was now considered to be a right of all.

The term *vita activa*, comprehending all human activities and defined from the viewpoint of the absolute quiet of contemplation, therefore corresponds more closely to the Greek *askholia* ("unquiet"), with which Aristotle designated all activity, than to the Greek *bios politikos*. As early as Aristotle the distinction between quiet and unquiet, between an almost breathless abstention from external physical movement and activity of every kind, is more decisive than the distinction between the political and the theoretical way of life, because it can eventually be found within each of the three ways of life. It is like the distinction between war and peace: just as war takes place for the sake of peace, thus every kind of activity, even the processes of mere thought, must culminate in the absolute quiet of contemplation.[11] Every movement, the movements of body and soul as well as of speech and reasoning, must cease before truth. Truth, be it the ancient truth of Being or the Christian truth of the living God, can reveal itself only in complete human stillness.[12]

Traditionally and up to the beginning of the modern age, the term *vita activa* never lost its negative connotation of "un-quiet," *nec-otium*, *a-skholia*. As such it remained intimately related to the even more fundamental Greek distinction between things that are by themselves whatever they are and things which owe their existence to man, between things that are *physei* and things that are *nomō*. The primacy of contemplation over activity rests on the conviction that no work of human hands can equal in beauty and truth the physical *kosmos*, which swings in itself in changeless eternity without any interference or assistance from outside, from man or god. This eternity discloses itself to mortal eyes only when all human movements and activities are at perfect rest. Compared with this attitude of quiet, all distinctions and articulations within

11. See Aristotle *Politics* 1333a30–33. Aquinas defines contemplation as *quies ab exterioribus motibus* (*Summa theologica* ii. 2. 179. 1).

12. Aquinas stresses the stillness of the soul and recommends the *vita activa* because it exhausts and therefore "quietens interior passions" and prepares for contemplation (*Summa theologica* ii. 2. 182. 3).

the *vita activa* disappear. Seen from the viewpoint of contemplation, it does not matter what disturbs the necessary quiet, as long as it is disturbed.

Traditionally, therefore, the term *vita activa* receives its meaning from the *vita contemplativa;* its very restricted dignity is bestowed upon it because it serves the needs and wants of contemplation in a living body.[13] Christianity, with its belief in a hereafter whose joys announce themselves in the delights of contemplation,[14] conferred a religious sanction upon the abasement of the *vita activa* to its derivative, secondary position; but the determination of the order itself coincided with the very discovery of contemplation (*theōria*) as a human faculty, distinctly different from thought and reasoning, which occurred in the Socratic school and from then on has ruled metaphysical and political thought throughout our tradition.[15] It seems unnecessary to my present purpose to discuss the reasons for this tradition. Obviously they are deeper than the historical occasion which gave rise to the conflict between the *polis* and the philosopher and thereby, almost incidentally, also led to the discovery of contemplation as the philosopher's way of life. They must lie in an altogether different aspect of the human condition, whose diversity is not exhausted in the various articulations of the *vita activa* and, we may suspect, would not be exhausted even if thought and the movement of reasoning were included in it.

If, therefore, the use of the term *vita activa*, as I propose it here,

13. Aquinas is quite explicit on the connection between the *vita activa* and the wants and needs of the human body which men and animals have in common (*Summa theologica* ii. 2. 182. 1).

14. Augustine speaks of the "burden" (*sarcina*) of active life imposed by the duty of charity, which would be unbearable without the "sweetness" (*suavitas*) and the "delight of truth" given in contemplation (*De civitate Dei* xix. 19).

15. The time-honored resentment of the philosopher against the human condition of having a body is not identical with the ancient contempt for the necessities of life; to be subject to necessity was only one aspect of bodily existence, and the body, once freed of this necessity, was capable of that pure appearance the Greeks called beauty. The philosophers since Plato added to the resentment of being forced by bodily wants the resentment of movement of any kind. It is because the philosopher lives in complete quiet that it is only his body which, according to Plato, inhabits the city. Here lies also the origin of the early reproach of busybodiness (*polypragmosynē*) leveled against those who spent their lives in politics.

is in manifest contradiction to the tradition, it is because I doubt not the validity of the experience underlying the distinction but rather the hierarchical order inherent in it from its inception. This does not mean that I wish to contest or even to discuss, for that matter, the traditional concept of truth as revelation and therefore something essentially given to man, or that I prefer the modern age's pragmatic assertion that man can know only what he makes himself. My contention is simply that the enormous weight of contemplation in the traditional hierarchy has blurred the distinctions and articulations within the *vita activa* itself and that, appearances notwithstanding, this condition has not been changed essentially by the modern break with the tradition and the eventual reversal of its hierarchical order in Marx and Nietzsche. It lies in the very nature of the famous "turning upside down" of philosophic systems or currently accepted values, that is, in the nature of the operation itself, that the conceptual framework is left more or less intact.

The modern reversal shares with the traditional hierarchy the assumption that the same central human preoccupation must prevail in all activities of men, since without one comprehensive principle no order could be established. This assumption is not a matter of course, and my use of the term *vita activa* presupposes that the concern underlying all its activities is not the same as and is neither superior nor inferior to the central concern of the *vita contemplativa*.

3

ETERNITY VERSUS IMMORTALITY

That the various modes of active engagement in the things of this world, on one side, and pure thought culminating in contemplation, on the other, might correspond to two altogether different central human concerns has in one way or another been manifest ever since "the men of thought and the men of action began to take different paths,"[16] that is, since the rise of political thought in the

16. See F. M. Cornford, "Plato's Commonwealth," in *Unwritten Philosophy* (1950), p. 54: "The death of Pericles and the Peloponnesian War mark the moment when the men of thought and the men of action began to take different paths, destined to diverge more and more widely till the Stoic sage ceased to be a citizen of his own country and became a citizen of the universe."

Socratic school. However, when the philosophers discovered—and it is probable, though unprovable, that this discovery was made by Socrates himself—that the political realm did not as a matter of course provide for all of man's higher activities, they assumed at once, not that they had found something different in addition to what was already known, but that they had found a higher principle to replace the principle that ruled the *polis*. The shortest, albeit somewhat superficial, way to indicate these two different and to an extent even conflicting principles is to recall the distinction between immortality and eternity.

Immortality means endurance in time, deathless life on this earth and in this world as it was given, according to Greek understanding, to nature and the Olympian gods. Against this background of nature's ever-recurring life and the gods' deathless and ageless lives stood mortal men, the only mortals in an immortal but not eternal universe, confronted with the immortal lives of their gods but not under the rule of an eternal God. If we trust Herodotus, the difference between the two seems to have been striking to Greek self-understanding prior to the conceptual articulation of the philosophers, and therefore prior to the specifically Greek experiences of the eternal which underlie this articulation. Herodotus, discussing Asiatic forms of worship and beliefs in an invisible God, mentions explicitly that compared with this transcendent God (as we would say today) who is beyond time and life and the universe, the Greek gods are *anthrōpophyeis*, have the same nature, not simply the same shape, as man.[17] The Greeks' concern with immortality grew out of their experience of an immortal nature and immortal gods which together surrounded the individual lives of mortal men. Imbedded in a cosmos where everything was immortal, mortality became the hallmark of human existence. Men are "the mortals," the only mortal things in existence, because unlike animals they do not exist only as members of a species

17. Herodotus (i. 131), after reporting that the Persians have "no images of the gods, no temples nor altars, but consider these doings to be foolish," goes on to explain that this shows that they "do not believe, as the Greeks do, that the gods are *anthrōpophyeis*, of human nature," or, we may add, that gods and men have the same nature. See also Pindar *Carmina Nemaea* vi.

whose immortal life is guaranteed through procreation.[18] The mortality of men lies in the fact that individual life, with a recognizable life-story from birth to death, rises out of biological life. This individual life is distinguished from all other things by the rectilinear course of its movement, which, so to speak, cuts through the circular movement 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.

The task and potential greatness of mortals lie in their ability to produce things—works and deeds and words[19]— which would deserve to be and, at least to a degree, are at home in everlastingness, so that through them mortals could find their place in a cosmos where everything is immortal except themselves. By their capacity for the immortal deed, by their ability to leave nonperishable traces behind, men, their individual mortality notwithstanding, attain an immortality of their own and prove themselves to be of a "divine" nature. The distinction between man and animal runs right through the human species itself: only the best (*aristoi*), who constantly prove themselves to be the best (*aristeuein*, a verb for which there is no equivalent in any other language) and who "prefer immortal fame to mortal things," are really human; the others, content with whatever pleasures nature will yield them, live and die like animals. This was still the opinion of Heraclitus,[20] an opinion whose equivalent one will find in hardly any philosopher after Socrates.

18. See Ps. Aristotle *Economics* 1343b24: Nature guarantees to the species their being forever through recurrence (*periodos*), but cannot guarantee such being forever to the individual. The same thought, "For living things, life is being," appears in *On the Soul* 415b13.

19. The Greek language does not distinguish between "works" and "deeds," but calls both *erga* if they are durable enough to last and great enough to be remembered. It is only when the philosophers, or rather the Sophists, began to draw their "endless distinctions" and to distinguish between making and acting (*poiein* and *prattein*) that the nouns *poiēmata* and *pragmata* received wider currency (see Plato's *Charmides* 163). Homer does not yet know the word *pragmata*, which in Plato (*ta tōn anthrōpōn pragmata*) is best rendered by "human affairs" and has the connotations of trouble and futility. In Herodotus *pragmata* can have the same connotation (cf., for instance, i. 155).

20. Heraclitus, frag. B29 (Diels, *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* [4th ed.; 1922]).

In our context it is of no great importance whether Socrates himself or Plato discovered the eternal as the true center of strictly metaphysical thought. It weighs heavily in favor of Socrates that he alone among the great thinkers—unique in this as in many other respects—never cared to write down his thoughts; for it is obvious that, no matter how concerned a thinker may be with eternity, the moment he sits down to write his thoughts he ceases to be concerned primarily with eternity and shifts his attention to leaving some trace of them. He has entered the *vita activa* and chosen its way of permanence and potential immortality. One thing is certain: it is only in Plato that concern with the eternal and the life of the philosopher are seen as inherently contradictory and in conflict with the striving for immortality, the way of life of the citizen, the *bios politikos*.

The philosopher's experience of the eternal, which to Plato was *arrhēton* ("unspeakable"), and to Aristotle *aneu logou* ("without word"), and which later was conceptualized in the paradoxical *nunc stans* ("the standing now"), can occur only outside the realm of human affairs and outside the plurality of men, as we know from the Cave parable in Plato's *Republic*, where the philosopher, having liberated himself from the fetters that bound him to his fellow men, leaves the cave in perfect "singularity," as it were, neither accompanied nor followed by others. Politically speaking, if to die is the same as "to cease to be among men," experience of the eternal is a kind of death, and the only thing that separates it from real death is that it is not final because no living creature can endure it for any length of time. And this is precisely what separates the *vita contemplativa* from the *vita activa* in medieval thought.[21] Yet it is decisive that the experience of the eternal, in contradistinction to that of the immortal, has no correspondence with and cannot be transformed into any activity whatsoever, since even the activity of thought, which goes on within one's self by means of words, is obviously not only inadequate to render it but would interrupt and ruin the experience itself.

Theōria, or "contemplation," is the word given to the experience of the eternal, as distinguished from all other attitudes, which at

21. *In vita activa fixi permanere possumus; in contemplativa autem intenta mente manere nullo modo valemus* (Aquinas *Summa theologica* ii. 2. 181. 4).

most may pertain to immortality. It may be that the philosophers' discovery of the eternal was helped by their very justified doubt of the chances of the *polis* for immortality or even permanence, and it may be that the shock of this discovery was so overwhelming that they could not but look down upon all striving for immortality as vanity and vainglory, certainly placing themselves thereby into open opposition to the ancient city-state and the religion which inspired it. However, the eventual victory of the concern with eternity over all kinds of aspirations toward immortality is not due to philosophic thought. The fall of the Roman Empire plainly demonstrated that no work of mortal hands can be immortal, and it was accompanied by the rise of the Christian gospel of an everlasting individual life to its position as the exclusive religion of Western mankind. Both together made any striving for an earthly immortality futile and unnecessary. And they succeeded so well in making the *vita activa* and the *bios politikos* the handmaidens of contemplation that not even the rise of the secular in the modern age and the concomitant reversal of the traditional hierarchy between action and contemplation sufficed to save from oblivion the striving for immortality which originally had been the spring and center of the *vita activa*.

CHAPTER II

The Public and the Private Realm

4

MAN: A SOCIAL OR A POLITICAL ANIMAL

The *vita activa*, human life in so far as it is actively engaged in doing something, is always rooted in a world of men and of man-made things which it never leaves or altogether transcends. Things and men form the environment for each of man's activities, which would be pointless without such location; yet this environment, the world into which we are born, would not exist without the human activity which produced it, as in the case of fabricated things; which takes care of it, as in the case of cultivated land; or which established it through organization, as in the case of the body politic. No human life, not even the life of the hermit in nature's wilderness, is possible without a world which directly or indirectly testifies to the presence of other human beings.

All human activities are conditioned by the fact that men live together, but it is only action that cannot even be imagined outside the society of men. The activity of labor does not need the presence of others, though a being laboring in complete solitude would not be human but an *animal laborans* in the word's most literal significance. Man working and fabricating and building a world inhabited only by himself would still be a fabricator, though not *homo faber:* he would have lost his specifically human quality and, rather, be a god—not, to be sure, the Creator, but a divine demiurge as Plato described him in one of his myths. Action alone is the exclusive prerogative of man; neither a beast nor a god

is capable of it,[1] and only action is entirely dependent upon the constant presence of others.

This special relationship between action and being together seems fully to justify the early translation of Aristotle's *zōon politikon* by *animal socialis*, already found in Seneca, which then became the standard translation through Thomas Aquinas: *homo est naturaliter politicus, id est, socialis* ("man is by nature political, that is, social").[2] More than any elaborate theory, this unconscious substitution of the social for the political betrays the extent to which the original Greek understanding of politics had been lost. For this, it is significant but not decisive that the word "social" is Roman in origin and has no equivalent in Greek language or thought. Yet the Latin usage of the word *societas* also originally had a clear, though limited, political meaning; it indicated an alliance between people for a specific purpose, as when men organize in order to rule others or to commit a crime.[3] It is only with the later

1. It seems quite striking that the Homeric gods act only with respect to men, ruling them from afar or interfering in their affairs. Conflicts and strife between the gods also seem to arise chiefly from their part in human affairs or their conflicting partiality with respect to mortals. What then appears is a story in which men and gods act together, but the scene is set by the mortals, even when the decision is arrived at in the assembly of gods on Olympus. I think such a "co-operation" is indicated in the Homeric *erg' andrōn te theōn te* (*Odyssey* i. 338): the bard sings the deeds of gods and men, not stories of the gods and stories of men. Similarly, Hesiod's *Theogony* deals not with the deeds of gods but with the genesis of the world (116); it therefore tells how things came into being through begetting and giving birth (constantly recurring). The singer, servant of the Muses, sings "the glorious deeds of men of old and the blessed gods" (97 ff.), but nowhere, as far as I can see, the glorious deeds of the gods.

2. The quotation is from the Index Rerum to the Taurinian edition of Aquinas (1922). The word "politicus" does not occur in the text, but the Index summarizes Thomas' meaning correctly, as can be seen from *Summa theologica* i. 96. 4; ii. 2. 109. 3.

3. *Societas regni* in Livius, *societas sceleris* in Cornelius Nepos. Such an alliance could also be concluded for business purposes, and Aquinas still holds that a "true *societas*" between businessmen exists only "where the investor himself shares in the risk," that is, where the partnership is truly an alliance (see W. J. Ashley, *An Introduction to English Economic History and Theory* [1931], p. 419).

concept of a *societas generis humani*, a "society of man-kind,"[4] that the term "social" begins to acquire the general meaning of a fundamental human condition. It is not that Plato or Aristotle was ignorant of, or unconcerned with, the fact that man cannot live outside the company of men, but they did not count this condition among the specifically human characteristics; on the contrary, it was something human life had in common with animal life, and for this reason alone it could not be fundamentally human. The natural, merely social companionship of the human species was considered to be a limitation imposed upon us by the needs of biological life, which are the same for the human animal as for other forms of animal life.

According to Greek thought, the human capacity for political organization is not only different from but stands in direct opposition to that natural association whose center is the home (*oikia*) and the family. The rise of the city-state meant that man received "besides his private life a sort of second life, his *bios politikos*. Now every citizen belongs to two orders of existence; and there is a sharp distinction in his life between what is his own (*idion*) and what is communal (*koinon*)."[5] It was not just an opinion or theory of Aristotle but a simple historical fact that the foundation of the *polis* was preceded by the destruction of all organized units resting on kinship, such as the *phratria* and the *phylē*.[6] Of all the activities

4. I use here and in the following the word "man-kind" to designate the human species, as distinguished from "mankind," which indicates the sum total of human beings.

5. Werner Jaeger, *Paideia* (1945), III, 111.

6. Although Fustel de Coulanges' chief thesis, according to the Introduction to *The Ancient City* (Anchor ed.; 1956), consists of demonstrating that "the same religion" formed the ancient family organization and the ancient city-state, he brings numerous references to the fact that the regime of the *gens* based on the religion of the family and the regime of the city "were in reality two antagonistic forms of government. . . . Either the city could not last, or it must in the course of time break up the family" (p. 252). The reason for the contradiction in this great book seems to me to be in Coulanges' attempt to treat Rome and the Greek city-states together; for his evidence and categories he relies chiefly on Roman institutional and political sentiment, although he recognizes that the Vesta cult "became weakened in Greece at a very early date . . . but it never became enfeebled at Rome" (p. 146). Not only was the gulf between household and city much deeper in Greece than in Rome, but only in Greece

necessary and present in human communities, only two were deemed to be political and to constitute what Aristotle called the *bios politikos*, namely action (*praxis*) and speech (*lexis*), out of which rises the realm of human affairs (*ta tōn anthrōpōn pragmata*, as Plato used to call it) from which everything merely necessary or useful is strictly excluded.

However, while certainly only the foundation of the city-state enabled men to spend their whole lives in the political realm, in action and speech, the conviction that these two human capacities belonged together and are the highest of all seems to have preceded the *polis* and was already present in pre-Socratic thought. The stature of the Homeric Achilles can be understood only if one sees him as "the doer of great deeds and the speaker of great words."[7] In distinction from modern understanding, such words were not considered to be great because they expressed great thoughts; on the contrary, as we know from the last lines of *Antigone*, it may be the capacity for "great words" (*megaloi logoi*) with which to reply to striking blows that will eventually teach thought in old age.[8] Thought was secondary to speech, but

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was the Olympian religion, the religion of Homer and the city-state, separate from and superior to the older religion of family and household. While Vesta, the goddess of the hearth, became the protectress of a "city hearth" and part of the official, political cult after the unification and second foundation of Rome, her Greek colleague, Hestia, is mentioned for the first time by Hesiod, the only Greek poet who, in conscious opposition to Homer, praises the life of the hearth and the household; in the official religion of the *polis*, she had to cede her place in the assembly of the twelve Olympian gods to Dionysos (see Mommsen, *Römische Geschichte* [5th ed.], Book I, ch. 12, and Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths* [1955], 27. k).

7. The passage occurs in Phoenix' speech, *Iliad* ix. 443. It clearly refers to education for war and *agora*, the public meeting, in which men can distinguish themselves. The literal translation is: "[your father] charged me to teach you all this, to be a speaker of words and a doer of deeds" (*mythōn te rhētēr' emenai prēktēra te ergōn*).

8. The literal translation of the last lines of *Antigone* (1350–54) is as follows: "But great words, counteracting [or paying back] the great blows of the overproud, teach understanding in old age." The content of these lines is so puzzling to modern understanding that one rarely finds a translator who dares to give the bare sense. An exception is Hölderlin's translation: "Grosse Blicke aber, / Grosse Streiche der hohen Schultern / Vergeltend, / Sie haben im Alter

speech and action were considered to be coeval and coequal, of the same rank and the same kind; and this originally meant not only that most political action, in so far as it remains outside the sphere of violence, is indeed transacted in words, but more fundamentally that finding the right words at the right moment, quite apart from the information or communication they may convey, is action. Only sheer violence is mute, and for this reason violence alone can never be great. Even when, relatively late in antiquity, the arts of war and speech (*rhetoric*) emerged as the two principal political subjects of education, the development was still inspired by this older pre-*polis* experience and tradition and remained subject to it.

In the experience of the *polis*, which not without justification has been called the most talkative of all bodies politic, and even more in the political philosophy which sprang from it, action and speech separated and became more and more independent activities. The emphasis shifted from action to speech, and to speech as a means of persuasion rather than the specifically human way of answering, talking back and measuring up to whatever happened or was done.[9] To be political, to live in a *polis*, meant that everything was decided through words and persuasion and not through force and violence. In Greek self-understanding, to force people

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gelehrt, zu denken." An anecdote, reported by Plutarch, may illustrate the connection between acting and speaking on a much lower level. A man once approached Demosthenes and related how terribly he had been beaten. "But you," said Demosthenes, "suffered nothing of what you tell me." Whereupon the other raised his voice and cried out: "I suffered nothing?" "Now," said Demosthenes, "I hear the voice of somebody who was injured and who suffered" (*Lives*, "Demosthenes"). A last remnant of this ancient connection of speech and thought, from which our notion of expressing thought through words is absent, may be found in the current Ciceronian phrase of *ratio et oratio*.

9. It is characteristic for this development that every politician was called a "rhetor" and that rhetoric, the art of public speaking, as distinguished from dialectic, the art of philosophic speech, is defined by Aristotle as the art of persuasion (see *Rhetoric* 1354a12 ff., 1355b26 ff.). (The distinction itself is derived from Plato, *Gorgias* 448.) It is in this sense that we must understand the Greek opinion of the decline of Thebes, which was ascribed to Theban neglect of rhetoric in favor of military exercise (see Jacob Burckhardt, *Griechische Kulturgeschichte*, ed. Kroener, III, 190).

by violence, to command rather than persuade, were prepolitical ways to deal with people characteristic of life outside the *polis*, of home and family life, where the household head ruled with uncontested, despotic powers, or of life in the barbarian empires of Asia, whose despotism was frequently likened to the organization of the household.

Aristotle's definition of man as *zōon politikon* was not only unrelated and even opposed to the natural association experienced in household life; it can be fully understood only if one adds his second famous definition of man as a *zōon logon ekhon* ("a living being capable of speech"). The Latin translation of this term into *animal rationale* rests on no less fundamental a misunderstanding than the term "social animal." Aristotle meant neither to define man in general nor to indicate man's highest capacity, which to him was not *logos*, that is, not speech or reason, but *nous*, the capacity of contemplation, whose chief characteristic is that its content cannot be rendered in speech.[10] In his two most famous definitions, Aristotle only formulated the current opinion of the *polis* about man and the political way of life, and according to this opinion, everybody outside the *polis*—slaves and barbarians—was *aneu logou*, deprived, of course, not of the faculty of speech, but of a way of life in which speech and only speech made sense and where the central concern of all citizens was to talk with each other.

The profound misunderstanding expressed in the Latin translation of "political" as "social" is perhaps nowhere clearer than in a discussion in which Thomas Aquinas compares the nature of household rule with political rule: the head of the household, he finds, has some similarity to the head of the kingdom, but, he adds, his power is not so "perfect" as that of the king.[11] Not only in Greece and the *polis* but throughout the whole of occidental antiquity, it would indeed have been self-evident that even the power of the tyrant was less great, less "perfect" than the power with which the *paterfamilias*, the *dominus*, ruled over his household of slaves and family. And this was not because the power of the city's

10. *Nicomachean Ethics* 1142a25 and 1178a6 ff.

11. Aquinas *op. cit.* ii. 2. 50. 3.

ruler was matched and checked by the combined powers of household heads, but because absolute, uncontested rule and a political realm properly speaking were mutually exclusive.[12]

5

THE *Polis* AND THE HOUSEHOLD

Although misunderstanding and equating the political and social realms is as old as the translation of Greek terms into Latin and their adaption to Roman-Christian thought, it has become even more confusing in modern usage and modern understanding of society. The distinction between a private and a public sphere of life corresponds to the household and the political realms, which have existed as distinct, separate entities at least since the rise of the ancient city-state; but the emergence of the social realm, which is neither private nor public, strictly speaking, is a relatively new phenomenon whose origin coincided with the emergence of the modern age and which found its political form in the nation-state.

What concerns us in this context is the extraordinary difficulty with which we, because of this development, understand the decisive division between the public and private realms, between the sphere of the *polis* and the sphere of household and family, and, finally, between activities related to a common world and those related to the maintenance of life, a division upon which all ancient political thought rested as self-evident and axiomatic. In our understanding, the dividing line is entirely blurred, because we see the body of peoples and political communities in the image of a family whose everyday affairs have to be taken care of by a gigantic, nation-wide administration of housekeeping. The scientific thought that corresponds to this development is no longer political science but "national economy" or "social economy" or *Volkswirtschaft*, all of which indicate a kind of "collective house-

12. The terms *dominus* and *paterfamilias* therefore were synonymous, like the terms *servus* and *familiaris: Dominum patrem familiae appellaverunt; servos . . . familiares* (Seneca *Epistolae* 47. 12). The old Roman liberty of the citizen disappeared when the Roman emperors adopted the title *dominus*, "ce nom, qu'Auguste et que Tibère encore, repoussaient comme une malédiction et une injure" (H. Wallon, *Histoire de l'esclavage dans l'antiquité* [1847], III, 21).

keeping";[13] the collective of families economically organized into the facsimile of one super-human family is what we call "society," and its political form of organization is called "nation."[14] We therefore find it difficult to realize that according to ancient thought on these matters, the very term "political economy" would have been a contradiction in terms: whatever was "economic," related to the life of the individual and the survival of the species, was a non-political, household affair by definition.[15]

Historically, it is very likely that the rise of the city-state and the public realm occurred at the expense of the private realm of family and household.[16] Yet the old sanctity of the hearth, though much less pronounced in classical Greece than in ancient Rome, was never entirely lost. What prevented the *polis* from violating the private lives of its citizens and made it hold sacred the boundaries surrounding each property was not respect for private property as we understand it, but the fact that without owning a house

13. According to Gunnar Myrdal (*The Political Element in the Development of Economic Theory* [1953], p. xl), the "idea of Social Economy or collective housekeeping (*Volkswirtschaft*)" is one of the "three main foci" around which "the political speculation which has permeated economics from the very beginning is found to be crystallized."

14. This is not to deny that the nation-state and its society grew out of the medieval kingdom and feudalism, in whose framework the family and household unit have an importance unequalled in classical antiquity. The difference, however, is marked. Within the feudal framework, families and households were mutually almost independent, so that the royal household, representing a given territorial region and ruling the feudal lords as *primus inter pares*, did not pretend, like an absolute ruler, to be the head of one family. The medieval "nation" was a conglomeration of families; its members did not think of themselves as members of one family comprehending the whole nation.

15. The distinction is very clear in the first paragraphs of the Ps. Aristotelian *Economics*, because it opposes the despotic one-man rule (*mon-archia*) of the household organization to the altogether different organization of the *polis*.

16. In Athens, one may see the turning point in Solon's legislation. Coulanges rightly sees in the Athenian law that made it a filial duty to support parents the proof of the loss of paternal power (*op. cit.*, pp. 315–16). However, paternal power was limited only if it conflicted with the interest of the city and never for the sake of the individual family member. Thus the sale of children and the exposure of infants lasted throughout antiquity (see R. H. Barrow, *Slavery in the Roman Empire* [1928], p. 8: "Other rights in the *patria potestas* had become obsolete; but the right of exposure remained unforbidden till A.D. 374").

a man could not participate in the affairs of the world because he had no location in it which was properly his own.[17] Even Plato, whose political plans foresaw the abolition of private property and an extension of the public sphere to the point of annihilating private life altogether, still speaks with great reverence of Zeus Herkeios, the protector of border lines, and calls the *horoi*, the boundaries between one estate and another, divine, without seeing any contradiction.[18]

The distinctive trait of the household sphere was that in it men lived together because they were driven by their wants and needs. The driving force was life itself—the penates, the household gods, were, according to Plutarch, "the gods who make us live and nourish our body"[19]—which, for its individual maintenance and its survival as the life of the species needs the company of others. That individual maintenance should be the task of the man and species survival the task of the woman was obvious, and both of these natural functions, the labor of man to provide nourishment and the labor of the woman in giving birth, were subject to the same urgency of life. Natural community in the household therefore was born of necessity, and necessity ruled over all activities performed in it.

The realm of the *polis*, on the contrary, was the sphere of freedom, and if there was a relationship between these two spheres, it was a matter of course that the mastering of the necessities of life

17. It is interesting for this distinction that there were Greek cities where citizens were obliged by law to share their harvest and consume it in common, whereas each of them had the absolute uncontested property of his soil. See Coulanges (*op. cit.*, p. 61), who calls this law "a singular contradiction"; it is no contradiction, because these two types of property had nothing in common in ancient understanding.

18. See *Laws* 842.

19. Quoted from Coulanges, *op. cit.*, p. 96; the reference to Plutarch is *Quaestiones Romanae* 51. It seems strange that Coulanges' one-sided emphasis on the underworld deities in Greek and Roman religion should have overlooked that these gods were not mere gods of the dead and the cult not merely a "death cult," but that this early earth-bound religion served life and death as two aspects of the same process. Life rises out of the earth and returns to it; birth and death are but two different stages of the same biological life over which the subterranean gods hold sway.

in the household was the condition for freedom of the *polis*. Under no circumstances could politics be only a means to protect society —a society of the faithful, as in the Middle Ages, or a society of property-owners, as in Locke, or a society relentlessly engaged in a process of acquisition, as in Hobbes, or a society of producers, as in Marx, or a society of jobholders, as in our own society, or a society of laborers, as in socialist and communist countries. In all these cases, it is the freedom (and in some instances so-called freedom) of society which requires and justifies the restraint of political authority. Freedom is located in the realm of the social, and force or violence becomes the monopoly of government.

What all Greek philosophers, no matter how opposed to *polis* life, took for granted is that freedom is exclusively located in the political realm, that necessity is primarily a prepolitical phenomenon, characteristic of the private household organization, and that force and violence are justified in this sphere because they are the only means to master necessity—for instance, by ruling over slaves—and to become free. Because all human beings are subject to necessity, they are entitled to violence toward others; violence is the prepolitical act of liberating oneself from the necessity of life for the freedom of world. This freedom is the essential condition of what the Greeks called felicity, *eudaimonia*, which was an objective status depending first of all upon wealth and health. To be poor or to be in ill health meant to be subject to physical necessity, and to be a slave meant to be subject, in addition, to man-made violence. This twofold and doubled "unhappiness" of slavery is quite independent of the actual subjective well-being of the slave. Thus, a poor free man preferred the insecurity of a daily-changing labor market to regular assured work, which, because it restricted his freedom to do as he pleased every day, was already felt to be servitude (*douleia*), and even harsh, painful labor was preferred to the easy life of many household slaves.[20]

20. The discussion between Socrates and Eutherus in Xenophon's *Memorabilia* (ii. 8) is quite interesting: Eutherus is forced by necessity to labor with his body and is sure that his body will not be able to stand this kind of life for very long and also that in his old age he will be destitute. Still, he thinks that to labor is better than to beg. Whereupon Socrates proposes that he look for somebody "who is better off and needs an assistant." Eutherus replies that he could not bear servitude (*douleia*).

The prepolitical force, however, with which the head of the household ruled over the family and its slaves and which was felt to be necessary because man is a "social" before he is a "political animal," has nothing in common with the chaotic "state of nature" from whose violence, according to seventeenth-century political thought, men could escape only by establishing a government that, through a monopoly of power and of violence, would abolish the "war of all against all" by "keeping them all in awe."[21] On the contrary, the whole concept of rule and being ruled, of government and power in the sense in which we understand them as well as the regulated order attending them, was felt to be prepolitical and to belong in the private rather than the public sphere.

The *polis* was distinguished from the household in that it knew only "equals," whereas the household was the center of the strictest inequality. To be free meant both not to be subject to the necessity of life or to the command of another *and* not to be in command oneself. It meant neither to rule nor to be ruled.[22] Thus within the realm of the household, freedom did not exist, for the household head, its ruler, was considered to be free only in so far as he had the power to leave the household and enter the political realm, where all were equals. To be sure, this equality of the political realm has very little in common with our concept of equality: it meant to live among and to have to deal only with one's peers, and it presupposed the existence of "unequals" who, as a matter of fact, were always the majority of the population in a city-state.[23] Equality, therefore, far from being connected with

21. The reference is to Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Part I, ch. 13.

22. The most famous and the most beautiful reference is the discussion of the different forms of government in Herodotus (iii. 80–83), where Otanes, the defender of Greek equality (*isonomiē*), states that he "wishes neither to rule nor to be ruled." But it is the same spirit in which Aristotle states that the life of a free man is better than that of a despot, denying freedom to the despot as a matter of course (*Politics* 1325a24). According to Coulanges, all Greek and Latin words which express some rulership over others, such as *rex*, *pater*, *anax*, *basileus*, refer originally to household relationships and were names the slaves gave to their master (*op. cit.*, pp. 89 ff., 228).

23. The proportion varied and is certainly exaggerated in Xenophon's report from Sparta, where among four thousand people in the market place, a foreigner counted no more than sixty citizens (*Hellenica* iii. 35).

justice, as in modern times, was the very essence of freedom: to be free meant to be free from the inequality present in rulership and to move in a sphere where neither rule nor being ruled existed.

However, the possibility of describing the profound difference between the modern and the ancient understanding of politics in terms of a clear-cut opposition ends here. In the modern world, the social and the political realms are much less distinct. That politics is nothing but a function of society, that action, speech, and thought are primarily superstructures upon social interest, is not a discovery of Karl Marx but on the contrary is among the axiomatic assumptions Marx accepted uncritically from the political economists of the modern age. This functionalization makes it impossible to perceive any serious gulf between the two realms; and this is not a matter of a theory or an ideology, since with the rise of society, that is, the rise of the "household" (*oikia*) or of economic activities to the public realm, housekeeping and all matters pertaining formerly to the private sphere of the family have become a "collective" concern.[24] In the modern world, the two realms indeed constantly flow into each other like waves in the never-resting stream of the life process itself.

The disappearance of the gulf that the ancients had to cross daily to transcend the narrow realm of the household and "rise" into the realm of politics is an essentially modern phenomenon. Such a gulf between the private and the public still existed somehow in the Middle Ages, though it had lost much of its significance

24. See Myrdal, *op. cit.*: "The notion that society, like the head of a family, keeps house for its members, is deeply rooted in economic terminology. . . . In German *Volkswirtschaftslehre* suggests . . . that there is a collective subject of economic activity . . . with a common purpose and common values. In English, . . . 'theory of wealth' or 'theory of welfare' express similar ideas" (p. 140). "What is meant by a social economy whose function is social housekeeping? In the first place, it implies or suggests an analogy between the individual who runs his own or his family household and society. Adam Smith and James Mill elaborated this analogy explicitly. After J. S. Mill's criticism, and with the wider recognition of the distinction between practical and theoretical political economy, the analogy was generally less emphasized" (p. 143). The fact that the analogy was no longer used may also be due to a development in which society devoured the family unit until it became a full-fledged substitute for it.

and changed its location entirely. It has been rightly remarked that after the downfall of the Roman Empire, it was the Catholic Church that offered men a substitute for the citizenship which had formerly been the prerogative of municipal government.[25] The medieval tension between the darkness of everyday life and the grandiose splendor attending everything sacred, with the concomitant rise from the secular to the religious, corresponds in many respects to the rise from the private to the public in antiquity. The difference is of course very marked, for no matter how "worldly" the Church became, it was always essentially an otherworldly concern which kept the community of believers together. While one can equate the public with the religious only with some difficulty, the secular realm under the rule of feudalism was indeed in its entirety what the private realm had been in antiquity. Its hallmark was the absorption of all activities into the household sphere, where they had only private significance, and consequently the very absence of a public realm.[26]

It is characteristic of this growth of the private realm, and incidentally of the difference between the ancient household head and the feudal lord, that the feudal lord could render justice within the limits of his rule, whereas the ancient household head, while he might exert a milder or harsher rule, knew neither of laws nor justice outside the political realm.[27] The bringing of all human

25. R. H. Barrow, *The Romans* (1953), p. 194.

26. The characteristics which E. Levasseur (*Histoire des classes ouvrières et le de l'industrie en France avant 1789* [1900]) finds for the feudal organization of labor are true for the whole of feudal communities: "Chacun vivait chez soi et vivait de soi-même, le noble sur sa seigneurie, le vilain sur sa culture, le citadin dans sa ville" (p. 229).

27. The fair treatment of slaves which Plato recommends in the *Laws* (777) has little to do with justice and is not recommended "out of regard for the [slaves], but more out of respect to ourselves." For the coexistence of two laws, the political law of justice and the household law of rule, see Wallon, *op. cit.*, II, 200: "La loi, pendant bien longtemps, donc . . . s'abstenait de pénétrer dans la famille, où elle reconnaissait l'empire d'une autre loi." Ancient, especially Roman, jurisdiction with respect to household matters, treatment of slaves, family relationships, etc., was essentially designed to restrain the otherwise unrestricted power of the household head; that there could be a rule of justice within the entirely "private" society of the slaves themselves was unthink-

activities into the private realm and the modeling of all human relationships upon the example of the household reached far into the specifically medieval professional organizations in the cities themselves, the guilds, *confrèries*, and *compagnons*, and even into the early business companies, where "the original joint household would seem to be indicated by the very word 'company' (*compānis*) . . . [and] such phrases as 'men who eat one bread,' 'men who have one bread and one wine.' "[28] The medieval concept of the "common good," far from indicating the existence of a political realm, recognizes only that private individuals have interests in common, material and spiritual, and that they can retain their privacy and attend to their own business only if one of them takes it upon himself to look out for this common interest. What distinguishes this essentially Christian attitude toward politics from the modern reality is not so much the recognition of a "common good" as the exclusivity of the private sphere and the absence of that curiously hybrid realm where private interests assume public significance that we call "society."

It is therefore not surprising that medieval political thought, concerned exclusively with the secular realm, remained unaware of the gulf between the sheltered life in the household and the merciless exposure of the *polis* and, consequently, of the virtue of courage as one of the most elemental political attitudes. What remains surprising is that the only postclassical political theorist who, in an extraordinary effort to restore its old dignity to politics, perceived the gulf and understood something of the courage needed to cross it was Machiavelli, who described it in the rise "of the Condottiere from low condition to high rank," from privacy to princedom, that is, from circumstances common to all men to the shining glory of great deeds.[29]

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able—they were by definition outside the realm of the law and subject to the rule of their master. Only the master himself, in so far as he was also a citizen, was subject to the rules of laws, which for the sake of the city eventually even curtailed his powers in the household.

28. W. J. Ashley, *op. cit.*, p. 415.

29. This "rise" from one realm or rank to a higher is a recurrent theme in Machiavelli (see esp. *Prince*, ch. 6 about Hiero of Syracuse and ch. 7; and *Discourses*, Book II, ch. 13).

To leave the household, originally in order to embark upon some adventure and glorious enterprise and later simply to devote one's life to the affairs of the city, demanded courage because only in the household was one primarily concerned with one's own life and survival. Whoever entered the political realm had first to be ready to risk his life, and too great a love for life obstructed freedom, was a sure sign of slavishness.[30] Courage therefore became the political virtue par excellence, and only those men who possessed it could be admitted to a fellowship that was political in content and purpose and thereby transcended the mere togetherness imposed on all—slaves, barbarians, and Greeks alike—through the urgencies of life.[31] The "good life," as Aristotle called the life of the citizen, therefore was not merely better, more carefree or nobler than ordinary life, but of an altogether different

30. "By Solon's time slavery had come to be looked on as worse than death" (Robert Schlaifer, "Greek Theories of Slavery from Homer to Aristotle," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* [1936], XLVII). Since then, *philopsychia* ("love of life") and cowardice became identified with slavishness. Thus, Plato could believe he had demonstrated the natural slavishness of slaves by the fact that they had not preferred death to enslavement (*Republic* 386A). A late echo of this might still be found in Seneca's answer to the complaints of slaves: "Is freedom so close at hand, yet is there any one a slave?" (*Ep.* 77. 14) or in his *vita si moriendi virtus abest, servitus est*—"life is slavery without the virtue which knows how to die" (77. 13). To understand the ancient attitude toward slavery, it is not immaterial to remember that the majority of slaves were defeated enemies and that generally only a small percentage were born slaves. And while under the Roman Republic slaves were, on the whole, drawn from outside the limits of Roman rule, Greek slaves usually were of the same nationality as their masters; they had proved their slavish nature by not committing suicide, and since courage was the political virtue par excellence, they had thereby shown their "natural" unworthiness, their unfitness to be citizens. The attitude toward slaves changed in the Roman Empire, not only because of the influence of Stoicism but because a much greater portion of the slave population were slaves by birth. But even in Rome, *labos* is considered to be closely connected with unglorious death by Vergil (*Aeneis* vi).

31. That the free man distinguishes himself from the slave through courage seems to have been the theme of a poem by the Cretan poet Hybrias: "My riches are spear and sword and the beautiful shield. . . . But those who do not dare to bear spear and sword and the beautiful shield that protects the body fall all down unto their knees with awe and address me as Lord and great King" (quoted from Eduard Meyer, *Die Sklaverei im Altertum* [1898], p. 22).

quality. It was "good" to the extent that by having mastered the necessities of sheer life, by being freed from labor and work, and by overcoming the innate urge of all living creatures for their own survival, it was no longer bound to the biological life process.

At the root of Greek political consciousness we find an unequaled clarity and articulateness in drawing this distinction. No activity that served only the purpose of making a living, of sustaining only the life process, was permitted to enter the political realm, and this at the grave risk of abandoning trade and manufacture to the industriousness of slaves and foreigners, so that Athens indeed became the "pensionopolis" with a "proletariat of consumers" which Max Weber so vividly described.[32] The true character of this *polis* is still quite manifest in Plato's and Aristotle's political philosophies, even if the borderline between household and *polis* is occasionally blurred, especially in Plato who, probably following Socrates, began to draw his examples and illustrations for the *polis* from everyday experiences in private life, but also in Aristotle when he, following Plato, tentatively assumed that at least the historical origin of the *polis* must be connected with the necessities of life and that only its content or inherent aim (*telos*) transcends life in the "good life."

These aspects of the teachings of the Socratic school, which soon were to become axiomatic to the point of banality, were then the newest and most revolutionary of all and sprang not from actual experience in political life but from the desire to be freed from its burden, a desire which in their own understanding the philosophers could justify only by demonstrating that even this freest of all ways of life was still connected with and subject to necessity. But the background of actual political experience, at least in Plato and Aristotle, remained so strong that the distinction between the spheres of household and political life was never doubted. Without mastering the necessities of life in the household, neither life nor the "good life" is possible, but politics is never for the sake of life. As far as the members of the *polis* are concerned, household life exists for the sake of the "good life" in the *polis*.

32. Max Weber, "Agrarverhältnisse im Altertum," *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* (1924), p. 147.

6

THE RISE OF THE SOCIAL

The emergence of society—the rise of housekeeping, its activities, problems, and organizational devices—from the shadowy interior of the household into the light of the public sphere, has not only blurred the old borderline between private and political, it has also changed almost beyond recognition the meaning of the two terms and their significance for the life of the individual and the citizen. Not only would we not agree with the Greeks that a life spent in the privacy of "one's own" (*idion*), outside the world of the common, is "idiotic" by definition, or with the Romans to whom privacy offered but a temporary refuge from the business of the *res publica;* we call private today a sphere of intimacy whose beginnings we may be able to trace back to late Roman, though hardly to any period of Greek antiquity, but whose peculiar manifoldness and variety were certainly unknown to any period prior to the modern age.

This is not merely a matter of shifted emphasis. In ancient feeling the privative trait of privacy, indicated in the word itself, was all-important; it meant literally a state of being deprived of something, and even of the highest and most human of man's capacities. A man who lived only a private life, who like the slave was not permitted to enter the public realm, or like the barbarian had chosen not to establish such a realm, was not fully human. We no longer think primarily of deprivation when we use the word "privacy," and this is partly due to the enormous enrichment of the private sphere through modern individualism. However, it seems even more important that modern privacy is at least as sharply opposed to the social realm—unknown to the ancients who considered its content a private matter—as it is to the political, properly speaking. The decisive historical fact is that modern privacy in its most relevant function, to shelter the intimate, was discovered as the opposite not of the political sphere but of the social, to which it is therefore more closely and authentically related.

The first articulate explorer and to an extent even theorist of

intimacy was Jean-Jacques Rousseau who, characteristically enough, is the only great author still frequently cited by his first name alone. He arrived at his discovery through a rebellion not against the oppression of the state but against society's unbearable perversion of the human heart, its intrusion upon an innermost region in man which until then had needed no special protection. The intimacy of the heart, unlike the private household, has no objective tangible place in the world, nor can the society against which it protests and asserts itself be localized with the same certainty as the public space. To Rousseau, both the intimate and the social were, rather, subjective modes of human existence, and in his case, it was as though Jean-Jacques rebelled against a man called Rousseau. The modern individual and his endless conflicts, his inability either to be at home in society or to live outside it altogether, his ever-changing moods and the radical subjectivism of his emotional life, was born in this rebellion of the heart. The authenticity of Rousseau's discovery is beyond doubt, no matter how doubtful the authenticity of the individual who was Rousseau. The astonishing flowering of poetry and music from the middle of the eighteenth century until almost the last third of the nineteenth, accompanied by the rise of the novel, the only entirely social art form, coinciding with a no less striking decline of all the more public arts, especially architecture, is sufficient testimony to a close relationship between the social and the intimate.

The rebellious reaction against society during which Rousseau and the Romanticists discovered intimacy was directed first of all against the leveling demands of the social, against what we would call today the conformism inherent in every society. It is important to remember that this rebellion took place before the principle of equality, upon which we have blamed conformism since Tocqueville, had had the time to assert itself in either the social or the political realm. Whether a nation consists of equals or non-equals is of no great importance in this respect, for society always demands that its members act as though they were members of one enormous family which has only one opinion and one interest. Before the modern disintegration of the family, this common interest and single opinion was represented by the household head who ruled in accordance with it and prevented possible dis-

unity among the family members.[33] The striking coincidence of the rise of society with the decline of the family indicates clearly that what actually took place was the absorption of the family unit into corresponding social groups. The equality of the members of these groups, far from being an equality among peers, resembles nothing so much as the equality of household members before the despotic power of the household head, except that in society, where the natural strength of one common interest and one unanimous opinion is tremendously enforced by sheer number, actual rule exerted by one man, representing the common interest and the right opinion, could eventually be dispensed with. The phenomenon of conformism is characteristic of the last stage of this modern development.

It is true that one-man, monarchical rule, which the ancients stated to be the organizational device of the household, is transformed in society—as we know it today, when the peak of the social order is no longer formed by the royal household of an absolute ruler—into a kind of no-man rule. But this nobody, the assumed one interest of society as a whole in economics as well as the assumed one opinion of polite society in the salon, does not cease to rule for having lost its personality. As we know from the most social form of government, that is, from bureaucracy (the last stage of government in the nation-state just as one-man rule in benevolent despotism and absolutism was its first), the rule by nobody is not necessarily no-rule; it may indeed, under certain circumstances, even turn out to be one of its cruelest and most tyrannical versions.

It is decisive that society, on all its levels, excludes the possibility of action, which formerly was excluded from the household. Instead, society expects from each of its members a certain kind of behavior, imposing innumerable and various rules, all of which tend to "normalize" its members, to make them behave, to exclude spontaneous action or outstanding achievement. With

33. This is well illustrated by a remark of Seneca, who, discussing the usefulness of highly educated slaves (who know all the classics by heart) to an assumedly rather ignorant master, comments: "What the household knows the master knows" (*Ep.* 27. 6, quoted from Barrow, *Slavery in the Roman Empire*, p. 61).

Rousseau, we find these demands in the salons of high society, whose conventions always equate the individual with his rank within the social framework. What matters is this equation with social status, and it is immaterial whether the framework happens to be actual rank in the half-feudal society of the eighteenth century, title in the class society of the nineteenth, or mere function in the mass society of today. The rise of mass society, on the contrary, only indicates that the various social groups have suffered the same absorption into one society that the family units had suffered earlier; with the emergence of mass society, the realm of the social has finally, after several centuries of development, reached the point where it embraces and controls all members of a given community equally and with equal strength. But society equalizes under all circumstances, and the victory of equality in the modern world is only the political and legal recognition of the fact that society has conquered the public realm, and that distinction and difference have become private matters of the individual.

This modern equality, based on the conformism inherent in society and possible only because behavior has replaced action as the foremost mode of human relationship, is in every respect different from equality in antiquity, and notably in the Greek city-states. To belong to the few "equals" (*homoioi*) meant to be permitted to live among one's peers; but the public realm itself, the *polis*, was permeated by a fiercely agonal spirit, where everybody had constantly to distinguish himself from all others, to show through unique deeds or achievements that he was the best of all (*aien aristeuein*).[34] The public realm, in other words, was reserved for individuality; it was the only place where men could show who they really and inexchangeably were. It was for the sake of this chance, and out of love for a body politic that made it possible to them all, that each was more or less willing to share in the burden of jurisdiction, defense, and administration of public affairs.

It is the same conformism, the assumption that men behave and

34. *Aien aristeuein kai hypeirochon emmenai allōn* ("always to be the best and to rise above others") is the central concern of Homer's heroes (*Iliad* vi. 208), and Homer was "the educator of Hellas."

do not act with respect to each other, that lies at the root of the modern science of economics, whose birth coincided with the rise of society and which, together with its chief technical tool, statistics, became the social science par excellence. Economics—until the modern age a not too important part of ethics and politics and based on the assumption that men act with respect to their economic activities as they act in every other respect[35]—could achieve a scientific character only when men had become social beings and unanimously followed certain patterns of behavior, so that those who did not keep the rules could be considered to be asocial or abnormal.

The laws of statistics are valid only where large numbers or long periods are involved, and acts or events can statistically appear only as deviations or fluctuations. The justification of statistics is that deeds and events are rare occurrences in everyday life and in history. Yet the meaningfulness of everyday relationships is disclosed not in everyday life but in rare deeds, just as the significance of a historical period shows itself only in the few events that illuminate it. The application of the law of large numbers and long periods to politics or history signifies nothing less than the wilful obliteration of their very subject matter, and it is a hopeless enterprise to search for meaning in politics or signifi-

35. "The conception of political economy as primarily a 'science' dates only from Adam Smith" and was unknown not only to antiquity and the Middle Ages, but also to canonist doctrine, the first "complete and economic doctrine" which "differed from modern economics in being an 'art' rather than a 'science'" (W. J. Ashley, *op. cit.*, pp. 379 ff.). Classical economics assumed that man, in so far as he is an active being, acts exclusively from self-interest and is driven by only one desire, the desire for acquisition. Adam Smith's introduction of an "invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of [anybody's] intention" proves that even this minimum of action with its uniform motivation still contains too much unpredictable initiative for the establishment of a science. Marx developed classical economics further by substituting group or class interests for individual and personal interests and by reducing these class interests to two major classes, capitalists and workers, so that he was left with one conflict, where classical economics had seen a multitude of contradictory conflicts. The reason why the Marxian economic system is more consistent and coherent, and therefore apparently so much more "scientific" than those of his predecessors, lies primarily in the construction of "socialized man," who is even less an acting being than the "economic man" of liberal economics.

cance in history when everything that is not everyday behavior or automatic trends has been ruled out as immaterial.

However, since the laws of statistics are perfectly valid where we deal with large numbers, it is obvious that every increase in population means an increased validity and a marked decrease of "deviation." Politically, this means that the larger the population in any given body politic, the more likely it will be the social rather than the political that constitutes the public realm. The Greeks, whose city-state was the most individualistic and least conformable body politic known to us, were quite aware of the fact that the *polis*, with its emphasis on action and speech, could survive only if the number of citizens remained restricted. Large numbers of people, crowded together, develop an almost irresistible inclination toward despotism, be this the despotism of a person or of majority rule; and although statistics, that is, the mathematical treatment of reality, was unknown prior to the modern age, the social phenomena which make such treatment possible—great numbers, accounting for conformism, behaviorism, and automatism in human affairs—were precisely those traits which, in Greek self-understanding, distinguished the Persian civilization from their own.

The unfortunate truth about behaviorism and the validity of its "laws" is that the more people there are, the more likely they are to behave and the less likely to tolerate non-behavior. Statistically, this will be shown in the leveling out of fluctuation. In reality, deeds will have less and less chance to stem the tide of behavior, and events will more and more lose their significance, that is, their capacity to illuminate historical time. Statistical uniformity is by no means a harmless scientific ideal; it is the no longer secret political ideal of a society which, entirely submerged in the routine of everyday living, is at peace with the scientific outlook inherent in its very existence.

The uniform behavior that lends itself to statistical determination, and therefore to scientifically correct prediction, can hardly be explained by the liberal hypothesis of a natural "harmony of interests," the foundation of "classical" economics; it was not Karl Marx but the liberal economists themselves who had to introduce the "communistic fiction," that is, to assume that there is

one interest of society as a whole which with "an invisible hand" guides the behavior of men and produces the harmony of their conflicting interests.[36] The difference between Marx and his forerunners was only that he took the reality of conflict, as it presented itself in the society of his time, as seriously as the hypothetical fiction of harmony; he was right in concluding that the "socialization of man" would produce automatically a harmony of all interests, and was only more courageous than his liberal teachers when he proposed to establish in reality the "communistic fiction" underlying all economic theories. What Marx did not—and, at his time, could not—understand was that the germs of communistic society were present in the reality of a national household, and that their full development was not hindered by any class-interest as such, but only by the already obsolete monarchical structure of the nation-state. Obviously, what prevented society from smooth functioning was only certain traditional remnants that interfered and still influenced the behavior of "backward" classes. From the viewpoint of society, these were merely disturbing factors in the way of a full development of "social forces"; they no longer corresponded to reality and were therefore, in a sense, much more "fictitious" than the scientific "fiction" of one interest.

A complete victory of society will always produce some sort of "communistic fiction," whose outstanding political characteristic is that it is indeed ruled by an "invisible hand," namely, by

36. That liberal utilitarianism, and not socialism, is "forced into an untenable 'communistic fiction' about the unity of society" and that "the communist fiction [is] implicit in most writings on economics" constitutes one of the chief theses of Myrdal's brilliant work (*op. cit.*, pp. 54 and 150). He shows conclusively that economics can be a science only if one assumes that one interest pervades society as a whole. Behind the "harmony of interests" stands always the "communistic fiction" of one interest, which may then be called welfare or commonwealth. Liberal economists consequently were always guided by a "communistic" ideal, namely, by "interest of society as a whole" (pp. 194–95). The crux of the argument is that this "amounts to the assertion that society must be conceived as a single subject. This, however, is precisely what cannot be conceived. If we tried, we would be attempting to abstract from the essential fact that social activity is the result of the intentions of several individuals" (p. 154).

nobody. What we traditionally call state and government gives place here to pure administration—a state of affairs which Marx rightly predicted as the "withering away of the state," though he was wrong in assuming that only a revolution could bring it about, and even more wrong when he believed that this complete victory of society would mean the eventual emergence of the "realm of freedom."[37]

To gauge the extent of society's victory in the modern age, its early substitution of behavior for action and its eventual substitution of bureaucracy, the rule of nobody, for personal rulership, it may be well to recall that its initial science of economics, which substitutes patterns of behavior only in this rather limited field of human activity, was finally followed by the all-comprehensive pretension of the social sciences which, as "behavioral sciences," aim to reduce man as a whole, in all his activities, to the level of a conditioned and behaving animal. If economics is the science of society in its early stages, when it could impose its rules of behavior only on sections of the population and on parts of their activities, the rise of the "behavioral sciences" indicates clearly the final stage of this development, when mass society has devoured all strata of the nation and "social behavior" has become the standard for all regions of life.

Since the rise of society, since the admission of household and housekeeping activities to the public realm, an irresistible tendency to grow, to devour the older realms of the political and private as well as the more recently established sphere of intimacy, has been one of the outstanding characteristics of the new realm.This constant growth, whose no less constant acceleration we can observe over at least three centuries, derives its strength from the fact that through society it is the life process itself which in one form or another has been channeled into the public realm. The private realm of the household was the sphere where the necessities of life, of individual survival as well as of continuity of the species, were taken care of and guaranteed. One of the character-

37. For a brilliant exposition of this usually neglected aspect of Marx's relevance for modern society, see Siegfried Landshut, "Die Gegenwart im Lichte der Marxschen Lehre," *Hamburger Jahrbuch für Wirtschafts- und Gesellschaftspolitik*, Vol. I (1956).

istics of privacy, prior to the discovery of the intimate, was that man existed in this sphere not as a truly human being but only as a specimen of the animal species man-kind. This, precisely, was the ultimate reason for the tremendous contempt held for it by antiquity. The emergence of society has changed the estimate of this whole sphere but has hardly transformed its nature. The monolithic character of every type of society, its conformism which allows for only one interest and one opinion, is ultimately rooted in the one-ness of man-kind. It is because this one-ness of man-kind is not fantasy and not even merely a scientific hypothesis, as in the "communistic fiction" of classical economics, that mass society, where man as a social animal rules supreme and where apparently the survival of the species could be guaranteed on a world-wide scale, can at the same time threaten humanity with extinction.

Perhaps the clearest indication that society constitutes the public organization of the life process itself may be found in the fact that in a relatively short time the new social realm transformed all modern communities into societies of laborers and jobholders; in other words, they became at once centered around the one activity necessary to sustain life. (To have a society of laborers, it is of course not necessary that every member actually be a laborer or worker—not even the emancipation of the working class and the enormous potential power which majority rule accords to it are decisive here—but only that all members consider whatever they do primarily as a way to sustain their own lives and those of their families.) Society is the form in which the fact of mutual dependence for the sake of life and nothing else assumes public significance and where the activities connected with sheer survival are permitted to appear in public.

Whether an activity is performed in private or in public is by no means a matter of indifference. Obviously, the character of the public realm must change in accordance with the activities admitted into it, but to a large extent the activity itself changes its own nature too. The laboring activity, though under all circumstances connected with the life process in its most elementary, biological sense, remained stationary for thousands of years, imprisoned in the eternal recurrence of the life process to which it was tied. The

admission of labor to public stature, far from eliminating its character as a process—which one might have expected, remembering that bodies politic have always been designed for permanence and their laws always understood as limitations imposed upon movement—has, on the contrary, liberated this process from its circular, monotonous recurrence and transformed it into a swiftly progressing development whose results have in a few centuries totally changed the whole inhabited world.

The moment laboring was liberated from the restrictions imposed by its banishment into the private realm—and this emancipation of labor was not a consequence of the emancipation of the working class, but preceded it—it was as though the growth element inherent in all organic life had completely overcome and overgrown the processes of decay by which organic life is checked and balanced in nature's household. The social realm, where the life process has established its own public domain, has let loose an unnatural growth, so to speak, of the natural; and it is against this growth, not merely against society but against a constantly growing social realm, that the private and intimate, on the one hand, and the political (in the narrower sense of the word), on the other, have proved incapable of defending themselves.

What we described as the unnatural growth of the natural is usually considered to be the constantly accelerated increase in the productivity of labor. The greatest single factor in this constant increase since its inception has been the organization of laboring, visible in the so-called division of labor, which preceded the industrial revolution; even the mechanization of labor processes, the second greatest factor in labor's productivity, is based upon it. Inasmuch as the organizational principle itself clearly derives from the public rather than the private realm, division of labor is precisely what happens to the laboring activity under conditions of the public realm and what could never have happened in the privacy of the household.[38] In no other sphere of life do we appear to have

38. Here and later I apply the term "division of labor" only to modern labor conditions where one activity is divided and atomized into innumerable minute manipulations, and not to the "division of labor" given in professional specialization. The latter can be so classified only under the assumption that society must be conceived as one single subject, the fulfilment of whose needs are then sub-

attained such excellence as in the revolutionary transformation of laboring, and this to the point where the verbal significance of the word itself (which always had been connected with hardly bearable "toil and trouble," with effort and pain and, consequently, with a deformation of the human body, so that only extreme misery and poverty could be its source), has begun to lose its meaning for us.[39] While dire necessity made labor indispensable to sustain life, excellence would have been the last thing to expect from it.

Excellence itself, *aretē* as the Greeks, *virtus* as the Romans

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divided by "an invisible hand" among its members. The same holds true, *mutatis mutandis*, for the odd notion of a division of labor between the sexes, which is even considered by some writers to be the most original one. It presumes as its single subject man-kind, the human species, which has divided its labors among men and women. Where the same argument is used in antiquity (see, for instance, Xenophon *Oeconomicus* vii. 22), emphasis and meaning are quite different. The main division is between a life spent indoors, in the household, and a life spent outside, in the world. Only the latter is a life fully worthy of man, and the notion of equality between man and woman, which is a necessary assumption for the idea of division of labor, is of course entirely absent (cf. n. 81). Antiquity seems to have known only professional specialization, which assumedly was predetermined by natural qualities and gifts. Thus work in the gold mines, which occupied several thousand workers, was distributed according to strength and skill. See J.-P. Vernant, "Travail et nature dans la Grèce ancienne," *Journal de psychologie normale et pathologique*, Vol. LII, No. 1 (January–March, 1955).

39. All the European words for "labor," the Latin and English *labor*, the Greek *ponos*, the French *travail*, the German *Arbeit*, signify pain and effort and are also used for the pangs of birth. *Labor* has the same etymological root as *labare* ("to stumble under a burden"); *ponos* and *Arbeit* have the same etymological roots as "poverty" (*penia* in Greek and *Armut* in German). Even Hesiod, currently counted among the few defenders of labor in antiquity, put *ponon alginoenta* ("painful labor") as first of the evils plaguing man (*Theogony* 226). For the Greek usage, see G. Herzog-Hauser, "*Ponos*," in Pauly-Wissowa. The German *Arbeit* and *arm* are both derived from the Germanic *arbma-*, meaning lonely and neglected, abandoned. See Kluge/Götze, *Etymologisches Wörterbuch* (1951). In medieval German, the word is used to translate *labor*, *tribulatio*, *persecutio*, *adversitas*, *malum* (see Klara Vontobel, *Das Arbeitsethos des deutschen Protestantismus* [Dissertation, Bern, 1946]).

would have called it, has always been assigned to the public realm where one could excel, could distinguish oneself from all others. Every activity performed in public can attain an excellence never matched in privacy; for excellence, by definition, the presence of others is always required, and this presence needs the formality of the public, constituted by one's peers, it cannot be the casual, familiar presence of one's equals or inferiors.[40] Not even the social realm—though it made excellence anonymous, emphasized the progress of mankind rather than the achievements of men, and changed the content of the public realm beyond recognition—has been able altogether to annihilate the connection between public performance and excellence. While we have become excellent in the laboring we perform in public, our capacity for action and speech has lost much of its former quality since the rise of the social realm banished these into the sphere of the intimate and the private. This curious discrepancy has not escaped public notice, where it is usually blamed upon an assumed time lag between our technical capacities and our general humanistic development or between the physical sciences, which change and control nature, and the social sciences, which do not yet know how to change and control society. Quite apart from other fallacies of the argument which have been pointed out so frequently that we need not repeat them, this criticism concerns only a possible change in the psychology of human beings—their so-called behavior patterns—not a change of the world they move in. And this psychological interpretation, for which the absence or presence of a public realm is as irrelevant as any tangible, worldly reality, seems rather doubtful in view of the fact that no activity can become excellent if the world does not provide a proper space for its exercise. Neither education nor ingenuity nor talent can replace the constituent elements of the public realm, which make it the proper place for human excellence.

40. Homer's much quoted thought that Zeus takes away half of a man's excellence (*aretē*) when the day of slavery catches him (*Odyssey* xvii. 320 ff.) is put into the mouth of Eumaios, a slave himself, and meant as an objective statement, not a criticism or a moral judgment. The slave lost excellence because he lost admission to the public realm, where excellence can show.

7

THE PUBLIC REALM: THE COMMON

The term "public" signifies two closely interrelated but not altogether identical phenomena:

It means, first, that everything that appears in public can be seen and heard by everybody and has the widest possible publicity. For us, appearance—something that is being seen and heard by others as well as by ourselves—constitutes reality. Compared with the reality which comes from being seen and heard, even the greatest forces of intimate life—the passions of the heart, the thoughts of the mind, the delights of the senses—lead an uncertain, shadowy kind of existence unless and until they are transformed, deprivatized and deindividualized, as it were, into a shape to fit them for public appearance.[41] The most current of such transformations occurs in storytelling and generally in artistic transposition of individual experiences. But we do not need the form of the artist to witness this transfiguration. Each time we talk about things that can be experienced only in privacy or intimacy, we bring them out into a sphere where they will assume a kind of reality which, their intensity notwithstanding, they never could have had before. The presence of others who see what we see and hear what we hear assures us of the reality of the world and ourselves, and while the intimacy of a fully developed private life, such as had never been known before the rise of the modern age and the concomitant decline of the public realm, will always greatly intensify and enrich the whole scale of subjective emotions and private feelings, this intensification will always come to pass at the expense of the assurance of the reality of the world and men.

Indeed, the most intense feeling we know of, intense to the point of blotting out all other experiences, namely, the experience of great bodily pain, is at the same time the most private and least

41. This is also the reason why it is impossible "to write a character sketch of any slave who lived. . . . Until they emerge into freedom and notoriety, they remain shadowy types rather than persons" (Barrow, *Slavery in the Roman Empire*, p. 156).

communicable of all. Not only is it perhaps the only experience which we are unable to transform into a shape fit for public appearance, it actually deprives us of our feeling for reality to such an extent that we can forget it more quickly and easily than anything else. There seems to be no bridge from the most radical subjectivity, in which I am no longer "recognizable," to the outer world of life.[42] Pain, in other words, truly a borderline experience between life as "being among men" (*inter homines esse*) and death, is so subjective and removed from the world of things and men that it cannot assume an appearance at all.[43]

Since our feeling for reality depends utterly upon appearance and therefore upon the existence of a public realm into which things can appear out of the darkness of sheltered existence, even the twilight which illuminates our private and intimate lives is ultimately derived from the much harsher light of the public realm. Yet there are a great many things which cannot withstand the implacable, bright light of the constant presence of others on the public scene; there, only what is considered to be relevant, worthy of being seen or heard, can be tolerated, so that the irrelevant becomes automatically a private matter. This, to be sure, does not mean that private concerns are generally irrelevant; on the contrary, we shall see that there are very relevant matters which can survive only in the realm of the private. For instance, love, in distinction from friendship, is killed, or rather extinguished, the moment it is displayed in public. ("Never seek to tell

42. I use here a little-known poem on pain from Rilke's deathbed: The first lines of the untitled poem are: "Komm du, du letzter, den ich anerkenne, / heilloser Schmerz im leiblichen Geweb"; and it concludes as follows: "Bin ich es noch, der da unkenntlich brennt? / Erinnerungen reiss ich nicht herein. / O Leben, Leben: Draussensein. / Und ich in Lohe. Niemand, der mich kennt."

43. On the subjectivity of pain and its relevance for all variations of hedonism and sensualism, see §§ 15 and 43. For the living, death is primarily dis-appearance. But unlike pain, there is one aspect of death in which it is as though death appeared among the living, and that is in old age. Goethe once remarked that growing old is "gradually receding from appearance" (*stufenweises Zurücktreten aus der Erscheinung*); the truth of this remark as well as the actual appearance of this process of disappearing becomes quite tangible in the old-age self-portraits of the great masters—Rembrandt, Leonardo, etc.—in which the intensity of the eyes seems to illuminate and preside over the receding flesh.

thy love / Love that never told can be.") Because of its inherent worldlessness, love can only become false and perverted when it is used for political purposes such as the change or salvation of the world.

What the public realm considers irrelevant can have such an extraordinary and infectious charm that a whole people may adopt it as their way of life, without for that reason changing its essentially private character. Modern enchantment with "small things," though preached by early twentieth-century poetry in almost all European tongues, has found its classical presentation in the *petit bonheur* of the French people. Since the decay of their once great and glorious public realm, the French have become masters in the art of being happy among "small things," within the space of their own four walls, between chest and bed, table and chair, dog and cat and flowerpot, extending to these things a care and tenderness which, in a world where rapid industrialization constantly kills off the things of yesterday to produce today's objects, may even appear to be the world's last, purely humane corner. This enlargement of the private, the enchantment, as it were, of a whole people, does not make it public, does not constitute a public realm, but, on the contrary, means only that the public realm has almost completely receded, so that greatness has given way to charm everywhere; for while the public realm may be great, it cannot be charming precisely because it is unable to harbor the irrelevant.

Second, the term "public" signifies the world itself, in so far as it is common to all of us and distinguished from our privately owned place in it. This world, however, is not identical with the earth or with nature, as the limited space for the movement of men and the general condition of organic life. It is related, rather, to the human artifact, the fabrication of human hands, as well as to affairs which go on among those who inhabit the man-made world together. To live together in the world means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common, as a table is located between those who sit around it; the world, like every in-between, relates and separates men at the same time.

The public realm, as the common world, gathers us together and yet prevents our falling over each other, so to speak. What makes mass society so difficult to bear is not the number of people

involved, or at least not primarily, but the fact that the world between them has lost its power to gather them together, to relate and to separate them. The weirdness of this situation resembles a spiritualistic séance where a number of people gathered around a table might suddenly, through some magic trick, see the table vanish from their midst, so that two persons sitting opposite each other were no longer separated but also would be entirely unrelated to each other by anything tangible.

Historically, we know of only one principle that was ever devised to keep a community of people together who had lost their interest in the common world and felt themselves no longer related and separated by it. To find a bond between people strong enough to replace the world was the main political task of early Christian philosophy, and it was Augustine who proposed to found not only the Christian "brotherhood" but all human relationships on charity. But this charity, though its worldlessness clearly corresponds to the general human experience of love, is at the same time clearly distinguished from it in being something which, like the world, is between men: "Even robbers have between them [*inter se*] what they call charity."[44] This surprising illustration of the Christian political principle is in fact very well chosen, because the bond of charity between people, while it is incapable of founding a public realm of its own, is quite adequate to the main Christian principle of worldlessness and is admirably fit to carry a group of essentially worldless people through the world, a group of saints or a group of criminals, provided only it is understood that the world itself is doomed and that every activity in it is undertaken with the proviso *quamdiu mundus durat* ("as long as the world lasts").[45] The unpolitical, non-public character of the Christian community was early defined in the demand that it should form a *corpus*, a "body," whose members were to be related to each other like brothers of the same family.[46] The structure of communal life was modeled

44. *Contra Faustum Manichaeum* v. 5.

45. This is of course still the presupposition even of Aquinas' political philosophy (see *op. cit.* ii. 2. 181. 4).

46. The term *corpus rei publicae* is current in pre-Christian Latin, but has the connotation of the population inhabiting a *res publica*, a given political realm. The corresponding Greek term *sōma* is never used in pre-Christian Greek in a political

on the relationships between the members of a family because these were known to be non-political and even antipolitical. A public realm had never come into being between the members of a family, and it was therefore not likely to develop from Christian community life if this life was ruled by the principle of charity and nothing else. Even then, as we know from the history and the rules of the monastic orders—the only communities in which the principle of charity as a political device was ever tried—the danger that the activities undertaken under "the necessity of present life" (*necessitas vitae praesentis*)[47] would lead by themselves, because they were performed in the presence of others, to the establishment of a kind of counterworld, a public realm within the orders themselves, was great enough to require additional rules and regulations, the most relevant one in our context being the prohibition of excellence and its subsequent pride.[48]

Worldlessness as a political phenomenon is possible only on the assumption that the world will not last; on this assumption, however, it is almost inevitable that worldlessness, in one form or another, will begin to dominate the political scene. This happened after the downfall of the Roman Empire and, albeit for quite other reasons and in very different, perhaps even more disconsolate forms, it seems to happen again in our own days. The Christian abstention from worldly things is by no means the only conclusion one can draw from the conviction that the human artifice, a product of mortal hands, is as mortal as its makers. This, on the contrary, may also intensify the enjoyment and consump-

sense. The metaphor seems to occur for the first time in Paul (I Cor. 12: 12–27) and is current in all early Christian writers (see, for instance, Tertullian *Apologeticus* 39, or Ambrosius *De officiis ministrorum* iii. 3. 17). It became of the greatest importance for medieval political theory, which unanimously assumed that all men were *quasi unum corpus* (Aquinas *op. cit.* ii. 1. 81. 1). But while the early writers stressed the equality of the members, which are all equally necessary for the well-being of the body as a whole, the emphasis later shifted to the difference between the head and the members, to the duty of the head to rule and of the members to obey. (For the Middle Ages, see Anton-Hermann Chroust, "The Corporate Idea in the Middle Ages," *Review of Politics*, Vol. VIII [1947].)

47. Aquinas *op. cit.* ii. 2. 179. 2.

48. See Article 57 of the Benedictine rule, in Levasseur, *op. cit.*, p. 187: If one of the monks became proud of his work, he had to give it up.

tion of the things of the world, all manners of intercourse in which the world is not primarily understood to be the *koinon*, that which is common to all. Only the existence of a public realm and the world's subsequent transformation into a community of things which gathers men together and relates them to each other depends entirely on permanence. If the world is to contain a public space, it cannot be erected for one generation and planned for the living only; it must transcend the life-span of mortal men.

Without this transcendence into a potential earthly immortality, no politics, strictly speaking, no common world and no public realm, is possible. For unlike the common good as Christianity understood it—the salvation of one's soul as a concern common to all—the common world is what we enter when we are born and what we leave behind when we die. It transcends our life-span into past and future alike; it was there before we came and will outlast our brief sojourn in it. It is what we have in common not only with those who live with us, but also with those who were here before and with those who will come after us. But such a common world can survive the coming and going of the generations only to the extent that it appears in public. It is the publicity of the public realm which can absorb and make shine through the centuries whatever men may want to save from the natural ruin of time. Through many ages before us—but now not any more—men entered the public realm because they wanted something of their own or something they had in common with others to be more permanent than their earthly lives. (Thus, the curse of slavery consisted not only in being deprived of freedom and of visibility, but also in the fear of these obscure people themselves "that from being obscure they should pass away leaving no trace that they have existed.")[49] There is perhaps no clearer testimony to the loss of the public realm in the modern age than the almost complete loss of authentic concern with immortality, a loss somewhat overshadowed by the simultaneous loss of the metaphysical concern with eternity. The latter, being the concern of the philosophers

49. Barrow (*Slavery in the Roman Empire*, p. 168), in an illuminating discussion of the membership of slaves in the Roman colleges, which provided, besides "good fellowship in life and the certainty of a decent burial . . . the crowning glory of an epitaph; and in this last the slave found a melancholy pleasure."

and the *vita contemplativa*, must remain outside our present considerations. But the former is testified to by the current classification of striving for immortality with the private vice of vanity. Under modern conditions, it is indeed so unlikely that anybody should earnestly aspire to an earthly immortality that we probably are justified in thinking it is nothing but vanity.

The famous passage in Aristotle, "Considering human affairs, one must not . . . consider man as he is and not consider what is mortal in mortal things, but think about them [only] to the extent that they have the possibility of immortalizing," occurs very properly in his political writings.[50] For the *polis* was for the Greeks, as the *res publica* was for the Romans, first of all their guarantee against the futility of individual life, the space protected against this futility and reserved for the relative permanence, if not immortality, of mortals.

What the modern age thought of the public realm, after the spectacular rise of society to public prominence, was expressed by Adam Smith when, with disarming sincerity, he mentions "that unprosperous race of men commonly called men of letters" for whom "public admiration . . . makes always a part of their reward . . . , a considerable part . . . in the profession of physic; a still greater perhaps in that of law; in poetry and philosophy it makes almost the whole."[51] Here it is self-evident that public admiration and monetary reward are of the same nature and can become substitutes for each other. Public admiration, too, is something to be used and consumed, and status, as we would say today, fulfils one need as food fulfils another: public admiration is consumed by individual vanity as food is consumed by hunger. Obviously, from this viewpoint the test of reality does not lie in the public presence of others, but rather in the greater or lesser urgency of needs to whose existence or non-existence nobody can ever testify except the one who happens to suffer them. And since the need for food has its demonstrable basis of reality in the life process itself, it is also obvious that the entirely subjective pangs of hunger are more real than "vainglory," as Hobbes used

50. *Nicomachean Ethics* 1177b31.

51. *Wealth of Nations*, Book I, ch. 10 (pp. 120 and 95 of Vol. I of Everyman's ed.).

to call the need for public admiration. Yet, even if these needs, through some miracle of sympathy, were shared by others, their very futility would prevent their ever establishing anything so solid and durable as a common world. The point then is not that there is a lack of public admiration for poetry and philosophy in the modern world, but that such admiration does not constitute a space in which things are saved from destruction by time. The futility of public admiration, which daily is consumed in ever greater quantities, on the contrary, is such that monetary reward, one of the most futile things there is, can become more "objective" and more real.

As distinguished from this "objectivity," whose only basis is money as a common denominator for the fulfilment of all needs, the reality of the public realm relies on the simultaneous presence of innumerable perspectives and aspects in which the common world presents itself and for which no common measurement or denominator can ever be devised. For though the common world is the common meeting ground of all, those who are present have different locations in it, and the location of one can no more coincide with the location of another than the location of two objects. Being seen and being heard by others derive their significance from the fact that everybody sees and hears from a different position. This is the meaning of public life, compared to which even the richest and most satisfying family life can offer only the prolongation or multiplication of one's own position with its attending aspects and perspectives. The subjectivity of privacy can be prolonged and multiplied in a family, it can even become so strong that its weight is felt in the public realm; but this family "world" can never replace the reality rising out of the sum total of aspects presented by one object to a multitude of spectators. Only where things can be seen by many in a variety of aspects without changing their identity, so that those who are gathered around them know they see sameness in utter diversity, can worldly reality truly and reliably appear.

Under the conditions of a common world, reality is not guaranteed primarily by the "common nature" of all men who constitute it, but rather by the fact that, differences of position and the resulting variety of perspectives notwithstanding, everybody

is always concerned with the same object. If the sameness of the object can no longer be discerned, no common nature of men, least of all the unnatural conformism of a mass society, can prevent the destruction of the common world, which is usually preceded by the destruction of the many aspects in which it presents itself to human plurality. This can happen under conditions of radical isolation, where nobody can any longer agree with anybody else, as is usually the case in tyrannies. But it may also happen under conditions of mass society or mass hysteria, where we see all people suddenly behave as though they were members of one family, each multiplying and prolonging the perspective of his neighbor. In both instances, men have become entirely private, that is, they have been deprived of seeing and hearing others, of being seen and being heard by them. They are all imprisoned in the subjectivity of their own singular experience, which does not cease to be singular if the same experience is multiplied innumerable times. The end of the common world has come when it is seen only under one aspect and is permitted to present itself in only one perspective.

8

THE PRIVATE REALM: PROPERTY

It is with respect to this multiple significance of the public realm that the term "private," in its original privative sense, has meaning. To live an entirely private life means above all to be deprived of things essential to a truly human life: to be deprived of the reality that comes from being seen and heard by others, to be deprived of an "objective" relationship with them that comes from being related to and separated from them through the intermediary of a common world of things, to be deprived of the possibility of achieving something more permanent than life itself. The privation of privacy lies in the absence of others; as far as they are concerned, private man does not appear, and therefore it is as though he did not exist. Whatever he does remains without significance and consequence to others, and what matters to him is without interest to other people.

Under modern circumstances, this deprivation of "objective"

relationships to others and of a reality guaranteed through them has become the mass phenomenon of loneliness, where it has assumed its most extreme and most antihuman form.[52] The reason for this extremity is that mass society not only destroys the public realm but the private as well, deprives men not only of their place in the world but of their private home, where they once felt sheltered against the world and where, at any rate, even those excluded from the world could find a substitute in the warmth of the hearth and the limited reality of family life. The full development of the life of hearth and family into an inner and private space we owe to the extraordinary political sense of the Roman people who, unlike the Greeks, never sacrificed the private to the public, but on the contrary understood that these two realms could exist only in the form of coexistence. And although the conditions of slaves probably were hardly better in Rome than in Athens, it is quite characteristic that a Roman writer should have believed that to slaves the household of the master was what the *res publica* was to citizens.[53] Yet no matter how bearable private life in the family might have been, it could obviously never be more than a substitute, even though the private realm in Rome as in Athens offered plenty of room for activities which we today class higher than political activity, such as the accumulation of wealth in Greece or the devotion to art and science in Rome. This "liberal" attitude, which could under certain circumstances result in very prosperous and highly educated slaves, meant only that to be prosperous had no reality in the Greek *polis* and to be a philosopher was without much consequence in the Roman republic.[54]

52. For modern loneliness as a mass phenomenon see David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd* (1950).

53. So Plinius Junior, quoted in W. L. Westermann, "Sklaverei," in Pauly-Wissowa, Suppl. VI, p. 1045.

54. There is plenty of evidence for this different estimation of wealth and culture in Rome and Greece. But it is interesting to note how consistently this estimate coincided with the position of slaves. Roman slaves played a much greater role in Roman culture than in Greece, where, on the other hand, their role in economic life was much more important (see Westermann, in Pauly-Wissowa, p. 984).

It is a matter of course that the privative trait of privacy, the consciousness of being deprived of something essential in a life spent exclusively in the restricted sphere of the household, should have been weakened almost to the point of extinction by the rise of Christianity. Christian morality, as distinguished from its fundamental religious precepts, has always insisted that everybody should mind his own business and that political responsibility constituted first of all a burden, undertaken exclusively for the sake of the well-being and salvation of those it freed from worry about public affairs.[55] It is surprising that this attitude should have survived into the secular modern age to such an extent that Karl Marx, who in this as in other respects only summed up, conceptualized, and transformed into a program the underlying assumptions of two hundred years of modernity, could eventually predict and hope for the "withering away" of the whole public realm. The difference between the Christian and socialist viewpoints in this respect, the one viewing government as a necessary evil because of man's sinfulness and the other hoping to abolish it eventually, is not a difference in estimate of the public sphere itself, but of human nature. What is impossible to perceive from either point of view is that Marx's "withering away of the state" had been preceded by a withering away of the public realm, or rather by its transformation into a very restricted sphere of government; in Marx's day, this government had already begun to wither further, that is, to be transformed into a nation-wide "housekeeping," until in our own day it has begun to disappear altogether into the even more restricted, impersonal sphere of administration.

It seems to be in the nature of the relationship between the public and private realms that the final stage of the disappearance

55. Augustine (*De civitate Dei* xix. 19) sees in the duty of *caritas* toward the *utilitas proximi* ("the interest of one's neighbor") the limitation of *otium* and contemplation. But "in active life, it is not the honors or power of this life we should covet, . . . but the welfare of those who are under us [*salutem subditorum*]." Obviously, this kind of responsibility resembles the responsibility of the household head for his family more than political responsibility, properly speaking. The Christian precept to mind one's own business is derived from I Thess. 4: 11: "that ye study to be quiet and to do your own business" (*prattein ta idia*, whereby *ta idia* is understood as opposed to *ta koina* ["public common affairs"]).

of the public realm should be accompanied by the threatened liquidation of the private realm as well. Nor is it an accident that the whole discussion has eventually turned into an argument about the desirability or undesirability of privately owned property. For the word "private" in connection with property, even in terms of ancient political thought, immediately loses its privative character and much of its opposition to the public realm in general; property apparently possesses certain qualifications which, though lying in the private realm, were always thought to be of utmost importance to the political body.

The profound connection between private and public, manifest on its most elementary level in the question of private property, is likely to be misunderstood today because of the modern equation of property and wealth on one side and propertylessness and poverty on the other. This misunderstanding is all the more annoying as both, property as well as wealth, are historically of greater relevance to the public realm than any other private matter or concern and have played, at least formally, more or less the same role as the chief condition for admission to the public realm and full-fledged citizenship. It is therefore easy to forget that wealth and property, far from being the same, are of an entirely different nature. The present emergence everywhere of actually or potentially very wealthy societies which at the same time are essentially propertyless, because the wealth of any single individual consists of his share in the annual income of society as a whole, clearly shows how little these two things are connected.

Prior to the modern age, which began with the expropriation of the poor and then proceeded to emancipate the new propertyless classes, all civilizations have rested upon the sacredness of private property. Wealth, on the contrary, whether privately owned or publicly distributed, had never been sacred before. Originally, property meant no more or less than to have one's location in a particular part of the world and therefore to belong to the body politic, that is, to be the head of one of the families which together constituted the public realm. This piece of privately owned world was so completely identical with the family who owned it[56] that

56. Coulanges (*op. cit.*) holds: "The true signification of *familia* is property; it designates the field, the house, money, and slaves" (p. 107). Yet, this "prop-

the expulsion of a citizen could mean not merely the confiscation of his estate but the actual destruction of the building itself.[57] The wealth of a foreigner or a slave was under no circumstances a substitute for this property,[58] and poverty did not deprive the head of a family of this location in the world and the citizenship resulting from it. In early times, if he happened to lose his location, he almost automatically lost his citizenship and the protection of the law as well.[59] The sacredness of this privacy was like the sacredness of the hidden, namely, of birth and death, the beginning and end of the mortals who, like all living creatures, grow out of and return to the darkness of an underworld.[60] The nonprivative trait of the household realm originally lay in its being the realm of birth and death which must be hidden from the public realm because it harbors the things hidden from human eyes and

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erty" is not seen as attached to the family; on the contrary, "the family is attached to the hearth, the hearth is attached to the soil" (p. 62). The point is: "The fortune is immovable like the hearth and the tomb to which it is attached. It is the man who passes away" (p. 74).

57. Levasseur (*op. cit.*) relates the medieval foundation of a community and the conditions of admission to it: "Il ne suffisait pas d'habiter la ville pour avoir droit à cette admission. Il fallait . . . posséder une maison. . . ." Furthermore: "Toute injure proférée en public contre la commune entraînait la démolition de la maison et le bannissement du coupable" (p. 240, including n. 3).

58. The distinction is most obvious in the case of slaves who, though without property in the ancient understanding (that is, without a place of their own), were by no means propertyless in the modern sense. The *peculium* (the "private possession of a slave") could amount to considerable sums and even contain slaves of his own (*vicarii*). Barrow speaks of "the property which the humblest of his class possessed" (*Slavery in the Roman Empire*, p. 122; this work is the best report on the role of the *peculium*).

59. Coulanges reports a remark of Aristotle that in ancient times the son could not be a citizen during the lifetime of his father; upon his death, only the eldest son enjoyed political rights (*op. cit.*, p. 228). Coulanges holds that the Roman *plebs* originally consisted of people without home and hearth, that it therefore was clearly distinct from the *populus Romanus* (pp. 229 ff.).

60. "The whole of this religion was inclosed within the walls of each house. . . . All these gods, the Hearth, the Lares, and the Manes, were called the hidden gods, or gods of the interior. To all the acts of this religion secrecy was necessary, *sacrificia occulta*, as Cicero said (De arusp. respl. 17)" (Coulanges, *op. cit.*, p. 37).

impenetrable to human knowledge.[61] It is hidden because man does not know where he comes from when he is born and where he goes when he dies.

Not the interior of this realm, which remains hidden and of no public significance, but its exterior appearance is important for the city as well, and it appears in the realm of the city through the boundaries between one household and the other. The law originally was identified with this boundary line,[62] which in ancient times was still actually a space, a kind of no man's land[63] between the private and the public, sheltering and protecting both realms while, at the same time, separating them from each other. The law of the *polis*, to be sure, transcended this ancient understanding from which, however, it retained its original spatial significance. The law of the city-state was neither the content of political action (the idea that political activity is primarily legislating, though Roman in origin, is essentially modern and found its greatest expession in Kant's political philosophy) nor was it a catalogue of prohibitions, resting, as all modern laws still do, upon the Thou Shalt Nots of the Decalogue. It was quite literally a

61. It seems as though the Eleusinian Mysteries provided for a common and quasi-public experience of this whole realm, which, because of its very nature and even though it was common to all, needed to be hidden, kept secret from the public realm: Everybody could participate in them, but nobody was permitted to talk about them. The mysteries concerned the unspeakable, and experiences beyond speech were non-political and perhaps antipolitical by definition (see Karl Kerenyi, *Die Geburt der Helena* [1943–45], pp. 48 ff.). That they concerned the secret of birth and death seems proved by a fragment of Pindar: *oide men biou teleutan, oiden de diosdoton archan* (frag. 137*a*), where the initiated is said to know "the end of life and the Zeus-given beginning."

62. The Greek word for law, *nomos*, derives from *nemein*, which means to distribute, to possess (what has been distributed), and to dwell. The combination of law and hedge in the word *nomos* is quite manifest in a fragment of Heraclitus: *machesthai chrē ton dēmon hyper tou nomou hokōsper teicheos* ("the people should fight for the law as for a wall"). The Roman word for law, *lex*, has an entirely different meaning; it indicates a formal relationship between people rather than the wall that separates them from others. But the boundary and its god, Terminus, who separated the *agrum publicum a privato* (Livius) was more highly revered than the corresponding *theoi horoi* in Greece.

63. Coulanges reports an ancient Greek law according to which two buildings never were permitted to touch (*op. cit.*, p. 63).

wall, without which there might have been an agglomeration of houses, a town (*asty*), but not a city, a political community. This wall-like law was sacred, but only the inclosure was political.[64] Without it a public realm could no more exist than a piece of property without a fence to hedge it in; the one harbored and inclosed political life as the other sheltered and protected the biological life process of the family.[65]

It is therefore not really accurate to say that private property, prior to the modern age, was thought to be a self-evident condition for admission to the public realm; it is much more than that. Privacy was like the other, the dark and hidden side of the public realm, and while to be political meant to attain the highest possibility of human existence, to have no private place of one's own (like a slave) meant to be no longer human.

Of an altogether different and historically later origin is the political significance of private wealth from which one draws the means of one's livelihood. We mentioned earlier the ancient identification of necessity with the private realm of the household, where each had to master the necessities of life for himself. The free man, who disposed of his own privacy and was not, like a slave, at the disposition of a master, could still be "forced" by poverty. Poverty forces the free man to act like a slave.[66] Private wealth, therefore, became a condition for admission to public life not because its owner was engaged in accumulating it but, on the contrary, because it assured with reasonable certainty that its owner would not have to engage in providing for himself the

64. The word *polis* originally connoted something like a "ring-wall," and it seems the Latin *urbs* also expressed the notion of a "circle" and was derived from the same root as *orbis*. We find the same connection in our word "town," which originally, like the German *Zaun*, meant a surrounding fence (see R. B. Onians, *The Origins of European Thought* [1954], p. 444, n. 1).

65. The legislator therefore did not need to be a citizen and frequently was called in from the outside. His work was not political; political life, however, could begin only after he had finished his legislation.

66. Demosthenes *Orationes* 57. 45: "Poverty forces the free to do many slavish and base things" (*polla doulika kai tapeina pragmata tous eleutherous hē penia biazetai poiein*).

means of use and consumption and was free for public activity.[67] Public life, obviously, was possible only after the much more urgent needs of life itself had been taken care of. The means to take care of them was labor, and the wealth of a person therefore was frequently counted in terms of the number of laborers, that is, slaves, he owned.[68] To own property meant here to be master over one's own necessities of life and therefore potentially to be a free person, free to transcend his own life and enter the world all have in common.

Only with the emergence of such a common world in concrete tangibility, that is, with the rise of the city-state, could this kind of private ownership acquire its eminent political significance, and it is therefore almost a matter of course that the famous "disdain for menial occupations" is not yet to be found in the Homeric world. If the property-owner chose to enlarge his property instead of using it up in leading a political life, it was as though he willingly sacrificed his freedom and became voluntarily what the slave was against his own will, a servant of necessity.[69]

67. This condition for admission to the public realm was still in existence in the earlier Middle Ages. The English "Books of Customs" still drew "a sharp distinction between the craftsman and the freeman, *franke homme*, of the town. . . . If a craftsman became so rich that he wished to become a freeman, he must first foreswear his craft and get rid of all his tools from his house" (W. J. Ashley, *op. cit.*, p. 83). It was only under the rule of Edward III that the craftsmen became so rich that "instead of the craftsmen being incapable of citizenship, citizenship came to be bound up with membership of one of the companies" (p. 89).

68. Coulanges, in distinction from other authors, stresses the time- and strength-consuming activities demanded from an ancient citizen, rather than his "leisure," and sees rightly that Aristotle's statement that no man who had to work for his livelihood could be a citizen is a simple statement of fact rather than the expression of a prejudice (*op. cit.*, pp. 335 ff.). It is characteristic of the modern development that riches as such, regardless of the occupation of their owner, became a qualification for citizenship: only now was it a mere privilege to be a citizen, unconnected with any specifically political activities.

69. This seems to me to be the solution of the "well-known puzzle in the study of the economic history of the ancient world that industry developed up to a certain point, but stopped short of making progress which might have been expected . . . [in view of the fact that] thoroughness and capacity for organization on a large scale is shown by the Romans in other departments, in the public services and the army" (Barrow, *Slavery in the Roman Empire*, pp. 109–10). It

Up to the beginning of the modern age, this kind of property had never been held to be sacred, and only where wealth as the source of income coincided with the piece of land on which a family was located, that is, in an essentially agricultural society, could these two types of property coincide to such an extent that all property assumed the character of sacredness. Modern advocates of private property, at any rate, who unanimously understand it as privately owned wealth and nothing else, have little cause to appeal to a tradition according to which there could be no free public realm without a proper establishment and protection of privacy. For the enormous and still proceeding accumulation of wealth in modern society, which was started by expropriation—the expropriation of the peasant classes which in turn was the almost accidental consequence of the expropriation of Church and monastic property after the Reformation[70]—has never shown

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seems a prejudice due to modern conditions to expect the same capacity for organization in private as in "public services." Max Weber, in his remarkable essay (*op. cit.*) had already insisted on the fact that ancient cities were rather "centers of consumption than of production" and that the ancient slave owner was a "*rentier* and not a capitalist [*Unternehmer*]" (pp. 13, 22 ff., and 144). The very indifference of ancient writers to economic questions, and the lack of documents in this respect, give additional weight to Weber's argument.

70. All histories of the working class, that is, a class of people who are without any property and live only from the work of their hands, suffer from the naïve assumption that there has always been such a class. Yet, as we saw, even slaves were not without property in antiquity, and the so-called free labor in antiquity usually turns out to consist of "free shopkeepers, traders and craftsmen" (Barrow, *Slavery in the Roman Empire*, p. 126). M. E. Park (*The Plebs Urbana in Cicero's Day* [1921]), therefore, comes to the conclusion that there was no free labor, since the free man always appears to be an owner of some sort. W. J. Ashley sums up the situation in the Middle Ages up to the fifteenth century: "There was as yet no large class of wage laborers, no 'working class' in the modern sense of the term. By 'working men,' we mean a number of men, from among whom individuals may indeed rise to become masters, but the majority of whom cannot hope ever to rise to a higher position. But in the fourteenth century a few years' work as a journeyman was but a stage through which the poorer men had to pass, while the majority probably set up for themselves as master craftsmen as soon as apprenticeship was over" (*op. cit.*, pp. 93–94).

Thus, the working class in antiquity was neither free nor without property; if, through manumission, the slave was given (in Rome) or had bought (in

much consideration for private property but has sacrificed it whenever it came into conflict with the accumulation of wealth. Proudhon's dictum that property is theft has a solid basis of truth in the origins of modern capitalism; it is all the more significant that even Proudhon hesitated to accept the doubtful remedy of general expropriation, because he knew quite well that the abolition of private property, while it might cure the evil of poverty, was only too likely to invite the greater evil of tyranny.[71] Since he did not distinguish between property and wealth, his two insights appear in his work like contradictions, which in fact they are not. Individual appropriation of wealth will in the long run respect private property no more than socialization of the accumulation process. It is not an invention of Karl Marx but actually in the very nature of this society itself that privacy in every sense can only hinder the development of social "productivity" and that considerations of private ownership therefore should be overruled in favor of the ever-increasing process of social wealth.[72]

Athens) his freedom, he did not become a free laborer but instantly became an independent businessman or craftsman. ("Most slaves seem to have taken into freedom some capital of their own" to set up in trade and industry [Barrow, *Slavery in the Roman Empire*, p. 103]). And in the Middle Ages, to be a worker in the modern sense of the term was a temporary stage in one's life, a preparation for mastership and manhood. Hired labor in the Middle Ages was an exception, and the German day laborers (the *Tagelöhner* in Luther's Bible translation) or the French *manœuvres* lived outside the settled communities and were identical with the poor, the "labouring poor" in England (see Pierre Brizon, *Histoire du travail et des travailleurs* [1926], p. 40). Moreover, the fact that no code of law before the *Code Napoléon* offers any treatment of free labor (see W. Endemann, *Die Behandlung der Arbeit im Privatrecht* [1896], pp. 49, 53) shows conclusively how recent the existence of a working class is.

71. See the ingenious comment on "property is theft" which occurs in Proudhon's posthumously published *Théorie de la propriété*, pp. 209–10, where he presents property in its "egoist, satanic nature" as the "most efficient means to resist despotism without overthrowing the state."

72. I must confess that I fail to see on what grounds in present-day society liberal economists (who today call themselves conservatives) can justify their optimism that the private appropriation of wealth will suffice to guard individual liberties—that is, will fulfil the same role as private property. In a jobholding

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THE SOCIAL AND THE PRIVATE

What we called earlier the rise of the social coincided historically with the transformation of the private care for private property into a public concern. Society, when it first entered the public realm, assumed the disguise of an organization of property-owners who, instead of claiming access to the public realm because of their wealth, demanded protection from it for the accumulation of more wealth. In the words of Bodin, government belonged to kings and property to subjects, so that it was the duty of the kings to rule in the interest of their subjects' property. "The commonwealth," as has recently been pointed out, "largely existed for the common *wealth*."[73]

When this common wealth, the result of activities formerly banished to the privacy of the households, was permitted to take over the public realm, private possessions—which are essentially much less permanent and much more vulnerable to the mortality of their owners than the common world, which always grows out of the past and is intended to last for future generations—began to undermine the durability of the world. It is true that wealth can be accumulated to a point where no individual life-span can use it up, so that the family rather than the individual becomes its owner. Yet wealth remains something to be used and consumed no matter how many individual life-spans it may sustain. Only when wealth became capital, whose chief function was to generate more capital, did private property equal or come close to the permanence inherent in the commonly shared world.[74] How-

society, these liberties are safe only as long as they are guaranteed by the state, and even now they are constantly threatened, not by the state, but by society, which distributes the jobs and determines the share of individual appropriation.

73. R. W. K. Hinton, "Was Charles I a Tyrant?" *Review of Politics*, Vol. XVIII (January, 1956).

74. For the history of the word "capital" deriving from the Latin *caput*, which in Roman law was employed for the principal of a debt, see W. J. Ashley, *op. cit.*, pp. 429 and 433, n. 183. Only eighteenth-century writers began to use the word in the modern sense as "wealth invested in such a way as to bring gain."

ever, this permanence is of a different nature; it is the permanence of a process rather than the permanence of a stable structure. Without the process of accumulation, wealth would at once fall back into the opposite process of disintegration through use and consumption.

Common wealth, therefore, can never become common in the sense we speak of a common world; it remained, or rather was intended to remain, strictly private. Only the government, appointed to shield the private owners from each other in the competitive struggle for more wealth, was common. The obvious contradiction in this modern concept of government, where the only thing people have in common is their private interests, need no longer bother us as it still bothered Marx, since we know that the contradiction between private and public, typical of the initial stages of the modern age, has been a temporary phenomenon which introduced the utter extinction of the very difference between the private and public realms, the submersion of both in the sphere of the social. By the same token, we are in a far better position to realize the consequences for human existence when both the public and private spheres of life are gone, the public because it has become a function of the private and the private because it has become the only common concern left.

Seen from this viewpoint, the modern discovery of intimacy seems a flight from the whole outer world into the inner subjectivity of the individual, which formerly had been sheltered and protected by the private realm. The dissolution of this realm into the social may most conveniently be watched in the progressing transformation of immobile into mobile property until eventually the distinction between property and wealth, between the *fungibiles* and the *consumptibiles* of Roman law, loses all significance because every tangible, "fungible" thing has become an object of "consumption"; it lost its private use value which was determined by its location and acquired an exclusively social value determined through its ever-changing exchangeability whose fluctuation could itself be fixed only temporarily by relating it to the common denominator of money.[75] Closely connected with this social evapora-

75. Medieval economic theory did not yet conceive of money as a common denominator and yardstick but counted it among the *consumptibiles*.

tion of the tangible was the most revolutionary modern contribution to the concept of property, according to which property was not a fixed and firmly located part of the world acquired by its owner in one way or another but, on the contrary, had its source in man himself, in his possession of a body and his indisputable ownership of the strength of this body, which Marx called "labor-power."

Thus modern property lost its worldly character and was located in the person himself, that is, in what an individual could lose only along with his life. Historically, Locke's assumption that the labor of one's body is the origin of property is more than doubtful; but in view of the fact that we already live under conditions where our only reliable property is our skill and our labor power, it is more than likely that it will become true. For wealth, after it became a public concern, has grown to such proportions that it is almost unmanageable by private ownership. It is as though the public realm had taken its revenge against those who tried to use it for their private interests. The greatest threat here, however, is not the abolition of private ownership of wealth but the abolition of private property in the sense of a tangible, worldly place of one's own.

In order to understand the danger to human existence from the elimination of the private realm, for which the intimate is not a very reliable substitute, it may be best to consider those non-privative traits of privacy which are older than, and independent of, the discovery of intimacy. The difference between what we have in common and what we own privately is first that our private possessions, which we use and consume daily, are much more urgently needed than any part of the common world; without property, as Locke pointed out, "the common is of no use."[76] The same necessity that, from the standpoint of the public realm, shows only its negative aspect as a deprivation of freedom possesses a driving force whose urgency is unmatched by the so-called higher desires and aspirations of man; not only will it always be the first among man's needs and worries, it will also prevent the apathy and disappearance of initiative which so obvi-

76. *Second Treatise of Civil Government*, sec. 27.

ously threatens all overly wealthy communities.[77] Necessity and life are so intimately related and connected that life itself is threatened where necessity is altogether eliminated. For the elimination of necessity, far from resulting automatically in the establishment of freedom, only blurs the distinguishing line between freedom and necessity. (Modern discussions of freedom, where freedom is never understood as an objective state of human existence but either presents an unsolvable problem of subjectivity, of an entirely undetermined or determined will, or develops out of necessity, all point to the fact that the objective, tangible difference between being free and being forced by necessity is no longer perceived.)

The second outstanding non-privative characteristic of privacy is that the four walls of one's private property offer the only reliable hiding place from the common public world, not only from everything that goes on in it but also from its very publicity, from being seen and being heard. A life spent entirely in public, in the presence of others, becomes, as we would say, shallow. While it retains its visibility, it loses the quality of rising into sight from some darker ground which must remain hidden if it is not to lose its depth in a very real, non-subjective sense. The only efficient way to guarantee the darkness of what needs to be hidden against the light of publicity is private property, a privately owned place to hide in.[78]

While it is only natural that the non-privative traits of privacy should appear most clearly when men are threatened with deprivation of it, the practical treatment of private property by premodern political bodies indicates clearly that men have always been conscious of their existence and importance. This, however, did not make them protect the activities in the private realm directly, but rather the boundaries separating the privately owned from other parts of the world, most of all from the common world itself. The distinguishing mark of modern political and economic theory,

77. The relatively few instances of ancient authors praising labor and poverty are inspired by this danger (for references see G. Herzog-Hauser, *op. cit.*).

78. The Greek and Latin words for the interior of the house, *megaron* and *atrium*, have a strong connotation of darkness and blackness (see Mommsen, *op. cit.*, pp. 22 and 236).

on the other hand, in so far as it regards private property as a crucial issue, has been its stress upon the private activities of property-owners and their need of government protection for the sake of accumulation of wealth at the expense of the tangible property itself. What is important to the public realm, however, is not the more or less enterprising spirit of private businessmen but the fences around the houses and gardens of citizens. The invasion of privacy by society, the "socialization of man" (Marx), is most efficiently carried through by means of expropriation, but this is not the only way. Here, as in other respects, the revolutionary measures of socialism or communism can very well be replaced by a slower and no less certain "withering away" of the private realm in general and of private property in particular.

The distinction between the private and public realms, seen from the viewpoint of privacy rather than of the body politic, equals the distinction between things that should be shown and things that should be hidden. Only the modern age, in its rebellion against society, has discovered how rich and manifold the realm of the hidden can be under the conditions of intimacy; but it is striking that from the beginning of history to our own time it has always been the bodily part of human existence that needed to be hidden in privacy, all things connected with the necessity of the life process itself, which prior to the modern age comprehended all activities serving the subsistence of the individual and the survival of the species. Hidden away were the laborers who "with their bodies minister to the [bodily] needs of life,"[79] and the women who with their bodies guarantee the physical survival of the species. Women and slaves belonged to the same category and were hidden away not only because they were somebody else's property but because their life was "laborious," devoted to bodily functions.[80] In the beginning of the modern age, when "free"

79. Aristotle *Politics* 1254b25.

80. The life of a woman is called *ponētikos* by Aristotle, *On the Generation of Animals* 775a33. That women and slaves belonged and lived together, that no woman, not even the wife of the household head, lived among her equals—other free women—so that rank depended much less on birth than on "occupation" or function, is very well presented by Wallon (*op. cit.*, I, 77 ff.), who speaks of a "confusion des rangs, ce partage de toutes les fonctions domestiques": "Les

labor had lost its hiding place in the privacy of the household, the laborers were hidden away and segregated from the community like criminals behind high walls and under constant supervision.[81] The fact that the modern age emancipated the working classes and the women at nearly the same historical moment must certainly be counted among the characteristics of an age which no longer believes that bodily functions and material concerns should be hidden. It is all the more symptomatic of the nature of these phenomena that the few remnants of strict privacy even in our own civilization relate to "necessities" in the original sense of being necessitated by having a body.

10

THE LOCATION OF HUMAN ACTIVITIES

Although the distinction between private and public coincides with the opposition of necessity and freedom, of futility and permanence, and, finally, of shame and honor, it is by no means true that only the necessary, the futile, and the shameful have their proper place in the private realm. The most elementary meaning of the two realms indicates that there are things that need to be hidden and others that need to be displayed publicly if they are to exist at all. If we look at these things, regardless of where we find them in any given civilization, we shall see that each human activity points to its proper location in the world. This is true for the chief activities of the *vita activa*, labor, work, and action; but there is one, admittedly extreme, example of this phenomenon, whose advantage for illustration is that it played a considerable role in political theory.

Goodness in an absolute sense, as distinguished from the "good-for" or the "excellent" in Greek and Roman antiquity, became known in our civilization only with the rise of Christianity. Since

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femmes . . . se confondaient avec leurs esclaves dans les soins habituels de la vie intérieure. De quelque rang qu'elles fussent, le travail était leur apanage, comme aux hommes la guerre."

81. See Pierre Brizon, *Histoire du travail et des travailleurs* (4th ed.; 1926), p. 184, concerning the conditions of factory work in the seventeenth century.

then, we know of good works as one important variety of possible human action. The well-known antagonism between early Christianity and the *res publica*, so admirably summed up in Tertullian's formula: *nec ulla magis res aliena quam publica* ("no matter is more alien to us than what matters publicly"),[82] is usually and rightly understood as a consequence of early eschatological expectations that lost their immediate significance only after experience had taught that even the downfall of the Roman Empire did not mean the end of the world.[83] Yet the otherworldliness of Christianity has still another root, perhaps even more intimately related to the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, and at any rate so independent of the belief in the perishability of the world that one is tempted to see in it the true inner reason why Christian alienation from the world could so easily survive the obvious non-fulfilment of its eschatological hopes.

The one activity taught by Jesus in word and deed is the activity of goodness, and goodness obviously harbors a tendency to hide from being seen or heard. Christian hostility toward the public realm, the tendency at least of early Christians to lead a life as far removed from the public realm as possible, can also be understood as a self-evident consequence of devotion to good works, independent of all beliefs and expectations. For it is manifest that the moment a good work becomes known and public, it loses its specific character of goodness, of being done for nothing but goodness' sake. When goodness appears openly, it is no longer goodness, though it may still be useful as organized charity or an act of solidarity. Therefore: "Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them." Goodness can exist only when it is not perceived, not even by its author; whoever sees himself performing a good work is no longer good, but at best a useful member of society or a dutiful member of a church. Therefore: "Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth."

It may be this curious negative quality of goodness, the lack of outward phenomenal manifestation, that makes Jesus of Naza-

82. Tertullian *op. cit.* 38.

83. This difference of experience may partly explain the difference between the great sanity of Augustine and the horrible concreteness of Tertullian's views on politics. Both were Romans and profoundly shaped by Roman political life.

reth's appearance in history such a profoundly paradoxical event; it certainly seems to be the reason why he thought and taught that no man can be good: "Why callest thou me good? none is good, save one, that is, God."[84] The same conviction finds its expression in the talmudic story of the thirty-six righteous men, for the sake of whom God saves the world and who also are known to nobody, least of all to themselves. We are reminded of Socrates' great insight that no man can be wise, out of which love for wisdom, or philo-sophy, was born; the whole life story of Jesus seems to testify how love for goodness arises out of the insight that no man can be good.

Love of wisdom and love of goodness, if they resolve themselves into the activities of philosophizing and doing good works, have in common that they come to an immediate end, cancel themselves, so to speak, whenever it is assumed that man can *be* wise or *be* good. Attempts to bring into being that which can never survive the fleeting moment of the deed itself have never been lacking and have always led into absurdity. The philosophers of late antiquity who demanded of themselves to *be* wise were absurd when they claimed to be happy when roasted alive in the famous Phaleric Bull. And no less absurd is the Christian demand to *be* good and to turn the other cheek, when not taken metaphorically but tried as a real way of life.

But the similarity between the activities springing from love of goodness and love of wisdom ends here. Both, it is true, stand in a certain opposition to the public realm, but the case of goodness is much more extreme in this respect and therefore of greater relevance in our context. Only goodness must go into absolute hiding and flee all appearance if it is not to be destroyed. The philosopher, even if he decides with Plato to leave the "cave" of human affairs, does not have to hide from himself; on the contrary, under the sky of ideas he not only finds the true essences of everything that is,

84. Luke 18 : 19. The same thought occurs in Matt. 6 : 1–18, where Jesus warns against hypocrisy, against the open display of piety. Piety cannot "appear unto men" but only unto God, who "seeth in secret." God, it is true, "shall reward" man, but not, as the standard translation claims, "openly." The German word *Scheinheiligkeit* expresses this religious phenomenon, where mere appearance is already hypocrisy, quite adequately.

but also himself, in the dialogue between "me and myself" (*eme emautō*) in which Plato apparently saw the essence of thought.[85] To be in solitude means to be with one's self, and thinking, therefore, though it may be the most solitary of all activities, is never altogether without a partner and without company.

The man, however, who is in love with goodness can never afford to lead a solitary life, and yet his living with others and for others must remain essentially without testimony and lacks first of all the company of himself. He is not solitary, but lonely; when living with others he must hide from them and cannot even trust himself to witness what he is doing. The philosopher can always rely upon his thoughts to keep him company, whereas good deeds can never keep anybody company; they must be forgotten the moment they are done, because even memory will destroy their quality of being "good." Moreover, thinking, because it can be remembered, can crystallize into thought, and thoughts, like all things that owe their existence to remembrance, can be transformed into tangible objects which, like the written page or the printed book, become part of the human artifice. Good works, because they must be forgotten instantly, can never become part of the world; they come and go, leaving no trace. They truly are not of this world.

It is this worldlessness inherent in good works that makes the lover of goodness an essentially religious figure and that makes goodness, like wisdom in antiquity, an essentially non-human, superhuman quality. And yet love of goodness, unlike love of wisdom, is not restricted to the experience of the few, just as loneliness, unlike solitude, is within the range of every man's experience. In a sense, therefore, goodness and loneliness are of much greater relevance to politics than wisdom and solitude; yet only solitude can become an authentic way of life in the figure of the philosopher, whereas the much more general experience of loneliness is so contradictory to the human condition of plurality that it is simply unbearable for any length of time and needs the company of God, the only imaginable witness of good works, if it is not to annihilate human existence altogether. The otherworldiness of religious experience, in so far as it is truly the experience of love in the sense

85. One finds this idiom *passim* in Plato (see esp. *Gorgias* 482).

of an activity, and not the much more frequent one of beholding passively a revealed truth, manifests itself within the world itself; this, like all other activities, does not leave the world, but must be performed within it. But this manifestation, though it appears in the space where other activities are performed and depends upon it, is of an actively negative nature; fleeing the world and hiding from its inhabitants, it negates the space the world offers to men, and most of all that public part of it where everything and everybody are seen and heard by others.

Goodness, therefore, as a consistent way of life, is not only impossible within the confines of the public realm, it is even destructive of it. Nobody perhaps has been more sharply aware of this ruinous quality of doing good than Machiavelli, who, in a famous passage, dared to teach men "how not to be good."[86] Needless to add, he did not say and did not mean that men must be taught how to be bad; the criminal act, though for other reasons, must also flee being seen and heard by others. Machiavelli's criterion for political action was glory, the same as in classical antiquity, and badness can no more shine in glory than goodness. Therefore all methods by which "one may indeed gain power, but not glory" are bad.[87] Badness that comes out of hiding is impudent and directly destroys the common world; goodness that comes out of hiding and assumes a public role is no longer good, but corrupt in its own terms and will carry its own corruption wherever it goes. Thus, for Machiavelli, the reason for the Church's becoming a corrupting influence in Italian politics was her participation in secular affairs as such and not the individual corruptness of bishops and prelates. To him, the alternative posed by the problem of religious rule over the secular realm was inescapably this: either the public realm corrupted the religious body and thereby became itself corrupt, or the religious body remained uncorrupt and destroyed the public realm altogether. A reformed Church therefore was even more dangerous in Machiavelli's eyes, and he looked with great respect but greater apprehension upon the religious revival of his time, the "new orders" which, by "saving religion from being destroyed by the licentious-

86. *Prince*, ch. 15.

87. *Ibid.*, ch. 8.

ness of the prelates and heads of the Church," teach people to be good and not "to resist evil"—with the result that "wicked rulers do as much evil as they please."[88]

We chose the admittedly extreme example of doing good works, extreme because this activity is not even at home in the realm of privacy, in order to indicate that the historical judgments of political communities, by which each determined which of the activities of the *vita activa* should be shown in public and which be hidden in privacy, may have their correspondence in the nature of these activities themselves. By raising this question, I do not intend to attempt an exhaustive analysis of the activities of the *vita activa*, whose articulations have been curiously neglected by a tradition which considered it chiefly from the standpoint of the *vita contemplativa*, but to try to determine with some measure of assurance their political significance.

88. *Discourses*, Book III, ch. 1.