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The Human Condition

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

communicable of all. Not only is it perhaps the only experience which we are unable to transform into a shape fit for public appearance, it actually deprives us of our feeling for reality to such an extent that we can forget it more quickly and easily than anything else. There seems to be no bridge from the most radical subjectivity, in which I am no longer "recognizable," to the outer world of life.[43] Pain, in other words, truly a borderline experience between life as "being among men" (*inter homines esse*) and death, is so subjective and removed from the world of things and men that it cannot assume an appearance at all.[44]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Historically, we know of only one principle that was ever devised to keep a community of people together who had lost their interest in the common world and felt themselves no longer related and separated by it. To find a bond between people strong enough to replace the world was the main political task of early Christian philosophy, and it was Augustine who proposed to found not only the Christian "brotherhood" but all human relationships on charity. But this charity, though its worldlessness clearly corresponds to the general human experience of love, is at the same time clearly distinguished from it in being something which, like the world, is between men: "Even robbers have between them [*inter se*] what they call charity."[45] This surprising illustration of the Christian political principle is in fact very well chosen, because the bond of charity between people, while it is incapable of founding a public realm of its own, is quite adequate to the main Christian principle of worldlessness and is admirably fit to carry a group of essentially worldless people through the world, a group of saints or a group of criminals, provided only it is understood that the world itself is doomed and that every activity in it is undertaken with the proviso *quamdiu mundus durat* ("as long as the world lasts").[46] The unpolitical, non-public character of the Christian community was early defined in the demand that it should form a *corpus*, a "body," whose members were to be related to each other like brothers of the same family.[47] The structure of communal life was modeled

45. *Contra Faustum Manichaeum* v. 5.

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

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

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

Without this transcendence into a potential earthly immortality, no politics, strictly speaking, no common world and no public realm, is possible. For unlike the common good as Christianity understood it—the salvation of one's soul as a concern common to all—the common world is what we enter when we are born and what we leave behind when we die. It transcends our life-span into past and future alike; it was there before we came and will outlast our brief sojourn in it. It is what we have in common not only with those who live with us, but also with those who were here before and with those who will come after us. But such a common world can survive the coming and going of the generations only to the extent that it appears in public. It is the publicity of the public realm which can absorb and make shine through the centuries whatever men may want to save from the natural ruin of time. Through many ages before us—but now not any more—men entered the public realm because they wanted something of their own or something they had in common with others to be more permanent than their earthly lives. (Thus, the curse of slavery consisted not only in being deprived of freedom and of visibility, but also in the fear of these obscure people themselves "that from being obscure they should pass away leaving no trace that they have existed.")[50] There is perhaps no clearer testimony to the loss of the public realm in the modern age than the almost complete loss of authentic concern with immortality, a loss somewhat overshadowed by the simultaneous loss of the metaphysical concern with eternity. The latter, being the concern of the philosophers

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

end of common world.
Fragment of Heraclitus.

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

8

THE PRIVATE REALM: PROPERTY

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

Under modern circumstances, this deprivation of "objective"

ously threatens all overly wealthy communities.[78] Necessity and life are so intimately related and connected that life itself is threatened where necessity is altogether eliminated. For the elimination of necessity, far from resulting automatically in the establishment of freedom, only blurs the distinguishing line between freedom and necessity. (Modern discussions of freedom, where freedom is never understood as an objective state of human existence but either presents an unsolvable problem of subjectivity, of an entirely undetermined or determined will, or develops out of necessity, all point to the fact that the objective, tangible difference between being free and being forced by necessity is no longer perceived.)

The second outstanding non-privative characteristic of privacy is that the four walls of one's private property offer the only reliable hiding place from the common public world, not only from everything that goes on in it but also from its very publicity, from being seen and being heard. A life spent entirely in public, in the presence of others, becomes, as we would say, shallow. While it retains its visibility, it loses the quality of rising into sight from some darker ground which must remain hidden if it is not to lose its depth in a very real, non-subjective sense. The only efficient way to guarantee the darkness of what needs to be hidden against the light of publicity is private property, a privately owned place to hide in.[79]

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

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

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

then, we know of good works as one important variety of possible human action. The well-known antagonism between early Christianity and the *res publica*, so admirably summed up in Tertullian's formula: *nec ulla magis res aliena quam publica* ("no matter is more alien to us than what matters publicly"),[83] is usually and rightly understood as a consequence of early eschatological expectations that lost their immediate significance only after experience had taught that even the downfall of the Roman Empire did not mean the end of the world.[84] Yet the otherworldliness of Christianity has still another root, perhaps even more intimately related to the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, and at any rate so independent of the belief in the perishability of the world that one is tempted to see in it the true inner reason why Christian alienation from the world could so easily survive the obvious non-fulfilment of its eschatological hopes.

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

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

83. Tertullian *op. cit.* 38.

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

but also himself, in the dialogue between "me and myself" (*eme emautō*) in which Plato apparently saw the essence of thought.[86] To be in solitude means to be with one's self, and thinking, therefore, though it may be the most solitary of all activities, is never altogether without a partner and without company.

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

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

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

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

Goodness, therefore, as a consistent way of life, is not only impossible within the confines of the public realm, it is even destructive of it. Nobody perhaps has been more sharply aware of this ruinous quality of doing good than Machiavelli, who, in a famous passage, dared to teach men "how not to be good."[87] Needless to add, he did not say and did not mean that men must be taught how to be bad; the criminal act, though for other reasons, must also flee being seen and heard by others. Machiavelli's criterion for political action was glory, the same as in classical antiquity, and badness can no more shine in glory than goodness. Therefore all methods by which "one may indeed gain power, but not glory" are bad.[88] Badness that comes out of hiding is impudent and directly destroys the common world; goodness that comes out of hiding and assumes a public role is no longer good, but corrupt in its own terms and will carry its own corruption wherever it goes. Thus, for Machiavelli, the reason for the Church's becoming a corrupting influence in Italian politics was her participation in secular affairs as such and not the individual corruptness of bishops and prelates. To him, the alternative posed by the problem of religious rule over the secular realm was inescapably this: either the public realm corrupted the religious body and thereby became itself corrupt, or the religious body remained uncorrupt and destroyed the public realm altogether. A reformed Church therefore was even more dangerous in Machiavelli's eyes, and he looked with great respect but greater apprehension upon the religious revival of his time, the "new orders" which, by "saving religion from being destroyed by the licentious-

87. *Prince*, ch. 15.

88. *Ibid.*, ch. 8.

Labor

It is not surprising that the distinction between labor and work was ignored in classical antiquity. The differentiation between the private household and the public political realm, between the household inmate who was a slave and the household head who was a citizen, between activities which should be hidden in privacy and those which were worth being seen, heard, and remembered, overshadowed and predetermined all other distinctions until only one criterion was left: is the greater amount of time and effort spent in private or in public? is the occupation motivated by *cura privati negotii* or *cura rei publicae*, care for private or for public business?[13] With the rise of political theory, the philosophers overruled even these distinctions, which had at least distinguished between activities, by opposing contemplation to all kinds of activity alike. With them, even political activity was leveled to the rank of necessity, which henceforth became the common denominator of all articulations within the *vita activa*. Nor can we reasonably expect any help from Christian political thought, which accepted the philosophers' distinction, refined it, and, religion being for the many and philosophy only for the few, gave it general validity, binding for all men.

It is surprising at first glance, however, that the modern age—with its reversal of all traditions, the traditional rank of action and contemplation no less than the traditional hierarchy within the *vita activa* itself, with its glorification of labor as the source of all values and its elevation of the *animal laborans* to the position traditionally held by the *animal rationale*—should not have brought forth a single theory in which *animal laborans* and *homo faber*, "the labour of our body and the work of our hands," are clearly distinguished. Instead, we find first the distinction between productive and unproductive labor, then somewhat later the differentiation between skilled and unskilled work, and, finally, outranking both because seemingly of more elementary significance, the division of all activities into manual and intellectual labor. Of the three, however, only the distinction between productive and unproductive labor goes to the heart of the matter, and it is no accident that the two greatest theorists in the field, Adam Smith and Karl Marx, based the whole structure of their argument upon it. The very

13. Cicero *De re publica* v. 2.

are finally the "products" of action and speech, which together constitute the fabric of human relationships and affairs. Left to themselves, they lack not only the tangibility of other things, but are even less durable and more futile than what we produce for consumption. Their reality depends entirely upon human plurality, upon the constant presence of others who can see and hear and therefore testify to their existence. Acting and speaking are still outward manifestations of human life, which knows only one activity that, though related to the exterior world in many ways, is not necessarily manifest in it and needs neither to be seen nor heard nor used nor consumed in order to be real: the activity of thought.

Viewed, however, in their worldliness, action, speech, and thought have much more in common than any one of them has with work or labor. They themselves do not "produce," bring forth anything, they are as futile as life itself. In order to become worldly things, that is, deeds and facts and events and patterns of thoughts or ideas, they must first be seen, heard, and remembered and then transformed, reified as it were, into things—into sayings of poetry, the written page or the printed book, into paintings or sculpture, into all sorts of records, documents, and monuments. The whole factual world of human affairs depends for its reality and its continued existence, first, upon the presence of others who have seen and heard and will remember, and, second, on the transformation of the intangible into the tangibility of things. Without remembrance and without the reification which remembrance needs for its own fulfilment and which makes it, indeed, as the Greeks held, the mother of all arts, the living activities of action, speech, and thought would lose their reality at the end of each process and disappear as though they never had been. The materialization they have to undergo in order to remain in the world at all is paid for in that always the "dead letter" replaces something which grew out of and for a fleeting moment indeed existed as the "living spirit." They must pay this price because they themselves are of an entirely unworldly nature and therefore need the help of an activity of an altogether different nature; they depend for their reality and materialization upon the same workmanship that builds the other things in the human artifice.

The reality and reliability of the human world rest primarily on

the most obvious solution of these contradictions, or rather the most obvious reason why these great authors should have remained unaware of them is their equation of work with labor, so that labor is endowed by them with certain faculties which only work possesses. This equation always leads into patent absurdities, though they usually are not so neatly manifest as in the following sentence of Veblen: "The lasting evidence of productive labor is its material product—commonly some article of consumption,"[40] where the "lasting evidence" with which he begins, because he needs it for the alleged productivity of labor, is immediately destroyed by the "consumption" of the product with which he ends, forced, as it were, by the factual evidence of the phenomenon itself.

Thus Locke, in order to save labor from its manifest disgrace of producing only "things of short duration," had to introduce money —a "lasting thing which men may keep without spoiling"—a kind of *deus ex machina* without which the laboring body, in its obedience to the life process, could never have become the origin of anything so permanent and lasting as property, because there are no "durable things" to be kept to survive the activity of the laboring process. And even Marx, who actually defined man as an *animal laborans*, had to admit that productivity of labor, properly speaking, begins only with reification (*Vergegenständlichung*), with "the erection of an objective world of things" (*Erzeugung einer gegenständlichen Welt*).[41] But the effort of labor never frees the labor-

40. The curious formulation occurs in Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1917), p. 44.

41. The term *vergegenständlichen* occurs not very frequently in Marx, but always in a crucial context. Cf. *Jugendschriften*, p. 88: "Das praktische Erzeugen einer gegenständlichen Welt, die Bearbeitung der unorganischen Natur ist die Bewährung des Menschen als eines bewussten Gattungswesens. . . . [Das Tier] produziert unter der Herrschaft des unmittelbaren Bedürfnisses, während der Mensch selbst frei vom physischen Bedürfnis produziert und erst wahrhaft produziert in der Freiheit von demselben." Here, as in the passage from *Capital* quoted in note 36, Marx obviously introduces an altogether different concept of labor, that is, speaks about work and fabrication. The same reification is mentioned in *Das Kapital* (Vol. I, Part 3, ch. 5), though somewhat equivocally: "[Die Arbeit] ist vergegenständlicht und der Gegenstand ist verarbeitet." The play on words with the term *Gegenstand* obscures what actually happens in the process: through reification, a new thing has been produced, but the "object" that this process transformed into a thing is, from the viewpoint of the process,

Labor

The reward of toil and trouble lies in nature's fertility, in the quiet confidence that he who in "toil and trouble" has done his part, remains a part of nature in the future of his children and his children's children. The Old Testament, which, unlike classical antiquity, held life to be sacred and therefore neither death nor labor to be an evil (and least of all an argument against life),[53] shows in the stories of the patriarchs how unconcerned about death their lives were, how they needed neither an individual, earthly immortality nor an assurance of the eternity of their souls, how death came to them in the familiar shape of night and quiet and eternal rest "in a good old age and full of years."

The blessing of life as a whole, inherent in labor, can never be found in work and should not be mistaken for the inevitably brief spell of relief and joy which follows accomplishment and attends achievement. The blessing of labor is that effort and gratification follow each other as closely as producing and consuming the means

53. Nowhere in the Old Testament is death "the wage of sin." Nor did the curse by which man was expelled from paradise punish him with labor and birth; it only made labor harsh and birth full of sorrow. According to Genesis, man (*adam*) had been created to take care and watch over the soil (*adamah*), as even his name, the masculine form of "soil," indicates (see Gen. 2:5—7:15). "And *Adam* was not to till *adamah* . . . and He, God, created Adam of the dust of *adamah*. . . . He, God, took Adam and put him into the garden of Eden to till and to watch it" (I follow the translation of Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, *Die Schrift* [Berlin, n.d.]). The word for "tilling" which later became the word for laboring in Hebrew, *leawod*, has the connotation of "to serve." The curse (3:17–19) does not mention this word, but the meaning is clear: the service for which man was created now became servitude. The current popular misunderstanding of the curse is due to an unconscious interpretation of the Old Testament in the light of Greek thinking. The misunderstanding is usually avoided by Catholic writers. See, for instance, Jacques Leclercq, *Leçons de droit naturel*, Vol. IV, Part 2, "Travail, Propriété," (1946), p. 31: "La peine du travail est le résultat du péché original. . . . L'homme non déchu eût travaillé dans la joie, mais il eût travaillé"; or J. Chr. Nattermann, *Die moderne Arbeit, soziologisch und theologisch betrachtet* (1953), p. 9. It is interesting in this context to compare the curse of the Old Testament with the seemingly similar explanation of the harshness of labor in Hesiod. Hesiod reports that the gods, in order to punish man, hid life from him (see n. 8) so that he had to search for it, while before, he apparently did not have to do anything but pluck the fruits of the earth from fields and trees. Here the curse consists not only in the harshness of labor but in labor itself.

of subsistence, so that happiness is a concomitant of the process itself, just as pleasure is a concomitant of the functioning of a healthy body. The "happiness of the greatest number," into which we have generalized and vulgarized the felicity with which earthly life has always been blessed, conceptualized into an "ideal" the fundamental reality of a laboring humanity. The right to the pursuit of this happiness is indeed as undeniable as the right to life; it is even identical with it. But it has nothing in common with good fortune, which is rare and never lasts and cannot be pursued, because fortune depends on luck and what chance gives and takes, although most people in their "pursuit of happiness" run after good fortune and make themselves unhappy even when it befalls them, because they want to keep and enjoy luck as though it were an inexhaustible abundance of "good things." There is no lasting happiness outside the prescribed cycle of painful exhaustion and pleasurable regeneration, and whatever throws this cycle out of balance —poverty and misery where exhaustion is followed by wretchedness instead of regeneration, or great riches and an entirely effortless life where boredom takes the place of exhaustion and where the mills of necessity, of consumption and digestion, grind an impotent human body mercilessly and barrenly to death—ruins the elemental happiness that comes from being alive.

The force of life is fertility. The living organism is not exhausted when it has provided for its own reproduction, and its "surplus" lies in its potential multiplication. Marx's consistent naturalism discovered "labor power" as the specifically human mode of the life force which is as capable of creating a "surplus" as nature herself. Since he was almost exclusively interested in this process itself, the process of the "productive forces of society," in whose life, as in the life of every animal species, production and consumption always strike a balance, the question of a separate existence of worldly things, whose durability will survive and withstand the devouring processes of life, does not occur to him at all. From the viewpoint of the life of the species, all activities indeed find their common denominator in laboring, and the only distinguishing criterion left is the abundance or scarcity of the goods to be fed into the life process. When every thing has become an object for consumption, the fact that labor's surplus does not

at best was considered a "necessary evil" and a "reflection on human nature,"[54] at worst a parasite on the otherwise healthy life of society.[55] What the modern age so heatedly defended was never property as such but the unhampered pursuit of more property or of appropriation; as against all organs that stood for the "dead" permanence of a common world, it fought its battles in the name of life, the life of society.

There is no doubt that, as the natural process of life is located in the body, there is no more immediately life-bound activity than laboring. Locke could neither remain satisfied with the traditional explanation of labor, according to which it is the natural and inevitable consequence of poverty and never a means of its abolition, nor with the traditional explanation of the origin of property through acquisition, conquest, or an original division of the common world.[56] What he actually was concerned with was appropria-

54. The writers of the modern age are all agreed that the "good" and "productive" side of human nature is reflected in society, while its wickedness makes government necessary. As Thomas Paine stated it: "Society is produced by our wants, and government by our wickedness; the former promotes our happiness positively by uniting our affections, the latter negatively by restraining our vices. . . . Society in every state is a blessing, but government, even in the best state, a necessary evil" (*Common Sense*, 1776). Or Madison: "But what is government itself but the greatest of all reflections on human nature? If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external or internal controls would be necessary" (*The Federalist* [Modern Library ed.], p. 337).

55. This was the opinion of Adam Smith, for instance, who was very indignant about "the public extravagance of government": "The whole, or almost the whole public revenue, is in most countries employed in maintaining unproductive hands" (*op. cit.*, I, 306).

56. No doubt, "before 1690 no one understood that a man had a natural right to property created by his labour; after 1690 the idea came to be an axiom of social science" (Richard Schlatter, *Private Property: The History of an Idea* [1951], p. 156). The concept of labor and property was even mutually exclusive, whereas labor and poverty (*ponos* and *penia*, *Arbeit* and *Armut*) belonged together in the sense that the activity corresponding to the status of poverty was laboring. Plato, therefore, who held that laboring slaves were "bad" because they were not masters of the animal part within them, said almost the same about the status of poverty. The poor man is "not master of himself" (*penēs ōn kai heautou mē kratōn* [*Seventh Letter* 351A]). None of the classical writers ever thought of labor as a possible source of wealth. According to Cicero—and he probably only sums

tion and what he had to find was a world-appropriating activity whose privacy at the same time must be beyond doubt and dispute.

Nothing, to be sure, is more private than the bodily functions of the life process, its fertility not excluded, and it is quite noteworthy that the few instances where even a "socialized mankind" respects and imposes strict privacy concern precisely such "activities" as are imposed by the life process itself. Of these, labor, because it is an activity and not merely a function, is the least private, so to speak, the only one we feel need not be hidden; yet it is still close enough to the life process to make plausible the argument for the privacy of appropriation as distinguished from the very different argument for the privacy of property.[57] Locke founded private property on the most privately owned thing there is, "the property [of man] in his own person," that is, in his own body.[58] "The labour of our body and the work of our hands" become one and the same, because both are the "means" to "appropriate" what "God . . . hath given . . . to men in common." And these means, body and hands and mouth, are the natural appropriators because they do not "belong to mankind in common" but are given to each man for his private use.[59]

Just as Marx had to introduce a natural force, the "labor power" of the body, to account for labor's productivity and a progressing process of growing wealth, Locke, albeit less explicitly, had to trace property to a natural origin of appropriation in order to force open those stable, worldly boundaries that "enclose" each person's privately owned share of the world "from the common."[60] What Marx still had in common with Locke was that he wished to see the process of growing wealth as a natural process, automatically following its own laws and beyond wilful decisions and purposes. If any human activity was to be involved in the process at all, it could only be a bodily "activity" whose natural functioning could not be checked even if one wanted to do so. To check these "activi-

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up contemporary opinion—property comes about either through ancient conquest or victory or legal division (*aut vetere occupatione aut victoria aut lege* [*De officiis* i. 21]).

57. See § 8 above.

58. *Op. cit.*, sec. 26.

59. *Ibid.*, sec. 25.

60. *Ibid.*, sec. 31.

While tools and instruments, designed to produce more and something altogether different from their mere use, are of secondary importance for laboring, the same is not true for the other great principle in the human labor process, the division of labor. Division of labor indeed grows directly out of the laboring process and should not be mistaken for the apparently similar principle of specialization which prevails in working processes and with which it is usually equated. Specialization of work and division of labor have in common only the general principle of organization, which itself has nothing to do with either work or labor but owes its origin to the strictly political sphere of life, to the fact of man's capacity to act and to act together and in concert. Only within the framework of political organization, where men not merely live, but act, together, can specialization of work and division of labor take place.

Yet, while specialization of work is essentially guided by the finished product itself, whose nature it is to require different skills which then are pooled and organized together, division of labor, on the contrary, presupposes the qualitative equivalence of all single activities for which no special skill is required, and these activities have no end in themselves, but actually represent only certain amounts of labor power which are added together in a purely quantitative way. Division of labor is based on the fact that two men can put their labor power together and "behave toward each other as though they were one."[74] This one-ness is the exact opposite of co-operation, it indicates the unity of the species with regard to which every single member is the same and exchangeable. (The formation of a labor collective where the laborers are socially organized in accordance with this principle of common and divisible labor power is the very opposite of the various workmen's organizations, from the old guilds and corporations to certain types of modern trade unions, whose members are bound together by the skills and specializations that distinguish them from others.) Since

74. See Viktor von Weizsäcker, "Zum Begriff der Arbeit," in *Festschrift für Alfred Weber* (1948), p. 739. The essay is noteworthy for certain scattered observations, but on the whole unfortunately useless, since Weizsäcker further obscures the concept of labor by the rather gratuitous assumption that the sick human being has to "perform labor" in order to get well.

none of the activities into which the process is divided has an end in itself, their "natural" end is exactly the same as in the case of "undivided" labor: either the simple reproduction of the means of subsistence, that is, the capacity for consumption of the laborers, or the exhaustion of human labor power. Neither of these two limitations, however, is final; exhaustion is part of the individual's, not of the collective's, life process, and the subject of the laboring process under the conditions of division of labor is a collective labor force, not individual labor power. The inexhaustibility of this labor force corresponds exactly to the deathlessness of the species, whose life process as a whole is also not interrupted by the individual births and deaths of its members.

More serious, it seems, is the limitation imposed by the capacity to consume, which remains bound to the individual even when a collective labor force has replaced individual labor power. The progress of accumulation of wealth may be limitless in a "socialized mankind" which has rid itself of the limitations of individual property and overcome the limitation of individual appropriation by dissolving all stable wealth, the possession of "heaped up" and "stored away" things, into money to spend and consume. We already live in a society where wealth is reckoned in terms of earning and spending power, which are only modifications of the twofold metabolism of the human body. The problem therefore is how to attune individual consumption to an unlimited accumulation of wealth.

Since mankind as a whole is still very far from having reached the limit of abundance, the mode in which society may overcome this natural limitation of its own fertility can be perceived only tentatively and on a national scale. There, the solution seems to be simple enough. It consists in treating all use objects as though they were consumer goods, so that a chair or a table is now consumed as rapidly as a dress and a dress used up almost as quickly as food. This mode of intercourse with the things of the world, moreover, is perfectly adequate to the way they are produced. The industrial revolution has replaced all workmanship with labor, and the result has been that the things of the modern world have become labor products whose natural fate is to be consumed, instead of work products which are there to be used. Just as tools and instruments,

though originating from work, were always employed in labor processes as well, so the division of labor, entirely appropriate and attuned to the laboring process, has become one of the chief characteristics of modern work processes, that is, of the fabrication and production of use objects. Division of labor rather than increased mechanization has replaced the rigorous specialization formerly required for all workmanship. Workmanship is required only for the design and fabrication of models before they go into mass production, which also depends on tools and machinery. But mass production would, in addition, be altogether impossible without the replacement of workmen and specialization with laborers and the division of labor.

Tools and instruments ease pain and effort and thereby change the modes in which the urgent necessity inherent in labor once was manifest to all. They do not change the necessity itself; they only serve to hide it from our senses. Something similar is true of labor's products, which do not become more durable through abundance. The case is altogether different in the corresponding modern transformation of the work process by the introduction of the principle of division of labor. Here the very nature of work is changed and the production process, although it by no means produces objects for consumption, assumes the character of labor. Although machines have forced us into an infinitely quicker rhythm of repetition than the cycle of natural processes prescribed—and this specifically modern acceleration is only too apt to make us disregard the repetitive character of all laboring—the repetition and the endlessness of the process itself put the unmistakable mark of laboring upon it. This is even more evident in the use objects produced by these techniques of laboring. Their very abundance transforms them into consumer goods. The endlessness of the laboring process is guaranteed by the ever-recurrent needs of consumption; the endlessness of production can be assured only if its products lose their use character and become more and more objects of consumption, or if, to put it in another way, the rate of use is so tremendously accelerated that the objective difference between use and consumption, between the relative durability of use objects and the swift coming and going of consumer goods, dwindles to insignificance.

In our need for more and more rapid replacement of the worldly

things around us, we can no longer afford to use them, to respect and preserve their inherent durability; we must consume, devour, as it were, our houses and furniture and cars as though they were the "good things" of nature which spoil uselessly if they are not drawn swiftly into the never-ending cycle of man's metabolism with nature. It is as though we had forced open the distinguishing boundaries which protected the world, the human artifice, from nature, the biological process which goes on in its very midst as well as the natural cyclical processes which surround it, delivering and abandoning to them the always threatened stability of a human world.

The ideals of *homo faber*, the fabricator of the world, which are permanence, stability, and durability, have been sacrificed to abundance, the ideal of the *animal laborans*. We live in a laborers' society because only laboring, with its inherent fertility, is likely to bring about abundance; and we have changed work into laboring, broken it up into its minute particles until it has lent itself to division where the common denominator of the simplest performance is reached in order to eliminate from the path of human labor power —which is part of nature and perhaps even the most powerful of all natural forces—the obstacle of the "unnatural" and purely worldly stability of the human artifice.

17

A CONSUMERS' SOCIETY

It is frequently said that we live in a consumers' society, and since, as we saw, labor and consumption are but two stages of the same process, imposed upon man by the necessity of life, this is only another way of saying that we live in a society of laborers. This society did not come about through the emancipation of the laboring classes but by the emancipation of the laboring activity itself, which preceded by centuries the political emancipation of laborers. The point is not that for the first time in history laborers were admitted and given equal rights in the public realm, but that we have almost succeeded in leveling all human activities to the common denominator of securing the necessities of life and providing for their abundance. Whatever we do, we are supposed to do for the

sake of "making a living"; such is the verdict of society, and the number of people, especially in the professions who might challenge it, has decreased rapidly. The only exception society is willing to grant is the artist, who, strictly speaking, is the only "worker" left in a laboring society. The same trend to level down all serious activities to the status of making a living is manifest in present-day labor theories, which almost unanimously define labor as the opposite of play. As a result, all serious activities, irrespective of their fruits, are called labor, and every activity which is not necessary either for the life of the individual or for the life process of society is subsumed under playfulness.[75] In these theories,

75. Although this labor-play category appears at first glance to be so general as to be meaningless, it is characteristic in another respect: the real opposite underlying it is the opposition of necessity and freedom, and it is indeed remarkable to see how plausible it is for modern thinking to consider playfulness to be the source of freedom. Aside from this generalization, the modern idealizations of labor may be said to fall roughly into the following categories: (1) Labor is a means to attain a higher end. This is generally the Catholic position, which has the great merit of not being able to escape from reality altogether, so that the intimate connections between labor and life and between labor and pain are usually at least mentioned. One outstanding representative is Jacques Leclercq of Louvain, especially his discussion of labor and property in *Leçons de droit naturel* (1946), Vol. IV, Part 2. (2) Labor is an act of shaping in which "a given structure is transformed into another, higher structure." This is the central thesis of the famous work by Otto Lipmann, *Grundriss der Arbeitswissenschaft* (1926). (3) Labor in a laboring society is pure pleasure or "can be made fully as satisfying as leisure-time activities" (see Glen W. Cleeton, *Making Work Human* [1949]). This position is taken today by Corrado Gini in his *Ecconomica Lavorista* (1954), who considers the United States to be a "laboring society" (*società lavorista*) where "labor is a pleasure and where all men want to labor." (For a summary of his position in German see *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Staatswissenschaft*, CIX [1953] and CX [1954].) This theory, incidentally, is less new than it seems. It was first formulated by F. Nitti ("Le travail humain et ses lois," *Revue internationale de sociologie* [1895]), who even then maintained that the "idea that labor is painful is a psychological rather than a physiological fact," so that pain will disappear in a society where everybody works. (4) Labor, finally, is man's confirmation of himself against nature, which is brought under his domination through labor. This is the assumption which underlies—explicitly or implicitly—the new, especially French trend of a humanism of labor. Its best-known representative is Georges Friedmann.

After all these theories and academic discussions, it is rather refreshing to learn that a large majority of workers, if asked "why does man work?" answer

which by echoing the current estimate of a laboring society on the theoretical level sharpen it and drive it into its inherent extreme, not even the "work" of the artist is left; it is dissolved into play and has lost its worldly meaning. The playfulness of the artist is felt to fulfil the same function in the laboring life process of society as the playing of tennis or the pursuit of a hobby fulfils in the life of the individual. The emancipation of labor has not resulted in an equality of this activity with the other activities of the *vita activa*, but in its almost undisputed predominance. From the standpoint of "making a living," every activity unconnected with labor becomes a "hobby."[76]

In order to dispel the plausibility of this self-interpretation of modern man, it may be well to remember that all civilizations prior to our own would rather have agreed with Plato that the "art of earning money" (*technē mistharnētikē*) is entirely unconnected with the actual content even of such arts as medicine, navigation, or architecture, which were attended by monetary rewards. It was in order to explain this monetary reward, which obviously is of an altogether different nature from health, the object of medicine, or the erection of buildings, the object of architecture, that Plato introduced one more art to accompany them all. This additional art is by no means understood as the element of labor in the otherwise free arts, but, on the contrary, the one art through which the "artist," the professional worker, as we would say, keeps himself free from the necessity to labor.[77] This art is in the same category

simply "in order to be able to live" or "to make money" (see Helmut Schelsky, *Arbeiterjugend Gestern und Heute* [1955], whose publications are remarkably free of prejudices and idealizations).

76. The role of the hobby in modern labor society is quite striking and may be the root of experience in the labor-play theories. What is especially noteworthy in this context is that Marx, who had no inkling of this development, expected that in his utopian, laborless society all activities would be performed in a manner which very closely resembles the manner of hobby activities.

77. *Republic* 346. Therefore, "the art of acquisition wards off poverty as medicine wards off disease" (*Gorgias* 478). Since payment for their services was voluntary (Loening, *op. cit.*), the liberal professions must indeed have attained a remarkable perfection in the "art of making money."

with the art required of the master of a household who must know how to exert authority and use violence in his rule over slaves. Its aim is to remain free from having "to make a living," and the aims of the other arts are even farther removed from this elementary necessity.

The emancipation of labor and the concomitant emancipation of the laboring classes from oppression and exploitation certainly meant progress in the direction of non-violence. It is much less certain that it was also progress in the direction of freedom. No man-exerted violence, except the violence used in torture, can match the natural force with which necessity itself compels. It is for this reason that the Greeks derived their word for torture from *necessity*, calling it *anagkai*, and not from *bia*, used for violence as exerted by man over man, just as this is the reason for the historical fact that throughout occidental antiquity torture, the "necessity no man can withstand," could be applied only to slaves, who were subject to necessity anyhow.[78] It was the arts of violence, the arts of war, piracy, and ultimately absolute rule, which brought the defeated into the services of the victors and thereby held necessity in abeyance for the longer period of recorded history.[79] The modern age, much more markedly than Christianity, has brought about —together with its glorification of labor—a tremendous degradation in the estimation of these arts and a less great but not less important actual decrease in the use of the instruments of violence in

78. The current modern explanation of this custom which was characteristic of the whole of Greek and Latin antiquity—that its origin is to be found in "the belief that the slave is unable to tell the truth except on the rack" (Barrow, *op. cit.*, p. 31)—is quite erroneous. The belief, on the contrary, is that nobody can invent a lie under torture: "On croyait recueillir la voix même de la nature dans les cris de la douleur. Plus la douleur pénétrait avant, plus intime et plus vrai sembla être ce témoignage de la chair et du sang" (Wallon, *op. cit.*, I, 325). Ancient psychology was much more aware than we are of the element of freedom, of free invention, in telling lies. The "necessities" of torture were supposed to destroy this freedom and therefore could not be applied to free citizens.

79. The older of the Greek words for slaves, *douloi* and *dmōes*, still signify the defeated enemy. About wars and the sale of prisoners of war as the chief source of slavery in antiquity, see W. L. Westermann, "Sklaverei," in Pauly-Wissowa.

human affairs generally.[80] The elevation of labor and the necessity inherent in the laboring metabolism with nature appear to be intimately connected with the downgrading of all activities which either spring directly from violence, as the use of force in human relations, or harbor an element of violence within themselves, which, as we shall see, is the case for all workmanship. It is as though the growing elimination of violence throughout the modern age almost automatically opened the doors for the re-entry of necessity on its most elementary level. What already happened once in our history, in the centuries of the declining Roman Empire, may be happening again. Even then, labor became an occupation of the free classes, "only to bring to them the obligations of the servile classes."[81]

The danger that the modern age's emancipation of labor will not only fail to usher in an age of freedom for all but will result, on the contrary, in forcing all mankind for the first time under the yoke of necessity, was already clearly perceived by Marx when he insisted that the aim of a revolution could not possibly be the already-accomplished emancipation of the laboring classes, but must consist in the emancipation of man from labor. At first glance, this aim seems utopian, and the only strictly utopian element in Marx's

80. Today, because of the new developments of instruments of war and destruction, we are likely to overlook this rather important trend in the modern age. As a matter of fact, the nineteenth century was one of the most peaceful centuries in history.

81. Wallon, *op. cit.*, III, 265. Wallon shows brilliantly how the late Stoic generalization that all men are slaves rested on the development of the Roman Empire, where the old freedom was gradually abolished by the imperial government, so that eventually nobody was free and everybody had his master. The turning point is when first Caligula and then Trajan consented to being called *dominus*, a word formerly used only for the master of the household. The so-called slave morality of late antiquity and its assumption that no real difference existed between the life of a slave and that of a free man had a very realistic background. Now the slave could indeed tell his master: Nobody is free, everybody has a master. In the words of Wallon: "Les condamnés aux mines ont pour confrères, à un moindre degré de peine, les condamnés aux moulins, aux boulangeries, aux relais publics, à tout autre travail faisant l'objet d'une corporation particulière" (p. 216). "C'est le droit de l'esclavage qui gouverne maintenant le citoyen; et nous avons retrouvé toute la législation propre aux esclaves dans les règlements qui concernent sa personne, sa famille ou ses biens" (pp. 219–20).

teachings.[82] Emancipation from labor, in Marx's own terms, is emancipation from necessity, and this would ultimately mean emancipation from consumption as well, that is, from the metabolism with nature which is the very condition of human life.[83] Yet the developments of the last decade, and especially the possibilities opened up through the further development of automation, give us reason to wonder whether the utopia of yesterday will not turn into the reality of tomorrow, so that eventually only the effort of consumption will be left of "the toil and trouble" inherent in the biological cycle to whose motor human life is bound.

However, not even this utopia could change the essential worldly futility of the life process. The two stages through which the ever-recurrent cycle of biological life must pass, the stages of labor and consumption, may change their proportion even to the point where nearly all human "labor power" is spent in consuming, with the concomitant serious social problem of leisure, that is, essentially the problem of how to provide enough opportunity for daily exhaustion to keep the capacity for consumption intact.[84]

82. The classless and stateless society of Marx is not utopian. Quite apart from the fact that modern developments have an unmistakable tendency to do away with class distinctions in society and to replace government by that "administration of things" which according to Engels was to be the hallmark of socialist society, these ideals in Marx himself were obviously conceived in accordance with Athenian democracy, except that in communist society the privileges of the free citizens were to be extended to all.

83. It is perhaps no exaggeration to say that Simone Weil's *La condition ouvrière* (1951) is the only book in the huge literature on the labor question which deals with the problem without prejudice and sentimentality. She chose as the motto for her diary, relating from day to day her experiences in a factory, the line from Homer: *poll' aekadzomenē, kraterē d'epikeiset' anagkē* ("much against your own will, since necessity lies more mightily upon you"), and concludes that the hope for an eventual liberation from labor and necessity is the only utopian element of Marxism and at the same time the actual motor of all Marx-inspired revolutionary labor movements. It is the "opium of the people" which Marx had believed religion to be.

84. This leisure, needless to say, is not at all the same, as current opinion has it, as the *skholē* of antiquity, which was not a phenomenon of consumption, "conspicuous" or not, and did not come about through the emergence of "spare time" saved from laboring, but was on the contrary a conscious "abstention from" all activities connected with mere being alive, the consuming activity no less than the laboring. The touchstone of this *skholē*, as distinguished from the

Painless and effortless consumption would not change but would only increase the devouring character of biological life until a mankind altogether "liberated" from the shackles of pain and effort would be free to "consume" the whole world and to reproduce daily all things it wished to consume. How many things would appear and disappear daily and hourly in the life process of such a society would at best be immaterial for the world, if the world and its thing-character could withstand the reckless dynamism of a wholly motorized life process at all. The danger of future automation is less the much deplored mechanization and artificialization of natural life than that, its artificiality notwithstanding, all human productivity would be sucked into an enormously intensified life process and would follow automatically, without pain or effort, its ever-recurrent natural cycle. The rhythm of machines would magnify and intensify the natural rhythm of life enormously, but it would not change, only make more deadly, life's chief character with respect to the world, which is to wear down durability.

It is a long way from the gradual decrease of working hours, which has progressed steadily for nearly a century, to this utopia. The progress, moreover, has been rather overrated, because it was measured against the quite exceptionally inhuman conditions of exploitation prevailing during the early stages of capitalism. If we think in somewhat longer periods, the total yearly amount of individual free time enjoyed at present appears less an achievement of modernity than a belated approximation to normality.[85] In this as

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modern ideal of leisure, is the well-known and frequently described frugality of Greek life in the classical period. Thus, it is characteristic that the maritime trade, which more than anything else was responsible for wealth in Athens, was felt to be suspect, so that Plato, following Hesiod, recommended the foundation of new city-states far away from the sea.

85. During the Middle Ages, it is estimated that one hardly worked more than half of the days of the year. Official holidays numbered 141 days (see Levasseur, *op. cit.*, p. 329; see also Liesse, *Le Travail* [1899], p. 253, for the number of working days in France before the Revolution). The monstrous extension of the working day is characteristic of the beginning of the industrial revolution, when the laborers had to compete with newly introduced machines. Before that, the length of the working day amounted to eleven or twelve hours in fifteenth-century England and to ten hours in the seventeenth (see H. Herkner, "Arbeitszeit," in *Handwörterbuch für die Staatswissenschaft* [1923], I, 889 ff.). In

in other respects, the specter of a true consumers' society is more alarming as an ideal of present-day society than as an already existing reality. The ideal is not new; it was clearly indicated in the unquestioned assumption of classical political economy that the ultimate goal of the *vita activa* is growing wealth, abundance, and the "happiness of the greatest number." And what else, finally, is this ideal of modern society but the age-old dream of the poor and destitute, which can have a charm of its own so long as it is a dream, but turns into a fool's paradise as soon as it is realized.

The hope that inspired Marx and the best men of the various workers' movements—that free time eventually will emancipate men from necessity and make the *animal laborans* productive—rests on the illusion of a mechanistic philosophy which assumes that labor power, like any other energy, can never be lost, so that if it is not spent and exhausted in the drudgery of life it will automatically nourish other, "higher," activities. The guiding model of this hope in Marx was doubtless the Athens of Pericles which, in the future, with the help of the vastly increased productivity of human labor, would need no slaves to sustain itself but would become a reality for all. A hundred years after Marx we know the fallacy of this reasoning; the spare time of the *animal laborans* is never spent in anything but consumption, and the more time left to him, the greedier and more craving his appetites. That these appetites become more sophisticated, so that consumption is no longer restricted to the necessities but, on the contrary, mainly concentrates on the superfluities of life, does not change the character of this society, but harbors the grave danger that eventually no object of the world will be safe from consumption and annihilation through consumption.

The rather uncomfortable truth of the matter is that the triumph

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brief, "les travailleurs ont connu, pendant la première moitié du 19e siècle, des conditions d'existences pires que celles subies auparavant par les plus infortunés" (Édouard Dolléans, *Histoire du travail en France* [1953]). The extent of progress achieved in our time is generally overrated, since we measure it against a very "dark age" indeed. It may, for instance, be that the life expectancy of the most highly civilized countries today corresponds only to the life expectancy in certain centuries of antiquity. We do not know, of course, but a reflection upon the age of death in the biographies of famous people invites this suspicion.

CHAPTER IV

Work

18

THE DURABILITY OF THE WORLD

The work of our hands, as distinguished from the labor of our bodies—*homo faber* who makes and literally "works upon"[1] as distinguished from the *animal laborans* which labors and "mixes with"—fabricates the sheer unending variety of things whose sum total constitutes the human artifice. They are mostly, but not exclusively, objects for use and they possess the durability Locke needed for the establishment of property, the "value" Adam Smith needed for the exchange market, and they bear testimony to productivity, which Marx believed to be the test of human nature. Their proper use does not cause them to disappear and they give the human artifice the stability and solidity without which it could not be relied upon to house the unstable and mortal creature which is man.

The durability of the human artifice is not absolute; the use we make of it, even though we do not consume it, uses it up. The life process which permeates our whole being invades it, too, and if we do not use the things of the world, they also will eventually decay, return into the over-all natural process from which they were

1. The Latin word for *faber*, probably related to *facere* ("to make something" in the sense of production), originally designated the fabricator and artist who works upon hard material, such as stone or wood; it also was used as translation for the Greek *tektōn*, which has the same connotation. The word *fabri*, often followed by *tignarii*, especially designates construction workers and carpenters. I have been unable to ascertain when and where the expression *homo faber*, certainly of modern, postmedieval origin, first appeared. Jean Leclercq ("Vers la société basée sur le travail," *Revue du travail*, Vol. LI, No. 3 [March, 1950]) suggests that only Bergson "threw the concept of *homo faber* into the circulation of ideas."

does not use tools and instruments in order to build a world but in order to ease the labors of its own life process, it has lived literally in a world of machines ever since the industrial revolution and the emancipation of labor replaced almost all hand tools with machines which in one way or another supplanted human labor power with the superior power of natural forces.

The decisive difference between tools and machines is perhaps best illustrated by the apparently endless discussion of whether man should be "adjusted" to the machine or the machines should be adjusted to the "nature" of man. We mentioned in the first chapter the chief reason why such a discussion must be sterile: if the human condition consists in man's being a conditioned being for whom everything, given or man-made, immediately becomes a condition of his further existence, then man "adjusted" himself to an environment of machines the moment he designed them. They certainly have become as inalienable a condition of our existence as tools and implements were in all previous ages. The interest of the discussion, from our point of view, therefore, lies rather in the fact that this question of adjustment could arise at all. There never was any doubt about man's being adjusted or needing special adjustment to the tools he used; one might as well have adjusted him to his hands. The case of the machines is entirely different. Unlike the tools of workmanship, which at every given moment in the work process remain the servants of the hand, the machines demand that the laborer serve them, that he adjust the natural rhythm of his body to their mechanical movement. This, certainly, does not imply that men as such adjust to or become the servants of their machines; but it does mean that, as long as the work at the machines lasts, the mechanical process has replaced the rhythm of the human body. Even the most refined tool remains a servant, unable to guide or to replace the hand. Even the most primitive machine guides the body's labor and eventually replaces it altogether.

As is so frequently the case with historical developments, it seems as though the actual implications of technology, that is, of the replacement of tools and implements with machinery, have come to light only in its last stage, with the advent of automation. For our purposes it may be useful to recall, however briefly, the

main stages of modern technology's development since the beginning of the modern age. The first stage, the invention of the steam engine, which led into the industrial revolution, was still characterized by an imitation of natural processes and the use of natural forces for human purposes, which did not differ in principle from the old use of water and wind power. Not the principle of the steam engine was new but rather the discovery and use of the coal mines to feed it.[9] The machine tools of this early stage reflect this imitation of naturally known processes; they, too, imitate and put to more powerful use the natural activities of the human hand. But today we are told that "the greatest pitfall to avoid is the assumption that the design aim is reproduction of the hand movements of the operator or laborer."[10]

The next stage is chiefly characterized by the use of electricity, and, indeed, electricity still determines the present stage of technical development. This stage can no longer be described in terms of a gigantic enlargement and continuation of the old arts and crafts, and it is only to this world that the categories of *homo faber*, to whom every instrument is a means to achieve a prescribed end, no longer apply. For here we no longer use material as nature yields it to us, killing natural processes or interrupting or imitating them. In all these instances, we changed and denaturalized nature for our own worldly ends, so that the human world or artifice on one hand and nature on the other remained two distinctly separate entities. Today we have begun to "create," as it were, that is, to unchain natural processes of our own which would never have happened without us, and instead of carefully surrounding the human artifice with defenses against nature's elementary forces, keeping them as

9. One of the important material conditions of the industrial revolution was the extinction of the forests and the discovery of coal as a substitute for wood. The solution which R. H. Barrow (in his *Slavery in the Roman Empire* [1928]) proposed to "the well-known puzzle in the study of the economic history of the ancient world that industry developed up to a certain point, but stopped short of making progress which might have been expected," is quite interesting and rather convincing in this connection. He maintains that the only factor that "hindered the application of machinery to industry [was] . . . the absence of cheap and good fuel, . . . no abundant supply of coal [being] close at hand" (p. 123).

10. John Diebold, *Automation: The Advent of the Automatic Factory* (1952), p. 67.

far as possible outside the man-made world, we have channeled these forces, along with their elementary power, into the world itself. The result has been a veritable revolution in the concept of fabrication; manufacturing, which always had been "a series of separate steps," has become "a continuous process," the process of the conveyor belt and the assembly line.[11]

Automation is the most recent stage in this development, which indeed "illuminates the whole history of machinism."[12] It certainly will remain the culminating point of the modern development, even if the atomic age and a technology based upon nuclear discoveries puts a rather rapid end to it. The first instruments of nuclear technology, the various types of atom bombs, which, if released in suf-

11. *Ibid.*, p. 69.

12. Friedmann, *Problèmes humains du machinisme industriel*, p. 168. This, in fact, is the most obvious conclusion to be drawn from Diebold's book: The assembly line is the result of "the concept of manufacturing as a continuous process," and automation, one may add, is the result of the machinization of the assembly line. To the release of human labor power in the earlier stage of industrialization, automation adds the release of human brain power, because "the monitoring and control tasks now humanly performed will be done by machines" (*op. cit.*, p. 140). The one as well as the other releases labor, and not work. The worker or the "self-respecting craftsman," whose "human and psychological values" (p. 164) almost every author in the field tries desperately to save—and sometimes with a grain of involuntary irony, as when Diebold and others earnestly believe that repair work, which perhaps will never be entirely automatic, can inspire the same contentment as fabrication and production of a new object—does not belong in this picture for the simple reason that he was eliminated from the factory long before anybody knew about automation. The workers in a factory have always been laborers, and though they may have excellent reasons for self-respect, it certainly cannot arise from the work they do. One can only hope that they themselves will not accept the social substitutes for contentment and self-respect offered them by labor theorists, who by now really believe that the interest in work and the satisfaction of craftsmanship can be replaced by "human relations" and by the respect workers "earn from their fellow workers" (p. 164). Automation, after all, should at least have the advantage of demonstrating the absurdities of all "humanisms of labor"; if the verbal and historical meaning of the word "humanism" is at all taken into account, the very term "humanism of labor" is clearly a contradiction in terms. (For an excellent criticism of the vogue of "human relations" see Daniel Bell, *Work and Its Discontents* [1956], ch. 5, and R. P. Genelli, "Facteur humain ou facteur social du travail," *Revue française du travail*, Vol. VII, Nos. 1–3 [January–March, 1952], where one also finds a very determined denunciation of the "terrible illusion" of the "joy of labor.")

man the measure of things?

existence of those that are not."[23] (Protagoras evidently did not say: "Man is the measure of all things," as tradition and the standard translations have made him say.) The point of the matter is that Plato saw immediately that if one makes man the measure of all things for use, it is man the user and instrumentalizer, and not man the speaker and doer or man the thinker, to whom the world is being related. And since it is in the nature of man the user and instrumentalizer to look upon everything as means to an end—upon every tree as potential wood—this must eventually mean that man becomes the measure not only of things whose existence depends upon him but of literally everything there is.

In this Platonic interpretation, Protagoras in fact sounds like the earliest forerunner of Kant, for if man is the measure of all things, then man is the only thing outside the means-end relationship, the only end in himself who can use everything else as a means. Plato knew quite well that the possibilities of producing use objects and of treating all things of nature as potential use objects are as limitless as the wants and talents of human beings. If one permits the standards of *homo faber* to rule the finished world as they must necessarily rule the coming into being of this world, then *homo faber* will eventually help himself to everything and consider everything that is as a mere means for himself. He will judge every thing as though it belonged to the class of *chrēmata*, of use objects, so that, to follow Plato's own example, the wind will no longer be understood in its own right as a natural force but will be considered exclusively in accordance with human needs for warmth or refreshment—which, of course, means that the wind as something objectively given has been eliminated from human experience. It is because of these consequences that Plato, who at the end of his life recalls once more in the *Laws* the saying of Protagoras, replies with an almost paradoxical formula: not man—who because of his

23. *Theaetetus* 152, and *Cratylus* 385E. In these instances, as well as in other ancient quotations of the famous saying, Protagoras is always quoted as follows: *pantōn chrēmatōn metron estin anthrōpos* (see Diels, *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* [4th ed.; 1922], frag. B1). The word *chrēmata* by no means signifies "all things," but specifically things used or needed or possessed by men. The supposed Protagorean saying, "Man is the measure of all things," would be rendered in Greek rather as *anthrōpos metron pantōn*, corresponding for instance to Heraclitus' *polemos patēr pantōn* ("strife is the father of all things").

make themselves understood. Signs and sounds to communicate immediate, identical needs and wants would be enough.

Human distinctness is not the same as otherness—the curious quality of *alteritas* possessed by everything that is and therefore, in medieval philosophy, one of the four basic, universal characteristics of Being, transcending every particular quality. Otherness, it is true, is an important aspect of plurality, the reason why all our definitions are distinctions, why we are unable to say what anything is without distinguishing it from something else. Otherness in its most abstract form is found only in the sheer multiplication of inorganic objects, whereas all organic life already shows variations and distinctions, even between specimens of the same species. But only man can express this distinction and distinguish himself, and only he can communicate himself and not merely something—thirst or hunger, affection or hostility or fear. In man, otherness, which he shares with everything that is, and distinctness, which he shares with everything alive, become uniqueness, and human plurality is the paradoxical plurality of unique beings.

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

With word and deed we insert ourselves into the human world, and this insertion is like a second birth, in which we confirm and take upon ourselves the naked fact of our original physical ap-

which cannot be expected from whatever may have happened before. This character of startling unexpectedness is inherent in all beginnings and in all origins. Thus, the origin of life from inorganic matter is an infinite improbability of inorganic processes, as is the coming into being of the earth viewed from the standpoint of processes in the universe, or the evolution of human out of animal life. The new always happens against the overwhelming odds of statistical laws and their probability, which for all practical, everyday purposes amounts to certainty; the new therefore always appears in the guise of a miracle. The fact that man is capable of action means that the unexpected can be expected from him, that he is able to perform what is infinitely improbable. And this again is possible only because each man is unique, so that with each birth something uniquely new comes into the world. With respect to this somebody who is unique it can be truly said that nobody was there before. If action as beginning corresponds to the fact of birth, if it is the actualization of the human condition of natality, then speech corresponds to the fact of distinctness and is the actualization of the human condition of plurality, that is, of living as a distinct and unique being among equals.

Action and speech are so closely related because the primordial and specifically human act must at the same time contain the answer to the question asked of every newcomer: "Who are you?" This disclosure of who somebody is, is implicit in both his words and his deeds; yet obviously the affinity between speech and revelation is much closer than that between action and revelation,[4] just as the affinity between action and beginning is closer than that between speech and beginning, although many, and even most acts, are performed in the manner of speech. Without the accompaniment of speech, at any rate, action would not only lose its revelatory character, but, and by the same token, it would lose its subject, as it were; not acting men but performing robots would achieve what, humanly speaking, would remain incomprehensible. Speechless action would no longer be action because there would no longer be an actor, and the actor, the doer of

4. This is the reason why Plato says that *lexis* ("speech") adheres more closely to truth than *praxis*.

Through it, the story resulting from action is misconstrued as a fictional story, where indeed an author pulls the strings and directs the play. The fictional story reveals a maker just as every work of art clearly indicates that it was made by somebody; this does not belong to the character of the story itself but only to the mode in which it came into existence. The distinction between a real and a fictional story is precisely that the latter was "made up" and the former not made at all. The real story in which we are engaged as long as we live has no visible or invisible maker because it is not made. The only "somebody" it reveals is its hero, and it is the only medium in which the originally intangible manifestation of a uniquely distinct "who" can become tangible *ex post facto* through action and speech. *Who* somebody is or was we can know only by knowing the story of which he is himself the hero—his biography, in other words; everything else we know of him, including the work he may have produced and left behind, tells us only *what* he is or was. Thus, although we know much less of Socrates, who did not write a single line and left no work behind, than of Plato or Aristotle, we know much better and more intimately who he was, because we know his story, than we know who Aristotle was, about whose opinions we are so much better informed.

The hero the story discloses needs no heroic qualities; the word "hero" originally, that is, in Homer, was no more than a name given each free man who participated in the Trojan enterprise[10] and about whom a story could be told. The connotation of courage, which we now feel to be an indispensable quality of the hero, is in fact already present in a willingness to act and speak at all, to insert one's self into the world and begin a story of one's own. And this courage is not necessarily or even primarily related to a willingness to suffer the consequences; courage and even boldness are already present in leaving one's private hiding place and showing who one is, in disclosing and exposing one's self. The extent of this original courage, without which action and speech and

10. In Homer, the word *hērōs* has certainly a connotation of distinction, but of no other than every free man was capable. Nowhere does it appear in the later meaning of "half-god," which perhaps arose out of a deification of the ancient epic heroes.

therefore, according to the Greeks, freedom, would not be possible at all, is not less great and may even be greater if the "hero" happens to be a coward.

The specific content as well as the general meaning of action and speech may take various forms of reification in art works which glorify a deed or an accomplishment and, by transformation and condensation, show some extraordinary event in its full significance. However, the specific revelatory quality of action and speech, the implicit manifestation of the agent and speaker, is so indissolubly tied to the living flux of acting and speaking that it can be represented and "reified" only through a kind of repetition, the imitation or *mimēsis*, which according to Aristotle prevails in all arts but is actually appropriate only to the *drama*, whose very name (from the Greek verb *dran*, "to act") indicates that play-acting actually is an imitation of acting.[11] But the imitative element lies not only in the art of the actor, but, as Aristotle rightly claims, in the making or writing of the play, at least to the extent that the drama comes fully to life only when it is enacted in the theater. Only the actors and speakers who re-enact the story's plot can convey the full meaning, not so much of the story itself, but of the "heroes" who reveal themselves in it.[12] In terms of Greek tragedy, this would mean that the story's direct as well as its universal meaning is revealed by the chorus, which does not imitate[13] and whose comments are pure poetry, whereas the intangible identities of the agents in the story, since they escape all

11. Aristotle already mentions that the word *drama* was chosen because *drōntes* ("acting people") are imitated (*Poetics* 1448a28). From the treatise itself, it is obvious that Aristotle's model for "imitation" in art is taken from the drama, and the generalization of the concept to make it applicable to all arts seems rather awkward.

12. Aristotle therefore usually speaks not of an imitation of action (*praxis*) but of the agents (*prattontes*) (see *Poetics* 1448a1 ff., 1448b25, 1449b24 ff.). He is not consistent, however, in this use (cf. 1451a29, 1447a28). The decisive point is that tragedy does not deal with the qualities of men, their *poiotēs*, but with whatever happened with respect to them, with their actions and life and good or ill fortune (1450a15–18). The content of tragedy, therefore, is not what we would call character but action or the plot.

13. That the chorus "imitates less" is mentioned in the Ps. Aristotelian *Problemata* (918b28).

haps cannot even be explained. It has the connotation of blessedness, but without any religious overtones, and it means literally something like the well-being of the *daimōn* who accompanies each man throughout life, who is his distinct identity, but appears and is visible only to others.[18] Unlike happiness, therefore, which is a passing mood, and unlike good fortune, which one may have at certain periods of life and lack in others, *eudaimonia*, like life itself, is a lasting state of being which is neither subject to change nor capable of effecting change. To be *eudaimōn* and to have been *eudaimōn*, according to Aristotle, are the same, just as to "live well" (*eu dzēn*) and to have "lived well" are the same as long as life lasts; they are not states or activities which change a person's quality, such as learning and having learned, which indicate two altogether different attributes of the same person at different moments.[19]

This unchangeable identity of the person, though disclosing itself intangibly in act and speech, becomes tangible only in the story of the actor's and speaker's life; but as such it can be known, that is, grasped as a palpable entity only after it has come to its end. In other words, human essence—not human nature in general (which does not exist) nor the sum total of qualities and shortcomings in the individual, but the essence of who somebody is—can come into being only when life departs, leaving behind nothing but a story. Therefore whoever consciously aims at being "essential," at leaving behind a story and an identity which will win "immortal fame," must not only risk his life but expressly choose, as Achilles did, a short life and premature death. Only a man who does not survive his one supreme act remains the indisputable master of his identity and possible greatness, because he withdraws into death from the possible consequences and con-

18. For this interpretation of *daimōn* and *eudaimonia*, see Sophocles *Oedipus Rex* 1186 ff., especially the verses: *Tis gar, tis anēr pleon / tas eudaimonias pherei / ē tosouton hoson dokein / kai doxant' apoklinai* ("For which, which man [can] bear more *eudaimonia* than he grasps from appearance and deflects in its appearance?"). It is against this inevitable distortion that the chorus asserts its own knowledge: these others see, they "have" Oedipus' *daimōn* before their eyes as an example; the misery of the mortals is their blindness toward their own *daimōn*.

19. Aristotle *Metaphysics* 1048a23 ff.

tinuation of what he began. What gives the story of Achilles its paradigmatic significance is that it shows in a nutshell that *eudaimonia* can be bought only at the price of life and that one can make sure of it only by foregoing the continuity of living in which we disclose ourselves piecemeal, by summing up all of one's life in a single deed, so that the story of the act comes to its end together with life itself. Even Achilles, it is true, remains dependent upon the storyteller, poet, or historian, without whom everything he did remains futile; but he is the only "hero," and therefore the hero par excellence, who delivers into the narrator's hands the full significance of his deed, so that it is as though he had not merely enacted the story of his life but at the same time also "made" it.

No doubt this concept of action is highly individualistic, as we would say today.[20] It stresses the urge toward self-disclosure at the expense of all other factors and therefore remains relatively untouched by the predicament of unpredictability. As such it became the prototype of action for Greek antiquity and influenced, in the form of the so-called agonal spirit, the passionate drive to show one's self in measuring up against others that underlies the concept of politics prevalent in the city-states. An outstanding symptom of this prevailing influence is that the Greeks, in distinction from all later developments, did not count legislating among the political activities. In their opinion, the lawmaker was like the builder of the city wall, someone who had to do and finish his work before political activity could begin. He therefore was treated like any other craftsman or architect and could be called from abroad and commissioned without having to be a citizen, whereas the right to *politeuesthai*, to engage in the numerous activities which eventually went on in the *polis*, was entirely restricted to citizens. To them, the laws, like the wall around the city, were not results of action but products of making. Before men began to act, a definite space had to be secured and a structure built where all subsequent actions could take place, the space

20. The fact that the Greek word for "every one" (*hekastos*) is derived from *hekas* ("far off") seems to indicate how deep-rooted this "individualism" must have been.

being the public realm of the *polis* and its structure the law; legislator and architect belonged in the same category.[21] But these tangible entities themselves were not the content of politics (not Athens, but the Athenians, were the *polis*[22]), and they did not command the same loyalty we know from the Roman type of patriotism.

Though it is true that Plato and Aristotle elevated lawmaking and city-building to the highest rank in political life, this does not indicate that they enlarged the fundamental Greek experiences of action and politics to comprehend what later turned out to be the political genius of Rome: legislation and foundation. The Socratic school, on the contrary, turned to these activities, which to the Greeks were prepolitical, because they wished to turn against politics and against action. To them, legislating and the execution of decisions by vote are the most legitimate political activities because in them men "act like craftsmen": the result of their action is a tangible product, and its process has a clearly recognizable end.[23] This is no longer or, rather, not yet action (*praxis*), properly speaking, but making (*poiēsis*), which they prefer because of its greater reliability. It is as though they had said that if men only renounce their capacity for action, with its futility, boundlessness, and uncertainty of outcome, there could be a remedy for the frailty of human affairs.

How this remedy can destroy the very substance of human relationships is perhaps best illustrated in one of the rare instances

21. See, for instance, Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* 1141b25. There is no more elemental difference between Greece and Rome than their respective attitudes toward territory and law. In Rome, the foundation of the city and the establishment of its laws remained the great and decisive act to which all later deeds and accomplishments had to be related in order to acquire political validity and legitimation.

22. See M. F. Schachermeyr, "La formation de la cité Grecque," *Diogenes*, No. 4 (1953), who compares the Greek usage with that of Babylon, where the notion of "the Babylonians" could be expressed only by saying: the people of the territory of the city of Babylon.

23. "For [the legislators] alone act like craftsmen [*cheirotechnoi*]" because their act has a tangible end, an *eschaton*, which is the decree passed in the assembly (*psēphisma*) (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1141b29).

where Aristotle draws an example of acting from the sphere of private life, in the relationship between the benefactor and his recipient. With that candid absence of moralizing that is the mark of Greek, though not of Roman, antiquity, he states first as a matter of fact that the benefactor always loves those he has helped more than he is loved by them. He then goes on to explain that this is only natural, since the benefactor has done a work, an *ergon*, while the recipient has only endured his beneficence. The benefactor, according to Aristotle, loves his "work," the life of the recipient which he has "made," as the poet loves his poems, and he reminds his readers that the poet's love for his work is hardly less passionate than a mother's love for her children.[24] This explanation shows clearly that he thinks of acting in terms of making, and of its result, the relationship between men, in terms of an accomplished "work" (his emphatic attempts to distinguish between action and fabrication, *praxis* and *poiēsis*, notwithstanding).[25] In this instance, it is perfectly obvious how this interpretation, though it may serve to explain psychologically the phenomenon of ingratitude on the assumption that both benefactor and recipient agree about an interpretation of action in terms of making, actually spoils the action itself and its true result, the relationship it should have established. The example of the legislator is less plausible for us only because the Greek notion of the task and role of the legislator in the public realm is so utterly alien to our own. In any event, work, such as the activity of the legislator in Greek understanding, can become the content of action only on condition that further action is not desirable or possible; and action can result in an end product only on condition that its own authentic, non-tangible, and always utterly fragile meaning is destroyed.

The original, prephilosophic Greek remedy for this frailty had been the foundation of the *polis*. The *polis*, as it grew out of and remained rooted in the Greek pre-*polis* experience and estimate of what makes it worthwhile for men to live together (*syzēn*),

24. *Ibid.* 1168a13 ff.

25. *Ibid.* 1140.

namely, the "sharing of words and deeds,"[26] had a twofold function. First, it was intended to enable men to do permanently, albeit under certain restrictions, what otherwise had been possible only as an extraordinary and infrequent enterprise for which they had to leave their households. The *polis* was supposed to multiply the occasions to win "immortal fame," that is, to multiply the chances for everybody to distinguish himself, to show in deed and word who he was in his unique distinctness. One, if not the chief, reason for the incredible development of gift and genius in Athens, as well as for the hardly less surprising swift decline of the city-state, was precisely that from beginning to end its foremost aim was to make the extraordinary an ordinary occurrence of everyday life. The second function of the *polis*, again closely connected with the hazards of action as experienced before its coming into being, was to offer a remedy for the futility of action and speech; for the chances that a deed deserving fame would not be forgotten, that it actually would become "immortal," were not very good. Homer was not only a shining example of the poet's political function, and therefore the "educator of all Hellas"; the very fact that so great an enterprise as the Trojan War could have been forgotten without a poet to immortalize it several hundred years later offered only too good an example of what could happen to human greatness if it had nothing but poets to rely on for its permanence.

We are not concerned here with the historical causes for the rise of the Greek city-state; what the Greeks themselves thought of it and its *raison d'être*, they have made unmistakably clear. The *polis*—if we trust the famous words of Pericles in the Funeral Oration—gives a guaranty that those who forced every sea and land to become the scene of their daring will not remain without witness and will need neither Homer nor anyone else who knows how to turn words to praise them; without assistance from others, those who acted will be able to establish together the everlasting remembrance of their good and bad deeds, to inspire admiration in the present and in future ages.[27] In other words, men's life together in the form of the *polis* seemed to assure that the most

26. *Logōn kai pragmatōn koinōnein*, as Aristotle once put it (*ibid.* 1126b12).

27. Thucydides ii. 41.

less visible internal decay that invites disaster—is due to this peculiarity of the public realm, which, because it ultimately resides on action and speech, never altogether loses its potential character. What first undermines and then kills political communities is loss of power and final impotence; and power cannot be stored up and kept in reserve for emergencies, like the instruments of violence, but exists only in its actualization. Where power is not actualized, it passes away, and history is full of examples that the greatest material riches cannot compensate for this loss. Power is actualized only where word and deed have not parted company, where words are not empty and deeds not brutal, where words are not used to veil intentions but to disclose realities, and deeds are not used to violate and destroy but to establish relations and create new realities.

Power is what keeps the public realm, the potential space of appearance between acting and speaking men, in existence. The word itself, its Greek equivalent *dynamis*, like the Latin *potentia* with its various modern dervatives or the German *Macht* (which derives from *mögen* and *möglich*, not from *machen*), indicates its "potential" character. Power is always, as we would say, a power potential and not an unchangeable, measurable, and reliable entity like force or strength. While strength is the natural quality of an individual seen in isolation, power springs up between men when they act together and vanishes the moment they disperse. Because of this peculiarity, which power shares with all potentialities that can only be actualized but never fully materialized, power is to an astonishing degree independent of material factors, either of numbers or means. A comparatively small but well-organized group of men can rule almost indefinitely over large and populous empires, and it is not infrequent in history that small and poor countries get the better of great and rich nations. (The story of David and Goliath is only metaphorically true; the power of a few can be greater than the power of many, but in a contest between two men not power but strength decides, and cleverness, that is, brain power, contributes materially to the outcome on the same level as muscular force.) Popular revolt against materially strong rulers, on the other hand, may engender an almost irresistible power even if it foregoes the use of violence in the face of

materially vastly superior forces. To call this "passive resistance" is certainly an ironic idea; it is one of the most active and efficient ways of action ever devised, because it cannot be countered by fighting, where there may be defeat or victory, but only by mass slaughter in which even the victor is defeated, cheated of his prize, since nobody can rule over dead men.

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

If power were more than this potentiality in being together, if it could be possessed like strength or applied like force instead of being dependent upon the unreliable and only temporary agreement of many wills and intentions, omnipotence would be a concrete human possibility. For power, like action, is boundless; it has no physical limitation in human nature, in the bodily existence of man, like strength. Its only limitation is the existence of other people, but this limitation is not accidental, because human power corresponds to the condition of plurality to begin with. For the same reason, power can be divided without decreasing it, and the interplay of powers with their checks and balances is even liable to generate more power, so long, at least, as the interplay is alive and has not resulted in a stalemate. Strength, on the contrary, is indivisible, and while it, too, is checked and balanced by the presence of others, the interplay of plurality in this case spells a definite limitation on the strength of the individual, which is kept in bounds and may be overpowered by the power potential of the many. An identification of the strength necessary for the production of things with the power necessary for action is conceivable

only as the divine attribute of one god. Omnipotence therefore is never an attribute of gods in polytheism, no matter how superior the strength of the gods may be to the forces of men. Conversely, aspiration toward omnipotence always implies—apart from its utopian *hubris*—the destruction of plurality.

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

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

ance, the public realm; on the contrary, it develops the germs of its own destruction the moment it comes into existence.[30]

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

If tyranny can be described as the always abortive attempt to substitute violence for power, ochlocracy, or mob rule, which is its exact counterpart, can be characterized by the much more promising attempt to substitute power for strength. Power indeed can ruin all strength and we know that where the main public realm is society, there is always the danger that, through a perverted form of "acting together"—by pull and pressure and the tricks of cliques—those are brought to the fore who know nothing and can do nothing. The vehement yearning for violence, so char-

30. In the words of Montesquieu, who ignores the difference between tyranny and despotism: "Le principe du gouvernement despotique se corrompt sans cesse, parcequ'il est corrompu par sa nature. Les autres gouvernements périssent, parceque des accidents particuliers en violent le principe: celui-ci périt par son vice intérieur, lorsque quelques causes accidentelles n'empêchent point son principe de se corrompre" (*op. cit.*, Book VIII, ch. 10).

acteristic of some of the best modern creative artists, thinkers, scholars, and craftsmen, is a natural reaction of those whom society has tried to cheat of their strength.[31]

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

Perhaps nothing in our history has been so short-lived as trust in power, nothing more lasting than the Platonic and Christian distrust of the splendor attending its space of appearance, nothing

31. The extent to which Nietzsche's glorification of the will to power was inspired by such experiences of the modern intellectual may be surmised from the following side remark: "Denn die Ohnmacht gegen Menschen, nicht die Ohnmacht gegen die Natur, erzeugt die desperateste Verbitterung gegen das Dasein" (*Wille zur Macht*, No. 55).

Pericles, knew full well that he had broken with the normal standards for everyday behavior when he found the glory of Athens in having left behind "everywhere everlasting remembrance [*mnēmeia aidia*] of their good and their evil deeds." The art of politics teaches men how to bring forth what is great and radiant—*ta megala kai lampra*, in the words of Democritus; as long as the *polis* is there to inspire men to dare the extraordinary, all things are safe; if it perishes, everything is lost.[34] Motives and aims, no matter how pure or how grandiose, are never unique; like psychological qualities, they are typical, characteristic of different types of persons. Greatness, therefore, or the specific meaning of each deed, can lie only in the performance itself and neither in its motivation nor its achievement.

It is this insistence on the living deed and the spoken word as the greatest achievements of which human beings are capable that was conceptualized in Aristotle's notion of *energeia* ("actuality"), with which he designated all activities that do not pursue an end (are *ateleis*) and leave no work behind (no *par' autas erga*), but exhaust their full meaning in the performance itself.[35] It is from the experience of this full actuality that the paradoxical "end in itself" derives its original meaning; for in these instances of action and speech[36] the end (*telos*) is not pursued but lies in the activity itself which therefore becomes an *entelecheia*, and the work is not what follows and extinguishes the process but is imbedded in it; the performance is the work, is *energeia*.[37] Aristotle, in his political philosophy, is still well aware of what is at stake in politics, namely, no less than the *ergon tou anthrōpou*[38] (the "work of man" *qua*

34. See fragment B157 of Democritus in Diels, *op. cit.*

35. For the concept of *energeia* see *Nicomachean Ethics* 1094a1–5; *Physics* 201b31; *On the Soul* 417a16, 431a6. The examples most frequently used are seeing and flute-playing.

36. It is of no importance in our context that Aristotle saw the highest possibility of "actuality" not in action and speech, but in contemplation and thought, in *theōria* and *nous*.

37. The two Aristotelian concepts, *energeia* and *entelecheia*, are closely interrelated (*energeia . . . synteinei pros tēn entelecheian*): full actuality (*energeia*) effects and produces nothing besides itself, and full reality (*entelecheia*) has no other end besides itself (see *Metaphysics* 1050a22–35).

38. *Nicomachean Ethics* 1097b22.

man), and if he defined this "work" as "to live well" (*eu zēn*), he clearly meant that "work" here is no work product but exists only in sheer actuality. This specifically human achievement lies altogether outside the category of means and ends; the "work of man" is no end because the means to achieve it—the virtues, or *aretai*—are not qualities which may or may not be actualized, but are themselves "actualities." In other words, the means to achieve the end would already be the end; and this "end," conversely, cannot be considered a means in some other respect, because there is nothing higher to attain than this actuality itself.

It is like a feeble echo of the prephilosophical Greek experience of action and speech as sheer actuality to read time and again in political philosophy since Democritus and Plato that politics is a *technē*, belongs among the arts, and can be likened to such activities as healing or navigation, where, as in the performance of the dancer or play-actor, the "product" is identical with the performing act itself. But we may gauge what has happened to action and speech, which are only in actuality, and therefore the highest activities in the political realm, when we hear what modern society, with the peculiar and uncompromising consistency that characterized it in its early stages, had to say about them. For this all-important degradation of action and speech is implied when Adam Smith classifies all occupations which rest essentially on performance—such as the military profession, "churchmen, lawyers, physicians and opera-singers"—together with "menial services," the lowest and most unproductive "labour."[39] It was precisely these occupations—healing, flute-playing, play-acting—which furnished ancient thinking with examples for the highest and greatest activities of man.

29

Homo Faber AND THE SPACE OF APPEARANCE

The root of the ancient estimation of politics is the conviction that man *qua* man, each individual in his unique distinctness, appears and confirms himself in speech and action, and that these activi-

39. *Wealth of Nations* (Everyman's ed.), II, 295.

ties, despite their material futility, possess an enduring quality of their own because they create their own remembrance.[40] The public realm, the space within the world which men need in order to appear at all, is therefore more specifically "the work of man" than is the work of his hands or the labor of his body.

The conviction that the greatest that man can achieve is his own appearance and actualization is by no means a matter of course. Against it stands the conviction of *homo faber* that a man's products may be more—and not only more lasting—than he is himself, as well as the *animal laborans*' firm belief that life is the highest of all goods. Both, therefore, are, strictly speaking, unpolitical, and will incline to denounce action and speech as idleness, idle busybodyness and idle talk, and generally will judge public activities in terms of their usefulness to supposedly higher ends—to make the world more useful and more beautiful in the case of *homo faber*, to make life easier and longer in the case of the *animal laborans*. This, however, is not to say that they are free to dispense with a public realm altogether, for without a space of appearance and without trusting in action and speech as a mode of being together, neither the reality of one's self, of one's own identity, nor the reality of the surrounding world can be established beyond doubt. The human sense of reality demands that men actualize the sheer passive givenness of their being, not in order to change it but in order to make articulate and call into full existence what otherwise they would have to suffer passively anyhow.[41] This actualization resides and comes to pass in those activities that exist only in sheer actuality.

The only character of the world by which to gauge its reality is its being common to us all, and common sense occupies such a high rank in the hierarchy of political qualities because it is the one sense that fits into reality as a whole our five strictly individual senses and the strictly particular data they perceive. It is by virtue

40. This is a decisive feature of the Greek, though perhaps not of the Roman, concept of "virtue": where *aretē* is, oblivion cannot occur (cf. Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* 1100b12–17).

41. This is the meaning of the last sentence of the Dante quotation at the head of this chapter; the sentence, though quite clear and simple in the Latin original, defies translation (*De monarchia* i. 13).

of common sense that the other sense perceptions are known to disclose reality and are not merely felt as irritations of our nerves or resistance sensations of our bodies. A noticeable decrease in common sense in any given community and a noticeable increase in superstition and gullibility are therefore almost infallible signs of alienation from the world.

This alienation—the atrophy of the space of appearance and the withering of common sense—is, of course, carried to a much greater extreme in the case of a laboring society than in the case of a society of producers. In his isolation, not only undisturbed by others but also not seen and heard and confirmed by them, *homo faber* is together not only with the product he makes but also with the world of things to which he will add his own products; in this, albeit indirect, way, he is still together with others who made the world and who also are fabricators of things. We have already mentioned the exchange market on which the craftsmen meet their peers and which represents to them a common public realm in so far as each of them has contributed something to it. Yet while the public realm as exchange market corresponds most adequately to the activity of fabrication, exchange itself already belongs in the field of action and is by no means a mere prolongation of production; it is even less a mere function of automatic processes, as the buying of food and other means of consumption is necessarily incidental to laboring. Marx's contention that economic laws are like natural laws, that they are not made by man to regulate the free acts of exchange but are functions of the productive conditions of society as a whole, is correct only in a laboring society, where all activities are leveled down to the human body's metabolism with nature and where no exchange exists but only consumption.

However, the people who meet on the exchange market are primarily not persons but producers of products, and what they show there is never themselves, not even their skills and qualities as in the "conspicuous production" of the Middle Ages, but their products. The impulse that drives the fabricator to the public market place is the desire for products, not for people, and the power that holds this market together and in existence is not the potentiality which springs up between people when they come together in action and speech, but a combined "power of ex-

change" (Adam Smith) which each of the participants acquired in isolation. It is this lack of relatedness to others and this primary concern with exchangeable commodities which Marx denounced as the dehumanization and self-alienation of commercial society, which indeed excludes men *qua* men and demands, in striking reversal of the ancient relationship between private and public, that men show themselves only in the privacy of their families or the intimacy of their friends.

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

However, the great reverence the modern age so willingly paid to genius, so frequently bordering on idolatry, could hardly change

the elementary fact that the essence of who somebody is cannot be reified by himself. When it appears "objectively"—in the style of an art work or in ordinary handwriting—it manifests the identity of a person and therefore serves to identify authorship, but it remains mute itself and escapes us if we try to interpret it as the mirror of a living person. In other words, the idolization of genius harbors the same degradation of the human person as the other tenets prevalent in commercial society.

It is an indispensable element of human pride to believe that who somebody is transcends in greatness and importance anything he can do and produce. "Let physicians and confectioners and the servants of the great houses be judged by what they have done, and even by what they have meant to do; the great people themselves are judged by what they are."[42] Only the vulgar will condescend to derive their pride from what they have done; they will, by this condescension, become the "slaves and prisoners" of their own faculties and will find out, should anything more be left in them than sheer stupid vanity, that to be one's own slave and prisoner is no less bitter and perhaps even more shameful than to be the servant of somebody else. It is not the glory but the predicament of the creative genius that in his case the superiority of man to his work seems indeed inverted, so that he, the living creator, finds himself in competition with his creations which he outlives, although they may survive him eventually. The saving grace of all really great gifts is that the persons who bear their burden remain superior to what they have done, at least as long as the source of creativity is alive; for this source springs indeed from *who* they are and remains outside the actual work process as well as independent of *what* they may achieve. That the predicament of genius is nevertheless a real one becomes quite apparent in the case of the *literati*, where the inverted order between man and his product is in fact consummated; what is so outrageous in their case, and incidentally incites popular hatred even more than spurious intellectual superiority, is that even their worst product is likely to be better than they are themselves. It is the hallmark of the "intellectual" that he remains quite undisturbed

42. I use here Isak Dinesen's wonderful story "The Dreamers," in *Seven Gothic Tales* (Modern Library ed.), especially pp. 340 ff.

tent that he appears much more the victim and the sufferer than the author and doer of what he has done. Nowhere, in other words, neither in labor, subject to the necessity of life, nor in fabrication, dependent upon given material, does man appear to be less free than in those capacities whose very essence is freedom and in that realm which owes its existence to nobody and nothing but man.

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

In other words, the issue here is not strength or weakness in the sense of self-sufficiency. In polytheist systems, for instance, even a

not defeated by reality, or to put it another way, whether the capacity for action does not harbor within itself certain potentialities which enable it to survive the disabilities of non-sovereignty.

33

IRREVERSIBILITY AND THE POWER TO FORGIVE

We have seen that the *animal laborans* could be redeemed from its predicament of imprisonment in the ever-recurring cycle of the life process, of being forever subject to the necessity of labor and consumption, only through the mobilization of another human capacity, the capacity for making, fabricating, and producing of *homo faber*, who as a toolmaker not only eases the pain and trouble of laboring but also erects a world of durability. The redemption of life, which is sustained by labor, is worldliness, which is sustained by fabrication. We saw furthermore that *homo faber* could be redeemed from his predicament of meaninglessness, the "devaluation of all values," and the impossibility of finding valid standards in a world determined by the category of means and ends, only through the interrelated faculties of action and speech, which produce meaningful stories as naturally as fabrication produces use objects. If it were not outside the scope of these considerations, one could add the predicament of thought to these instances; for thought, too, is unable to "think itself" out of the predicaments which the very activity of thinking engenders. What in each of these instances saves man—man *qua animal laborans*, *qua homo faber*, *qua* thinker—is something altogether different; it comes from the outside—not, to be sure, outside of man, but outside of each of the respective activities. From the viewpoint of the *animal laborans*, it is like a miracle that it is also a being which knows of and inhabits a world; from the viewpoint of *homo faber*, it is like a miracle, like the revelation of divinity, that meaning should have a place in this world.

The case of action and action's predicaments is altogether different. Here, the remedy against the irreversibility and unpredictability of the process started by acting does not arise out of another and possibly higher faculty, but is one of the potentialities

of action itself. The possible redemption from the predicament of irreversibility—of being unable to undo what one has done though one did not, and could not, have known what he was doing—is the faculty of forgiving. The remedy for unpredictability, for the chaotic uncertainty of the future, is contained in the faculty to make and keep promises. The two faculties belong together in so far as one of them, forgiving, serves to undo the deeds of the past, whose "sins" hang like Damocles' sword over every new generation; and the other, binding oneself through promises, serves to set up in the ocean of uncertainty, which the future is by definition, islands of security without which not even continuity, let alone durability of any kind, would be possible in the relationships between men.

Without being forgiven, released from the consequences of what we have done, our capacity to act would, as it were, be confined to one single deed from which we could never recover; we would remain the victims of its consequences forever, not unlike the sorcerer's apprentice who lacked the magic formula to break the spell. Without being bound to the fulfilment of promises, we would never be able to keep our identities; we would be condemned to wander helplessly and without direction in the darkness of each man's lonely heart, caught in its contradictions and equivocalities —a darkness which only the light shed over the public realm through the presence of others, who confirm the identity between the one who promises and the one who fulfils, can dispel. Both faculties, therefore, depend on plurality, on the presence and acting of others, for no one can forgive himself and no one can feel bound by a promise made only to himself; forgiving and promising enacted in solitude or isolation remain without reality and can signify no more than a role played before one's self.

Since these faculties correspond so closely to the human condition of plurality, their role in politics establishes a diametrically different set of guiding principles from the "moral" standards inherent in the Platonic notion of rule. For Platonic rulership, whose legitimacy rested upon the domination of the self, draws its guiding principles—those which at the same time justify and limit power over others—from a relationship established between me and myself, so that the right and wrong of relationships with others are

determined by attitudes toward one's self, until the whole of the public realm is seen in the image of "man writ large," of the right order between man's individual capacities of mind, soul, and body. The moral code, on the other hand, inferred from the faculties of forgiving and of making promises, rests on experiences which nobody could ever have with himself, which, on the contrary, are entirely based on the presence of others. And just as the extent and modes of self-rule justify and determine rule over others—how one rules himself, he will rule others—thus the extent and modes of being forgiven and being promised determine the extent and modes in which one may be able to forgive himself or keep promises concerned only with himself.

Because the remedies against the enormous strength and resiliency inherent in action processes can function only under the condition of plurality, it is very dangerous to use this faculty in any but the realm of human affairs. Modern natural science and technology, which no longer observe or take material from or imitate processes of nature but seem actually to act into it, seem, by the same token, to have carried irreversibility and human unpredictability into the natural realm, where no remedy can be found to undo what has been done. Similarly, it seems that one of the great dangers of acting in the mode of making and within its categorical framework of means and ends lies in the concomitant self-deprivation of the remedies inherent only in action, so that one is bound not only to *do* with the means of violence necessary for all fabrication, but also to *undo* what he has done as he undoes an unsuccessful object, by means of destruction. Nothing appears more manifest in these attempts than the greatness of human power, whose source lies in the capacity to act, and which without action's inherent remedies inevitably begins to overpower and destroy not man himself but the conditions under which life was given to him.

The discoverer of the role of forgiveness in the realm of human affairs was Jesus of Nazareth. The fact that he made this discovery in a religious context and articulated it in religious language is no reason to take it any less seriously in a strictly secular sense. It has been in the nature of our tradition of political thought (and for reasons we cannot explore here) to be highly selective and to exclude from articulate conceptualization a great variety of authentic

political experiences, among which we need not be surprised to find some of an even elementary nature. Certain aspects of the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth which are not primarily related to the Christian religious message but sprang from experiences in the small and closely knit community of his followers, bent on challenging the public authorities in Israel, certainly belong among them, even though they have been neglected because of their allegedly exclusively religious nature. The only rudimentary sign of an awareness that forgiveness may be the necessary corrective for the inevitable damages resulting from action may be seen in the Roman principle to spare the vanquished (*parcere subiectis*)—a wisdom entirely unknown to the Greeks—or in the right to commute the death sentence, probably also of Roman origin, which is the prerogative of nearly all Western heads of state.

It is decisive in our context that Jesus maintains against the "scribes and pharisees" first that it is not true that only God has the power to forgive,[76] and second that this power does not derive from God—as though God, not men, would forgive through the medium of human beings—but on the contrary must be mobilized by men toward each other before they can hope to be forgiven by God also. Jesus' formulation is even more radical. Man in the gospel is not supposed to forgive because God forgives and he must do "likewise," but "if ye from your hearts forgive," God shall do "likewise."[77] The reason for the insistence on a duty to forgive is clearly "for they know not what they do" and it does not apply to the extremity of crime and willed evil, for then it would not have been necessary to teach: "And if he trespass

76. This is stated emphatically in Luke 5:21–24 (cf. Matt. 9:4–6 or Mark 12:7–10), where Jesus performs a miracle to prove that "the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins," the emphasis being on "upon earth." It is his insistence on the "power to forgive," even more than his performance of miracles, that shocks the people, so that "they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgives sins also?" (Luke 7:49).

77. Matt. 18:35; cf. Mark 11:25; "And when ye stand praying, forgive, . . . that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses." Or: "If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matt. 6:14–15). In all these instances, the power to forgive is primarily a human power: God forgives "us our debts, as we forgive our debtors."

against thee seven times a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him."[78] Crime and willed evil are rare, even rarer perhaps than good deeds; according to Jesus, they will be taken care of by God in the Last Judgment, which plays no role whatsoever in life on earth, and the Last Judgment is not characterized by forgiveness but by just retribution (*apodōsis*).[79] But trespassing is an everyday occurrence which is in the very nature of action's constant establishment of new relationships within a web of relations, and it needs forgiving, dismissing, in order to make it possible for life to go on by constantly releasing men from what they have done unknowingly.[80] Only through this constant mutual release from what they do can men remain free agents, only by constant willingness to change their minds and start again can they be trusted with so great a power as that to begin something new.

In this respect, forgiveness is the exact opposite of vengeance, which acts in the form of re-acting against an original trespassing, whereby far from putting an end to the consequences of the first misdeed, everybody remains bound to the process, permitting the chain reaction contained in every action to take its unhindered

78. Luke 17:3–4. It is important to keep in mind that the three key words of the text—*aphienai*, *metanoein*, and *hamartanein*—carry certain connotations even in New Testament Greek which the translations fail to render fully. The original meaning of *aphienai* is "dismiss" and "release" rather than "forgive"; *metanoein* means "change of mind" and—since it serves also to render the Hebrew *shuv*—"return," "trace back one's steps," rather than "repentance" with its psychological emotional overtones; what is required is: change your mind and "sin no more," which is almost the opposite of doing penance. *Hamartanein*, finally, is indeed very well rendered by "trespassing" in so far as it means rather "to miss," "fail and go astray," than "to sin" (see Heinrich Ebeling, *Griechisch-deutsches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testamente* [1923]). The verse which I quote in the standard translation could also be rendered as follows: "And if he trespass against thee . . . and . . . turn again to thee, saying, *I changed my mind;* thou shalt *release* him."

79. Matt. 12:36–37.

80. This interpretation seems justified by the context (Luke 17:1–5): Jesus introduces his words by pointing to the inevitability of "offenses" (*skandala*) which are unforgivable, at least on earth; for "woe unto him, through whom they come! It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea"; and then continues by teaching forgiveness for "trespassing" (*hamartanein*).

course. In contrast to revenge, which is the natural, automatic reaction to transgression and which because of the irreversibility of the action process can be expected and even calculated, the act of forgiving can never be predicted; it is the only reaction that acts in an unexpected way and thus retains, though being a reaction, something of the original character of action. Forgiving, in other words, is the only reaction which does not merely re-act but acts anew and unexpectedly, unconditioned by the act which provoked it and therefore freeing from its consequences both the one who forgives and the one who is forgiven. The freedom contained in Jesus' teachings of forgiveness is the freedom from vengeance, which incloses both doer and sufferer in the relentless automatism of the action process, which by itself need never come to an end.

The alternative to forgiveness, but by no means its opposite, is punishment, and both have in common that they attempt to put an end to something that without interference could go on endlessly. It is therefore quite significant, a structural element in the realm of human affairs, that men are unable to forgive what they cannot punish and that they are unable to punish what has turned out to be unforgivable. This is the true hallmark of those offenses which, since Kant, we call "radical evil" and about whose nature so little is known, even to us who have been exposed to one of their rare outbursts on the public scene. All we know is that we can neither punish nor forgive such offenses and that they therefore transcend the realm of human affairs and the potentialities of human power, both of which they radically destroy wherever they make their appearance. Here, where the deed itself dispossesses us of all power, we can indeed only repeat with Jesus: "It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea."

Perhaps the most plausible argument that forgiving and acting are as closely connected as destroying and making comes from that aspect of forgiveness where the undoing of what was done seems to show the same revelatory character as the deed itself. Forgiving and the relationship it establishes is always an eminently personal (though not necessarily individual or private) affair in which *what* was done is forgiven for the sake of *who* did it. This, too, was clearly recognized by Jesus ("Her sins which are many are for-

given; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little"), and it is the reason for the current conviction that only love has the power to forgive. For love, although it is one of the rarest occurrences in human lives,[81] indeed possesses an unequaled power of self-revelation and an unequaled clarity of vision for the disclosure of *who*, precisely because it is unconcerned to the point of total unworldliness with *what* the loved person may be, with his qualities and shortcomings no less than with his achievements, failings, and transgressions. Love, by reason of its passion, destroys the in-between which relates us to and separates us from others. As long as its spell lasts, the only in-between which can insert itself between two lovers is the child, love's own product. The child, this in-between to which the lovers now are related and which they hold in common, is representative of the world in that it also separates them; it is an indication that they will insert a new world into the existing world.[82] Through the child, it is as though the lovers return to the world from which their love had expelled them. But this new worldliness, the possible result and the only possibly happy ending of a love affair, is, in a sense, the end of love, which must either overcome the partners anew or be transformed into another mode of belonging together. Love, by its very nature, is unworldly, and it is for this reason rather than its rarity that it is not only apolitical but antipolitical, perhaps the most powerful of all antipolitical human forces.

If it were true, therefore, as Christianity assumed, that only love can forgive because only love is fully receptive to *who* somebody

81. The common prejudice that love is as common as "romance" may be due to the fact that we all learned about it first through poetry. But the poets fool us; they are the only ones to whom love is not only a crucial, but an indispensable experience, which entitles them to mistake it for a universal one.

82. This world-creating faculty of love is not the same as fertility, upon which most creation myths are based. The following mythological tale, on the contrary, draws its imagery clearly from the experience of love: the sky is seen as a gigantic goddess who still bends down upon the earth god, from whom she is being separated by the air god who was born between them and is now lifting her up. Thus a world space composed of air comes into being and inserts itself between earth and sky. I was unable to ascertain the origin of this myth; it is mentioned by Wolfgang Schadewaldt, "Das Welt-Modell der Griechen," *Neue Rundschau*, Vol. LXVIII, No. 2 (1957).

is, to the point of being always willing to forgive him whatever he may have done, forgiving would have to remain altogether outside our considerations. Yet what love is in its own, narrowly circumscribed sphere, respect is in the larger domain of human affairs. Respect, not unlike the Aristotelian *philia politikē*, is a kind of "friendship" without intimacy and without closeness; it is a regard for the person from the distance which the space of the world puts between us, and this regard is independent of qualities which we may admire or of achievements which we may highly esteem. Thus, the modern loss of respect, or rather the conviction that respect is due only where we admire or esteem, constitutes a clear symptom of the increasing depersonalization of public and social life. Respect, at any rate, because it concerns only the person, is quite sufficient to prompt forgiving of what a person did, for the sake of the person. But the fact that the same *who*, revealed in action and speech, remains also the subject of forgiving is the deepest reason why nobody can forgive himself; here, as in action and speech generally, we are dependent upon others, to whom we appear in a distinctness which we ourselves are unable to perceive. Closed within ourselves, we would never be able to forgive ourselves any failing or transgression because we would lack the experience of the person for the sake of whom one can forgive.

34

UNPREDICTABILITY AND THE POWER OF PROMISE

In contrast to forgiving, which—perhaps because of its religious context, perhaps because of the connection with love attending its discovery—has always been deemed unrealistic and inadmissible in the public realm, the power of stabilization inherent in the faculty of making promises has been known throughout our tradition. We may trace it back to the Roman legal system, the inviolability of agreements and treaties (*pacta sunt servanda*); or we may see its discoverer in Abraham, the man from Ur, whose whole story, as the Bible tells it, shows such a passionate drive toward making covenants that it is as though he departed from his country for no other reason than to try out the power of mutual promise in the

wilderness of the world, until eventually God himself agreed to make a Covenant with him. At any rate, the great variety of contract theories since the Romans attests to the fact that the power of making promises has occupied the center of political thought over the centuries.

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

The function of the faculty of promising is to master this twofold darkness of human affairs and is, as such, the only alternative to a mastery which relies on domination of one's self and rule over others; it corresponds exactly to the existence of a freedom which was given under the condition of non-sovereignty. The danger and the advantage inherent in all bodies politic that rely on contracts and treaties is that they, unlike those that rely on rule and sovereignty, leave the unpredictability of human affairs and the unreliability of men as they are, using them merely as the medium, as it were, into which certain islands of predictability are thrown and in which certain guideposts of reliability are erected. The moment promises lose their character as isolated islands of certainty in an ocean of uncertainty, that is, when this faculty is misused to cover the whole ground of the future and to map out a path secured in all directions, they lose their binding power and the whole enterprise becomes self-defeating.

We mentioned before the power generated when people gather together and "act in concert," which disappears the moment they depart. The force that keeps them together, as distinguished from the space of appearances in which they gather and the power which

keeps this public space in existence, is the force of mutual promise or contract. Sovereignty, which is always spurious if claimed by an isolated single entity, be it the individual entity of the person or the collective entity of a nation, assumes, in the case of many men mutually bound by promises, a certain limited reality. The sovereignty resides in the resulting, limited independence from the incalculability of the future, and its limits are the same as those inherent in the faculty itself of making and keeping promises. The sovereignty of a body of people bound and kept together, not by an identical will which somehow magically inspires them all, but by an agreed purpose for which alone the promises are valid and binding, shows itself quite clearly in its unquestioned superiority over those who are completely free, unbound by any promises and unkept by any purpose. This superiority derives from the capacity to dispose of the future as though it were the present, that is, the enormous and truly miraculous enlargement of the very dimension in which power can be effective. Nietzsche, in his extraordinary sensibility to moral phenomena, and despite his modern prejudice to see the source of all power in the will power of the isolated individual, saw in the faculty of promises (the "memory of the will," as he called it) the very distinction which marks off human from animal life.[83] If sovereignty is in the realm of action and human affairs what mastership is in the realm of making and the world of things, then their chief distinction is that the one can only be achieved by the many bound together, whereas the other is conceivable only in isolation.

In so far as morality is more than the sum total of *mores*, of customs and standards of behavior solidified through tradition and valid on the ground of agreements, both of which change with time, it has, at least politically, no more to support itself than the good will to counter the enormous risks of action by readiness to forgive and to be forgiven, to make promises and to keep them.

83. Nietzsche saw with unequaled clarity the connection between human sovereignty and the faculty of making promises, which led him to a unique insight into the relatedness of human pride and human conscience. Unfortunately, both insights remained unrelated with and without effect upon his chief concept, the "will to power," and therefore are frequently overlooked even by Nietzsche scholars. They are to be found in the first two aphorisms of the second treatise in *Zur Genealogie der Moral*.

These moral precepts are the only ones that are not applied to action from the outside, from some supposedly higher faculty or from experiences outside action's own reach. They arise, on the contrary, directly out of the will to live together with others in the mode of acting and speaking, and thus they are like control mechanisms built into the very faculty to start new and unending processes. If without action and speech, without the articulation of natality, we would be doomed to swing forever in the ever-recurring cycle of becoming, then without the faculty to undo what we have done and to control at least partially the processes we have let loose, we would be the victims of an automatic necessity bearing all the marks of the inexorable laws which, according to the natural sciences before our time, were supposed to constitute the outstanding characteristic of natural processes. We have seen before that to mortal beings this natural fatality, though it swings in itself and may be eternal, can only spell doom. If it were true that fatality is the inalienable mark of historical processes, then it would indeed be equally true that everything done in history is doomed.

And to a certain extent this is true. If left to themselves, human affairs can only follow the law of mortality, which is the most certain and the only reliable law of a life spent between birth and death. It is the faculty of action that interferes with this law because it interrupts the inexorable automatic course of daily life, which in its turn, as we saw, interrupted and interfered with the cycle of the biological life process. The life span of man running toward death would inevitably carry everything human to ruin and destruction if it were not for the faculty of interrupting it and beginning something new, a faculty which is inherent in action like an ever-present reminder that men, though they must die, are not born in order to die but in order to begin. Yet just as, from the standpoint of nature, the rectilinear movement of man's life-span between birth and death looks like a peculiar deviation from the common natural rule of cyclical movement, thus action, seen from the viewpoint of the automatic processes which seem to determine the course of the world, looks like a miracle. In the language of natural science, it is the "infinite improbability which occurs regularly." Action is, in fact, the one miracle-working faculty of man, as Jesus

of Nazareth, whose insights into this faculty can be compared in their originality and unprecedentedness with Socrates' insights into the possibilities of thought, must have known very well when he likened the power to forgive to the more general power of performing miracles, putting both on the same level and within the reach of man.[84]

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

84. Cf. the quotations given in n. 77. Jesus himself saw the human root of this power to perform miracles in faith—which we leave out of our considerations. In our context, the only point that matters is that the power to perform miracles is not considered to be divine—faith will move mountains and faith will forgive; the one is no less a miracle than the other, and the reply of the apostles when Jesus demanded of them to forgive seven times in a day was: "Lord, increase our faith."

tive Being is of such a nature that its disclosures must be illusions and that conclusions drawn from its appearances must be delusions.

Descartes' philosophy is haunted by two nightmares which in a sense became the nightmares of the whole modern age, not because this age was so deeply influenced by Cartesian philosophy, but because their emergence was almost inescapable once the true implications of the modern world view were understood. These nightmares are very simple and very well known. In the one, reality, the reality of the world as well as of human life, is doubted; if neither the senses nor common sense nor reason can be trusted, then it may well be that all that we take for reality is only a dream. The other concerns the general human condition as it was revealed by the new discoveries and the impossibility for man to trust his senses and his reason; under these circumstances it seems, indeed, much more likely that an evil spirit, a *Dieu trompeur*, wilfully and spitefully betrays man than that God is the ruler of the universe. The consummate devilry of this evil spirit would consist in having created a creature which harbors a notion of truth only to bestow on it such other faculties that it will never be able to reach any truth, never be able to be certain of anything.

Indeed, this last point, the question of certainty, was to become decisive for the whole development of modern morality. What was lost in the modern age, of course, was not the capacity for truth or reality or faith nor the concomitant inevitable acceptance of the testimony of the senses and of reason, but the certainty that formerly went with it. In religion it was not belief in salvation or a hereafter that was immediately lost, but the *certitudo salutis*—and this happened in all Protestant countries where the downfall of the Catholic Church had eliminated the last tradition-bound institution which, wherever its authority remained unchallenged, stood between the impact of modernity and the masses of believers. Just as the immediate consequence of this loss of certainty was a new zeal for making good in this life as though it were only an overlong period of probation,[34] so the loss of certainty of truth ended in a

34. Max Weber, who, despite some errors in detail which by now have been corrected, is still the only historian who raised the question of the modern age with the depth and relevance corresponding to its importance, was also aware that it was not a simple loss of faith that caused the reversal in the estimate of

new, entirely unprecedented zeal for truthfulness—as though man could afford to be a liar only so long as he was certain of the unchallengeable existence of truth and objective reality, which surely would survive and defeat all his lies.[35] The radical change in moral standards occurring in the first century of the modern age was inspired by the needs and ideals of its most important group of men, the new scientists; and the modern cardinal virtues—success, industry, and truthfulness—are at the same time the greatest virtues of modern science.[36]

The learned societies and Royal Academies became the morally influential centers where scientists were organized to find ways and means by which nature could be trapped by experiments and instruments so that she would be forced to yield her secrets. And this gigantic task, to which no single man but only the collective effort of the best minds of mankind could possibly be adequate, prescribed the rules of behavior and the new standards of judgment. Where formerly truth had resided in the kind of "theory" that since the Greeks had meant the contemplative glance of the beholder who was concerned with, and received, the reality opening up before him, the question of success took over and the test of theory became a "practical" one—whether or not it will work. Theory became hypothesis, and the success of the hypothesis became truth. This all-important standard of success, however, does not depend upon practical considerations or the technical developments which may or may not accompany specific scientific discoveries. The criterion of success is inherent in the very essence and progress of modern science quite apart from its applicability. Success here is not at all the empty idol to which it degenerated in

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work and labor, but the loss of the *certitudo salutis*, of the certainty of salvation. In our context, it would appear that this certainty was only one among the many certainties lost with the arrival of the modern age.

35. It certainly is quite striking that not one of the major religions, with the exception of Zoroastrianism, has ever included lying as such among the mortal sins. Not only is there no commandment: Thou shalt not lie (for the commandment: Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor, is of course of a different nature), but it seems as though prior to puritan morality nobody ever considered lies to be serious offenses.

36. This is the chief point of Bronowski's article quoted above.

bourgeois society; it was, and in the sciences has been ever since, a veritable triumph of human ingenuity against overwhelming odds.

The Cartesian solution of universal doubt or its salvation from the two interconnected nightmares—that everything is a dream and there is no reality and that not God but an evil spirit rules the world and mocks man—was similar in method and content to the turning away from truth to truthfulness and from reality to reliability. Descartes' conviction that "though our mind is not the measure of things or of truth, it must assuredly be the measure of things that we affirm or deny"[37] echoes what scientists in general and without explicit articulation had discovered: that even if there is no truth, man can be truthful, and even if there is no reliable certainty, man can be reliable. If there was salvation, it had to lie in man himself, and if there was a solution to the questions raised by doubting, it had to come from doubting. If everything has become doubtful, then doubting at least is certain and real. Whatever may be the state of reality and of truth as they are given to the senses and to reason, "nobody can doubt of his doubt and remain uncertain whether he doubts or does not doubt."[38] The famous *cogito ergo sum* ("I think, hence I am") did not spring for Descartes from any self-certainty of thought as such—in which case, indeed, thought would have acquired a new dignity and significance for man—but was a mere generalization of a *dubito ergo sum*.[39] In

37. From a letter of Descartes to Henry More, quoted from Koyré, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

38. In the dialogue *La recherche de la vérité par la lumière naturelle*, where Descartes exposes his fundamental insights without technical formality, the central position of doubting is even more in evidence than in his other works. Thus Eudoxe, who stands for Descartes, explains: "Vous pouvez douter avec raison de toutes les choses dont la connaissance ne vous vient que par l'office des sens; mais pouvez-vous douter de votre doute et rester incertain si vous doutez ou non? . . . vous qui doutez vous êtes, et cela est si vrai que vous n'en pouvez douter davantage" (Pléiade ed., p. 680).

39. "Je doute, donc je suis, ou bien ce qui est la même chose: je pense, donc je suis" (*ibid.*, p. 687). Thought in Descartes has indeed a mere derivative character: "Car s'il est vrai que je doute, comme je n'en puis douter, il est également vrai que je pense; en effet douter est-il autre chose que penser d'une certaine manière?" (*ibid.*, p. 686). The leading idea of this philosophy is by no means that I would not be able to think without being, but that "nous ne saurions douter sans être, et que cela est la première connaissance certaine qu'on peut acquérir" (*Prin-*

The goodness of the God of the theodicies, therefore, is strictly the quality of a *deus ex machina;* inexplicable goodness is ultimately the only thing that saves reality in Descartes' philosophy (the co-existence of mind and extension, *res cogitans* and *res extensa*), as it saves the prestabilized harmony between man and world in Leibniz.[41]

The very ingenuity of Cartesian introspection, and hence the reason why this philosophy became so all-important to the spiritual and intellectual development of the modern age, lies first in that it had used the nightmare of non-reality as a means of submerging all worldly objects into the stream of consciousness and its processes. The "seen tree" found in consciousness through introspection is no longer the tree given in sight and touch, an entity in itself with an unalterable identical shape of its own. By being processed into an object of consciousness on the same level with a merely remembered or entirely imaginary thing, it becomes part and parcel of this process itself, of that consciousness, that is, which one knows only as an ever-moving stream. Nothing perhaps could prepare our minds better for the eventual dissolution of matter into energy, of objects into a whirl of atomic occurrences, than this dissolution of objective reality into subjective states of mind or, rather, into subjective mental processes. Second, and this was of even greater relevance to the initial stages of the modern age, the Cartesian method of securing certainty against universal doubt corresponded most precisely to the most obvious conclusion to be drawn from the new physical science: though one cannot know truth as something given and disclosed, man can at least know what he makes himself. This, indeed, became the most general and most generally accepted attitude of the modern age, and it is this conviction, rather

41. This quality of God as a *deus ex machina*, as the only possible solution to universal doubt, is especially manifest in Descartes' *Méditations*. Thus, he says in the third meditation: In order to eliminate the cause of doubting, "je dois examiner s'il y a un Dieu . . . ; et si je trouve qu'il y en ait un, je dois aussi examiner s'il peut être trompeur: car sans la connaissance de ces deux vérités, je ne vois pas que je puisse jamais être certain d'aucune chose." And he concludes at the end of the fifth meditation: "Ainsi je reconnais très clairement que la certitude et la vérité de toute science dépend de la seule connaissance du vrai Dieu: en sorte qu'avant que je le connusse, je ne pouvais savoir parfaitement aucune autre chose" (Pléiade ed., pp. 177, 208).

However that may be, the fundamental experience behind the reversal of contemplation and action was precisely that man's thirst for knowledge could be assuaged only after he had put his trust into the ingenuity of his hands. The point was not that truth and knowledge were no longer important, but that they could be won only by "action" and not by contemplation. It was an instrument, the telescope, a work of man's hands, which finally forced nature, or rather the universe, to yield its secrets. The reasons for trusting *doing* and for distrusting *contemplation* or *observation* became even more cogent after the results of the first active inquiries. After being and appearance had parted company and truth was no longer supposed to appear, to reveal and disclose itself to the mental eye of a beholder, there arose a veritable necessity to hunt for truth behind deceptive appearances. Nothing indeed could be less trustworthy for acquiring knowledge and approaching truth than passive observation or mere contemplation. In order to be certain one had to *make sure*, and in order to know one had to do. Certainty of knowledge could be reached only under a twofold condition: first, that knowledge concerned only what one had done himself—so that its ideal became mathematical knowledge, where we deal only with self-made entities of the mind—and second, that knowledge was of such a nature that it could be tested only through more doing.

Since then, scientific and philosophic truth have parted company; scientific truth not only need not be eternal, it need not even be comprehensible or adequate to human reason. It took many generations of scientists before the human mind grew bold enough to fully face this implication of modernity. If nature and the universe are products of a divine maker, and if the human mind is incapable of understanding what man has not made himself, then man cannot possibly expect to learn anything about nature that he can understand. He may be able, through ingenuity, to find out and even to imitate the devices of natural processes, but that does not mean these devices will ever make sense to him—they do not have to be intelligible. As a matter of fact, no supposedly suprarational divine revelation and no supposedly abstruse philosophic truth has ever offended human reason so glaringly as certain results of modern science. One can indeed say with Whitehead: "Heaven knows

what seeming nonsense may not to-morrow be demonstrated truth."[55]

Actually, the change that took place in the seventeenth century was more radical than what a simple reversal of the established traditional order between contemplation and doing is apt to indicate. The reversal, strictly speaking, concerned only the relationship between thinking and doing, whereas contemplation, in the original sense of beholding the truth, was altogether eliminated. For thought and contemplation are not the same. Traditionally, thought was conceived as the most direct and important way to lead to the contemplation of truth. Since Plato, and probably since Socrates, thinking was understood as the inner dialogue in which one speaks with himself (*eme emautō*, to recall the idiom current in Plato's dialogues); and although this dialogue lacks all outward manifestation and even requires a more or less complete cessation of all other activities, it constitutes in itself a highly active state. Its outward inactivity is clearly separated from the passivity, the complete stillness, in which truth is finally revealed to man. If medieval scholasticism looked upon philosophy as the handmaiden of theology, it could very well have appealed to Plato and Aristotle themselves; both, albeit in a very different context, considered this dialogical thought process to be the way to prepare the soul and lead the mind to a beholding of truth beyond thought and beyond speech—a truth that is *arrhēton*, incapable of being communicated through words, as Plato put it,[56] or beyond speech, as in Aristotle.[57]

The reversal of the modern age consisted then not in raising doing to the rank of contemplating as the highest state of which human beings are capable, as though henceforth doing was the ultimate meaning for the sake of which contemplation was to be performed, just as, up to that time, all activities of the *vita activa* had been judged and justified to the extent that they made the *vita con-*

55. *Science and the Modern World*, p. 116.

56. In the *Seventh Letter* 341C: *rhēton gar oudamōs estin hōs alla mathēmata* ("for it is never to be expressed by words like other things we learn").

57. See esp. *Nicomachean Ethics* 1142a25 ff. and 1143a36 ff. The current English translation distorts the meaning because it renders *logos* as "reason" or "argument."

templativa possible. The reversal concerned only thinking, which from then on was the handmaiden of doing as it had been the *ancilla theologiae*, the handmaiden of contemplating divine truth in medieval philosophy and the handmaiden of contemplating the truth of Being in ancient philosophy. Contemplation itself became altogether meaningless.

The radicality of this reversal is somehow obscured by another kind of reversal, with which it is frequently identified and which, since Plato, has dominated the history of Western thought. Whoever reads the Cave allegory in Plato's *Republic* in the light of Greek history will soon be aware that the *periagōgē*, the turning-about that Plato demands of the philosopher, actually amounts to a reversal of the Homeric world order. Not life after death, as in the Homeric Hades, but ordinary life on earth, is located in a "cave," in an underworld; the soul is not the shadow of the body, but the body the shadow of the soul; and the senseless, ghostlike motion ascribed by Homer to the lifeless existence of the soul after death in Hades is now ascribed to the senseless doings of men who do not leave the cave of human existence to behold the eternal ideas visible in the sky.[58]

In this context, I am concerned only with the fact that the Platonic tradition of philosophical as well as political thought started with a reversal, and that this original reversal determined to a large extent the thought patterns into which Western philosophy almost automatically fell wherever it was not animated by a great and original philosophical impetus. Academic philosophy, as a matter of fact, has ever since been dominated by the never-ending reversals of idealism and materialism, of transcendentalism and immanentism, of realism and nominalism, of hedonism and asceticism, and so on. What matters here is the reversibility of all these systems, that they can be turned "upside down" or "downside up" at any moment in history without requiring for such reversal either historical events or changes in the structural elements involved. The concepts themselves remain the same no matter where they

58. It is particularly Plato's use of the words *eidōlon* and *skia* in the story of the Cave which makes the whole account read like a reversal of and a reply to Homer; for these are the key words in Homer's description of Hades in the *Odyssey*.

are placed in the various systematic orders. Once Plato had succeeded in making these structural elements and concepts reversible, reversals within the course of intellectual history no longer needed more than purely intellectual experience, an experience within the framework of conceptual thinking itself. These reversals already began with the philosophical schools in late antiquity and have remained part of the Western tradition. It is still the same tradition, the same intellectual game with paired antitheses that rules, to an extent, the famous modern reversals of spiritual hierarchies, such as Marx's turning Hegelian dialectic upside down or Nietzsche's revaluation of the sensual and natural as against the supersensual and supernatural.

The reversal we deal with here, the spiritual consequence of Galileo's discoveries, although it has frequently been interpreted in terms of the traditional reversals and hence as integral to the Western history of ideas, is of an altogether different nature. The conviction that objective truth is not given to man but that he can know only what he makes himself is not the result of skepticism but of a demonstrable discovery, and therefore does not lead to resignation but either to redoubled activity or to despair. The world loss of modern philosophy, whose introspection discovered consciousness as the inner sense with which one senses his senses and found it to be the only guaranty of reality, is different not only in degree from the age-old suspicion of the philosophers toward the world and toward the others with whom they shared the world; the philosopher no longer turns from the world of deceptive perishability to another world of eternal truth, but turns away from both and withdraws into himself. What he discovers in the region of the inner self is, again, not an image whose permanence can be beheld and contemplated, but, on the contrary, the constant movement of sensual perceptions and the no less constantly moving activity of the mind. Since the seventeenth century, philosophy has produced the best and least disputed results when it has investigated, through a supreme effort of self-inspection, the processes of the senses and of the mind. In this aspect, most of modern philosophy is indeed theory of cognition and psychology, and in the few instances where the potentialities of the Cartesian method of introspection were fully realized by men like Pascal, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche, one

is tempted to say that philosophers have experimented with their own selves no less radically and perhaps even more fearlessly than the scientists experimented with nature.

Much as we may admire the courage and respect the extraordinary ingenuity of philosophers throughout the modern age, it can hardly be denied that their influence and importance decreased as never before. It was not in the Middle Ages but in modern thinking that philosophy came to play second and even third fiddle. After Descartes based his own philosophy upon the discoveries of Galileo, philosophy has seemed condemned to be always one step behind the scientists and their ever more amazing discoveries, whose principles it has strived arduously to discover *ex post facto* and to fit into some over-all interpretation of the nature of human knowledge. As such, however, philosophy was not needed by the scientists, who—up to our time, at least—believed that they had no use for a handmaiden, let alone one who would "carry the torch in front of her gracious lady" (Kant). The philosophers became either epistemologists, worrying about an over-all theory of science which the scientists did not need, or they became, indeed, what Hegel wanted them to be, the organs of the *Zeitgeist*, the mouthpieces in which the general mood of the time was expressed with conceptual clarity. In both instances, whether they looked upon nature or upon history, they tried to understand and come to terms with what happened without them. Obviously, philosophy suffered more from modernity than any other field of human endeavor; and it is difficult to say whether it suffered more from the almost automatic rise of activity to an altogether unexpected and unprecedented dignity or from the loss of traditional truth, that is, of the concept of truth underlying our whole tradition.

42

THE REVERSAL WITHIN THE *Vita Activa* AND THE VICTORY OF *Homo Faber*

First among the activities within the *vita activa* to rise to the position formerly occupied by contemplation were the activities of making and fabricating—the prerogatives of *homo faber*. This was

itself, it is in the nature of Process to remain invisible, to be something whose existence can only be inferred from the presence of certain phenomena. This process was originally the fabrication process which "disappears in the product," and it was based on the experience of *homo faber*, who knew that a production process necessarily precedes the actual existence of every object.

Yet while this insistence on the process of making or the insistence upon considering every thing as the result of a fabrication process is highly characteristic of *homo faber* and his sphere of experience, the exclusive emphasis the modern age placed on it at the expense of all interest in the things, the products themselves, is quite new. It actually transcends the mentality of man as a toolmaker and fabricator, for whom, on the contrary, the production process was a mere means to an end. Here, from the standpoint of *homo faber*, it was as though the means, the production process or development, was more important than the end, the finished product. The reason for this shift of emphasis is obvious: the scientist made only in order to know, not in order to produce things, and the product was a mere by-product, a side effect. Even today all true scientists will agree that the technical applicability of what they are doing is a mere by-product of their endeavor.

The full significance of this reversal of means and ends remained latent as long as the mechanistic world view, the world view of *homo faber* par excellence, was predominant. This view found its most plausible theory in the famous analogy of the relationship between nature and God with the relationship between the watch and the watchmaker. The point in our context is not so much that the eighteenth-century idea of God was obviously formed in the image of *homo faber* as that in this instance the process character of nature was still limited. Although all particular natural things had already been engulfed in the process from which they had come into being, nature as a whole was not yet a process but the more or less stable end product of a divine maker. The image of watch and watchmaker is so strikingly apposite precisely because it contains both the notion of a process character of nature in the image of the movements of the watch and the notion of its still intact object character in the image of the watch itself and its maker.

It is important at this point to remember that the specifically

modern suspicion toward man's truth-receiving capacities, the mistrust of the given, and hence the new confidence in making and introspection which was inspired by the hope that in human consciousness there was a realm where knowing and producing would coincide, did not arise directly from the discovery of the Archimedean point outside the earth in the universe. They were, rather, the necessary consequences of this discovery for the discoverer himself, in so far as he was and remained an earth-bound creature. This close relationship of the modern mentality with philosophical reflection naturally implies that the victory of *homo faber* could not remain restricted to the employment of new methods in the natural sciences, the experiment and the mathematization of scientific inquiry. One of the most plausible consequences to be drawn from Cartesian doubt was to abandon the attempt to understand nature and generally to know about things not produced by man, and to turn instead exclusively to things that owed their existence to man. This kind of argument, in fact, made Vico turn his attention from natural science to history, which he thought to be the only sphere where man could obtain certain knowledge, precisely because he dealt here only with the products of human activity.[62] The modern discovery of history and historical consciousness owed one of its greatest impulses neither to a new enthusiasm for the greatness of man, his doings and sufferings, nor to the belief that the meaning of human existence can be found in the story of mankind, but to the

62. Vico (*op. cit.*, ch. 4) states explicitly why he turned away from natural science. True knowledge of nature is impossible, because not man but God made it; God can know nature with the same certainty man knows geometry: *Geometrica demonstramus quia facimus; si physica demonstrare possemus, faceremus* ("We can prove geometry because we make it; to prove the physical we would have to make it"). This little treatise, written more than fifteen years before the first edition of the *Scienza Nuova* (1725), is interesting in more than one respect. Vico criticizes all existing sciences, but not yet for the sake of his new science of history; what he recommends is the study of moral and political science, which he finds unduly neglected. It must have been much later that the idea occurred to him that history is made by man as nature is made by God. This biographical development, though quite extraordinary in the early eighteenth century, became the rule approximately one hundred years later: each time the modern age had reason to hope for a new political philosophy, it received a philosophy of history instead.

despair of human reason, which seemed adequate only when confronted with man-made objects.

Prior to the modern discovery of history but closely connected with it in its impulses are the seventeenth-century attempts to formulate new political philosophies or, rather, to invent the means and instruments with which to "make an artificial animal . . . called a Commonwealth, or State."[63] With Hobbes as with Descartes "the prime mover was doubt,"[64] and the chosen method to establish the "art of man," by which he would make and rule his own world as "God hath made and governs the world" by the art of nature, is also introspection, "to read in himself," since this reading will show him "the similitude of the thoughts and passions of one man to the thoughts and passions of another." Here, too, the rules and standards by which to build and judge this most human of human "works of art"[65] do not lie outside of men, are not something men have in common in a worldly reality perceived by the senses or by the mind. They are, rather, inclosed in the inwardness of man, open only to introspection, so that their very validity rests on the assumption that "not . . . the objects of the passions" but the passions themselves are the same in every specimen of the species man-kind. Here again we find the image of the watch, this time applied to the human body and then used for the movements of the passions. The establishment of the Commonwealth, the human creation of "an artificial man," amounts to the building of an "automaton [an engine] that moves [itself] by springs and wheels as doth a watch."

In other words, the process which, as we saw, invaded the natural sciences through the experiment, through the attempt to imitate under artificial conditions the process of "making" by which a natural thing came into existence, serves as well or even better as the principle for doing in the realm of human affairs. For here the processes of inner life, found in the passions through introspection, can become the standards and rules for the creation of the "auto-

63. Hobbes's Introduction to the *Leviathan*.

64. See Michael Oakeshott's excellent Introduction to the *Leviathan* (Blackwell's Political Texts), p. xiv.

65. *Ibid.*, p. lxiv.

known by many, weighed heavily in favor of a contemplation primarily derived from the experiences of *homo faber*. It already weighed heavily with Plato, who drew his examples from the realm of making because they were closer to a more general human experience, and it weighed even more heavily where some kind of contemplation and meditation was required of everybody, as in medieval Christianity.

Thus it was not primarily the philosopher and philosophic speechless wonder that molded the concept and practice of contemplation and the *vita contemplativa*, but rather *homo faber* in disguise; it was man the maker and fabricator, whose job it is to do violence to nature in order to build a permanent home for himself, and who now was persuaded to renounce violence together with all activity, to leave things as they are, and to find his home in the contemplative dwelling in the neighborhood of the imperishable and eternal. *Homo faber* could be persuaded to this change of attitude because he knew contemplation and some of its delights from his own experience; he did not need a complete change of heart, a true *periagōgē*, a radical turnabout. All he had to do was let his arms drop and prolong indefinitely the act of beholding the *eidos*, the eternal shape and model he had formerly wanted to imitate and whose excellence and beauty he now knew he could only spoil through any attempt at reification.

If, therefore, the modern challenge to the priority of contemplation over every kind of activity had done no more than turn upside down the established order between making and beholding, it would still have remained in the traditional framework. This framework was forced wide open, however, when in the understanding of fabrication itself the emphasis shifted entirely away from the product and from the permanent, guiding model to the fabrication process, away from the question of what a thing is and what kind of thing was to be produced to the question of how and through which means and processes it had come into being and could be reproduced. For this implied both that contemplation was no longer believed to yield truth and that it had lost its position in the *vita activa* itself and hence within the range of ordinary human experience.

43

THE DEFEAT OF *Homo Faber* AND THE PRINCIPLE OF HAPPINESS

If one considers only the events that led into the modern age and reflects solely upon the immediate consequences of Galileo's discovery, which must have struck the great minds of the seventeenth century with the compelling force of self-evident truth, the reversal of contemplation and fabrication, or rather the elimination of contemplation from the range of meaningful human capacities, is almost a matter of course. It seems equally plausible that this reversal should have elevated *homo faber*, the maker and fabricator, rather than man the actor or man as *animal laborans*, to the highest range of human possibilities.

And, indeed, among the outstanding characteristics of the modern age from its beginning to our own time we find the typical attitudes of *homo faber:* his instrumentalization of the world, his confidence in tools and in the productivity of the maker of artificial objects; his trust in the all-comprehensive range of the means-end category, his conviction that every issue can be solved and every human motivation reduced to the principle of utility; his sovereignty, which regards everything given as material and thinks of the whole of nature as of "an immense fabric from which we can cut out whatever we want to resew it however we like";[68] his equation of intelligence with ingenuity, that is, his contempt for all

68. Henri Bergson, *Évolution créatrice* (1948), p. 157. An analysis of Bergson's position in modern philosophy would lead us too far afield. But his insistence on the priority of *homo faber* over *homo sapiens* and on fabrication as the source of human intelligence, as well as his emphatic opposition of life to intelligence, is very suggestive. Bergson's philosophy could easily be read like a case study of how the modern age's earlier conviction of the relative superiority of making over thinking was then superseded and annihilated by its more recent conviction of an absolute superiority of life over everything else. It is because Bergson himself still united both of these elements that he could exert such a decisive influence on the beginnings of labor theories in France. Not only the earlier works of Édouard Berth and Georges Sorel, but also Adriano Tilgher's *Homo faber* (1929), owe their terminology chiefly to Bergson; this is still true of Jules Vuillemin's *L'Être et le travail* (1949), although Vuillemin, like almost every present-day French writer, thinks primarily in Hegelian terms.

thought which cannot be considered to be "the first step . . . for the fabrication of artificial objects, particularly of tools to make tools, and to vary their fabrication indefinitely";[69] finally, his matter-of-course identification of fabrication with action.

It would lead us too far afield to follow the ramifications of this mentality, and it is not necessary, for they are easily detected in the natural sciences, where the purely theoretical effort is understood to spring from the desire to create order out of "mere disorder," the "wild variety of nature,"[70] and where therefore *homo faber*'s predilection for patterns for things to be produced replaces the older notions of harmony and simplicity. It can be found in classical economics, whose highest standard is productivity and whose prejudice against non-productive activities is so strong that even Marx could justify his plea for justice for laborers only by misrepresenting the laboring, non-productive activity in terms of work and fabrication. It is most articulate, of course, in the pragmatic trends of modern philosophy, which are not only characterized by Cartesian world alienation but also by the unanimity with which English philosophy from the seventeenth century onward and French philosophy in the eighteenth century adopted the principle of utility as the key which would open all doors to the explanation of human motivation and behavior. Generally speaking, the oldest conviction of *homo faber*—that "man is the measure of all things"—advanced to the rank of a universally accepted commonplace.

What needs explanation is not the modern esteem of *homo faber* but the fact that this esteem was so quickly followed by the elevation of laboring to the highest position in the hierarchical order of the *vita activa*. This second reversal of hierarchy within the *vita activa* came about more gradually and less dramatically than either the reversal of contemplation and action in general or the reversal of action and fabrication in particular. The elevation of laboring was preceded by certain deviations and variations from the traditional mentality of *homo faber* which were highly characteristic of the modern age and which, indeed, arose almost automatically from the very nature of the events that ushered it in. What changed

69. Bergson, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

70. Bronowski, *op. cit.*

the mentality of *homo faber* was the central position of the concept of process in modernity. As far as *homo faber* was concerned, the modern shift of emphasis from the "what" to the "how," from the thing itself to its fabrication process, was by no means an unmixed blessing. It deprived man as maker and builder of those fixed and permanent standards and measurements which, prior to the modern age, have always served him as guides for his doing and criteria for his judgment. It is not only and perhaps not even primarily the development of commercial society that, with the triumphal victory of exchange value over use value, first introduced the principle of interchangeability, then the relativization, and finally the devaluation, of all values. For the mentality of modern man, as it was determined by the development of modern science and the concomitant unfolding of modern philosophy, it was at least as decisive that man began to consider himself part and parcel of the two superhuman, all-encompassing processes of nature and history, both of which seemed doomed to an infinite progress without ever reaching any inherent *telos* or approaching any preordained idea.

Homo faber, in other words, as he arose from the great revolution of modernity, though he was to acquire an undreamed-of ingenuity in devising instruments to measure the infinitely large and the infinitely small, was deprived of those permanent measures that precede and outlast the fabrication process and form an authentic and reliable absolute with respect to the fabricating activity. Certainly, none of the activities of the *vita activa* stood to lose as much through the elimination of contemplation from the range of meaningful human capacities as fabrication. For unlike action, which partly consists in the unchaining of processes, and unlike laboring, which follows closely the metabolic process of biological life, fabrication experiences processes, if it is aware of them at all, as mere means toward an end, that is, as something secondary and derivative. No other capacity, moreover, stood to lose as much through modern world alienation and the elevation of introspection into an omnipotent device to conquer nature as those faculties which are primarily directed toward the building of the world and the production of worldly things.

Nothing perhaps indicates clearer the ultimate failure of *homo faber* to assert himself than the rapidity with which the principle of

utility, the very quintessence of his world view, was found wanting and was superseded by the principle of "the greatest happiness of the greatest number."[71] When this happened it was manifest that the conviction of the age that man can know only what he makes himself—which seemingly was so eminently propitious to a full victory of *homo faber*—would be overruled and eventually destroyed by the even more modern principle of process, whose concepts and categories are altogether alien to the needs and ideals of *homo faber*. For the principle of utility, though its point of reference is clearly man, who uses matter to produce things, still presupposes a world of use objects by which man is surrounded and in which he moves. If this relationship between man and world is no longer secure, if worldly things are no longer primarily considered in their usefulness but as more or less incidental results of the production process which brought them into being, so that the end product of the production process is no longer a true end and the produced thing is valued not for the sake of its predetermined usage but "for its production of something else," then, obviously, the objection can be "raised that . . . its value is secondary only, and a world that contains no primary values can contain no secondary ones either."[72] This radical loss of values within the restricted

71. Jeremy Bentham's formula in *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1789) was "suggested to him by Joseph Priestley and closely resembled Beccaria's *la massima felicità divisa nel maggior numero*" (Introduction to the Hafner edition by Laurence J. Lafleur). According to Élie Halévy (*The Growth of Philosophic Radicalism* [Beacon Press, 1955]), both Beccaria and Bentham were indebted to Helvétius' *De l'esprit*.

72. Lafleur, *op. cit.*, p. xi. Bentham himself expresses his dissatisfaction with a merely utilitarian philosophy in the note added to a late edition of his work (Hafner ed., p. 1): "The word *utility* does not so clearly point to the ideas of *pleasure* and *pain* as the words *happiness* and *felicity* do." His chief objection is that utility is not measurable and therefore does not "lead us to the consideration of the *number*," without which a "formation of the standard of right and wrong" would not be possible. Bentham derives his happiness principle from the utility principle by divorcing the concept of utility from the notion of usage (see ch. 1, par. 3). This separation marks a turning point in the history of utilitarianism. For while it is true that the utility principle had been related primarily to the ego prior to Bentham, it is only Bentham who radically emptied the idea of utility of all reference to an independent world of use things and thus transformed utilitarianism into a truly "universalized egoism" (Halévy).

pendent of any object, that only one who is in pain really senses nothing but himself; pleasure does not enjoy itself but something besides itself. Pain is the only inner sense found by introspection which can rival in independence from experienced objects the self-evident certainty of logical and arithmetical reasoning.

While this ultimate foundation of hedonism in the experience of pain is true for both its ancient and modern varieties, in the modern age it acquires an altogether different and much stronger emphasis. For here it is by no means the world, as in antiquity, that drives man into himself to escape the pains it may inflict, under which circumstance both pain and pleasure still retain a good deal of their worldly significance. Ancient world alienation in all its varieties—from stoicism to epicureanism down to hedonism and cynicism—had been inspired by a deep mistrust of the world and moved by a vehement impulse to withdraw from worldly involvement, from the trouble and pain it inflicts, into the security of an inward realm in which the self is exposed to nothing but itself. Their modern counterparts—puritanism, sensualism, and Bentham's hedonism—on the contrary, were inspired by an equally deep mistrust of man as such; they were moved by doubt of the adequacy of the human senses to receive reality, the adequacy of human reason to receive truth, and hence by the conviction of the deficiency or even depravity of human nature.

This depravity is not Christian or biblical either in origin or in content, although it was of course interpreted in terms of original sin, and it is difficult to say whether it is more harmful and repulsive when puritans denounce man's corruptness or when Benthamites brazenly hail as virtues what men always have known to be vices. While the ancients had relied upon imagination and memory, the imagination of pains from which they were free or the memory of past pleasures in situations of acute painfulness, to convince themselves of their happiness, the moderns needed the calculus of pleasure or the puritan moral bookkeeping of merits and transgressions to arrive at some illusory mathematical certainty of happiness or salvation. (These moral arithmetics are, of course, quite alien to the spirit pervading the philosophic schools of late antiquity. Moreover, one need only reflect on the rigidity of self-imposed discipline and the concomitant nobility of character, so manifest in

those who had been formed by ancient stoicism or epicureanism, to become aware of the gulf by which these versions of hedonism are separated from modern puritanism, sensualism, and hedonism. For this difference, it is almost irrelevant whether the modern character is still formed by the older narrow-minded, fanatic self-righteousness or has yielded to the more recent self-centered and self-indulgent egotism with its infinite variety of futile miseries.) It seems more than doubtful that the "greatest happiness principle" would have achieved its intellectual triumphs in the English-speaking world if no more had been involved than the questionable discovery that "nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure,"[74] or the absurd idea of establishing morals as an exact science by isolating "in the human soul that feeling which seems to be the most easily measurable."[75]

Hidden behind this as behind other, less interesting variations of the sacredness of egoism and the all-pervasive power of self-interest, which were current to the point of being commonplace in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, we find another point of reference which indeed forms a much more potent principle than any pain-pleasure calculus could ever offer, and that is the principle of life itself. What pain and pleasure, fear and desire, are actually supposed to achieve in all these systems is not happiness at all but the promotion of individual life or a guaranty of the survival of mankind. If modern egoism were the ruthless search for pleasure (called happiness) it pretends to be, it would not lack what in all truly hedonistic systems is an indispensable element of argumentation—a radical justification of suicide. This lack alone indicates that in fact we deal here with life philosophy in its most vulgar and least critical form. In the last resort, it is always life itself which is the supreme standard to which everything else is referred, and the

74. This, of course, is the first sentence of the *Principles of Morals and Legislation*. The famous sentence is "copied almost word for word from Helvétius" (Halévy, *op. cit.*, p. 26). Halévy rightly remarks that "it was natural that a current idea should on all sides rather tend to find expression in the same formulae" (p. 22). This fact, incidentally, clearly shows that the authors we deal with here are not philosophers; for no matter how current certain ideas might be during a given period, there never are two philosophers who could arrive at identical formulations without copying from each other.

75. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

interests of the individual as well as the interests of mankind are always equated with individual life or the life of the species as though it were a matter of course that life is the highest good.

The curious failure of *homo faber* to assert himself under conditions seemingly so extraordinarily propitious could also have been illustrated by another, philosophically even more relevant, revision of basic traditional beliefs. Hume's radical criticism of the causality principle, which prepared the way for the later adoption of the principle of evolution, has often been considered one of the origins of modern philosophy. The causality principle with its twofold central axiom—that everything that is must have a cause (*nihil sine causa*) and that the cause must be more perfect than its most perfect effect—obviously relies entirely on experiences in the realm of fabrication, where the maker is superior to his products. Seen in this context, the turning point in the intellectual history of the modern age came when the image of organic life development—where the evolution of a lower being, for instance the ape, can cause the appearance of a higher being, for instance man—appeared in the place of the image of the watchmaker who must be superior to all watches whose cause he is.

Much more is implied in this change than the mere denial of the lifeless rigidity of a mechanistic world view. It is as though in the latent seventeenth-century conflict between the two possible methods to be derived from the Galilean discovery, the method of the experiment and of making on one hand and the method of introspection on the other, the latter was to achieve a somewhat belated victory. For the only tangible object introspection yields, if it is to yield more than an entirely empty consciousness of itself, is indeed the biological process. And since this biological life, accessible in self-observation, is at the same time a metabolic process between man and nature, it is as though introspection no longer needs to get lost in the ramifications of a consciousness without reality, but has found within man—not in his mind but in his bodily processes—enough outside matter to connect him again with the outer world. The split between subject and object, inherent in human consciousness and irremediable in the Cartesian opposition of man as a *res cogitans* to a surrounding world of *res extensae*, disappears altogether in the case of a living organism, whose very survival depends upon

the incorporation, the consumption, of outside matter. Naturalism, the nineteenth-century version of materialism, seemed to find in life the way to solve the problems of Cartesian philosophy and at the same time to bridge the ever-widening chasm between philosophy and science.[76]

44

LIFE AS THE HIGHEST GOOD

Tempting as it may be for the sake of sheer consistency to derive the modern life concept from the self-inflicted perplexities of modern philosophy, it would be a delusion and a grave injustice to the seriousness of the problems of the modern age if one looked upon them merely from the viewpoint of the development of ideas. The defeat of *homo faber* may be explainable in terms of the initial transformation of physics into astrophysics, of natural sciences into a "universal" science. What still remains to be explained is why this defeat ended with a victory of the *animal laborans;* why, with the rise of the *vita activa*, it was precisely the laboring activity that was to be elevated to the highest rank of man's capacities or, to put it another way, why within the diversity of the human condition with its various human capacities it was precisely life that overruled all other considerations.

The reason why life asserted itself as the ultimate point of reference in the modern age and has remained the highest good of mod-

76. The greatest representatives of modern life philosophy are Marx, Nietzsche, and Bergson, inasmuch as all three equate Life and Being. For this equation, they rely on introspection, and life is indeed the only "being" man can possibly be aware of by looking merely into himself. The difference between these and the earlier philosophers of the modern age is that life appears to be more active and more productive than consciousness, which seems to be still too closely related to contemplation and the old ideal of truth. This last stage of modern philosophy is perhaps best described as the rebellion of the philosophers against philosophy, a rebellion which, beginning with Kierkegaard and ending in existentialism, appears at first glance to emphasize action as against contemplation. Upon closer inspection, however, none of these philosophers is actually concerned with action as such. We may leave aside here Kierkegaard and his non-worldly, inward-directed acting. Nietzsche and Bergson describe action in terms of fabrication—*homo faber* instead of *homo sapiens*—just as Marx thinks of acting in terms of making and describes labor in terms of work. But their ultimate point of reference is not work and worldliness any more than action; it is life and life's fertility.

ern society is that the modern reversal operated within the fabric of a Christian society whose fundamental belief in the sacredness of life has survived, and has even remained completely unshaken by, secularization and the general decline of the Christian faith. In other words, the modern reversal followed and left unchallenged the most important reversal with which Christianity had broken into the ancient world, a reversal that was politically even more far-reaching and, historically at any rate, more enduring than any specific dogmatic content or belief. For the Christian "glad tidings" of the immortality of individual human life had reversed the ancient relationship between man and world and promoted the most mortal thing, human life, to the position of immortality, which up to then the cosmos had held.

Historically, it is more than probable that the victory of the Christian faith in the ancient world was largely due to this reversal, which brought hope to those who knew that their world was doomed, indeed a hope beyond hope, since the new message promised an immortality they never had dared to hope for. This reversal could not but be disastrous for the esteem and the dignity of politics. Political activity, which up to then had derived its greatest inspiration from the aspiration toward worldly immortality, now sank to the low level of an activity subject to necessity, destined to remedy the consequences of human sinfulness on one hand and to cater to the legitimate wants and interests of earthly life on the other. Aspiration toward immortality could now only be equated with vainglory; such fame as the world could bestow upon man was an illusion, since the world was even more perishable than man, and a striving for worldly immortality was meaningless, since life itself was immortal.

It is precisely individual life which now came to occupy the position once held by the "life" of the body politic, and Paul's statement that "death is the wages of sin," since life is meant to last forever, echoes Cicero's statement that death is the reward of sins committed by political communities which were built to last for eternity.[77] It is as though the early Christians—at least Paul,

77. Cicero's remark: *Civitatibus autem mors ipsa poena est . . . debet enim constituta sic esse civitas ut aeterna sit* (*De re publica* iii. 23). For the conviction in antiquity that a well-founded body politic should be immortal, see also Plato, *Laws* 713,

who after all was a Roman citizen—consciously shaped their concept of immortality after the Roman model, substituting individual life for the political life of the body politic. Just as the body politic possesses only a potential immortality which can be forfeited by political transgressions, individual life had once forfeited its guaranteed immortality in Adam's fall and now, through Christ, had regained a new, potentially everlasting life which, however, could again be lost in a second death through individual sin.

Certainly, Christian emphasis on the sacredness of life is part and parcel of the Hebrew heritage, which already presented a striking contrast to the attitudes of antiquity: the pagan contempt for the hardships which life imposes upon man in labor and giving birth, the envious picture of the "easy life" of the gods, the custom of exposing unwanted offspring, the conviction that life without health is not worth living (so that the physician, for instance, is held to have misunderstood his calling when he prolongs life where he cannot restore health)[78] and that suicide is a noble gesture to escape a life that has become burdensome. Still, one need only remember how the Decalogue enumerates the offense of murder, without any special emphasis, among a number of other transgressions—which to our way of thinking can hardly compete in gravity with this supreme crime—to realize that not even the Hebrew legal code, though much closer to our own than any pagan scale of offenses, made the preservation of life the cornerstone of the legal system of the Jewish people. This intermediary position which the Hebrew legal code occupies between pagan antiquity and all Christian or post-Christian legal systems may be explicable by the Hebrew creed which stresses the potential immortality of the people, as distinguished from the pagan immortality of the world on one side and the Christian immortality of individual life on the other. At any event, this Christian immortality that is bestowed upon the person, who in his uniqueness begins life by birth on earth, resulted not only in the more obvious increase of otherworldliness, but also in an enormously increased importance of life

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where the founders of a new *polis* are told to imitate the immortal part in man (*hoson en hēmin athanasias enest*).

78. See Plato *Republic* 405C.

on earth. The point is that Christianity—except for heretical and gnostic speculations—always insisted that life, though it had no longer a final end, still has a definite beginning. Life on earth may be only the first and the most miserable stage of eternal life; it still is life, and without this life that will be terminated in death, there cannot be eternal life. This may be the reason for the undisputable fact that only when the immortality of individual life became the central creed of Western mankind, that is, only with the rise of Christianity, did life on earth also become the highest good of man.

Christian emphasis on the sacredness of life tended to level out the ancient distinctions and articulations within the *vita activa*; it tended to view labor, work, and action as equally subject to the necessity of present life. At the same time it helped to free the laboring activity, that is, whatever is necessary to sustain the biological process itself, from some of the contempt in which antiquity had held it. The old contempt toward the slave, who had been despised because he served only life's necessities and submitted to the compulsion of his master because he wanted to stay alive at all costs, could not possibly survive in the Christian era. One could no longer with Plato despise the slave for not having committed suicide rather than submit to a master, for to stay alive under all circumstances had become a holy duty, and suicide was regarded as worse than murder. Not the murderer, but he who had put an end to his own life was refused a Christian burial.

Yet contrary to what some modern interpreters have tried to read into Christian sources, there are no indications of the modern glorification of laboring in the New Testament or in other premodern Christian writers. Paul, who has been called "the apostle of labor,"[79] was nothing of the sort, and the few passages on which

79. By the Dominican Bernard Allo, *Le travail d'après St. Paul* (1914). Among the defenders of the Christian origin of modern glorification of labor are: in France, Étienne Borne and François Henry, *Le travail et l'homme* (1937); in Germany, Karl Müller, *Die Arbeit: Nach moral-philosophischen Grundsätzen des heiligen Thomas von Aquino* (1912). More recently, Jacques Leclercq from Louvain, who has contributed one of the most valuable and interesting works to the philosophy of labor in the fourth book of his *Leçons de droit naturel*, entitled *Travail, propriété* (1946), has rectified this misinterpretation of the Christian sources: "Le christianisme n'a pas changé grand'chose à l'estime du travail";

this claim is based either are addressed to those who out of laziness "ate other men's bread" or they recommend labor as a good means to keep out of trouble, that is, they reinforce the general prescription of a strictly private life and warn of political activities.[80] It is even more relevant that in later Christian philosophy, and particularly in Thomas Aquinas, labor had become a duty for those who had no other means to keep alive, the duty consisting in keeping one's self alive and not in laboring; if one could provide for himself through beggary, so much the better. Whoever reads the sources without modern prolabor prejudices will be surprised at how little the church fathers availed themselves even of the obvious opportunity to justify labor as punishment for original sin. Thus Thomas does not hesitate to follow Aristotle rather than the Bible in this question and to assert that "only the necessity to keep alive compels to do manual labor."[81] Labor to him is nature's way of keeping the human species alive, and from this he concludes that it is by no means necessary that all men earn their bread by the sweat of their brows, but that this is rather a kind of last and desperate resort to solve the problem or fulfil the duty.[82] Not even the use of labor as a means with which to ward off the dangers of otiosity is a new Christian discovery, but was already a commonplace of Roman morality. In complete agreement with ancient convictions about the character of the laboring activity, finally, is the frequent Christian use for the mortification of the flesh, where labor, especially in the monasteries, sometimes played the same role as other painful exercises and forms of self-torture.[83]

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and in Aquinas' work "la notion du travail n'apparaît que fort accidentellement" (pp. 61–62).

80. See I Thess. 4:9–12 and II Thess. 3:8–12.

81. *Summa contra Gentiles* iii. 135: *Sola enim necessitas victus cogit manibus operari.*

82. *Summa theologica* ii. 2. 187. 3, 5.

83. In the monastic rules, particularly in the *ora et labora* of Benedict, labor is recommended against the temptations of an idle body (see ch. 48 of the rule). In the so-called rule of Augustine (*Epistolae* 211), labor is considered to be a law of nature, not a punishment for sin. Augustine recommends manual labor—he uses the words *opera* and *labor* synonymously as the opposite of *otium*—for three

The reason why Christianity, its insistence on the sacredness of life and on the duty to stay alive notwithstanding, never developed a positive labor philosophy lies in the unquestioned priority given to the *vita contemplativa* over all kinds of human activities. *Vita contemplativa simpliciter melior est quam vita activa* ("the life of contemplation is simply better than the life of action"), and whatever the merits of an active life might be, those of a life devoted to contemplation are "more effective and more powerful."[84] This conviction, it is true, can hardly be found in the preachings of Jesus of Nazareth, and it is certainly due to the influence of Greek philosophy; yet even if medieval philosophy had kept closer to the spirit of the Gospels, it could hardly have found there any reason for a glorification of laboring.[85] The only activity Jesus of Nazareth recommends in his preachings is action, and the only human capacity he stresses is the capacity "to perform miracles."

However that may be, the modern age continued to operate under the assumption that life, and not the world, is the highest good of man; in its boldest and most radical revisions and criticisms of traditional beliefs and concepts, it never even thought of challenging this fundamental reversal which Christianity had brought into

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reasons: it helps to fight the temptations of otiosity; it helps the monasteries to fulfil their duty of charity toward the poor; and it is favorable to contemplation because it does not engage the mind unduly like other occupations, for instance, the buying and selling of goods. For the role of labor in the monasteries, compare Étienne Delaruelle, "Le travail dans les règles monastiques occidentales du 4e au 9e siècle," *Journal de psychologie normale et pathologique*, Vol. XLI, No. 1 (1948). Apart from these formal considerations, it is quite characteristic that the Solitaires de Port-Royal, looking for some instrument of really effective punishment, thought immediately of labor (see Lucien Fèbre, "Travail: Évolution d'un mot et d'une idée," *Journal de psychologie normale et pathologique*, Vol. XLI, No. 1 [1948]).

84. Aquinas *Summa theologica* ii. 2. 182. 1, 2. In his insistence on the absolute superiority of the *vita contemplativa*, Thomas shows a characteristic difference from Augustine, who recommends the *inquisitio, aut inventio veritatis: ut in ea quisque proficiat*—"inquisition or discovery of truth so that somebody may profit from it" (*De civitate Dei* xix. 19). But this difference is hardly more than the difference between a Christian thinker formed by Greek, and another by Roman, philosophy.

85. The Gospels are concerned with the evil of earthly possessions, not with the praise of labor or laborers (see esp. Matt. 6:19–32, 19:21–24; Mark 4:19; Luke 6:20–34, 18:22–25; Acts 4:32–35).

the dying ancient world. No matter how articulate and how conscious the thinkers of modernity were in their attacks on tradition, the priority of life over everything else had acquired for them the status of a "self-evident truth," and as such it has survived even in our present world, which has begun already to leave the whole modern age behind and to substitute for a laboring society the society of jobholders. But while it is quite conceivable that the development following upon the discovery of the Archimedean point would have taken an altogether different direction if it had taken place seventeen hundred years earlier, when not life but the world was still the highest good of man, it by no means follows that we still live in a Christian world. For what matters today is not the immortality of life, but that life is the highest good. And while this assumption certainly is Christian in origin, it constitutes no more than an important attending circumstance for the Christian faith. Moreover, even if we disregard the details of Christian dogma and consider only the general mood of Christianity, which resides in the importance of faith, it is obvious that nothing could be more detrimental to this spirit than the spirit of distrust and suspicion of the modern age. Surely, Cartesian doubt has proved its efficiency nowhere more disastrously and irretrievably than in the realm of religious belief, where it was introduced by Pascal and Kierkegaard, the two greatest religious thinkers of modernity. (For what undermined the Christian faith was not the atheism of the eighteenth century or the materialism of the nineteenth—their arguments are frequently vulgar and, for the most part, easily refutable by traditional theology—but rather the doubting concern with salvation of genuinely religious men, in whose eyes the traditional Christian content and promise had become "absurd.")

Just as we do not know what would have happened if the Archimedean point had been discovered before the rise of Christianity, we are in no position to ascertain what the destiny of Christianity would have been if the great awakening of the Renaissance had not been interrupted by this event. Before Galileo, all paths still seemed to be open. If we think back to Leonardo, we may well imagine that a technical revolution would have overtaken the development of humanity in any case. This might well have led to flight, the realization of one of the oldest and most persistent

dreams of man, but it hardly would have led into the universe; it might well have brought about the unification of the earth, but it hardly would have brought about the transformation of matter into energy and the adventure into the microscopic universe. The only thing we can be sure of is that the coincidence of the reversal of doing and contemplating with the earlier reversal of life and world became the point of departure for the whole modern development. Only when the *vita activa* had lost its point of reference in the *vita contemplativa* could it become active life in the full sense of the word; and only because this active life remained bound to life as its only point of reference could life as such, the laboring metabolism of man with nature, become active and unfold its entire fertility.

45

THE VICTORY OF THE *Animal Laborans*

The victory of the *animal laborans* would never have been complete had not the process of secularization, the modern loss of faith inevitably arising from Cartesian doubt, deprived individual life of its immortality, or at least of the certainty of immortality. Individual life again became mortal, as mortal as it had been in antiquity, and the world was even less stable, less permanent, and hence less to be relied upon than it had been during the Christian era. Modern man, when he lost the certainty of a world to come, was thrown back upon himself and not upon this world; far from believing that the world might be potentially immortal, he was not even sure that it was real. And in so far as he was to assume that it was real in the uncritical and apparently unbothered optimism of a steadily progressing science, he had removed himself from the earth to a much more distant point than any Christian otherworldliness had ever removed him. Whatever the word "secular" is meant to signify in current usage, historically it cannot possibly be equated with worldliness; modern man at any rate did not gain this world when he lost the other world, and he did not gain life, strictly speaking, either; he was thrust back upon it, thrown into the closed inwardness of introspection, where the highest he could experience were the empty processes of reckoning of the mind, its play with itself. The only contents left were appetites and desires, the senseless

urges of his body which he mistook for passion and which he deemed to be "unreasonable" because he found he could not "reason," that is, not reckon with them. The only thing that could now be potentially immortal, as immortal as the body politic in antiquity and as individual life during the Middle Ages, was life itself, that is, the possibly everlasting life process of the species mankind.

We saw before that in the rise of society it was ultimately the life of the species which asserted itself. Theoretically, the turning point from the earlier modern age's insistence on the "egoistic" life of the individual to its later emphasis on "social" life and "socialized man" (Marx) came when Marx transformed the cruder notion of classical economy—that all men, in so far as they act at all, act for reasons of self-interest—into forces of interest which inform, move, and direct the classes of society, and through their conflicts direct society as a whole. Socialized mankind is that state of society where only one interest rules, and the subject of this interest is either classes or man-kind, but neither man nor men. The point is that now even the last trace of action in what men were doing, the motive implied in self-interest, disappeared. What was left was a "natural force," the force of the life process itself, to which all men and all human activities were equally submitted ("the thought process itself is a natural process")[86] and whose only aim, if it had an aim at all, was survival of the animal species man. None of the higher capacities of man was any longer necessary to connect individual life with the life of the species; individual life became part of the life process, and to labor, to assure the continuity of one's own life and the life of his family, was all that was needed. What was not needed, not necessitated by life's metabolism with nature, was either superfluous or could be justified only in terms of a peculiarity of human as distinguished from other animal life—so that Milton was considered to have written his *Paradise Lost* for the same reasons and out of similar urges that compel the silkworm to produce silk.

If we compare the modern world with that of the past, the loss of human experience involved in this development is extraordinarily striking. It is not only and not even primarily contemplation which

86. In a letter Marx wrote to Kugelmann in July, 1868.

has become an entirely meaningless experience. Thought itself, when it became "reckoning with consequences," became a function of the brain, with the result that electronic instruments are found to fulfil these functions much better than we ever could. Action was soon and still is almost exclusively understood in terms of making and fabricating, only that making, because of its worldliness and inherent indifference to life, was now regarded as but another form of laboring, a more complicated but not a more mysterious function of the life process.

Meanwhile, we have proved ingenious enough to find ways to ease the toil and trouble of living to the point where an elimination of laboring from the range of human activities can no longer be regarded as utopian. For even now, laboring is too lofty, too ambitious a word for what we are doing, or think we are doing, in the world we have come to live in. The last stage of the laboring society, the society of jobholders, demands of its members a sheer automatic functioning, as though individual life had actually been submerged in the over-all life process of the species and the only active decision still required of the individual were to let go, so to speak, to abandon his individuality, the still individually sensed pain and trouble of living, and acquiesce in a dazed, "tranquillized," functional type of behavior. The trouble with modern theories of behaviorism is not that they are wrong but that they could become true, that they actually are the best possible conceptualization of certain obvious trends in modern society. It is quite conceivable that the modern age—which began with such an unprecedented and promising outburst of human activity—may end in the deadliest, most sterile passivity history has ever known.

But there are other more serious danger signs that man may be willing and, indeed, is on the point of developing into that animal species from which, since Darwin, he imagines he has come. If, in concluding, we return once more to the discovery of the Archimedean point and apply it, as Kafka warned us not to do, to man himself and to what he is doing on this earth, it at once becomes manifest that all his activities, watched from a sufficiently removed vantage point in the universe, would appear not as activities of any kind but as processes, so that, as a scientist recently put it, modern motorization would appear like a process of biological mutation in

which human bodies gradually begin to be covered by shells of steel. For the watcher from the universe, this mutation would be no more or less mysterious than the mutation which now goes on before our eyes in those small living organisms which we fought with antibiotics and which mysteriously have developed new strains to resist us. How deep-rooted this usage of the Archimedean point against ourselves is can be seen in the very metaphors which dominate scientific thought today. The reason why scientists can tell us about the "life" in the atom—where apparently every particle is "free" to behave as it wants and the laws ruling these movements are the same statistical laws which, according to the social scientists, rule human behavior and make the multitude behave as it must, no matter how "free" the individual particle may appear to be in its choices—the reason, in other words, why the behavior of the infinitely small particle is not only similar in pattern to the planetary system as it appears to us but resembles the life and behavior patterns in human society is, of course, that we look and live in this society as though we were as far removed from our own human existence as we are from the infinitely small and the immensely large which, even if they could be perceived by the finest instruments, are too far away from us to be experienced.

Needless to say, this does not mean that modern man has lost his capacities or is on the point of losing them. No matter what sociology, psychology, and anthropology will tell us about the "social animal," men persist in making, fabricating, and building, although these faculties are more and more restricted to the abilities of the artist, so that the concomitant experiences of worldliness escape more and more the range of ordinary human experience.[87]

Similarly, the capacity for action, at least in the sense of the releasing of processes, is still with us, although it has become the exclusive prerogative of the scientists, who have enlarged the

87. This inherent worldliness of the artist is of course not changed if a "non-objective art" replaces the representation of things; to mistake this "non-objectivity" for subjectivity, where the artist feels called upon to "express himself," his subjective feelings, is the mark of charlatans, not of artists. The artist, whether painter or sculptor or poet or musician, produces worldly objects, and his reification has nothing in common with the highly questionable and, at any rate, wholly unartistic practice of expression. Expressionist art, but not abstract art, is a contradiction in terms.

realm of human affairs to the point of extinguishing the time-honored protective dividing line between nature and the human world. In view of such achievements, performed for centuries in the unseen quiet of the laboratories, it seems only proper that their deeds should eventually have turned out to have greater news value, to be of greater political significance, than the administrative and diplomatic doings of most so-called statesmen. It certainly is not without irony that those whom public opinion has persistently held to be the least practical and the least political members of society should have turned out to be the only ones left who still know how to act and how to act in concert. For their early organizations, which they founded in the seventeenth century for the conquest of nature and in which they developed their own moral standards and their own code of honor, have not only survived all vicissitudes of the modern age, but they have become one of the most potent power-generating groups in all history. But the action of the scientists, since it acts into nature from the standpoint of the universe and not into the web of human relationships, lacks the revelatory character of action as well as the ability to produce stories and become historical, which together form the very source from which meaningfulness springs into and illuminates human existence. In this existentially most important aspect, action, too, has become an experience for the privileged few, and these few who still know what it means to act may well be even fewer than the artists, their experience even rarer than the genuine experience of and love for the world.

Thought, finally—which we, following the premodern as well as the modern tradition, omitted from our reconsideration of the *vita activa*—is still possible, and no doubt actual, wherever men live under the conditions of political freedom. Unfortunately, and contrary to what is currently assumed about the proverbial ivory-tower independence of thinkers, no other human capacity is so vulnerable, and it is in fact far easier to act under conditions of tyranny than it is to think. As a living experience, thought has always been assumed, perhaps wrongly, to be known only to the few. It may not be presumptuous to believe that these few have not become fewer in our time. This may be irrelevant, or of restricted relevance, for the future of the world; it is not irrelevant

for the future of man. For if no other test but the experience of being active, no other measure but the extent of sheer activity were to be applied to the various activities within the *vita activa*, it might well be that thinking as such would surpass them all. Whoever has any experience in this matter will know how right Cato was when he said: *Numquam se plus agere quam nihil cum ageret, numquam minus solum esse quam cum solus esset*—"Never is he more active than when he does nothing, never is he less alone than when he is by himself."