

*Hannah Arendt*

BETWEEN PAST  
AND FUTURE

*Six Exercises in  
Political Thought*

1961

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# 3

## WHAT IS AUTHORITY?

### *I*

**I**N order to avoid misunderstanding, it might have been wiser to ask in the title: What was—and not what is—authority? For it is my contention that we are tempted and entitled to raise this question because authority has vanished from the modern world. Since we can no longer fall back upon authentic and undisputable experiences common to all, the very term has become clouded by controversy and confusion. Little about its nature appears self-evident or even comprehensible to everybody, except that the political scientist may still remember that this concept was once fundamental to political theory, or that most will agree that a constant, ever-widening and deepening crisis of authority has accompanied the development of the modern world in our century.

This crisis, apparent since the inception of the century, is political in origin and nature. The rise of political movements intent upon replacing the party system, and the development of a new totalitarian form of government, took place against a background of a more or less general, more or less dramatic breakdown of all traditional authorities. Nowhere was this breakdown the direct result

of the regimes or movements themselves; it rather seemed as though totalitarianism, in the form of movements as well as of regimes, was best fitted to take advantage of a general political and social atmosphere in which the party system had lost its prestige and the government's authority was no longer recognized.

The most significant symptom of the crisis, indicating its depth and seriousness, is that it has spread to such prepolitical areas as child-rearing and education, where authority in the widest sense has always been accepted as a natural necessity, obviously required as much by natural needs, the helplessness of the child, as by political necessity, the continuity of an established civilization which can be assured only if those who are newcomers by birth are guided through a pre-established world into which they are born as strangers. Because of its simple and elementary character, this form of authority has, throughout the history of political thought, served as a model for a great variety of authoritarian forms of government, so that the fact that even this prepolitical authority which ruled the relations between adults and children, teachers and pupils, is no longer secure signifies that all the old time-honored metaphors and models for authoritarian relations have lost their plausibility. Practically as well as theoretically, we are no longer in a position to know what authority really *is*.

In the following reflections I assume that the answer to this question cannot possibly lie in a definition of the nature or essence of "authority in general." The authority we have lost in the modern world is no such "authority in general," but rather a very specific form which had been valid throughout the Western World over a long period of time. I therefore propose to reconsider what authority was historically and the sources of its strength and meaning. Yet, in view of the present confusion, it seems that even this limited and tentative approach must be preceded by a few remarks on what authority never was, in order to avoid the more common misunderstandings and make sure that we visualize and consider the same phenomenon and not any number of connected or unconnected issues.

Since authority always demands obedience, it is commonly mis-

taken for some form of power or violence. Yet authority precludes the use of external means of coercion; where force is used, authority itself has failed. Authority, on the other hand, is incompatible with persuasion, which presupposes equality and works through a process of argumentation. Where arguments are used, authority is left in abeyance. Against the egalitarian order of persuasion stands the authoritarian order, which is always hierarchical. If authority is to be defined at all, then, it must be in contradistinction to both coercion by force and persuasion through arguments. (The authoritarian relation between the one who commands and the one who obeys rests neither on common reason nor on the power of the one who commands; what they have in common is the hierarchy itself, whose rightness and legitimacy both recognize and where both have their predetermined stable place.) This point is of historical importance; one aspect of our concept of authority is Platonic in origin, and when Plato began to consider the introduction of authority into the handling of public affairs in the polis, he knew he was seeking an alternative to the common Greek way of handling domestic affairs, which was persuasion (*πειθελειν*) as well as to the common way of handling foreign affairs, which was force and violence (*βία*).

Historically, we may say that the loss of authority is merely the final, though decisive, phase of a development which for centuries undermined primarily religion and tradition. Of tradition, religion, and authority—whose interconnectedness we shall discuss later—authority has proved to be the most stable element. With the loss of authority, however, the general doubt of the modern age also invaded the political realm, where things not only assume a more radical expression but become endowed with a reality peculiar to the political realm alone. What perhaps hitherto had been of spiritual significance only for the few now has become a concern of one and all. Only now, as it were after the fact, the loss of tradition and of religion have become political events of the first order.

When I said that I did not wish to discuss “authority in general,” but only the very specific concept of authority which has been dominant in our history, I wished to hint at some distinctions which we are liable to neglect when we speak too sweepingly of the crisis of

our time, and which I may perhaps more easily explain in terms of the related concepts of tradition and religion. Thus the undeniable loss of tradition in the modern world does not at all entail a loss of the past, for tradition and past are not the same, as the believers in tradition on one side and the believers in progress on the other would have us believe—whereby it makes little difference that the former deplore this state of affairs while the latter extend their congratulations. With the loss of tradition we have lost the thread which safely guided us through the vast realms of the past, but this thread was also the chain fettering each successive generation to a predetermined aspect of the past. It could be that only now will the past open up to us with unexpected freshness and tell us things no one has yet had ears to hear. But it cannot be denied that without a securely anchored tradition—and the loss of this security occurred several hundred years ago—the whole dimension of the past has also been endangered. We are in danger of forgetting, and such an oblivion—quite apart from the contents themselves that could be lost—would mean that, humanly speaking, we would deprive ourselves of one dimension, the dimension of depth in human existence. For memory and depth are the same, or rather, depth cannot be reached by man except through remembrance.

It is similar with the loss of religion. Ever since the radical criticism of religious beliefs in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it has remained characteristic of the modern age to doubt religious truth, and this is true for believers and nonbelievers alike. Since Pascal and, even more pointedly, since Kierkegaard, doubt has been carried into belief, and the modern believer must constantly guard his beliefs against doubts; not the Christian faith as such, but Christianity (and Judaism, of course) in the modern age is ridden by paradoxes and absurdity. And whatever else may be able to survive absurdity—philosophy perhaps can—religion certainly cannot. Yet this loss of belief in the dogmas of institutional religion need not necessarily imply a loss or even a crisis of faith, for religion and faith, or belief and faith, are by no means the same. Only belief, but not faith, has an inherent affinity with and is constantly exposed to doubt. But who can deny that faith too, for so many centuries se-

curely protected by religion, its beliefs and its dogmas, has been gravely endangered through what is actually only a crisis of institutional religion?

Some similar qualifications seem to me to be necessary regarding the modern loss of authority. Authority, resting on a foundation in the past as its unshaken cornerstone, gave the world the permanence and durability which human beings need precisely because they are mortals—the most unstable and futile beings we know of. Its loss is tantamount to the loss of the groundwork of the world, which indeed since then has begun to shift, to change and transform itself with ever-increasing rapidity from one shape into another, as though we were living and struggling with a Protean universe where everything at any moment can become almost anything else. But the loss of worldly permanence and reliability—which politically is identical with the loss of authority—does not entail, at least not necessarily, the loss of the human capacity for building, preserving, and caring for a world that can survive us and remain a place fit to live in for those who come after us.

It is obvious that these reflections and descriptions are based on the conviction of the importance of making distinctions. To stress such a conviction seems to be a gratuitous truism in view of the fact that, at least as far as I know, nobody has yet openly stated that distinctions are nonsense. There exists, however, a silent agreement in most discussions among political and social scientists that we can ignore distinctions and proceed on the assumption that everything can eventually be called anything else, and that distinctions are meaningful only to the extent that each of us has the right “to define his terms.” Yet does not this curious right, which we have come to grant as soon as we deal with matters of importance—as though it were actually the same as the right to one’s own opinion—already indicate that such terms as “tyranny,” “authority,” “totalitarianism” have simply lost their common meaning, or that we have ceased to live in a common world where the words we have in common possess an unquestionable meaningfulness, so that, short of being condemned to live verbally in an altogether meaningless world, we grant

each other the right to retreat into our own worlds of meaning, and demand only that each of us remain consistent within his own private terminology? If, in these circumstances, we assure ourselves that we still understand each other, we do not mean that together we understand a world common to us all, but that we understand the consistency of arguing and reasoning, of the process of argumentation in its sheer formality.

However that may be, to proceed under the implicit assumption that distinctions are not important or, better, that in the social-political-historical realm, that is, in the sphere of human affairs, things do not possess that distinctness which traditional metaphysics used to call their "otherness" (their *alteritas*), has become the hallmark of a great many theories in the social, political, and historical sciences. Among these, two seem to me to deserve special mention because they touch the subject under discussion in an especially significant manner.

The first concerns the ways in which, since the nineteenth century, liberal and conservative writers have dealt with the problem of authority and, by implication, with the related problem of freedom in the realm of politics. Generally speaking, it has been quite typical of liberal theories to start from the assumption that "the constancy of progress . . . in the direction of organized and assured freedom is the characteristic fact of modern history" <sup>1</sup> and to look upon each deviation from this course as a reactionary process leading in the opposite direction. This makes them overlook the differences in principle between the restriction of freedom in authoritarian regimes, the abolition of political freedom in tyrannies and dictatorships, and the total elimination of spontaneity itself, that is, of the most general and most elementary manifestation of human freedom, at which only totalitarian regimes aim by means of their various methods of conditioning. The liberal writer, concerned with history and the progress of freedom rather than with forms of government, sees only differences in degree here, and ignores that authoritarian government committed to the restriction of liberty remains tied to the freedom it limits to the extent that it would lose its very substance if it abolished it altogether, that is, would change into tyranny. The same is

true for the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate power on which all authoritarian government hinges. The liberal writer is apt to pay little attention to it because of his conviction that all power corrupts and that the constancy of progress requires constant loss of power, no matter what its origin may be.

Behind the liberal identification of totalitarianism with authoritarianism, and the concomitant inclination to see "totalitarian" trends in every authoritarian limitation of freedom, lies an older confusion of authority with tyranny, and of legitimate power with violence. The difference between tyranny and authoritarian government has always been that the tyrant rules in accordance with his own will and interest, whereas even the most draconic authoritarian government is bound by laws. Its acts are tested by a code which was made either not by man at all, as in the case of the law of nature or God's Commandments or the Platonic ideas, or at least not by those actually in power. The source of authority in authoritarian government is always a force external and superior to its own power; it is always this source, this external force which transcends the political realm, from which the authorities derive their "authority," that is, their legitimacy, and against which their power can be checked.

Modern spokesmen of authority, who, even in the short intervals when public opinion provides a favorable climate for neo-conservatism, remain well aware that theirs is an almost lost cause, are of course eager to point to this distinction between tyranny and authority. Where the liberal writer sees an essentially assured progress in the direction of freedom, which is only temporarily interrupted by some dark forces of the past, the conservative sees a process of doom which started with the dwindling of authority, so that freedom, after it lost the restricting limitations which protected its boundaries, became helpless, defenseless, and bound to be destroyed. (It is hardly fair to say that only liberal political thought is primarily interested in freedom; there is hardly a school of political thought in our history which is not centered around the idea of freedom, much as the concept of liberty may vary with different writers and in different political circumstances. The only exception of any consequence to

this statement seems to me to be the political philosophy of Thomas Hobbes, who, of course, was anything but a conservative.) Tyranny and totalitarianism are again identified, except that now totalitarian government, if it is not directly identified with democracy, is seen as its almost inevitable result, that is, the result of the disappearance of all traditionally recognized authorities. Yet the differences between tyranny and dictatorship on one side, and totalitarian domination on the other, are no less distinct than those between authoritarianism and totalitarianism.

These structural differences become apparent the moment we leave the over-all theories behind and concentrate our attention on the apparatus of rule, the technical forms of administration, and the organization of the body politic. For brevity's sake, it may be permitted to sum up the technical-structural differences between authoritarian, tyrannical, and totalitarian government in the image of three different representative models. As an image for authoritarian government, I propose the shape of the pyramid, which is well known in traditional political thought. The pyramid is indeed a particularly fitting image for a governmental structure whose source of authority lies outside itself, but whose seat of power is located at the top, from which authority and power is filtered down to the base in such a way that each successive layer possesses some authority, but less than the one above it, and where, precisely because of this careful filtering process, all layers from top to bottom are not only firmly integrated into the whole but are interrelated like converging rays whose common focal point is the top of the pyramid as well as the transcending source of authority above it. This image, it is true, can be used only for the Christian type of authoritarian rule as it developed through and under the constant influence of the Church during the Middle Ages, when the focal point above and beyond the earthly pyramid provided the necessary point of reference for the Christian type of equality, the strictly hierarchical structure of life on earth notwithstanding. The Roman understanding of political authority, where the source of authority lay exclusively in the past, in the foundation of Rome and the greatness of ancestors, leads into institutional structures whose shape requires a different

kind of image—about which more later (p. 124). In any event, an authoritarian form of government with its hierarchical structure is the least egalitarian of all forms; it incorporates inequality and distinction as its all-permeating principles.

All political theories concerning tyranny agree that it belongs strictly among the egalitarian forms of government; the tyrant is the ruler who rules as one against all, and the “all” he oppresses are all equal, namely equally powerless. If we stick to the image of the pyramid, it is as though all intervening layers between top and bottom were destroyed, so that the top remains suspended, supported only by the proverbial bayonets, over a mass of carefully isolated, disintegrated, and completely equal individuals. Classical political theory used to rule the tyrant out of mankind altogether, to call him a “wolf in human shape” (Plato), because of this position of one against all, in which he had put himself and which sharply distinguished his rule, the rule of one, which Plato still calls indiscriminately *μον-αρχία* or tyranny, from various forms of kingship or *βασιλεία*.

In contradistinction to both tyrannical and authoritarian regimes, the proper image of totalitarian rule and organization seems to me to be the structure of the onion, in whose center, in a kind of empty space, the leader is located; whatever he does—whether he integrates the body politic as in an authoritarian hierarchy, or oppresses his subjects like a tyrant—he does it from within, and not from without or above. All the extraordinarily manifold parts of the movement: the front organizations, the various professional societies, the party membership, the party bureaucracy, the elite formations and police groups, are related in such a way that each forms the façade in one direction and the center in the other, that is, plays the role of normal outside world for one layer and the role of radical extremism for another. The great advantage of this system is that the movement provides for each of its layers, even under conditions of totalitarian rule, the fiction of a normal world along with a consciousness of being different from and more radical than it. Thus, the sympathizers in the front organizations, whose convictions differ only in intensity from those of the party membership, sur-

round the whole movement and provide a deceptive façade of normality to the outside world because of their lack of fanaticism and extremism, while, at the same time, they represent the normal world to the totalitarian movement, whose members come to believe that their convictions differ only in degree from those of other people, so that they need never be aware of the abyss which separates their own world from that which actually surrounds it. The onion structure makes the system organizationally shock-proof against the factuality of the real world.<sup>2</sup>

However, while both liberalism and conservatism fail us the moment we try to apply their theories to factually existing political forms and institutions, it can hardly be doubted that their over-all assertions carry a high amount of plausibility. Liberalism, we saw, measures a process of receding freedom, and conservatism measures a process of receding authority; both call the expected end-result totalitarianism and see totalitarian trends wherever either one or the other is present. No doubt, both can produce excellent documentation for their findings. Who would deny the serious threats to freedom from all sides since the beginning of the century, and the rise of all kinds of tyranny, at least since the end of the First World War? Who can deny, on the other hand, that disappearance of practically all traditionally established authorities has been one of the most spectacular characteristics of the modern world? It seems as though one has only to fix his glance on either of these two phenomena to justify a theory of progress or a theory of doom according to his own taste or, as the phrase goes, according to his own "scale of values." If we look upon the conflicting statements of conservatives and liberals with impartial eyes, we can easily see that the truth is equally distributed between them and that we are in fact confronted with a simultaneous recession of both freedom and authority in the modern world. As far as these processes are concerned, one can even say that the numerous oscillations in public opinion, which for more than a hundred and fifty years has swung at regular intervals from one extreme to the other, from a liberal mood to a conservative one and back to a more liberal again, at times attempting to reassert authority and at others to reassert freedom, have resulted only in

further undermining both, confusing the issues, blurring the distinctive lines between authority and freedom, and eventually destroying the political meaning of both.

Both liberalism and conservatism were born in this climate of violently oscillating public opinion, and they are tied together, not only because each would lose its very substance without the presence of its opponent in the field of theory and ideology, but because both are primarily concerned with restoration, with restoring either freedom or authority, or the relationship between both, to its traditional position. It is in this sense that they form the two sides of the same coin, just as their progress-or-doom ideologies correspond to the two possible directions of the historical process as such; if one assumes, as both do, that there is such a thing as a historical process with a definable direction and a predictable end, it obviously can land us only in paradise or in hell.

It is, moreover, in the nature of the very image in which history is usually conceived, as process or stream or development, that everything comprehended by it can change into anything else, that distinctions become meaningless because they become obsolete, submerged, as it were, by the historical stream, the moment they have appeared. From this viewpoint, liberalism and conservatism present themselves as the political philosophies which correspond to the much more general and comprehensive philosophy of history of the nineteenth century. In form and content, they are the political expression of the history-consciousness of the last stage of the modern age. Their inability to distinguish, theoretically justified by the concepts of history and process, progress or doom, testifies to an age in which certain notions, clear in their distinctness to all previous centuries, have begun to lose their clarity and plausibility because they have lost their meaning in the public-political reality—without altogether losing their significance.

The second and more recent theory implicitly challenging the importance of making distinctions is, especially in the social sciences, the almost universal functionalization of all concepts and ideas. Here, as in the example previously quoted, liberalism and conservatism differ not in method, viewpoint, and approach, but only in emphasis

and evaluation. A convenient instance may be provided by the widespread conviction in the free world today that communism is a new "religion," notwithstanding its avowed atheism, because it fulfills socially, psychologically, and "emotionally" the same function traditional religion fulfilled and still fulfills in the free world. The concern of the social sciences does not lie in what bolshevism as ideology or as form of government is, nor in what its spokesmen have to say for themselves; that is not the interest of the social sciences, and many social scientists believe they can do without the study of what the historical sciences call the sources themselves. Their concern is only with functions, and whatever fulfills the same function can, according to this view, be called the same. It is as though I had the right to call the heel of my shoe a hammer because I, like most women, use it to drive nails into the wall.

Obviously one can draw quite different conclusions from such equations. Thus it would be characteristic of conservatism to insist that after all a heel is not a hammer, but that the use of the heel as a substitute for the hammer proves that hammers are indispensable. In other words, it will find in the fact that atheism can fulfill the same function as religion the best proof that religion is necessary, and recommend the return to true religion as the only way to counter a "heresy." The argument is weak, of course; if it is only a question of function and how a thing works, the adherents of "false religion" can make as good a case for using theirs as I can for using my heel, which does not work so badly either. The liberals, on the contrary, view the same phenomena as a bad case of treason to the cause of secularism and believe that only "true secularism" can cure us of the pernicious influence of both false and true religion on politics. But these conflicting recommendations at the address of free society to return to true religion and become more religious, or to rid ourselves of institutional religion (especially of Roman Catholicism with its constant challenge to secularism) hardly conceal the opponents' agreement on one point: that whatever fulfills the function of a religion is a religion.

The same argument is frequently used with respect to authority: if violence fulfills the same function as authority—namely, makes

people obey—then violence is authority. Here again we find those who counsel a return to authority because they think only a reintroduction of the order-obedience relationship can master the problems of a mass society, and those who believe that a mass society can rule itself, like any other social body. Again both parties agree on the one essential point: authority is whatever makes people obey. All those who call modern dictatorships “authoritarian,” or mistake totalitarianism for an authoritarian structure, have implicitly equated violence with authority, and this includes those conservatives who explain the rise of dictatorships in our century by the need to find a surrogate for authority. The crux of the argument is always the same: everything is related to a functional context, and the use of violence is taken to demonstrate that no society can exist except in an authoritarian framework.

The dangers of these equations, as I see them, lie not only in the confusion of political issues and in the blurring of the distinctive lines which separate totalitarianism from all other forms of government. I do not believe that atheism is a substitute for or can fulfill the same function as a religion any more than I believe that violence can become a substitute for authority. But if we follow the recommendations of the conservatives, who at this particular moment have a rather good chance of being heard, I am quite convinced that we shall not find it hard to produce such substitutes, that we shall use violence and pretend to have restored authority or that our re-discovery of the functional usefulness of religion will produce a substitute-religion—as though our civilization were not already sufficiently cluttered up with all sorts of pseudo-things and nonsense.

Compared with these theories, the distinctions between tyrannical, authoritarian, and totalitarian systems which I have proposed are unhistorical, if one understands by history not the historical space in which certain forms of government appeared as recognizable entities, but the historical process in which everything can always change into something else; and they are anti-functional insofar as the content of the phenomenon is taken to determine both the nature of the political body and its function in society, and not vice-versa. Politically speaking, they have a tendency to assume that in the

modern world authority has disappeared almost to the vanishing point, and this in the so-called authoritarian systems no less than in the free world, and that freedom—that is, the freedom of movement of human beings—is threatened everywhere, even in free societies, but abolished radically only in totalitarian systems, and not in tyrannies and dictatorships.

It is in the light of this present situation that I propose to raise the following questions: What were the political experiences that corresponded to the concept of authority and from which it sprang? What is the nature of a public-political world constituted by authority? Is it true that the Platonic-Aristotelian statement that every well-ordered community is constituted of those who rule and those who are ruled was always valid prior to the modern age? Or, to put it differently, what kind of world came to an end after the modern age not only challenged one or another form of authority in different spheres of life but caused the whole concept of authority to lose its validity altogether?

## II

Authority as the one, if not the decisive, factor in human communities did not always exist, though it can look back on a long history, and the experiences on which this concept is based are not necessarily present in all bodies politic. The word and the concept are Roman in origin. Neither the Greek language nor the varied political experiences of Greek history shows any knowledge of authority and the kind of rule it implies.<sup>3</sup> This is expressed most clearly in the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle, who, in quite different ways but from the same political experiences, tried to introduce something akin to authority into the public life of the Greek polis.

There existed two kinds of rule on which they could fall back and from which they derived their political philosophy, one known to them from the public-political realm, and the other from the private sphere of Greek household and family life. To the polis, absolute rule was known as tyranny, and the chief characteristics of

the tyrant were that he ruled by sheer violence, had to be protected from the people by a bodyguard, and insisted that his subjects mind their own business and leave to him the care of the public realm. The last characteristic, in Greek public opinion, signified that he destroyed the public realm of the polis altogether—"a polis belonging to one man is no polis"<sup>4</sup>—and thereby deprived the citizens of that political faculty which they felt was the very essence of freedom. Another political experience of the need for command and obedience might have been provided by the experience in warfare, where danger and the necessity to make and carry out decisions quickly seem to constitute an inherent reason for the establishment of authority. Neither of these political models, however, could possibly serve the purpose. The tyrant remained, for Plato as for Aristotle, the "wolf in human shape," and the military commander was too obviously connected with a temporary emergency to be able to serve as model for a permanent institution.

Because of this absence of valid political experience on which to base a claim to authoritarian rule, both Plato and Aristotle, albeit in very different ways, had to rely on examples of human relations drawn from Greek household and family life, where the head of the household ruled as a "despot," in uncontested mastery over the members of his family and the slaves of the household. The despot, unlike the king, the βασιλεύς, who had been the leader of household heads and as such *primus inter pares*, was by definition vested with the power to coerce. Yet it was precisely this characteristic that made the despot unfit for political purposes; his power to coerce was incompatible not only with the freedom of others but with his own freedom as well. Wherever he ruled there was only one relation, that between master and slaves. And the master, according to Greek common opinion (which was still blissfully unaware of Hegelian dialectics), was not free when he moved among his slaves; his freedom consisted in his ability to leave the sphere of the household altogether and to move among his equals, freemen. Hence, neither the despot nor the tyrant, the one moving among slaves, the other among subjects, could be called a free man.

Authority implies an obedience in which men retain their freedom, and Plato hoped to have found such an obedience when, in his old age, he bestowed upon the laws that quality which would make them undisputable rulers over the whole public realm. Men could at least have the illusion of being free because they did not depend upon other men. Yet the rulership of these laws was construed in an obviously despotic rather than an authoritarian manner, the clearest sign of which is that Plato was led to speak of them in terms of private household affairs, and not in political terms, and to say, probably in a variation of Pindar's νόμος βασιλεὺς πάντων ("a law is king over everything"): νόμος δεσπότης τῶν ἀρχόντων, οἱ δὲ ἄρχοντες δοῦλοι τοῦ νόμου ("the law is the *despot* of the rulers, and the rulers are the *slaves* of the law").<sup>5</sup> In Plato, the despotism originating in the household, and its concomitant destruction of the political realm as antiquity understood it, remained utopian. But it is interesting to note that when the destruction became a reality in the last centuries of the Roman Empire, the change was introduced by the application to public rule of the term *dominus*, which in Rome (where the family also was "organized like a monarchy")<sup>6</sup> had the same meaning as the Greek "despot." Caligula was the first Roman emperor who consented to be called *dominus*, that is, to be given a name "which Augustus and Tiberius still had rejected as if it were a malediction and an injury,"<sup>7</sup> precisely because it implied a despotism unknown in the political realm, although all too familiar in the private, household realm.

The political philosophies of Plato and Aristotle have dominated all subsequent political thought, even when their concepts have been superimposed upon such greatly different political experiences as those of the Romans. If we wish not only to comprehend the actual political experiences behind the concept of authority—which, at least in its positive aspect, is exclusively Roman—but also to understand authority as the Romans themselves already understood it theoretically and made it part of the political tradition of the West, we shall have to concern ourselves briefly with those features of Greek political philosophy which have so decisively influenced its shaping.

Nowhere else has Greek thinking so closely approached the concept of authority as in Plato's *Republic*, wherein he confronted the reality of the polis with a utopian rule of reason in the person of the philosopher-king. The motive for establishing reason as ruler in the realm of politics was exclusively political, although the consequences of expecting reason to develop into an instrument of coercion perhaps have been no less decisive for the tradition of Western philosophy than for the tradition of Western politics. The fatal resemblance between Plato's philosopher-king and the Greek tyrant, as well as the potential harm to the political realm that his rule would imply, seems to have been recognized by Aristotle;<sup>8</sup> but that this combination of reason and rule implied a danger to philosophy as well has been pointed out, as far as I know, only in Kant's reply to Plato: "It is not to be expected that kings philosophize or that philosophers become kings, nor is it to be desired, because the possession of power corrupts the free judgment of reason inevitably"<sup>9</sup>—although even this reply does not go to the root of the matter.

The reason Plato wanted the philosophers to become the rulers of the city lay in the conflict between the philosopher and the polis, or in the hostility of the polis toward philosophy, which probably had lain dormant for some time before it showed its immediate threat to the life of the philosopher in the trial and death of Socrates. Politically, Plato's philosophy shows the rebellion of the philosopher against the polis. The philosopher announces his claim to rule, but not so much for the sake of the polis and politics (although patriotic motivation cannot be denied in Plato and distinguishes his philosophy from those of his followers in antiquity) as for the sake of philosophy and the safety of the philosopher.

It was after Socrates' death that Plato began to discount persuasion as insufficient for the guidance of men and to seek for something liable to compel them without using external means of violence. Very early in his search he must have discovered that truth, namely, the truths we call self-evident, compels the mind, and that this coercion, though it needs no violence to be effective, is stronger than

persuasion and argument. The trouble with coercion through reason, however, is that only the few are subject to it, so that the problem arises of how to assure that the many, the people who in their very multitude compose the body politic, can be submitted to the same truth. Here, to be sure, other means of coercion must be found, and here again coercion through violence must be avoided if political life as the Greeks understood it is not to be destroyed.<sup>10</sup> This is the central predicament of Plato's political philosophy and has remained a predicament of all attempts to establish a tyranny of reason. In *The Republic* the problem is solved through the concluding myth of rewards and punishments in the hereafter, a myth which Plato himself obviously neither believed nor wanted the philosophers to believe. What the allegory of the cave story in the middle of *The Republic* is for the few or for the philosopher the myth of hell at the end is for the many who are not capable of philosophical truth. In the *Laws* Plato deals with the same perplexity, but in the opposite way; here he proposes a substitute for persuasion, the introduction to the laws in which their intent and purpose are to be explained to the citizens.

In his attempts to find a legitimate principle of coercion Plato was originally guided by a great number of models of existing relations, such as that between the shepherd and his sheep, between the helmsman of a ship and the passengers, between the physician and the patient, or between the master and the slave. In all these instances either expert knowledge commands confidence so that neither force nor persuasion are necessary to obtain compliance, or the ruler and the ruled belong to two altogether different categories of beings, one of which is already by implication subject to the other, as in the cases of the shepherd and his flock or the master and his slaves. All these examples are taken from what to the Greeks was the private sphere of life, and they occur time and again in all the great political dialogues, *The Republic*, the *Statesman*, and the *Laws*. Nevertheless, it is obvious that the relation between master and slave has a special significance. The master, according to the discussion in the *Statesman*, knows what should be done and gives his orders, while the slave executes them and obeys, so that know-

ing what to do and actual doing become separate and mutually exclusive functions. In *The Republic* they are the political characteristics of two different classes of men. The plausibility of these examples lies in the natural inequality prevailing between the ruling and the ruled, most apparent in the example of the shepherd, where Plato himself ironically concludes that no man, only a god, could relate to human beings as the shepherd relates to his sheep. Although it is obvious that Plato himself was not satisfied with these models, for his purpose, to establish the "authority" of the philosopher over the polis, he returned to them time and again, because only in these instances of glaring inequality could rule be exerted without seizure of power and the possession of the means of violence. What he was looking for was a relationship in which the compelling element lies in the relationship itself and is prior to the actual issuance of commands; the patient became subject to the physician's authority when he fell ill, and the slave came under the command of his master when he became a slave.

It is important to bear these examples in mind in order to realize what kind of coercion Plato expected reason to exert in the hands of the king-philosopher. Here, it is true, the compelling power does not lie in the person or in inequality as such, but in the ideas which are perceived by the philosopher. These ideas can be used as measures of human behavior because they transcend the sphere of human affairs in the same way that a yardstick transcends, is outside and beyond, all things whose length it can measure. In the parable of the cave in *The Republic*, the sky of ideas stretches above the cave of human existence, and therefore can become its standard. But the philosopher who leaves the cave for the pure sky of ideas does not originally do so in order to acquire those standards and learn the "art of measurement"<sup>11</sup> but to contemplate the true essence of Being—*βλέπειν εἰς τὸ ἀληθέστατον*. The basically authoritative element of the ideas, that is, the quality which enables them to rule and compel, is therefore not at all a matter of course. The ideas become measures only after the philosopher has left the bright sky of ideas and returned to the dark cave of human existence. In this part of the story Plato touches upon the deepest reason for the conflict

between the philosopher and the polis.<sup>12</sup> He tells of the philosopher's loss of orientation in human affairs, of the blindness striking the eyes, of the predicament of not being able to communicate what he has seen, and of the actual danger to his life which thereby arises. It is in this predicament that the philosopher resorts to what he has seen, the ideas, as standards and measures, and finally, in fear of his life, uses them as instruments of domination.

For the transformation of the ideas into measures, Plato is helped by an analogy from practical life, where it appears that all arts and crafts are also guided by "ideas," that is, by the "shapes" of objects, visualized by the inner eye of the craftsman, who then reproduces them in reality through imitation.<sup>13</sup> This analogy enables him to understand the transcendent character of the ideas in the same manner as he does the transcendent existence of the model, which lies beyond the fabrication process it guides and therefore can eventually become the standard for its success or failure. The ideas become the unwavering, "absolute" standards for political and moral behavior and judgment in the same sense that the "idea" of a bed in general is the standard for making and judging the fitness of all particular manufactured beds. For there is no great difference between using the ideas as models and using them, in a somewhat cruder fashion, as actual yardsticks of behavior, and Aristotle in his earliest dialogue, written under the direct influence of Plato, already compares "the most perfect law," that is, the law which is the closest possible approximation to the idea, with "the plummet, the rule, and the compass . . . [which] are outstanding among all tools." <sup>14</sup>

It is only in this context that the ideas relate to the varied multitude of things concrete in the same way as one yardstick relates to the varied multitude of things measurable, or as the rule of reason or common sense relates to the varied multitude of concrete events which can be subsumed under it. This aspect of Plato's doctrine of ideas had the greatest influence on the Western tradition, and even Kant, though he had a very different and considerably deeper concept of human judgment, still occasionally mentioned this capacity for subsuming as its essential function. Likewise, the essential char-

acteristic of specifically authoritarian forms of government—that the source of their authority, which legitimates the exercise of power, must be beyond the sphere of power and, like the law of nature or the commands of God, must not be man-made—goes back to this applicability of the ideas in Plato's political philosophy.

At the same time the analogy relating to fabrication and the arts and crafts offers a welcome opportunity to justify the otherwise very dubious use of examples and instances taken from activities in which some expert knowledge and specialization are required. Here the concept of the expert enters the realm of political action for the first time, and the statesman is understood to be competent to deal with human affairs in the same sense as the carpenter is competent to make furniture or the physician to heal the sick. Closely connected with this choice of examples and analogies is the element of violence, which is so glaringly evident in Plato's utopian republic and actually constantly defeats his great concern for assuring voluntary obedience, that is, for establishing a sound foundation for what, since the Romans, we call authority. Plato solved his dilemma through rather lengthy tales about a hereafter with rewards and punishments, which he hoped would be believed literally by the many and whose usage he therefore recommended to the attention of the few at the close of most of his political dialogues. In view of the enormous influence these tales have exerted upon the images of hell in religious thought, it is of some importance to note that they were originally designed for purely political purposes. In Plato they are simply an ingenious device to enforce obedience upon those who are not subject to the compelling power of reason, without actually using external violence.

It is of greater relevance in our context, however, that an element of violence is inevitably inherent in all activities of making, fabricating, and producing, that is, in all activities by which men confront nature directly, as distinguished from such activities as action and speech, which are primarily directed toward human beings. The building of the human artifice always involves some violence done to nature—we must kill a tree in order to have lumber, and we must violate this material in order to build a table. In the few

instances where Plato shows a dangerous preference for the tyrannical form of government, he is carried to this extreme by his own analogies. This, obviously, is most tempting when he speaks about the right way to found new communities, because this foundation can be easily seen in the light of another "making" process. If the republic is to be made by somebody who is the political equivalent of a craftsman or artist, in accordance with an established *τέχνη* and the rules and measurements valid in this particular "art," the tyrant is indeed in the best position to achieve the purpose.<sup>15</sup>

We have seen that, in the parable of the cave, the philosopher leaves the cave in search of the true essence of Being without a second thought to the practical applicability of what he is going to find. Only later, when he finds himself again confined to the darkness and uncertainty of human affairs and encounters the hostility of his fellow human beings, does he begin to think of his "truth" in terms of standards applicable to the behavior of other people. This discrepancy between the ideas as true essences to be contemplated and as measures to be applied<sup>16</sup> is manifest in the two entirely different ideas which represent the highest idea, the one to which all others owe their existence. We find in Plato either that this supreme idea is that of the beautiful, as in the *Symposium*, where it constitutes the topmost rung of the ladder that leads to truth,<sup>17</sup> and in *Phaedrus*, where Plato speaks of the "lover of wisdom or of beauty" as though these two actually were the same because beauty is what "shines forth most" (the beautiful is *ἐκφανέστατον*) and therefore illuminates everything else;<sup>18</sup> or that the highest idea is the idea of the good, as in *The Republic*.<sup>19</sup> Obviously Plato's choice was based on the current ideal of the *καλὸν κ'ἀγαθόν*, but it is striking that the idea of the good is found only in the strictly political context of *The Republic*. If we were to analyze the original philosophical experiences underlying the doctrine of ideas (which we cannot do here), it would appear that the idea of the beautiful as the highest idea reflected these experiences far more adequately than the idea of the good. Even in the first books of *The Republic*<sup>20</sup> the philosopher is still defined as a lover of beauty, not of goodness, and only in the sixth book is the idea of good as the highest idea introduced. For the original func-

tion of the ideas was not to rule or otherwise determine the chaos of human affairs, but, in "shining brightness," to illuminate their darkness. As such, the ideas have nothing whatever to do with politics, political experience, and the problem of action, but pertain exclusively to philosophy, the experience of contemplation, and the quest for the "true being of things." It is precisely ruling, measuring, subsuming, and regulating that are entirely alien to the experiences underlying the doctrine of ideas in its original conception. It seems that Plato was the first to take exception to the political "irrelevance" of his new teaching, and he tried to modify the doctrine of ideas so that it would become useful for a theory of politics. But usefulness could be saved only by the idea of the good, since "good" in the Greek vocabulary always means "good for" or "fit." If the highest idea, in which all other ideas must partake in order to be ideas at all, is that of fitness, then the ideas are applicable by definition, and in the hands of the philosopher, the expert in ideas, they can become rules and standards or, as later in the *Laws*, they can become laws. (The difference is negligible. What in *The Republic* is still the philosopher's, the philosopher-king's, direct personal claim to rule, has become reason's impersonal claim to domination in the *Laws*.) The actual consequence of this political interpretation of the doctrine of ideas would be that neither man nor a god is the measure of all things, but the good itself—a consequence which apparently Aristotle, not Plato, drew in one of his earlier dialogues.<sup>21</sup>

For our purposes it is essential to remember that the element of rule, as reflected in our present concept of authority so tremendously influenced by Platonic thinking, can be traced to a conflict between philosophy and politics, but not to specifically political experiences, that is, experiences immediately derived from the realm of human affairs. One cannot understand Plato without bearing in mind both his repeated emphatic insistence on the philosophic irrelevance of this realm, which he always warned should not be taken too seriously, and the fact that he himself, in distinction to nearly all philosophers who came after him, still took human affairs so seriously that he changed the very center of his thought to make it applicable to politics. And it is this ambivalence rather than any formal ex-

position of his new doctrine of ideas which forms the true content of the parable of the cave in *The Republic*, which after all is told in the context of a strictly political dialogue searching for the best form of government. In the midst of this search Plato tells his parable, which turns out to be the story of the philosopher in this world, as though he had intended to write the concentrated biography of *the* philosopher. Hence, the search for the best form of government reveals itself to be the search for the best government for philosophers, which turns out to be a government in which philosophers have become the rulers of the city—a not too surprising solution for people who had witnessed the life and death of Socrates.

Still, the philosopher's rule had to be justified, and it could be justified only if the philosopher's truth possessed a validity for that very realm of human affairs which the philosopher had to turn away from in order to perceive it. Insofar as the philosopher is nothing but a philosopher, his quest ends with the contemplation of the highest truth, which, since it illuminates everything else, is also the highest beauty; but insofar as the philosopher is a man among men, a mortal among mortals, and a citizen among citizens, he must take his truth and transform it into a set of rules, by virtue of which transformation he then may claim to become an actual ruler—the king-philosopher. The lives of the many in the cave over which the philosopher has established his rule are characterized not by contemplation but by *λέξις*, speech, and *πραξις*, action; it is therefore characteristic that in the parable of the cave Plato depicts the lives of the inhabitants as though they too were interested only in seeing: first the images on the screen, then the things themselves in the dim light of the fire in the cave, until finally those who want to see truth itself must leave the common world of the cave altogether and embark upon their new adventure all by themselves.

In other words, the whole realm of human affairs is seen from the viewpoint of a philosophy which assumes that even those who inhabit the cave of human affairs are human only insofar as they too want to see, though they remain deceived by shadows and images. And the rule of the philosopher-king, that is, the domination of human affairs by something outside its own realm, is justified not

only by an absolute priority of seeing over doing, of contemplation over speaking and acting, but also by the assumption that what makes men human is the urge to see. Hence, the interest of the philosopher and the interest of man *qua* man coincide; both demand that human affairs, the results of speech and action, must not acquire a dignity of their own but be subjected to the domination of something outside their realm.

### III

The dichotomy between seeing the truth in solitude and remoteness and being caught in the relationships and relativities of human affairs became authoritative for the tradition of political thought. It is expressed most forcefully in Plato's parable of the cave, and one is therefore somehow tempted to see its origin in the Platonic doctrine of ideas. Historically, however, it was not dependent upon an acceptance of this doctrine, but depended much more upon an attitude which Plato expressed only once, almost casually in a random remark, and which Aristotle later quoted in a famous sentence of *Metaphysics* almost verbatim, namely that the beginning of all philosophy is *θαυμάζειν*, the surprised wonder at everything that is as it is. More than anything else, Greek "theory" is the prolongation and Greek philosophy the articulation and conceptualization of this initial wonder. To be capable of it is what separates the few from the many, and to remain devoted to it is what alienates them from the affairs of men. Aristotle, therefore, without accepting Plato's doctrine of ideas, and even repudiating Plato's ideal state, still followed him in the main not only by separating a "theoretical way of life" (*βίος θεωρητικός*) from a life devoted to human affairs (*βίος πολιτικός*)—the first to establish such ways of life in hierarchical order had been Plato in his *Phaedrus*—but accepted as a matter of course the hierarchical order implied in it. The point in our context is not only that thought was supposed to rule over action, to prescribe principles to action so that the rules of the latter were invariably derived from experiences of the former, but that by way of the

*βίαια*, of identifying activities with ways of life, the principle of rulership was established between men as well. Historically this became the hallmark of the political philosophy of the Socratic school, and the irony of this development is probably that it was precisely this dichotomy between thought and action that Socrates had feared and tried to prevent in the polis.

Thus it is in the political philosophy of Aristotle that we find the second attempt to establish a concept of authority in terms of rulers and the ruled; it was equally important for the development of the tradition of political thought, although Aristotle took a basically different approach. For him reason has neither dictatorial nor tyrannical features, and there is no philosopher-king to regulate human affairs once and for all. His reason for maintaining that "each body politic is composed of those who rule and those who are ruled" does not derive from the superiority of the expert over the layman, and he is too conscious of the difference between acting and making to draw his examples from the sphere of fabrication. Aristotle, as far as I can see, was the first to appeal, for the purpose of establishing rule in the handling of human affairs, to "nature," which "established the difference . . . between the younger and the older ones, destined the ones to be ruled and the others to rule."<sup>22</sup>

The simplicity of this argument is all the more deceptive since centuries of repetition have degraded it into a platitude. This may be why one usually overlooks its flagrant contradiction of Aristotle's own definition of the polis as also given in *Politics*: "The polis is a community of equals for the sake of a life which is potentially the best."<sup>23</sup> Obviously the notion of rule in the polis was for Aristotle himself so far from convincing that he, one of the most consistent and least self-contradictory great thinkers, did not feel particularly bound by his own argument. We therefore need not be surprised when we read at the beginning of the *Economics* (a pseudo-Aristotelian treatise, but written by one of his closest disciples) that the essential difference between a political community (the *πόλις*) and a private household (the *οικία*) is that the latter constitutes a "monarchy," a one-man rule, while the polis, on the contrary, "is composed of many rulers."<sup>24</sup> In order to understand this characteriza-

tion we must remember first that the words "monarchy" and "tyranny" were used synonymously and in clear contradistinction to kingship; second, that the character of the polis as "composed of many rulers" has nothing to do with the various forms of government that usually are opposed to one-man rule, such as oligarchy, aristocracy, or democracy. The "many rulers" in this context are the household heads, who have established themselves as "monarchs" at home before they join to constitute the public-political realm of the city. Ruling itself and the distinction between rulers and ruled belong to a sphere which precedes the political realm, and what distinguishes it from the "economic" sphere of the household is that the polis is based upon the principle of equality and knows no differentiation between rulers and ruled.

In this distinction between what we would today call the private and the public spheres, Aristotle only articulates current Greek public opinion, according to which "every citizen belongs to two orders of existence," because "the polis gives each individual . . . besides his private life a sort of second life, his *bios politikos*." <sup>25</sup> (The latter Aristotle called the "good life," and redefined its content; only this definition, not the differentiation itself, conflicted with common Greek opinion.) Both orders were forms of human living-together, but only the household community was concerned with keeping alive as such and coping with the physical necessities (*ἀναγκαῖα*) involved in maintaining individual life and guaranteeing the survival of the species. In characteristic difference from the modern approach, care for the preservation of life, both of the individual and the species, belonged exclusively in the private sphere of the household, while in the polis man appeared *κατ' ἀριθμὸν*, as an individual personality, as we would say today. <sup>26</sup> As living beings, concerned with the preservation of life, men are confronted with and driven by necessity. Necessity must be mastered before the political "good life" can begin, and it can be mastered only through domination. Hence the freedom of the "good life" rests on the domination of necessity.

The mastery of necessity then has as its goal the controlling of the necessities of life, which coerce men and hold them in their

power. But such domination can be accomplished only by controlling and doing violence to others, who as slaves relieve free men from themselves being coerced by necessity. The free man, the citizen of a polis, is neither coerced by the physical necessities of life nor subject to the man-made domination of others. He not only must not be a slave, he must own and rule over slaves. The freedom of the political realm begins after all elementary necessities of sheer living have been mastered by rule, so that domination and subjection, command and obedience, ruling and being ruled, are preconditions for establishing the political realm precisely because they are not its content.

There can be no question that Aristotle, like Plato before him, meant to introduce a kind of authority into the handling of public affairs and the life of the polis, and no doubt for very good political reasons. Yet he too had to resort to a kind of makeshift solution in order to make plausible the introduction into the political realm of a distinction between rulers and ruled, between those who command and those who obey. And he too could take his examples and models only from a prepolitical sphere, from the private realm of the household and the experiences of a slave economy. This leads him into glaringly contradictory statements, insofar as he superimposes on the actions and life in the polis those standards which, as he explains elsewhere, are valid only for the behavior and life in the household community. The inconsistency of his enterprise is apparent even if we consider only the famous example from the *Politics* previously mentioned, in which the differentiation between rulers and ruled is derived from the natural difference between the younger and the elder. For this example is in itself eminently unsuitable to prove Aristotle's argument. The relation between old and young is educational in essence, and in this education no more is involved than the training of the future rulers by the present rulers. If rule is at all involved here, it is entirely different from political forms of rule, not only because it is limited in time and intent, but because it happens between people who are potentially equals. Yet substitution of education for rule had the most far-reaching consequences. On its grounds rulers have posed as educators and edu-

cators have been accused of ruling. Then, as well as now, nothing is more questionable than the political relevance of examples drawn from the field of education. In the political realm we deal always with adults who are past the age of education, properly speaking, and politics or the right to participate in the management of public affairs begins precisely where education has come to an end. (Adult education, individual or communal, may be of great relevance for the formation of personality, its full development or greater enrichment, but is politically irrelevant unless its purpose is to supply technical requirements, somehow not acquired in youth, needed for participation in public affairs.) In education, conversely, we always deal with people who cannot yet be admitted to politics and equality because they are being prepared for it. Aristotle's example is nevertheless of great relevance because it is true that the necessity for "authority" is more plausible and evident in child-rearing and education than anywhere else. That is why it is so characteristic of our own time to want to eradicate even this extremely limited and politically irrelevant form of authority.

Politically, authority can acquire an educational character only if we presume with the Romans that under all circumstances ancestors represent the example of greatness for each successive generation, that they are the *maiores*, the greater ones, by definition. Wherever the model of education through authority, without this fundamental conviction, was superimposed on the realm of politics (and this has happened often enough and still is a mainstay of conservative argument), it served primarily to obscure real or coveted claims to rule and pretended to educate while in reality it wanted to dominate.

The grandiose attempts of Greek philosophy to find a concept of authority which would prevent deterioration of the polis and safeguard the life of the philosopher foundered on the fact that in the realm of Greek political life there was no awareness of authority based on immediate political experience. Hence all prototypes by which subsequent generations understood the content of authority were drawn from specifically unpolitical experiences, stemming either from the sphere of "making" and the arts, where there must

be experts and where fitness is the highest criterion, or from the private household community. It is precisely in this politically determined aspect that the philosophy of the Socratic school has exerted its greatest impact upon our tradition. Even today we believe that Aristotle defined man primarily as a political being endowed with speech or reason, which he did only in a political context, or that Plato exposed the original meaning of his doctrine of ideas in *The Republic*, where, on the contrary, he changed it for political reasons. In spite of the grandeur of Greek political philosophy, it may be doubted that it would have lost its inherent utopian character if the Romans, in their indefatigable search for tradition and authority, had not decided to take it over and acknowledge it as their highest authority in all matters of theory and thought. But they were able to accomplish this integration only because both authority and tradition had already played a decisive role in the political life of the Roman republic.

#### IV

At the heart of Roman politics, from the beginning of the republic until virtually the end of the imperial era, stands the conviction of the sacredness of foundation, in the sense that once something has been founded it remains binding for all future generations. To be engaged in politics meant first and foremost to preserve the founding of the city of Rome. This is why the Romans were unable to repeat the founding of their first polis in the settlement of colonies but were capable of adding to the original foundation until the whole of Italy and, eventually, the whole of the Western world were united and administered by Rome, as though the whole world were nothing but Roman hinterland. From beginning to end, the Romans were bound to the specific locality of this one city, and unlike the Greeks, they could not say in times of emergency or overpopulation, "Go and found a new city, for wherever you are you will always be a polis." Not the Greeks, but the Romans, were really rooted in the soil, and the word *patria* derives its full meaning from Roman his-

tory. The foundation of a new body politic—to the Greeks an almost commonplace experience—became to the Romans the central, decisive, unrepeatable beginning of their whole history, a unique event. And the most deeply Roman divinities were Janus, the god of beginning, with whom, as it were, we still begin our year, and Minerva, the goddess of remembrance.

The founding of Rome—*tanta molis erat Romanam condere gentem* (“so great was the effort and toil to found the Roman people”), as Virgil sums up the ever-present theme of the *Aeneid*, that all wandering and suffering reach their end and their goal *dum conderet urbem* (“that he may found the city”)—this foundation and the equally un-Greek experience of the sanctity of house and hearth, as though Homerically speaking the spirit of Hector had survived the fall of Troy and been resurrected on Italian soil, form the deeply political content of Roman religion. In contrast to Greece, where piety depended upon the immediate revealed presence of the gods, here religion literally meant *re-ligare*:<sup>27</sup> to be tied back, obligated, to the enormous, almost superhuman and hence always legendary effort to lay the foundations, to build the cornerstone, to found for eternity.<sup>28</sup> To be religious meant to be tied to the past, and Livy, the great recorder of past events, could therefore say, *Mihi vetustas res scribenti nescio quo pacto antiquus fit animus et quaedam religio tenet* (“While I write down these ancient events, I do not know through what connection my mind grows old and some *religio* holds [me]”).<sup>29</sup> Thus religious and political activity could be considered as almost identical, and Cicero could say, “In no other realm does human excellence approach so closely the paths of the gods (*numen*) as it does in the founding of new and in the preservation of already founded communities.”<sup>30</sup> The binding power of the foundation itself was religious, for the city also offered the gods of the people a permanent home—again unlike Greece, whose gods protected the cities of the mortals and occasionally dwelt in them but had their own home, far from the abode of men, on Mount Olympus.

It is in this context that word and concept of authority originally appeared. The word *auctoritas* derives from the verb *augere*, “aug-

ment," and what authority or those in authority constantly augment is the foundation. Those endowed with authority were the elders, the Senate or the *patres*, who had obtained it by descent and by transmission (tradition) from those who had laid the foundations for all things to come, the ancestors, whom the Romans therefore called the *maiores*. The authority of the living was always derivative, depending upon the *auctores imperii Romani conditoresque*, as Pliny puts it, upon the authority of the founders, who no longer were among the living. Authority, in contradistinction to power (*potestas*), had its roots in the past, but this past was no less present in the actual life of the city than the power and strength of the living. *Moribus antiquis res stat Romana virisque*, in the words of Ennius.

In order to understand more concretely what it meant to be in authority, it may be useful to notice that the word *auctores* can be used as the very opposite of the *artifices*, the actual builders and makers, and this precisely when the word *auctor* signifies the same thing as our "author." Who, asks Pliny at the occasion of a new theater, should be more admired, the maker or the author, the inventor or the invention?—meaning, of course, the latter in both instances. The author in this case is not the builder but the one who inspired the whole enterprise and whose spirit, therefore, much more than the spirit of the actual builder, is represented in the building itself. In distinction to the *artifex*, who only made it, he is the actual "author" of the building, namely its founder; with it he has become an "augmenter" of the city.

However, the relation between *auctor* and *artifex* is by no means the (Platonic) relation between the master who gives orders and the servant who executes them. The most conspicuous characteristic of those in authority is that they do not have power. *Cum potestas in populo auctoritas in senatu sit*, "while power resides in the people, authority rests with the Senate."<sup>31</sup> Because the "authority," the augmentation which the Senate must add to political decisions, is not power, it seems to us curiously elusive and intangible, bearing in this respect a striking resemblance to Montesquieu's judiciary branch of government, whose power he called "somehow nil" (*en quelque façon nulle*) and which nevertheless constitutes the highest

authority in constitutional governments.<sup>32</sup> Mommsen called it "more than advice and less than a command, an advice which one may not safely ignore," whereby it is assumed that "the will and the actions of the people like those of children are exposed to error and mistakes and therefore need 'augmentation' and confirmation through the council of elders."<sup>33</sup> The authoritative character of the "augmentation" of the elders lies in its being a mere advice, needing neither the form of command nor external coercion to make itself heard.<sup>34</sup>

The binding force of this authority is closely connected with the religiously binding force of the *auspices*, which, unlike the Greek oracle, does not hint at the objective course of future events but reveals merely divine approval or disapproval of decisions made by men.<sup>35</sup> The gods too have authority among, rather than power over, men; they "augment" and confirm human actions but do not guide them. And just as "all *auspices* were traced back to the great sign by which the gods gave Romulus the authority to found the city,"<sup>36</sup> so all authority derives from this foundation, binding every act back to the sacred beginning of Roman history, adding, as it were, to every single moment the whole weight of the past. *Gravitas*, the ability to bear this weight, became the outstanding trait of the Roman character, just as the Senate, the representation of authority in the republic, could function—in the words of Plutarch ("Life of Lycurgus")—as "a central weight, like ballast in a ship, which always keeps things in a just equilibrium."

Thus precedents, the deeds of the ancestors and the usage that grew out of them, were always binding.<sup>37</sup> Anything that happened was transformed into an example, and the *auctoritas maiorum* became identical with authoritative models for actual behavior, with the moral political standard as such. This is also why old age, as distinguished from mere adulthood, was felt by the Romans to contain the very climax of human life; not so much because of accumulated wisdom and experience as because the old man had grown closer to the ancestors and the past. Contrary to our concept of growth, where one grows into the future, the Romans felt that growth was directed toward the past. If one wants to relate this

attitude to the hierarchical order established by authority and to visualize this hierarchy in the familiar image of the pyramid, it is as though the peak of the pyramid did not reach into the height of a sky above (or, as in Christianity, beyond) the earth, but into the depth of an earthly past.

It is in this primarily political context that the past was sanctified through tradition. Tradition preserved the past by handing down from one generation to the next the testimony of the ancestors, who first had witnessed and created the sacred founding and then augmented it by their authority throughout the centuries. As long as this tradition was uninterrupted, authority was inviolate; and to act without authority and tradition, without accepted, time-honored standards and models, without the help of the wisdom of the founding fathers, was inconceivable. The notion of a spiritual tradition and of authority in matters of thought and ideas is here derived from the political realm and therefore essentially derivative—just as Plato's conception of the role of reason and ideas in politics was derived from the philosophical realm and became derivative in the realm of human affairs. But the historically all-important fact is that the Romans felt they needed founding fathers and authoritative examples in matters of thought and ideas as well, and accepted the great "ancestors" in Greece as their authorities for theory, philosophy, and poetry. The great Greek authors became authorities in the hands of the Romans, not of the Greeks. The way Plato and others before and after him treated Homer, "the educator of all Hellas," was inconceivable in Rome, nor would a Roman philosopher have dared "to raise his hand against his [spiritual] father," as Plato said of himself (in the *Sophistes*) when he broke with the teaching of Parmenides.

Just as the derivative character of the applicability of the ideas to politics did not prevent Platonic political thought from becoming the origin of Western political theory, so the derivative character of authority and tradition in spiritual matters did not prevent them from becoming the dominant features of Western philosophic thought for the longer part of our history. In both instances the political origin and the political experiences underlying the theories

were forgotten, the original conflict between politics and philosophy, between the citizen and the philosopher, no less than the experience of foundation in which the Roman trinity of religion, authority, and tradition had its legitimate source. The strength of this trinity lay in the binding force of an authoritative beginning to which "religious" bonds tied men back through tradition. The Roman trinity not only survived the transformation of the republic into the empire but penetrated wherever the *pax Romana* created Western civilization on Roman foundations.

The extraordinary strength and endurance of this Roman spirit—or the extraordinary reliability of the founding principle for the creation of bodies politic—were subjected to a decisive test and proved themselves conspicuously after the decline of the Roman Empire, when Rome's political and spiritual heritage passed to the Christian Church. Confronted with this very real mundane task, the Church became so "Roman" and adapted itself so thoroughly to Roman thinking in matters of politics that it made the death and resurrection of Christ the cornerstone of a new foundation, erecting on it a new human institution of tremendous durability. Thus, after Constantine the Great had called upon the Church to secure for the declining empire the protection of the "most powerful God," the Church was eventually able to overcome the antipolitical and anti-institutional tendencies of the Christian faith, which had caused so much trouble in earlier centuries, and which are so manifest in the New Testament and in early Christian writings, and seemingly so insurmountable. The victory of the Roman spirit is really almost a miracle; in any event, it alone enabled the Church "to offer men in the membership of the Church the sense of citizenship which neither Rome nor municipality could any longer offer them."<sup>38</sup> Yet, just as Plato's politicalization of the ideas changed Western philosophy and determined the philosophic concept of reason, so the politicalization of the Church changed the Christian religion. The basis of the Church as a community of believers and a public institution was now no longer the Christian faith in resurrection (though this faith remained its content) or the Hebrew obedience to the commands of God, but rather the testimony of the life, of the birth, death, and

resurrection, of Jesus of Nazareth as a historically recorded event.<sup>39</sup> As witnesses to this event the Apostles could become the “founding fathers” of the Church, from whom she would derive her own authority as long as she handed down their testimony by way of tradition from generation to generation. Only when this had happened, one is tempted to say, had the Christian faith become a “religion” not only in the post-Christian sense but in the ancient sense as well; only then, at any rate, could a whole world—as distinguished from mere groups of believers, no matter how large they might have been—become Christian. The Roman spirit could survive the catastrophe of the Roman Empire because its most powerful enemies—those who had laid, as it were, a curse on the whole realm of worldly public affairs and sworn to live in hiding—discovered in their own faith something which could be understood as a worldly event as well and could be transformed into a new mundane beginning to which the world was bound back once more (*religare*) in a curious mixture of new and old religious awe. This transformation was to a large extent accomplished by Augustine, the only great philosopher the Romans ever had. For the mainstay of his philosophy, *Sedis animi est in memoria* (“the seat of the mind is in memory”), is precisely that conceptual articulation of the specifically Roman experience which the Romans themselves, overwhelmed as they were by Greek philosophy and concepts, never achieved.

Thanks to the fact that the foundation of the city of Rome was repeated in the foundation of the Catholic Church, though, of course, with a radically different content, the Roman trinity of religion, authority, and tradition could be taken over by the Christian era. The most conspicuous sign of this continuity is perhaps that the Church, when she embarked upon her great political career in the fifth century, at once adopted the Roman distinction between authority and power, claiming for herself the old authority of the Senate and leaving the power—which in the Roman Empire was no longer in the hands of the people but had been monopolized by the imperial household—to the princes of the world. Thus, at the close of the fifth century, Pope Gelasius I could write to Emperor Anastasius I: “Two are the things by which this world is chiefly

ruled: the sacred authority of the Popes and the royal power.”<sup>40</sup> The result of the continuity of the Roman spirit in the history of the West was twofold. On one hand, the miracle of permanence repeated itself once more; for within the framework of our history the durability and continuity of the Church as a public institution can be compared only with the thousand years of Roman history in antiquity. The separation of church and state, on the other hand, far from signifying unequivocally a secularization of the political realm and, hence, its rise to the dignity of the classical period, actually implied that the political had now, for the first time since the Romans, lost its authority and with it that element which, at least in Western history, had endowed political structures with durability, continuity, and permanence.

It is true that Roman political thought at a very early date began to use Platonic concepts in order to understand and interpret the specifically Roman political experiences. Yet it seems as though it has been only in the Christian era that Plato’s invisible spiritual yardsticks, by which the visible, concrete affairs of men were to be measured and judged, have unfolded their full political effectiveness. Precisely those parts of Christian doctrine which would have had great difficulty in fitting in and being assimilated to the Roman political structure—namely, the revealed commandments and truths of a genuinely transcendent authority which, unlike Plato’s, did not stretch above but was beyond the earthly realm—could be integrated into the Roman foundation legend via Plato. God’s revelation could now be interpreted politically as if the standards for human conduct and the principle of political communities, intuitively anticipated by Plato, had been finally revealed directly, so that, in the words of a modern Platonist, it appeared as though Plato’s early “orientation toward the unseen measure was now confirmed through the revelation of the measure itself.”<sup>41</sup> To the extent that the Catholic Church incorporated Greek philosophy into the structure of its doctrines and dogmatic beliefs, it amalgamated the Roman political concept of authority, which inevitably was based on a beginning, a founding in the past, with the Greek notion of transcending measurements and rules. General and transcendent standards under which the par-

ticular and immanent could be subsumed were now required for any political order, moral rules for all interhuman behavior, and rational measurements for the guidance of all individual judgment. There is scarcely anything that eventually was to assert itself with greater authority and more far-reaching consequences than the amalgamation itself.

Since then it has turned out, and this fact speaks for the stability of the amalgamation, that wherever one of the elements of the Roman trinity, religion or authority or tradition, was doubted or eliminated, the remaining two were no longer secure. Thus, it was Luther's error to think that his challenge of the temporal authority of the Church and his appeal to unguided individual judgment would leave tradition and religion intact. So it was the error of Hobbes and the political theorists of the seventeenth century to hope that authority and religion could be saved without tradition. So, too, was it finally the error of the humanists to think it would be possible to remain within an unbroken tradition of Western civilization without religion and without authority.

## V

Politically the most momentous consequence of the amalgamation of Roman political institutions with Greek philosophic ideas was that it enabled the Church to interpret the rather vague and conflicting notions of early Christianity about life in the hereafter in the light of the Platonic political myths, and thus to elevate to the rank of dogmatic certitude an elaborate system of rewards and punishments for deeds and misdeeds that did not find their just retribution on earth. This happened not before the fifth century, when the earlier teachings of the redemption of all sinners, even of Satan himself (as taught by Origen and still held by Gregory of Nyssa), and the spiritualizing interpretation of the torments of hell as torments of conscience (also taught by Origen) were declared to be heretical; but it coincided with the downfall of Rome, the disappearance of an assured secular order, the assumption of responsibility

for secular affairs by the Church, and the emergence of the papacy as a temporal power. Popular and literate notions about a hereafter with rewards and punishments were, of course, widespread then as they had been throughout antiquity, but the original Christian version of these beliefs, consistent with the "glad tidings" and the redemption from sin, was not a threat of eternal punishment and eternal suffering, but, on the contrary, the *descensus ad inferos*, Christ's mission to the underworld where he had spent the three days between his death and his resurrection in order to liquidate hell, defeat Satan, and liberate the souls of dead sinners, as he had liberated the souls of the living, from death and punishment.

We find it somewhat difficult to gauge correctly the political, non-religious origin of the doctrine of hell because the Church incorporated it, in its Platonic version, so early into the body of dogmatic beliefs. It seems only natural that this incorporation in its turn should have blurred the understanding of Plato himself to the point of identifying his strictly philosophic teaching of the immortality of the soul, which was meant for the few, with his political teaching of a hereafter with punishments and rewards, which was clearly meant for the multitude. The philosopher's concern is with the invisible which can be perceived by the soul, which itself is something invisible (*ἀειδές*) and hence goes to Hades, the place of invisibility (*Ἄ-ιδης*), after death has rid the invisible part of man of his body, the organ of sense perception.<sup>42</sup> This is the reason why philosophers always seem "to pursue death and dying" and why philosophy can also be called "the study of death."<sup>43</sup> Those who have no experience with a philosophic truth beyond the range of sense perception, of course, cannot be persuaded of the immortality of a bodyless soul; for them, Plato invented a number of tales to conclude his political dialogues, usually after the argument itself had broken down, as in *The Republic*, or it had turned out that Socrates' opponent could not be persuaded, as in the *Gorgias*.<sup>44</sup> Of these tales, the Er-myth of *The Republic* is the most elaborate and has exerted the greatest influence. Between Plato and the secular victory of Christianity in the fifth century, which brought with it the religious sanction of the doctrine of hell (so that from then on this became so general a feature of

the Christian world that political treatises did not need to mention it specifically), there was hardly an important discussion of political problems—except in Aristotle—which did not conclude with an imitation of the Platonic myth.<sup>45</sup> And it is still Plato, as distinguished from the Hebrew and early Christian speculations about an afterlife, who is the true forerunner of Dante's elaborate descriptions; for in Plato we find for the first time not merely a concept of final judgment about eternal life or eternal death, about rewards and punishments, but the geographical separation of hell, purgatory, and paradise, as well as the horribly concrete notions of graduated bodily punishment.<sup>46</sup>

The purely political implications of Plato's myths in the last book of *The Republic*, as well as in the concluding parts of *Phaedon* and *Gorgias*, seem to be indisputable. The distinction between the philosophic conviction of the immortality of the soul and the politically desirable belief in an afterlife runs parallel to the distinction in the doctrine of ideas between the idea of the beautiful as the highest idea of the philosopher and the idea of the good as the highest idea of the statesman. Yet while Plato, when applying his philosophy of ideas to the political realm, somehow blurred the decisive distinction between the ideas of the beautiful and of the good, silently substituting the latter for the former in his discussions of politics, the same cannot be said for the distinction between an immortal, invisible, bodyless soul and an afterlife in which bodies, sensitive to pain, will receive their punishment. One of the clearest indications for the political character of these myths is indeed that they, because they imply bodily punishment, stand in flagrant contradiction to his doctrine of the mortality of the body, and of this contradiction Plato himself was by no means unaware.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, when he came to telling his tales, he used elaborate precautions to make sure that what followed was not truth but a possible opinion of which one better persuaded the multitude "as though it were the truth."<sup>48</sup> Finally, is it not rather obvious, especially in *The Republic*, that this whole concept of life after death cannot possibly make sense to those who have understood the story of the cave and know that the true underworld is life on earth?

No doubt Plato relied on popular beliefs, perhaps on Orphic and Pythagorean traditions, for his descriptions of an afterlife, just as the Church, almost a thousand years later, could choose freely which of the then prevalent beliefs and speculations she wanted to lay down as dogma and which to declare as heretical. The distinction between Plato and his predecessors, whoever they may have been, was that he was the first to become aware of the enormous, strictly political potentiality inherent in such beliefs, just as the distinction between Augustine's elaborate teachings about hell, purgatory, and paradise and the speculations of Origen or Clement of Alexandria was that he (and perhaps Tertullian before him) understood to what an extent these doctrines could be used as threats in this world, quite apart from their speculative value about a future life. Nothing, indeed, is more suggestive in this context than that it was Plato who coined the word "theology," for the passage in which the new word is used occurs again in a strictly political discussion, namely in *The Republic*, when the dialogue deals with the founding of cities.<sup>49</sup> This new theological god is neither a living God nor the god of the philosophers nor a pagan divinity; he is a political device, "the measurement of measurements,"<sup>50</sup> that is, the standard according to which cities may be founded and rules of behavior laid down for the multitude. Theology, moreover, teaches how to enforce these standards absolutely, even in cases when human justice seems at a loss, that is, in the case of crimes which escape punishment as well as in the case of those for which even the death sentence would not be adequate. For "the main thing" about the hereafter is, as Plato says explicitly, that "for every wrong men had done to anyone they suffered tenfold."<sup>51</sup> To be sure, Plato had no inkling of theology as we understand it, as the interpretation of God's word whose sacrosanct text is the Bible; theology to him was part and parcel of "political science," and specifically that part which taught the few how to rule the many.

Whatever other historical influences may have been at work to elaborate the doctrine of hell, it continued, during antiquity, to be used for political purposes in the interest of the few to retain a moral and political control over the multitude. The point at stake was al-

ways the same: truth by its very nature is self-evident and therefore cannot be satisfactorily argued out and demonstrated.<sup>52</sup> Hence, belief is necessary for those who lack the eyes for what is at the same time self-evident, invisible, and beyond argument. Platonically speaking, the few cannot persuade the multitude of truth because truth cannot be the object of persuasion, and persuasion is the only way to deal with the multitude. But the multitude, carried away by the irresponsible tales of poets and storytellers, can be persuaded to believe almost anything; the appropriate tales which carry the truth of the few to the multitude are tales about rewards and punishments after death; persuading the citizens of the existence of hell will make them behave as though they knew the truth.

As long as Christianity remained without secular interests and responsibilities, it left the beliefs and speculations about a hereafter as free as they had been in antiquity. Yet when the purely religious development of the new creed had come to an end and the Church had become aware of, and willing to take over, political responsibilities, she found herself confronted with a perplexity similar to the one that had given rise to Plato's political philosophy. Again it had become a question of imposing absolute standards on a realm which is made up of human affairs and relations, whose very essence therefore seems to be relativity; and to this relativity corresponds the fact that the worst man can do to man is to kill him, that is, to bring about what one day is bound to happen to him anyhow. The "improvement" on this limitation, proposed in the hell images, is precisely that punishment can mean more than the "eternal death" which early Christianity thought to be the appropriate reward of sin, namely eternal suffering, compared to which eternal death is salvation.

The introduction of the Platonic hell into the body of Christian dogmatic beliefs strengthened religious authority to the point where it could hope to remain victorious in any contest with secular power. But the price paid for this additional strength was that the Roman concept of authority was diluted, and an element of violence was permitted to insinuate itself into both the very structure of Western

religious thought and the hierarchy of the Church. How high this price actually was might be gauged by the more than embarrassing fact that men of unquestionable stature—among them Tertullian and even Thomas Aquinas—could be convinced that one of the joys in heaven would be the privilege of watching the spectacle of unspeakable sufferings in hell. Nothing perhaps in the whole development of Christianity throughout the centuries is farther removed from and more alien to the letter and spirit of the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth than the elaborate catalogue of future punishments and the enormous power of coercion through fear which only in the last stages of the modern age have lost their public, political significance. As far as religious thought is concerned, it certainly is a terrible irony that the “glad tidings” of the Gospels, “Life is everlasting,” should eventually have resulted not in an increase of joy but of fear on earth, should not have made it easier but harder for man to die.

However that may be, the fact is that the most significant consequence of the secularization of the modern age may well be the elimination from public life, along with religion, of the only political element in traditional religion, the fear of hell. We who had to witness how, during the Hitler and Stalin era, an entirely new and unprecedented criminality, almost unchallenged in the respective countries, was to invade the realm of politics should be the last to underestimate its “persuasive” influence upon the functioning of conscience. And the impact of these experiences is likely to grow when we recall that, in the very age of enlightenment, the men of the French Revolution no less than the founding fathers in America insisted on making the fear of an “avenging God” and hence the belief in “a future state” part and parcel of the new body politic. For the obvious reason why the men of the revolutions of all people should be so strangely out of tune in this respect with the general climate of their age was that precisely because of the new separation of church and state they found themselves in the old Platonic predicament. When they warned against the elimination of the fear of hell from public life because this would pave the way “to make

murder itself as indifferent as shooting plover, and the extermination of the Rohilla nation as innocent as the swallowing of mites on a morsel of cheese,"<sup>53</sup> their words may sound with an almost prophetic ring in our ears; yet they were clearly spoken not out of any dogmatic faith in the "avenging God" but out of mistrust in the nature of man.

Thus the belief in a future state of rewards and punishments, consciously designed as a political device by Plato and perhaps no less consciously adopted, in its Augustinian form, by Gregory the Great, was to survive all other religious and secular elements which together had established authority in Western history. It was not during the Middle Ages, when secular life had become religious to such an extent that religion could not serve as a political instrument, but during the modern age that the usefulness of religion for secular authority was rediscovered. The true motives of this rediscovery have been somewhat overshadowed by the various more or less infamous alliances of "throne and altar" when kings, frightened at the prospect of revolution, believed that "the people must not be permitted to lose its religion" because, in Heine's words, *Wer sich von seinem Gotte reisst, / wird endlich auch abtrünnig werden / von seinen irdischen Behörden* ("who tears himself away from his God will end by deserting his earthly authorities as well"). The point is rather that the revolutionaries themselves preached belief in a future state, that even Robespierre ended by appealing to an "Immortal Legislator" to give sanction to the revolution, that none of the early American constitutions lacked an appropriate provision for future rewards and punishments, that men like John Adams regarded them as "the only true foundation of morality."<sup>54</sup>

It certainly is not surprising that all these attempts at retaining the only element of violence from the crumbling edifice of religion, authority, and tradition, and at using it as safeguard for the new, secular political order should be in vain. And it was by no means the rise of socialism or of the Marxian belief that "religion is the opiate of the people" which put an end to them. (Authentic religion in general and the Christian faith in particular—with its unrelenting stress on the individual and his own role in salvation, which led

to the elaboration of a catalogue of sins greater than in any other religion—could never be used as tranquilizers. Modern ideologies, whether political or psychological or social, are far better fitted to immunize man's soul against the shocking impact of reality than any traditional religion we know. Compared with the various superstitions of the twentieth century, the pious resignation to God's will seems like a child's pocket-knife in competition with atomic weapons.) The conviction that "good morals" in civil society ultimately depended upon fear and hope for another life may still have appeared to the political men of the eighteenth century no more than good common sense; to those of the nineteenth century it appeared simply scandalous that, for instance, English courts took it for granted "that the oath is worthless of a person who does not believe in a future state," and this not only for political reasons but also because it implies "that they who do believe are only prevented from lying . . . by the fear of hell." <sup>55</sup>

Superficially speaking, the loss of belief in future states is politically, though certainly not spiritually, the most significant distinction between our present period and the centuries before. And this loss is definite. For no matter how religious our world may turn again, or how much authentic faith still exists in it, or how deeply our moral values may be rooted in our religious systems, the fear of hell is no longer among the motives which would prevent or stimulate the actions of a majority. This seems inevitable if secularity of the world involves separation of the religious and political realms of life; under these circumstances religion was bound to lose its political element, just as public life was bound to lose the religious sanction of transcendent authority. In this situation, it would be well to recall that Plato's device of how to persuade the multitude to follow the standards of the few had remained utopian prior to its being sanctioned by religion; its purpose, to establish rule of the few over the many, was too patent to be useful. For the same reason the beliefs in future states withered from the public realm at once when their political usefulness was blatantly exposed by the very fact that they, out of the whole body of dogmatic beliefs, were deemed worthy of preservation.

## VI

One thing, however, is particularly striking in this context: while all the models, prototypes, and examples for authoritarian relationships—such as the statesman as healer and physician, as expert, as helmsman, as the master who knows, as educator, as the wise man—all Greek in origin, have been faithfully preserved and further articulated until they became empty platitudes, the one political experience which brought authority as word, concept, and reality into our history—the Roman experience of foundation—seems to have been entirely lost and forgotten. And this to such an extent that the moment we begin to talk and think about authority, after all one of the central concepts of political thought, it is as though we were caught in a maze of abstractions, metaphors, and figures of speech in which everything can be taken and mistaken for something else, because we have no reality, either in history or in everyday experience, to which we can unanimously appeal. This, among other things, indicates what could also be proved otherwise, namely that the Greek concepts, once they had been sanctified by the Romans through tradition and authority, simply eliminated from historical consciousness all political experiences which could not be fitted into their framework.

However, this statement is not entirely true. There exists in our political history one type of event for which the notion of founding is decisive, and there is in our history of thought one political thinker in whose work the concept of foundation is central, if not paramount. The events are the revolutions of the modern age, and the thinker is Machiavelli, who stood at the threshold of this age and, though he never used the word, was the first to conceive of a revolution.

Machiavelli's unique position in the history of political thought has little to do with his often praised but by no means unarguable realism, and he was certainly not the father of political science, a role now frequently attributed to him. (If one understands by

political science political theory, its father certainly is Plato rather than Machiavelli. If one stresses the scientific character of political science, it is hardly possible to date its birth earlier than the rise of all modern science, that is, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In my opinion the scientific character of Machiavelli's theories is often greatly exaggerated.) His unconcern with moral judgments and his freedom from prejudice are astonishing enough, but they do not strike the core of the matter; they have contributed more to his fame than to the understanding of his works, because most of his readers, then as today, were too shocked even to read him properly. When he insists that in the public-political realm men "should learn how not to be good,"<sup>56</sup> he of course never meant that they should learn how to be evil. After all, there is scarcely another political thinker who has spoken with such vehement contempt of "methods [by which] one may indeed gain power but not glory."<sup>57</sup> The truth is only that he opposed both concepts of the good which we find in our tradition: the Greek concept of the "good for" or fitness, and the Christian concept of an absolute goodness which is not of this world. Both concepts in his opinion were valid, but only in the private sphere of human life; in the public realm of politics they had no more place than their opposites, unfitness or incompetence and evil. The *virtù*, on the other hand, which according to Machiavelli is the specifically political human quality, has neither the connotation of moral character as does the Roman *virtus*, nor that of a morally neutral excellence like the Greek ἀρετή. *Virtù* is the response, summoned up by man, to the world, or rather to the constellation of *fortuna* in which the world opens up, presents and offers itself to him, to his *virtù*. There is no *virtù* without *fortuna* and no *fortuna* without *virtù*; the interplay between them indicates a harmony between man and world—playing with each other and succeeding together—which is as remote from the wisdom of the statesman as from the excellence, moral or otherwise, of the individual, and the competence of experts.

His experiences in the struggles of his time taught Machiavelli a deep contempt for all traditions, Christian and Greek, as presented, nurtured, and reinterpreted by the Church. His contempt was leveled

at a corrupt Church which had corrupted the political life of Italy, but such corruption, he argued, was inevitable because of the Christian character of the Church. What he witnessed, after all, was not only corruption but also the reaction against it, the deeply religious and sincere revival emanating from the Franciscans and Dominicans, culminating in the fanaticism of Savonarola, whom he held in considerable respect. Respect for these religious forces and contempt for the Church together led him to certain conclusions about a basic discrepancy between the Christian faith and politics that are oddly reminiscent of the first centuries of our era. His point was that every contact between religion and politics must corrupt both, and that a noncorrupt Church, though considerably more respectable, would be even more destructive to the public realm than its present corruption.<sup>58</sup> What he did not, and perhaps in his time could not, see was the Roman influence on the Catholic Church, which, indeed, was much less noticeable than its Christian content and its Greek theoretical framework of reference.

It was more than patriotism and more than the current revival of interest in antiquity that sent Machiavelli to search for the central political experiences of the Romans as they had originally been presented, equally removed from Christian piety and Greek philosophy. The greatness of his rediscovery lies in that he could not simply revive or resort to an articulate conceptual tradition, but had himself to articulate those experiences which the Romans had not conceptualized but rather expressed in terms of Greek philosophy vulgarized for this purpose.<sup>59</sup> He saw that the whole of Roman history and mentality depended upon the experience of foundation, and he believed it should be possible to repeat the Roman experience through the foundation of a unified Italy which was to become the same sacred cornerstone for an "eternal" body politic for the Italian nation as the founding of the Eternal City had been for the Italic people. The fact that he was aware of the contemporary beginnings of the birth of nations and the need for a new body politic, for which he therefore used the hitherto unknown term *lo stato*, has caused him to be commonly and rightfully identified as the father of the modern nation-state and its notion of a "reason of state."

What is even more striking, though less well known, is that Machiavelli and Robespierre so often seem to speak the same language. When Robespierre justifies terror, "the despotism of liberty against tyranny," he sounds at times as if he were repeating almost word for word Machiavelli's famous statements on the necessity of violence for the founding of new political bodies and for the reforming of corrupt ones.

This resemblance is all the more startling since both Machiavelli and Robespierre in this respect go beyond what the Romans themselves had to say about foundation. To be sure, the connection between foundation and dictatorship could be learned from the Romans themselves, and Cicero, for instance, appeals explicitly to Scipio to become *dictator rei publicae constituendae*, to seize the dictatorship in order to restore the republic.<sup>60</sup> Like the Romans, Machiavelli and Robespierre felt founding was the central political action, the one great deed that established the public-political realm and made politics possible; but unlike the Romans, to whom this was an event of the past, they felt that for this supreme "end" all "means," and chiefly the means of violence, were justified. They understood the act of founding entirely in the image of making; the question to them was literally how to "make" a unified Italy or a French republic, and their justification of violence was guided by and received its inherent plausibility from the underlying argument: You cannot make a table without killing trees, you cannot make an omelet without breaking eggs, you cannot make a republic without killing people. In this respect, which was to become so fateful for the history of revolutions, Machiavelli and Robespierre were not Romans, and the authority to which they could have appealed would have been rather Plato, who also recommended tyranny as the government where "change is likely to be easiest and most rapid."<sup>61</sup>

It is precisely in this double respect, because of his rediscovery of the foundation experience and his reinterpretation of it in terms of the justification of (violent) means for a supreme end, that Machiavelli may be regarded as the ancestor of modern revolutions, all of which can be characterized by Marx's remark that the French Revolution appeared on the stage of history in Roman costume. Unless

it is recognized that the Roman pathos for foundation inspired them, it seems to me that neither the grandeur nor the tragedy of Western revolutions in the modern age can be properly understood. For if I am right in suspecting that the crisis of the present world is primarily political, and that the famous "decline of the West" consists primarily in the decline of the Roman trinity of religion, tradition, and authority, with the concomitant undermining of the specifically Roman foundations of the political realm, then the revolutions of the modern age appear like gigantic attempts to repair these foundations, to renew the broken thread of tradition, and to restore, through founding new political bodies, what for so many centuries had endowed the affairs of men with some measure of dignity and greatness.

Of these attempts, only one, the American Revolution, has been successful: the founding fathers as, characteristically enough, we still call them, founded a completely new body politic without violence and with the help of a constitution. And this body politic has at least endured to the present day, in spite of the fact that the specifically modern character of the modern world has nowhere else produced such extreme expressions in all nonpolitical spheres of life as it has in the United States.

This is not the place to discuss the reasons for the surprising stability of a political structure under the onslaught of the most vehement and shattering social instability. It seems certain that the relatively nonviolent character of the American Revolution, where violence was more or less restricted to regular warfare, is an important factor in this success. It may also be that the founding fathers, because they had escaped the European development of the nation-state, had remained closer to the original Roman spirit. More important, perhaps, was that the act of foundation, namely the colonization of the American continent, had preceded the Declaration of Independence, so that the framing of the Constitution, falling back on existing charters and agreements, confirmed and legalized an already existing body politic rather than made it anew.<sup>62</sup> Thus the actors in the American Revolution were spared the effort of "initiating a new order of things" altogether; that is, they were spared the one action of which Machiavelli once said that "there is nothing

more difficult to carry out, nor more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to handle." <sup>63</sup> And Machiavelli surely must have known, for he, like Robespierre and Lenin and all the great revolutionaries whose ancestor he was, wished nothing more passionately than to initiate a new order of things.

However that may be, revolutions, which we commonly regard as radical breaks with tradition, appear in our context as events in which the actions of men are still inspired by and derive their greatest strength from the origins of this tradition. They seem to be the only salvation which this Roman-Western tradition has provided for emergencies. The fact that not only the various revolutions of the twentieth century but all revolutions since the French have gone wrong, ending in either restoration or tyranny, seems to indicate that even these last means of salvation provided by tradition have become inadequate. Authority as we once knew it, which grew out of the Roman experience of foundation and was understood in the light of Greek political philosophy, has nowhere been re-established, either through revolutions or through the even less promising means of restoration, and least of all through the conservative moods and trends which occasionally sweep public opinion. For to live in a political realm with neither authority nor the concomitant awareness that the source of authority transcends power and those who are in power, means to be confronted anew, without the religious trust in a sacred beginning and without the protection of traditional and therefore self-evident standards of behavior, by the elementary problems of human living-together.