6. What Was Authority?

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It is my contention (the reasons for which I tried to outline in another context[1]) that authority has vanished from the modern world, and that if we raise the question what authority is, we can no longer fall back upon authentic and undisputable experiences common to all. The very term has become clouded by controversy and confusion. Little about its nature appears self-evident and comprehensible to everybody, except that the political scientist knows that this concept was once fundamental to political theory and that a constant, ever-widening and deepening crisis of authority is a naked fact. This crisis, apparent since the inception of the century, is political in origin and nature, but it has spread — and this is perhaps the most significant symptom of its depth and seriousness — to such prepolitical areas as child-rearing and education, where authority in the widest sense has always been accepted as a natural necessity. We shall see later that the earliest (Greek) attempts to define authority were based exclusively on experiences made not in the public-political, but in the private realm of the household, where children are brought up and educated, and that they appealed to this natural necessity of authority implied in the relations between parents and children, teachers and pupils. Thus, the fact that the crisis or the loss of authority has spread to these prepolitical areas signifies that all the old time-honored metaphors and models for

[1] Under the title "Authority in the Twentieth Century," *Review of Politics*, vol. 18, no. 4 (October 1956).

authoritarian relations have lost their plausibility. Practically as well as theoretically, we are no longer in a position to know what authority really *is*.

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

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

Closely connected with these negative characteristics is the issue of

legitimacy, which plays such an enormous role in all truly authoritarian thought. Those who are not only in power but in authority are aware that their (authoritarian) power depends upon its legitimacy, which is assumed and "proven" by invocation of a source beyond or above the ruler. Historically, we know of a variety of sources to which authoritarian rulers could appeal in order to justify their power: it could be the law of nature, or the commands of God, or the Platonic ideas, or ancient customs sanctified by tradition, or one great event in the past, such as the foundation of the body politic. In all these cases, legitimacy derives from something outside the range of human deeds; it is either not man-made at all, like natural or divine law, or has at least not been made by those who happen to be in power.

Another familiar misunderstanding arises from the frequent antithesis of authority and freedom, upon which is based the liberal theory postulating that each loss of authority is compensated by a newly won measure of freedom. The simple fact that, for some time now, we have been living in a world where progressive loss of authority is accompanied by at least an equal threat to freedom, should make us suspect some oversimplification. It seems rather as though traditionally the political concepts of freedom and authority are so intimately interconnected and dependent upon each other that the validity and understanding of the idea of freedom become gravely compromised once the validity of authority has been lost. Historically, at any rate, authoritarian forms of rule did not wish to abolish, but to limit freedom, and these limitations were felt to be necessary to protect and safeguard liberty. An authoritarian structure, therefore, loses its essential substance, its *raison d'être,* if it does away with freedom altogether. Whenever this happens, it is no longer authoritarian but tyrannical. And a tyranny is no less anti-authoritarian than certain extreme types of democracy or anarchy. There is perhaps no clearer symptom of the confusion of our political vocabulary than the almost unanimous habit of calling Soviet Russia or Nazi Germany authoritarian, while these forms of domination in fact arose out of a catastrophic breakdown of all legitimate authority. But this confusion is neither merely semantic nor theoretical; it arises directly out of the modern world, where, outside of certain islands and some circumscribed, not very important areas, it is

almost impossible to have a genuine experience of what authority is, or rather was.

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

Authority as the one, if not *the* decisive factor in human communities did not always exist, though it can look back on a long history, and the experiences on which this concept is based are not necessarily present in all bodies politic. The word and the concept are Roman in origin. Neither the Greek language nor the varied political experiences of Greek history show any knowledge of authority and the kind of rule it implies.[2] This is expressed most clearly in the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle, who, in quite different ways but from the same political experiences, tried to introduce something akin to authority into the public life of the Greek *polis.*

There existed two kinds of rule on which they could fall back and from which they derived their political philosophy, the one known to them from the public-political realm, and the other from the private sphere of Greek household and family life. With the *polis,* absolute rule was known as tyranny, and the chief characteristics of the tyrant were that he ruled by sheer violence, had to be protected

[2] This was already noticed by the Greek historian Dio Cassius, who, when writing a history of Rome, found it impossible to translate the word *auctoritas: "hellenisai auto kathapax adynaton esti."* Quoted from T. Mommsen, *Römisches Staatsrecht* (3rd ed., 1888), vol. III, p. 952, n. 4. Moreover, one need only compare the Roman Senate, the republic's specifically authoritarian institution, with Plato's nocturnal council in the *Laws,* which, being composed of the ten oldest guardians for the constant supervision of the state, superficially resembles it, to become aware of the impossibility of finding a true alternative for coercion and persuasion within the framework of Greek political experience.

from the people by a bodyguard, and insisted that his subjects mind their own business and leave to him the care for the public realm altogether. The last characteristic, in Greek public opinion, signified that he destroyed the public realm of the *polis* altogether and thereby deprived the citizens of that political faculty which they felt was the very essence of freedom. Another political experience of the need for command and obedience might have been provided by the experience in warfare, where danger and the necessity to make and carry out decisions quickly seem to constitute an inherent reason for the establishment of authority. Neither of these political models, however, could possibly serve the purpose. The tyrant remained, for Plato as for Aristotle, the "wolf in human shape," and the military commander was too obviously connected with a temporary emergency to be able to serve as model for a permanent institution.

Because of this absence of valid political experience on which to base a claim to authoritarian rule, both Plato and Aristotle, albeit in very different ways, had to rely on examples of human relations drawn from Greek household and family life, where the head of the household ruled as a *despótes,* in uncontested mastery over the members of his family and the slaves of the household. The despot, unlike the king, the *basileús,* who had been the leader of household heads and as such *primus inter pares,* was by definition vested with the power to coerce. Yet it was precisely this characteristic that made the despot unfit for political purposes; his power to coerce was incompatible with the freedom of any other person. Wherever he ruled there was only one relation, that between master and slaves. When Plato, therefore, in his old age hoped to find in the *Laws* some quality which would make them undisputable rulers over the whole public realm, he not only construed this rule in an obviously despotic manner, but was even led to apply the terms of private household affairs to the affairs of the *polis* and to say, probably in a variation of Pindar's *nomos basileus pantôn* ("a law is king over everything"), *nómos despótes tôn archontôn, hoi de árchontes douloi tou nómou* ("the law is the despot of the rulers, and the rulers are the slaves of the law").[3] In Plato, the despotism originating in the household and

[3] *Laws,* 715.

its concomitant destruction of the political realm as antiquity understood it remained utopian. But it is interesting to note that when the destruction became a reality in the last centuries of the Roman Empire, the change was introduced by the application to public rule of the term *dominus,* which in Latin had the same meaning as the Greek *despótes.* Caligula was the first Roman Emperor who consented to be called *dominus,* that is, to be given a name "which Augustus and Tiberius still had rejected like a malediction and an injury,"[4] precisely because it implied a despotism unknown in the political realm, although only all too familiar in the private, household realm.

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

Nowhere else has Greek thinking so closely approached the concept of authority as in Plato's *Republic,* wherein he confronted the reality of the *polis* with a utopian rule of reason in the person of the philosopher-king. The motive for establishing reason as ruler in the realm of politics was exclusively political, although the consequences of expecting reason to develop into an instrument of coercion perhaps have been no less decisive for the tradition of western philosophy than for the tradition of western politics. The fatal resemblance between Plato's philosopher-king and the Greek tyrant, as well as the potential harm to the political realm that his rule would imply,

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

seems to have been recognized by Aristotle;[5] but that this combination of reason and rule implied a danger to philosophy as well has been pointed out, as far as I know, only in Kant's reply to Plato: "It is not to be expected that kings philosophize or that philosophers become kings, nor is it to be desired, because the possession of power corrupts the free judgment of reason inevitably,"[6] although even this reply does not go to the root of the matter.

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

It was after Socrates' death that Plato began to discount persuasion

[5] A fragment from the lost dialogue *On Kingship* states that "it was not only not necessary for a king to become a philosopher, but actually a hindrance to his work; that, however, it was necessary [for a good king] to listen to the true philosopher and to be agreeable to their advice." See Kurt von Fritz, *The Constitution of Athens, and Related Texts* (1950). In Aristotelian terms, both Plato's philosopher-king and the Greek tyrant rule for the sake of their own interest, and this was for Aristotle, though not for Plato, an outstanding characteristic of tyrants. Plato was not aware of the resemblance, because for him as for Greek current opinion, the principal characteristic of the tyrant was that he deprived the citizen of access to a public realm, to a "market place" where he could show himself, see and be seen, hear and be heard, that he prohibited the *agoreuein* and *politeuein,* confined the citizens to the privacy of their households, and demanded to be the only one in charge of public affairs. He would not have ceased to be a tyrant if he had used his power solely in the interests of his subjects — as indeed some of the tyrants undoubtedly did. According to the Greeks, to be banished to the privacy of household life was tantamount to being deprived of the specifically human potentialities of life. In other words, the very features which so convincingly demonstrate to us the tyrannical character of Plato's republic — the almost complete elimination of privacy and the omnipresence of political organs and institutions — presumably prevented Plato from recognizing its tyrannical character. To him, it would have been a contradiction in terms to brand as tyranny a constitution which not only did not relegate the citizen to his household but on the contrary, did not leave him a shred of private life whatsoever.

[6] "Eternal Peace," *The Philosophy of Kant,* ed. and trans. C. J. Friedrich (Modern Library Edition, 1949), p. 456.

as insufficient for the guidance of men and to seek for something liable to compel them without using external means of violence. Very early in his search, he must have discovered that Truth, namely, the truths we call self-evident, compel the mind, and that this coercion, though it needs no violence to be effective, is stronger than persuasion and argument. The trouble with coercion through reason, however, is that only the few are subject to it, so that the problem arises how to assure that the many, the people who in their very multitude compose the body politic, can be submitted to the same truth. Here, to be sure, other means of coercion must be found, and here again coercion through violence must be avoided if political life as the Greeks understood it is not to be destroyed.[7] This is the central predicament of Plato's political philosophy and has remained a predicament of all attempts to establish a tyranny of reason. In the *Republic,* the problem is solved through the concluding myth of rewards and punishments in the hereafter, a myth which Plato himself obviously neither believed nor wanted the philosophers to believe. What the allegory of the cave story in the middle of the *Republic* is for the few or for the philosopher, the myth of hell at the end is for the many who are not capable of philosophical truth. In the *Laws,* Plato deals with the same perplexity, but in the opposite way; here he proposes a substitute for persuasion, the introduction to the laws in which their intent and purpose are to be explained to the citizens.

In his attempts to find a legitimate principle of coercion, Plato was originally guided by a great number of models of existing relations, such as that between the shepherd and his sheep, between the helmsman of a ship and the passengers, between the physician and the patient, or between the master and the slave. In all these instances, either expert knowledge commands confidence so that neither force nor persuasion are necessary to obtain compliance, or the ruler and the ruled belong to two altogether different categories of beings who already are by implication subject one to the other, as in the cases of the shepherd and sheep and the master and slave. All these examples

[7] Von Fritz rightly insists on Plato's aversion to violence, "also revealed by the fact that, wherever he did make an attempt to bring about a change of political institutions in the direction of his political ideals, he addressed himself to men already in power."

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

It is important to bear these examples in mind in order to realize what kind of coercion Plato expected reason to exert in the hands of the king-philosopher. Here, it is true, the compelling power does not lie in the person or in inequality as such, but in the ideas which are perceived by the philosopher. These ideas can be used as measures of human behavior because they transcend the sphere of human affairs in the same way that a yardstick transcends, is outside and beyond, all things whose length it can measure. In the parable of the cave in the *Republic,* the sky of ideas stretches above the cave of human existence, and therefore can become its standard. But the philosopher who leaves the cave for the pure sky of ideas does not originally do so in order to acquire those standards and learn the "art of measurement" [8] but to contemplate the true essence of Being. The basically

[8] Werner Jaeger's statement in *Paideia* (1945), vol. III, p. 416n: "The idea that there is a supreme art of measurement and that the philosopher's knowledge of

authoritative element of the ideas, that is, the quality which enables them to rule and compel, is therefore not at all a matter of course. The ideas become measures only after the philosopher has left the bright sky of ideas and returned to the dark cave of human existence. In this part of the story, Plato touches upon the deepest reason for the conflict between the philosopher and the *polis*.[9] He tells of the philosopher's loss of orientation in human affairs, of the blindness striking the eyes, of the predicament of not being able to communicate what he has seen, and of the actual danger to his life which thereby arises. It is in this predicament that the philosopher resorts to what he has seen, the ideas, as standards and measures, and finally, in fear of his life, uses them as instruments of domination.

For the transformation of the ideas into measures, Plato is helped by an analogy from practical life, where it appears that all arts and crafts are also guided by "ideas," that is, by the "shapes" of objects, visualized by the inner eye of the craftsman who then reproduces them in reality through imitation.[10] This analogy enables him to understand the transcendent character of the ideas in the same manner as he does the transcendent existence of the model, which lives beyond the fabrication process it guides and therefore can eventually become the standard for its success or failure. The ideas become the unwavering, "absolute" standards for political and moral behavior and judgment in the same sense that the "idea" of a bed in general is the standard for making and judging the fitness of all particular manufactured beds.

It is only in this context that the ideas relate to the varied multitude of things concrete in the same way as one yardstick related to the varied multitude of things measurable, or as the rule of reason or common sense relates to the varied multitude of concrete events which can be subsumed under it. This aspect of Plato's doctrine of ideas had the greatest influence on the western tradition, and even Kant, though he had a very different and considerably deeper con-

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values (*phronésis*) is the ability to measure, runs through all Plato's work right down to the end" is true only for Plato's political philosophy. The very word *phronésis* characterizes in Plato and Aristotle the insight of the statesman rather than the vision of the philosopher.

[9] *Republic*, Book VII, 516–517.

[10] See especially *Timaeus*, 31, where the divine Demiurge makes the universe in accordance with a *paradigma*.

cept of human judgment, still occasionally mentions this capacity for subsuming as its essential function. Likewise, the essential characteristic of specifically authoritarian forms of government — that the source of their authority, which legitimates the exercise of power, must be beyond the sphere of power and, like the law of nature or the commands of God, must not be man-made — goes back to this applicability of the ideas in Plato's political philosophy.

At the same time the analogy relating to fabrication and the arts and crafts offers a welcome opportunity to justify the otherwise very dubious use of examples and instances taken from activities in which some expert knowledge and specialization are required. Here, the concept of the expert enters the realm of political action for the first time, and the statesman is understood to be competent to deal with human affairs in the same sense as the carpenter is competent to make furniture or the physician to heal the sick. Closely connected with this choice of examples and analogies is the element of violence, which is so glaringly evident in Plato's utopian republic and actually constantly defeats his great concern for assuring voluntary obedience, that is, for establishing a sound foundation for what, since the Romans, we call authority. There is no great difference between using the ideas as models and using them, in a somewhat cruder fashion, as actual yardsticks of behavior, and Aristotle in his earliest dialogue, written under the direct influence of Plato, already compares "the most perfect law," that is, the law which is the closest possible approximation to the idea, with "the plummet, the rule, and the compass . . . [which] are outstanding among all tools." [11]

It is of greater relevance in our context, however, that an element of violence is inevitably inherent in all activities of making, fabricating, and producing, that is, in all activities by which men confront nature directly, as distinguished from those activities, like action and speech, which are primarily directed toward human beings. The building of the human artifice always involves some violence done to nature — we must kill a tree in order to have lumber, and we must violate this material in order to build a table. In the few instances where Plato shows a dangerous preference for the tyrannical form of government, he is carried to this extreme by his own analogies. This, obviously, is most tempting when he speaks about the right

[11] In *Protrepticus*, quoted from von Fritz.

way to found new communities, because this foundation can be easily seen in the light of another "making" process. If the republic is to be made by somebody who is the political equivalent of a craftsman or artist, in accordance with an established *techné* and the rules and measurements valid in this particular "art," the tyrant is indeed in the best position to achieve the purpose.[12]

We have seen that in the parable of the cave, the philosopher leaves the cave in search of the true essence of Being without a second thought to the possible practicality of what he is going to find. Only later, when he finds himself again confined to the darkness and uncertainty of human affairs and encounters the hostility of his fellow human beings, does he begin to think of his "truth" in terms of standards applicable to the behavior of other people. This discrepancy between the ideas as true essences to be contemplated and as measures to be applied [13] is manifest in the two entirely different ideas which represent the highest idea, the one to which all others owe their existence. We find in Plato that this first idea is either that of the beautiful, described in the *Symposion* and elsewhere as *ekphanestaton* (that which shines forth most), or the idea of the good, as in the *Republic*.[14] Obviously, Plato's choice was based on the current ideal of the *kalon-kagathón*, but it is striking that the idea of the good is found only in the strictly political context of the *Republic*. If we were to analyze the original philosophical experiences underlying the doctrine of ideas (which we cannot do here), it would appear that the idea of the beautiful as the highest idea reflected these ex-

[12] *Laws*, 710–711.

[13] This presentation is indebted to Martin Heidegger's great interpretation of the cave parable in *Platons Lehre von der Wahrheit* (1947). Heidegger demonstrates how Plato transformed the concept of truth (*alétheia*) until it became identical with correct statements (*orthotés*). Correctness indeed, and not truth, would be required if the philosopher's knowledge is the ability to measure. Although he explicitly mentions the risks the philosopher runs when he is forced to return to the cave, Heidegger is not aware of the political context in which the parable appears. According to him, the transformation comes to pass because the subjective act of vision (the *idein* and the *idea* in the mind of the philosopher) takes precedence over objective truth (*aletheia*), which, according to Heidegger, signifies *Unverborgenheit*, unveiling or revelation (from *a-lanthano*, unveil).

[14] The word *ekphanestaton* is used in *Phaedrus*, 250, to mean the chief quality of beauty. In the *Republic*, 518, a similar quality is stated for the idea of the good, which is called *phanotaton*. Both words derive from *phainesthai*, to appear and shine forth, and in both cases the superlative is used.

periences far more adequately than the idea of the good. Even in the first books of the *Republic,*[15] the philosopher is still defined as a lover of beauty, not of goodness, and only in the sixth book is the idea of good as the highest idea introduced. For the original function of the ideas was not to rule or otherwise determine the chaos of human affairs, but, in "shining brightness," to illuminate their darkness. As such, the ideas have nothing whatever to do with politics, political experience, and the problem of action, but pertain exclusively to philosophy, the experience of contemplation, and the quest for the "true being of things." It is precisely ruling, measuring, subsuming, and regulating that are entirely alien to the experiences underlying the doctrine of ideas in its original conception. It seems that Plato was the first to take exception to the political "irrelevance" of his new teaching, and he tried to modify the doctrine of ideas so that it would become useful for a theory of politics. But usefulness could be saved only by the idea of the good, since "good" in the Greek vocabulary always means "good for" or "fit." If the highest idea, in which all other ideas must partake in order to be ideas at all, is that of fitness, then the ideas are applicable by definition, and in the hands of the philosopher, the expert in ideas, they can become rules and standards or, as later in the *Laws,* they can become laws. (The difference is negligible. What in the *Republic* is still the philosopher's, the philosopher-king's direct personal claim to rule, has become reason's impersonal claim to domination in the *Laws.*) The actual consequence of this political interpretation of the doctrine of ideas would be that neither man nor a god is the measure of all things, but the good itself—a consequence which apparently Aristotle, not Plato, had drawn in one of his earlier dialogues.[16]

For our purposes it is essential to remember that the element of

[15] *Republic,* 475–476. In the tradition of philosophy, the result of this Platonic repudiation of the beautiful has been that it was omitted from the so-called transcendentals or universals, that is, those qualities possessed by everything that is, and which were enumerated in medieval philosophy as *unum, alter, ens,* and *bonum.* Jacques Maritain, in his wonderful book, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry* (Bollingen Series XXXV, 1, 1953), is aware of this omission and insists that Beauty be included in the realm of transcendentals, for "Beauty is the radiance of all transcendentals united" (p. 162).

[16] In the dialogue *Politicus:* "for the most exact measure of all things is the good" (quoted from von Fritz). The notion must have been that only through the concept of the good do things become comparable and hence measurable.

rule, as reflected in our present concept of authority so tremendously influenced by Platonic thinking, can be traced to a conflict between philosophy and politics, but not to specifically political experiences. That is, experiences immediately derived from the realm of human affairs. One cannot understand Plato without bearing in mind both his repeated emphatic insistence on the philosophic irrelevance of this realm, which he always warned should not be taken too seriously, and the fact that he himself, in distinction to nearly all philosophers who came after him, still took human affairs so seriously that he changed the very center of his thought to make it applicable to politics. But the rule of the philosopher-king and the domination of human affairs by something outside its own realm are demanded precisely because, from the standpoint of philosophy as well as the philosopher, under no circumstances must they acquire a dignity of their own.

In the political philosophy of Aristotle, we find the second attempt to establish a concept of authority in terms of rulers and the ruled; it was equally important for the development of the tradition of political thought, although Aristotle took a basically different approach. For him, reason has neither dictatorial nor tyrannical features, and there is no philosopher-king to regulate human affairs once and for all. His reason for maintaining that "each body politic is composed of those who rule and those who are ruled" does not derive from the superiority of the expert over the layman, and he is too conscious of the difference between acting and making to draw his examples from the sphere of fabrication. Aristotle, as far as I can see, was the first to appeal, for the purpose of establishing rule in the handling of human affairs, to "nature," which "established the difference . . . between the younger and the older ones, destined the ones to be ruled and the others to rule." [17]

The simplicity of this argument is all the more deceptive since centuries of repetition have degraded it into a platitude. This may be why one usually overlooks its flagrant contradiction of Aristotle's own definition of the *polis* as also given in *Politics:* "The *polis* is a community of equals for the sake of a life which is potentially the

[17] *Politics,* 1332b12 and 1332b36. The distinction between the younger and older ones goes back to Plato; see *Republic,* 412, and *Laws,* 690 and 714. The appeal to nature is Aristotelian.

best." [18] Obviously, the notion of rule in the *polis* was for Aristotle himself so far from convincing that he, one of the most consistent and least self-contradictory great thinkers, did not feel particularly bound by his own argument. We therefore need not be surprised when we read at the beginning of the *Economics* (a pseudo-Aristotelian treatise, but written by one of his closest disciples) that the essential difference between a political community (the *polis*) and a private household (the *oikia*) is that the *oikia* constitutes a "monarchy," a one-man rule, while the *polis,* on the contrary, "is composed of many rulers." [19] In order to understand this characterization, we must remember first that the words "monarchy" and "tyranny" were used synonymously and in clear contradistinction to kingship; second, the character of the *polis* as "composed of many rulers" has nothing to do with the various forms of government that usually are opposed to one-man rule, such as oligarchy, aristocracy, or democracy. The "many rulers" in this context are the household heads, who have established themselves as "monarchs" at home before they join to constitute the public-political realm of the city. Ruling itself, and the distinction between rulers and ruled, belong to a sphere which precedes the political realm, and what distinguishes it from the "economic" sphere of the household is that the *polis* is based upon the principle of equality and knows no differentiation between rulers and ruled.

In this distinction between what we would today call the private and the public spheres, Aristotle only articulates current Greek public opinion, according to which "every citizen belongs to two orders of existence" because "the polis gives each individual . . . besides his private life a sort of second life, his *bios politikos.*" [20] (The latter, Aristotle called the "good life," and redefined its content; only this definition, not the differentiation itself, conflicted with common Greek opinion.) Both orders were forms of human living-together, but only the household community was concerned with keeping alive as such and coping with the physical necessities involved in maintaining individual life and guaranteeing the survival of the species. It was in the *polis* that man appeared as an individual

[18] *Politics,* 1328b35.
[19] *Economics,* 1343a1–4.
[20] Jaeger, vol. I, p. 111.

personality, as we would say today.[21] As living beings, concerned with the preservation of life, men are confronted with and driven by necessity. Necessity must be mastered before the political "good life" can begin, and it can be mastered only through domination. Hence the freedom of the "good life" rests on the domination of necessity.

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

There can be no question that Aristotle, like Plato before him, meant to introduce a kind of authority into the handling of public affairs and the life of the *polis,* and no doubt for very good political reasons. Yet, he too had to resort to a kind of makeshift solution in order to make plausible the introduction into the political realm of a distinction between rulers and ruled, between those who command and those who obey. And he too could take his examples and models only from a prepolitical sphere, from the private realm of the household and the experiences of a slave economy. This leads him into glaringly contradictory statements, insofar as he superimposes on the actions and life in the *polis* those standards which, as he explains elsewhere, are valid only for the behavior and life in the household community. The inconsistency of his enterprise is apparent even if we consider only the famous example from the *Politics* mentioned above, in which the differentiation between rulers and ruled is derived from the natural difference between the younger and the elder. For this example is in itself eminently unsuitable to prove Aristotle's argument. The relation between old and young is educa-

[21] *Economics,* 1343b24.

tional in essence, and in this education no more is involved than the training of the future rulers by the present rulers. If rule is at all involved here, it is entirely different from political forms of rule, not only because it is limited in time and intent, but because it happens between people who are potentially equals. Yet, substitution of education for rule had the most far-reaching consequences. On its grounds, rulers have posed as educators and educators have been accused of ruling. Then, as well as now, nothing is more questionable than the political relevance of examples drawn from the field of education. In the political realm we deal always with adults who are past the age of education, properly speaking, and politics or the right to participate in the management of public affairs begins precisely where education has come to an end. (Adult education, individual or communal, may be of great relevance for the formation of personality, its full development or greater enrichment, but is politically irrelevant unless its purpose is to make up for the education, somehow not acquired in youth, needed for participation in public affairs.) In education, conversely, we always deal with people who cannot yet be admitted to politics and equality because they are being prepared. Aristotle's example is nevertheless of great relevance because it is true that the necessity for "authority" is more plausible and evident in child-rearing and education than anywhere else. That is why it is so characteristic of our own time to want to eradicate even this extremely limited and politically irrelevant form of authority.

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

The grandiose attempts of Greek philosophy to find a concept of authority which would prevent deterioration of the *polis* and safeguard the life of the philosopher foundered on the fact that in the realm of Greek political life there was no awareness of authority

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

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

Greek an almost commonplace experience — became to the Roman the central, decisive, unrepeatable beginning of his whole history, a unique event.

The founding of Rome — *tanta molis erat Romanam condere gentem* ("so great was the effort and toil to found the Roman people"), as Virgil sums up the ever-present theme of the *Aeneid,* that all wandering and suffering reach their end and their goal *dum conderet urbem* ("that he may found the city") — this foundation and the equally un-Greek experience of the sanctity of house and hearth, as though Homerically speaking the spirit of Hector had survived the fall of Troy and been resurrected on Italian soil, form the deeply political content of Roman religion. In contrast to Greece, where piety depended upon the immediate revealed presence of the gods, here religion literally meant religare:[22] to be tied back, obligated, to the enormous, almost superhuman and hence always legendary effort to lay the foundations, to build the cornerstone, to found for eternity.[23] To be religious meant to be tied to the past, and Livy, the great recorder of past events, could therefore say: *Mihi vetustas res scribenti nescio quo pacto antiquus fit animus et quaedam religio tenet,* "while I write down these ancient events, I do not know through what connection my mind grows old and some *religio* holds (me)."[24] Thus religious and political activity could be considered as almost identical, and Cicero could say: "In no other realm does human excellence approach so closely the paths of the gods (*numen*) as it does in the founding of new and in the preservation of already founded communities."[25] The binding power of the foundation itself was religious, for the city also offered the gods of the people a permanent home — again unlike the Greek gods, who protected the cities of the mortals and occasionally dwelt in them, but who had their own home, far from the abode of men, on Mount Olympus.

It is in this context that word and concept of authority originally appeared. The word *auctoritas* derives from the verb "augment,"

[22] The derivation of *religio* from *religare* occurs in Cicero. Since we deal here only with the political self-interpretation of the Romans, the question whether this derivation is etymologically correct is irrelevant.

[23] See Cicero, *De Re Publica,* III, 23.

[24] *Annals,* Book 43, ch. 13.

[25] *De Re Publica,* I, 7.

and what authority or those in authority constantly augment is the foundation. Those endowed with authority were the elders, the Senate or the *patres,* who had obtained it by descent and by transmission (tradition) from those who had laid the foundations for all things to come, the ancestors, whom the Romans therefore called the *maiores.* The authority of the living was always derivative, depending upon the *auctores imperii Romani conditoresque,* as Pliny puts it, upon the authority of the founders who no longer were among the living. It is of some importance that the word *auctores* can be used as the very opposite of the *artifices,* the actual builders and makers, and this precisely when the word *auctor* signifies the same thing as our "author." Who, asks Pliny at the occasion of a new theater, should be more admired, the maker or the author, the inventor or the invention, meaning, of course, the latter in both instances. The author in this case is not the builder but the one who inspired the whole enterprise and whose spirit, therefore, much more than the spirit of the actual builder, is represented in the building itself. In distinction to the *artifex* who only made it, he is the actual author of the building, because with it he has become an "augmenter" of the city.

However, the relation between *auctor* and *artifex* is by no means the (Platonic) relation between the master who gives orders and the servant who executes them. The most conspicuous characteristic of those in authority is that they do not have power. *Cum potestas in populo auctoritas in senatu sit,* "while power resides in the people, authority rests with the Senate." [26] Because the "authority," the augmentation which the Senate must add to political decisions, seems to us so curiously elusive and intangible, Mommsen called it "more than advice and less than a command, an advice which one may not safely ignore," whereby it is assumed that "the will and the actions of the people like those of children are exposed to error and mistakes and therefore need 'augmentation' and confirmation through the council of elders." [27] The authoritative character of the "augmentation" of the elders lies in its being a

[26] Cicero, *De legibus,* 3, 12, 38.

[27] Mommsen, pp. 1034, 1038–1039. I am very grateful to Professor Carl J. Friedrich, who drew my attention to the important discussion of authority in Mommsen's *Römisches Staatsrecht.*

mere advice, needing neither the form of command nor external coercion to make itself heard.[28]

The binding force of this authority is closely connected with the religiously binding force of the *auspices,* which, unlike the Greek oracle, does not hint at the objective course of future events but reveals merely divine approval or disapproval of decisions made by men.[29] The gods, too, have authority among, rather than power over men; they "augment" and confirm human actions but do not guide them. And just as "all *auspices* were traced back to the great sign by which the gods gave Romulus the authority to found the city," [30] so all authority derives from this foundation, binding every act back to the sacred beginning of Roman history, adding, as it were, to every single moment the whole weight of the past.

Thus, precedents, the deeds of the ancestors and the usage that grew out of them, are always binding.[31] Anything that has happened is transformed into an example, and the *auctoritas maiorum* is identical with authoritative models for actual behavior, is the moral political standard as such. This is also why old age, as distinguished from mere adulthood, was felt by the Romans to contain the very climax of human life; not so much because of accumulated wisdom and experience as because the old man had grown closer to the ancestors and the past. Contrary to our concept of growth, where one grows into the future, the Romans felt that growth was directed toward the past. If one wants to relate this attitude to the hierarchical order established by authority and to visualize this hierarchy in the familiar image of the pyramid, it is as though the peak of the pyramid did not reach into the

[28] This interpretation is further supported by the idiomatic Latin use of *alicui auctorem esse* for "giving advice to somebody."

[29] See Mommsen (2nd ed.), vol. I, pp. 73ff. The Latin word *numen,* which is nearly untranslatable, meaning "divine command" as well as the divine modes of acting, derives from *nuere,* to nod in affirmation. Thus, the commands of the gods and all their interference in human affairs are restricted to approval or disapproval of human actions.

[30] Mommsen (2nd ed.), vol. I, p. 87.

[31] See also the various Latin idioms such as *auctores habere* for having predecessors or examples; *auctoritas maiorum,* signifying the authoritative example of the ancestors; *usus et auctoritas* as used in Roman law for property rights which come from usage. An excellent presentation of this Roman spirit as well as a very useful collection of the more important source materials are to be found in Victor Poeschl, *Römischer Staat und Griechisches Staatsdenken bei Cicero* (1936), especially pp. 101ff.

height of a sky above (or, as in Christianity, beyond) the earth, but into the depth of an earthly past.

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

Just as the derivative character of the applicability of the ideas to politics did not prevent Platonic political thought from becoming the origin of western political theory, so the derivative character of authority and tradition in spiritual matters did not prevent them from becoming the dominant features of western philosophic thought for the longer part of our history. In both instances, the political origin and the political experiences underlying the theories were forgotten, the original conflict between politics and philosophy, between the citizen and the philosopher, no less than the experience of foundation in which the Roman trinity of religion, authority, and tradition had its legitimate source. The strength of this trinity lay in the binding force of an authoritative beginning to which

"religious" bonds tied men back through tradition. The Roman trinity survived not only the transformation of the republic into the empire but penetrated wherever the *pax romana* created western civilization on Roman foundations.

The extraordinary strength and endurance of this Roman spirit — or the extraordinary reliability of the founding principle for the creation of bodies politic — were subjected to a decisive test and proved themselves, conspicuously after the decline of the Roman empire, when Rome's political and spiritual heritage passed to the Christian Church. Confronted with this very real mundane task, the Church became so "Roman" and adapted itself so thoroughly to Roman thinking in matters of politics that it made the death and resurrection of Christ the cornerstone of a new foundation, erecting on it a new human institution of tremendous durability. Thus, after Constantine the Great had called upon the Church to secure for the declining empire the protection of the "most powerful God," the Church was eventually able to overcome the antipolitical and anti-institutional tendencies of the Christian faith which had caused so much trouble in earlier centuries, and which are so manifest in the New Testament and in early Christian writings and seemingly so insurmountable. The victory of the Roman spirit is really almost a miracle; in any event, it alone enabled the Church "to offer men in the membership of the Church the sense of citizenship which neither Rome nor municipality could any longer offer them."[32] Yet, just as Plato's politicalization of the ideas changed western philosophy and determined the philosophic concept of reason, so the politicalization of the Church changed the Christian religion. The basis of the Church as a community of believers and a public institution was now no longer the Christian faith in resurrection (though this faith remained its content) nor the Hebrew obedience to the commands of God, but rather the testimony of the life, of the birth, death, and resurrection, of Jesus of Nazareth as a historically recorded event.[33] As witnesses to this

[32] R. H. Barrow, *The Romans* (1949), p. 194.

[33] A similar amalgamation of Roman imperial political sentiment with Christianity is discussed by Erik Peterson, *Der Monotheismus als politiches Problem* (1935), in connection with Orosius who related the Roman emperor Augustus to Christ. "Dabei ist deutlich, dass Augustus auf diese Weise christianisiert und Christus zum *civis romanus* wird, romanisiert worden ist" (p. 92).

event the apostles could become the "founding fathers" of the Church, from whom she would derive her own authority, as long as she would hand down their testimony by way of tradition from generation to generation. This transformation was to a large extent accomplished by Augustine, the only great philosopher, one is tempted to think, the Romans ever had. For the mainstay of his philosophy: *sedis animi est in memoria* ("the seat of the mind is in memory") is precisely that conceptual articulation of the specifically Roman experience which the Romans themselves, overwhelmed as they were by Greek philosophy and concepts, never achieved.

Thanks to the fact that the foundation of the city of Rome was repeated in the foundation of the Catholic Church, though, of course, with a radically different content, the Roman trinity of religion, authority, and tradition could be taken over by the Christian era, with the result that the miracle of permanence, too, repeated itself; for within the framework of our history, the durability and continuity of the Church as a public institution can only be compared with the thousand years of Roman history in antiquity.

It is true that Roman political thought at a very early date began to use Platonic concepts in order to understand and interpret the specifically Roman political experiences. Yet, it seems as though it was only in the Christian era that Plato's invisible, spiritual yardsticks, by which the visible, concrete affairs of men are to be measured and judged, were unfolding their full political effectiveness. Precisely those parts of Christian doctrine which would have had great difficulty in fitting in and being assimilated to the Roman political structure — namely, the revealed commandments and truths of a genuinely transcendent authority which, unlike Plato's, did not stretch above but were beyond the earthly realm — could be integrated into the Roman foundation legend via Plato. God's revelation could now be interpreted politically as if the standards for human conduct and the principle of political communities, intuitively anticipated by Plato, had been finally revealed directly, so that in the words of a modern Platonist it appeared as though Plato's early "orientation toward the unseen measure was now confirmed through the revelation of the measure itself."[34] To

[34] Eric Voeglin, *A New Science of Politics* (1952), p. 78.

the extent that the Catholic Church incorporated Greek philosophy into the structure of its doctrines and dogmatic beliefs, it amalgamated the Roman political concept of authority, which inevitably was based on a beginning, a founding in the past, with the Greek notion of transcending measurements and rules. General and transcendent standards under which the particular and immanent could be subsumed were now required for any political order, moral rules for all interhuman behavior and rational measurements for the guidance of all individual judgment. There is scarcely anything that eventually was to assert itself with greater authority and more far-reaching consequences than the amalgamation itself.

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

One thing, however, is particularly striking in this context: while all the models, prototypes, and examples for authoritarian relationships — such as the statesman as healer and physician, as expert, as helmsman, as the master who knows, as educator, as the wise man — all Greek in origin, have been faithfully preserved and further articulated until they became empty platitudes, the one political experience which brought authority as word, concept, and reality into our history — the Roman experience of foundation — seems to have been entirely lost and forgotten. And this to such an extent that the moment we begin to talk and think about authority, after all one of the central concepts of political thought, it is as though we were caught in a maze of abstractions, metaphors, and figures of speech in which everything can be taken and mistaken for something else, because we have no reality, either in history or in everyday experience, to which we can unanimously appeal. This,

among other things, indicates what could also be proved otherwise, namely that the Greek concepts, once they had been sanctified by the Romans through tradition and authority, simply eliminated from historical consciousness all political experiences which could not be fitted into their framework.

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

Machiavelli's unique position in the history of political thought has little to do with his often praised but by no means unarguable realism, and he was certainly not the father of political science, a role now frequently attributed to him.[35] His unconcern with moral judgments and his freedom from prejudice are astonishing enough, but they do not strike the core of the matter; they have contributed more to his fame than to the understanding of his works, because most of his readers, then as today, were too shocked even to read him properly. When he insists that in the public-political realm men "should learn how not to be good,"[36] he of course never meant that they should learn how to be evil. After all, there is scarcely another political thinker who has spoken with such vehement contempt of "methods [by which] one may indeed gain power but not glory."[37] True, it is only that he opposed both concepts of the good which we find in our tradition: the Platonic concept of the "good for" or fitness, and the Christian concept of an absolute goodness which is not of this world. Both concepts in his opinion were valid, but only in the private sphere of human life; in the public realm of politics they had no more place than

[35] If one understands by political science political theory, its father certainly is Plato rather than Machiavelli. If one stresses the scientific character of political science, it is hardly possible to date its birth earlier than the rise of all modern science, that is, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In my opinion, the scientific character of Machiavelli's theories is often greatly exaggerated.

[36] *Prince*, ch. 15.

[37] *Prince*, ch. 8.

their opposites, unfitness or incompetence and evil. The *virtù,* on the other hand, which according to Machiavelli is the specifically political human quality, has neither the connotation of moral character like the Roman *virtus,* nor that of excellence like the Greek *arete. Virtù* has much closer relation to the world; it is man's response to the constellation of *fortuna* in which the world presents and offers itself to him, to his *virtù.* There is no *virtù* without *fortuna* and no *fortuna* without *virtù;* the interplay between them indicates a harmony between man and world — playing with each other and succeeding together — which is as remote from the wisdom of the statesman as from the competence of experts.

His experiences in the struggles of his time taught Machiavelli a deep contempt for all traditions, Christian and Greek, as presented, nurtured, and reinterpreted by the Church. His contempt was leveled at a corrupt Church which had corrupted the political life of Italy, but such corruption, he argued, was inevitable because of the Christian character of the Church. What he witnessed, after all, was not only corruption but also the reaction against it, the deeply religious and sincere revival emanating from the Franciscans and Dominicans, culminating in the fanaticism of Savonarola, whom he held in considerable respect. Respect for these religious forces and contempt for the Church together led him to certain conclusions about a basic discrepancy between the Christian faith and politics that is oddly reminiscent of the first centuries of our era. His point was that every contact between religion and politics must corrupt both, and that a noncorrupt Church, though considerably more respectable, would be even more destructive to the public realm than its present corruption.[38] What he did not, and perhaps in his time could not see was the Roman influence on the Catholic Church which, indeed, was much less noticeable than its Christian content and its Greek theoretical framework of reference.

It was more than patriotism and more than the current revival of interest in antiquity that sent Machiavelli to search for the central political experiences of the Romans as they had originally been presented, equally removed from Christian piety and Greek philosophy. The greatness of his rediscovery lies in that he could not simply revive or resort to an articulate conceptual tradition, but

[38] See especially the *Discourses,* Book III, ch. 1.

had himself to articulate those experiences which the Romans had not conceptualized but rather expressed in terms of Greek philosophy vulgarized for this purpose.[39] He saw that the whole of Roman history and mentality depended upon the experience of foundation, and he believed it should be possible to repeat the Roman experience through the foundation of a unified Italy which was to become the same sacred cornerstone for an "eternal" body politic for the Italian nation as the founding of the Eternal City had been for the Italic people. The fact that he was aware of the contemporary beginnings of the birth of nations and the need for a new body politic, for which he therefore used the hitherto unknown term *lo stato,* has caused him to be commonly and rightfully identified as the father of the modern nation-state and its notion of a "reason of state." What is even more striking, though less well known, is that Machiavelli and Robespierre so often seem to speak the same language. When Robespierre justifies terror, "the despotism of liberty against tyranny," he sounds at times as if he were repeating almost word for word Machiavelli's famous statements on the necessity of violence for the founding of new political bodies, the refounding of corrupt ones.

This resemblance is all the more startling since both Machiavelli and Robespierre in this respect go beyond what the Romans themselves had to say about foundation. To be sure, the connection between foundation and dictatorship could be learned from the Romans themselves, and Cicero, for instance, appeals explicitly to Scipio to become *dictator rei publicae constituendae,* to seize the dictatorship in order to restore the republic.[40] Like the Romans, Machiavelli and Robespierre felt founding was the central political action, the one great deed that established the public-political realm and made politics possible; but unlike the Romans, to whom this was an event of the past, they felt that for this supreme "end" all "means," and chiefly the means of violence, were justified. They understood the act of founding entirely in the image of making; the question to them was literally how to "make" a unified Italy or a French Republic, and their justification of violence

[39] It is curious to see how carefully Machiavelli avoided in his interpretations of Roman history any reference to Cicero.

[40] *De Re Publica,* VI, 12.

was guided by and received its inherent plausibility from the underlying argument: You cannot make a table without killing trees, you cannot make a republic without killing people. In this respect, which was to become so fateful for the history of revolutions, Machiavelli and Robespierre were not Romans and the authority to which they could have appealed would have been rather Plato who also recommended tyranny as the government where "change is likely to be easiest and most rapid."[41]

It is precisely in this double respect, because of his rediscovery of the foundation experience and his reinterpretations of it in terms of the justification of (violent) means for a supreme end, that Machiavelli may be regarded as the ancestor of modern revolutions, all of which can be characterized by Marx's remark that the French Revolution appeared on the stage of history in Roman costume. Unless it is recognized that the Roman pathos for foundation inspired them, it seems to me that neither the grandeur nor the tragedy of western revolutions in the modern age can be properly understood. Of these, only one, the American Revolution, has been successful: the founding fathers as, characteristically enough, we still call them, founded a completely new body politic without violence and with the help of a constitution. And this body politic has at least endured to the present day, in spite of the fact that the specifically modern character of the modern world has nowhere else produced such extreme expressions in all nonpolitical spheres of life as it has in the United States.

This is not the place to discuss the reasons for the surprising stability of a political structure under the onslaught of the most vehement and shattering social instability. It seems certain that the relatively nonviolent character of the American Revolution, where violence was more or less restricted to regular warfare, is an important factor in this success. It may also be that the founding fathers, because they had escaped the European development of the nation-state, had remained closer to the original Roman spirit. More important, perhaps, was that the act of foundation, namely the colonization of the American continent, had preceded the Declaration of Independence, so that the framing of the Constitution, falling back on existing charters and agreements, confirmed

[41] *Laws*, 711a.

and legalized an already existing body politic rather than made it anew.[42] Thus, the actors in the American Revolution were spared the effort of "initiating a new order of things" altogether; that is, they were spared the one action of which Machiavelli once said that "there is nothing more difficult to carry out, nor more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to handle."[43] And Machiavelli surely must have known, for he, like Robespierre and Lenin and all the great revolutionaries whose ancestor he was, wished nothing more passionately than to initiate a new order of things.

However that may be, revolutions, which we commonly regard as radical breaks with tradition, appear in our context as events in which the actions of men are still inspired by and derive their greatest strength from the origins of this tradition. They seem to be the only salvation which this Roman-western tradition has provided for emergencies. The fact that not only the various revolutions of the twentieth century, but all revolutions since the French have gone wrong, ending in either restoration or tyranny, seems to indicate that even these last means of salvation provided by tradition have become inadequate. Authority as we once knew it, which grew out of the Roman experience of foundation and was understood in the light of Greek political philosophy, has nowhere been re-established, neither through revolutions nor through the even less promising means of restoration, and least of all through the conservative moods and trends which occasionally sweep public opinion.

To live in a political realm with neither authority nor the concomitant awareness that the source of authority transcends power and those who are in power, means to be confronted anew, without the protection of tradition and self-evident standards of behavior, by the elementary problems of human living-together. Historically, we may say that the loss of authority is merely the final, though decisive, phase of a development which for centuries undermined primarily religion and tradition. Of tradition, religion, and authority, the Roman-inherited trinity, authority has proved to be the most stable element. With the loss of authority, however, the

[42] Professor Norman Jacobson mentioned to me certain remarks of John Adams which would justify these assumptions.

[43] *Prince*, ch. 6.

general doubt of the modern age also invaded the political realm, where things not only assume a more radical expression, but become endowed with a reality peculiar to the political realm alone. What perhaps hitherto had been only of spiritual significance for the few, now has become a concern to one and all. Only now, as it were after the fact, the loss of tradition and religion have become political events of the first order.

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

It is similar with the loss of religion. Ever since the radical criticism of religious beliefs in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it has remained characteristic of the modern age to doubt religious truth, and this is true for believers and nonbelievers alike. Since Pascal and, even more pointedly, since Kierkegaard,

doubt has been carried into belief and the modern believer must constantly guard his beliefs against doubts; not the Christian faith as such, but Christianity (and Judaism of course) in the modern age are ridden by paradoxes and absurdity. And whatever else may be able to survive absurdity — philosophy perhaps can — religion certainly cannot. Yet this loss of belief in the dogmas of institutional religion need not necessarily imply a loss or even a crisis of faith, for religion and faith, or belief and faith, are by no means the same. Only belief, but not faith, has an inherent affinity with and is constantly exposed to doubt. But who can deny that faith, too, for so many centuries securely protected by religion and its dogmas, has been gravely endangered through what is actually only a crisis of institutional religion?

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