

POLITICS AND HISTORY

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12. History and Politics

POLITICAL THOUGHT CAN BE NEITHER detached from nor a slave to reality. One cannot opt for a certain regime while ignoring the one that exists in a given country at a given time or those that have existed throughout the world in times past; nor can one determine what should be on the basis of what is.

It is doubtless permissible to apply classical logic and to make a distinction between political science, which studies facts relating to government and patterns of authority, and the art of politics, which by combining ethical imperatives and the lessons of experience seeks to proffer advice or prescribe courses of action. But the soundest outcome of any reflection on political thought (as on all the so-called social sciences) is to limit the importance of such a distinction. The knowledge of facts is in numerous ways influenced by our value judgments, and these in turn are defined largely by the milieu—nation, class, period—to which the thinker belongs. In short, political thought is essentially impure, equivocal. When it claims to be scientific it is already moralizing. When it claims to be normative it is influenced by prevailing realities.

It is not impossible to conceive, at one extreme, a politics of pure and simple observation and, at the other, a politics of pure and simple ideals, each of these two terms setting, so to speak, the limits of an effort either toward objectivity or toward utopia. However, raw observation is hardly instructive and utopia of little use in practice.

It is in the middle area that political philosophy can thrive, expressing both the free and conditioned nature of human thought. The situation always allows for a margin of choice, but the margin is never unlimited. A Frenchman in 1949 is not limited to the choice of one social regime or diplomatic orientation, but he is not free to choose any regime or diplomacy whatsoever. More precisely, he can, in the abstract, conceive

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of any regime or diplomacy, but reality will not allow all conceptions to be realized.

This proposition will probably be accepted at face value with no great objection. But difficulties arise as soon as one tries to specify this "margin of choice." Who is competent to say what arguments are suitable to demonstrate that a certain policy is without merit because it is unrealistic and that another one is compatible with the facts of a given situation? The answer, however unsatisfactory, seems to me obvious. It is political thought itself, coming round full circle, that determines the margin of choice as well as its contents. Whoever suggests reforming parliamentary democracies in the middle of the twentieth century must show both the steps that would improve their functioning and the compatibility of such steps with the structure of these regimes.

In other words, political thought is essentially an attempt to elucidate, from the study of societies, the goals one can aspire to and the means most likely to reach them. Clearly, this investigation of what is possible is influenced by prior desires and preferences, desires and preferences that are also modified by the investigation itself. The outcome is never a moral or political imperative but an indication of diverse possibilities (as to goals) and degrees of probability (as to means).

Political thought, whatever the scope of its ambitions, remains basically the same. The here-and-now judgment made by a statesman and the decision he takes involve this consideration of possible objectives, the recognition of compatible elements, and the selection of effective means. The doctrines of theorists are based also on an analysis of actuality and a formulation of values. For the theorist, however, actuality is fused with the whole of history, the multiplicity of regimes that have existed in the past or continue to exist at the present hour. Consequently, the relation between what is and what ought to be is tantamount, at a higher level not so much of abstraction as of scope, to the relation between historical experience and political will.

Among competent observers who have taken the trouble to pursue the necessary studies, a large measure of agreement can quite easily be reached on what is possible within a given political or economic system. If a common political stand does not ensue it is because all concrete steps entail consequences favorable or unfavorable to diverse groups in the body politic. Each one of these is more affected by the inconveniences it suffers than by those suffered by other groups or the society as a whole. No policy simultaneously satisfies *all* the desires of men, none avoids *all* the risks. Everyone establishes differently the priorities to be considered or the risks to be avoided. When history seen in its entirety is at stake these antitheses become basic.

Men's minds are divided between two tendencies: some look to the past to understand the present and draw lessons from precedents; others

are inclined to pursue changes throughout time and, by their actions, stress the desire for the new. Of course, a reasonable mind seeks to combine these two tendencies. The same analysis should prevail for history, strategy, or politics. Tactics, as developed by German theory, the geometry of the battles of Cannes or Lützen, retain their relevance in the twentieth century—that is, if proper account is taken of the revolution in the composition and equipment of modern armies. Generalities on the comparative merits of defense and offense have led to disastrous errors when endowed with timeless authority. The defeat of 1945 will not suffice to change the psychology of the German people. It is dangerous to dub as "eternal Germany" the Germany of one set of policies. Great Britain was fiercely opposed, in the nineteenth century, to a union of continental European states. The same concerns, in the middle of the twentieth century, can lead to an opposite point of view.

Specifically, there is not and should not be a contradiction between the search for constant factors or regularities and the search for unique situations or progressive changes. The task of the historian and the statesman is precisely to discriminate, at each moment, between one and the other. But when one envisages general philosophies of history is there not an unbridgeable antithesis? Does one not have to pronounce in one sense or the other? One acknowledges, strictly speaking, partial cycles that would not exclude unilinear progression either by a society toward fulfillment (or collapse) or by humanity as a whole toward unity. But is not the hypothesis of a plurality of regimes, each *immédiatement à Dieu*, incompatible with the hypothesis of a unique history whose result would be either liberal democracy or communism?

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I call millenarian politics those that endow an objective, one that can be achieved within a fixed period of time, with absolute value, or again that confuse a society in history, actual or to be created, with the ideal society that would fulfill human destiny. Communist politics are a perfect example of millenarian politics.

Originally, Marxism combined fatality and will, reform and revolution. The spontaneous course of history leads to the Russian Revolution, whose agent is the proletariat and from which the reign of freedom will emerge. Reforms within the present system strengthen the position of the working class and lead to the final break. Leninism, in the form it has taken since 1917 (and maybe one should even say since 1903), reduces the role of fatality and of reform while emphasizing the part played by the will to revolution. The supposed inevitability of the Russian Revolution serves only to communicate to the faithful the certitude of final victory.

Anticapitalist revolutions, of Marxist inspiration, have so far succeeded only in predominantly agricultural countries with a precapitalist

structure. On the other hand, the full development of capitalism has brought with it profound changes but has in no way numerically increased the strength of the truly revolutionary forces. The development of productive forces tends rather to weaken than to quicken any subversive élan in the masses. The historical pattern—feudalism, capitalism, liberal socialism—that Marx endowed with a kind of inevitability has been denied by experience, with the appearance in Russia of socialism as the substitute for and not the heir of capitalism. The mechanism by which capitalism is supposed to destroy itself—proletarianization, pauperization, concentration, and the like—is refuted by the facts: the rise in the standard of living, the social differentiation in the bosom of capitalism, and so on. I do not mean to say that communism is wrong when it heralds its final victory: it is simply wrong (in the eyes of reason) to declare this success inevitable by virtue of a historical evolution that never took place.

There is no dearth of Marxists who have more or less admitted that the revolution necessary *rationality* may not be determined historically. Marx's formula "socialism or barbarity" (which implies that revolution is not inevitable) is often cited. Trotsky himself, toward the end of his life, was inclined to doubt the coming of socialism, if after the second war the proletariat of the world did not perform its function. Still more clearly Maurice Merleau-Ponty writes:

Perhaps no proletariat will ever exercise the historical function that the Marxist scheme awarded it. . . . But it is obvious that no other class would be able to replace the proletariat in this role. . . . This would mean that there is no history, if history is the coming of humanity and humanity the mutual respect by men for each other—consequently, no philosophy of history—and that finally, as Barrès said, the world and our existence are a senseless tumult.¹

Is it possible, philosophically, to separate a rational end to history from a necessary one? The difficulties are greater than is usually believed, at least within the framework of a philosophy that aspires to be truly historical. Whereas it is usually held that historical truth emerges only retrospectively, man is here given the capacity to anticipate the future and find within it an absolute truth. Since the future event cannot be grasped in its concrete features, one is led to an abstract formalization of the goal of history. Thus, Merleau-Ponty speaks of a mutual and universal respect by men for each other, but one may well wonder to what point such a formalization is compatible with an essentially historical philosophy. Are we not led back to a sort of Kantianism and does mankind's mutual respect teach us more than the Kantian maxim to treat man as an end and never as a means?

As soon as rational dialectics and actual dialectics fail to coincide, millenarianism is forced concretely to define the October Revolution,

¹ *Humanisme et terreur* (Paris, 1947), p. 168.

alone capable of conducting humanity toward the goal of history. The strength (political) and weakness (intellectual) of Russian Communism are rooted in the definition, disarming in its simplicity, that it gives to the true revolution: the conquest of the state by the Communist party. Lacking such a definition, Merleau-Ponty cannot escape ambiguity.

Marxism, he says, has placed its stamp on a humanism pushed to its limits: no more masters and slaves, respect by man for man, concrete equality and freedom, the formation of the proletariat as a universal class, alone capable of advancing this revolution. But it was not Marx who discovered that humanism would be accomplished only on the day that all men truly participated in humanity and recognized each other as men. It is not possible to determine from this formal proposition the historical mission of the proletariat as long as one does not specify the social relations implied by this mutual recognition. There will always be, in any foreseeable society, governors and governed, employers and employees. Neither the technical nor the political hierarchy excludes mutual respect. The task is to discover in which cases hierarchy and respect are compatible. Otherwise, no one knows what the mission of the proletariat is or whether it has a chance of being realized. Let us assume that mutual respect implies the revolt of the oppressed class (in this instance the proletariat). It is not appropriate, even within this philosophy, to say that history has no meaning unless the proletariat becomes a universal class. Why would the middle of the twentieth century be just the moment in history when the destiny of humanity is played out? One has no right to shift from an end to history, formally defined, to the alternative: now or never (at a time when more than half of humanity still lives in incredible poverty).

A formalized end to history avoids the obvious absurdity of transforming a rather banal fact into an ultimate end. But this formalization entails a kind of rupture with Hegelian thought and imposes the obligation, as with all philosophies of the Kantian type, to refer social systems and political decisions that give rise to uncertainty to the ultimate ends of humanity and history. On the other hand, the confusion of the end of history with a possible or probable event, of limited scope, allows millenarian politics to develop logically (once this confusion is accepted).

Since absolute good is defined in historical terms, the ultimate relationship is no longer that of the soul to God but that of the individual acting for historical ends—that is to say, the militant in the revolution. The spiritualization of human worth, to which all religions of personal salvation tend, becomes impossible: worth is measured only in relation to the revolution and cannot be distinguished in the final analysis from efficiency. If the October Revolution marks the entry into the kingdom of God, the class struggle and the conflict between nations constitute sacred history. All of secular history becomes sacred history to the degree to

which it has an influence (and what event has not?) on the progress or setbacks of the revolutionary movement. The interpretation of history rests with the prophet or the pontiff, who at every instant proclaim the given truth, unassailable like all interpretations of dogma.

The interpretation of specific situations can be free of dogma. Such was the case for the Social Democrats before 1914. Only the historical scheme partook of dogma—which explains the condemnation of Bernstein, who had expressed doubts about it: the interpretation of events and the making of decisions depended on the militants and on the parties. The Russian Revolution proved that there is no need to wait for the ripening of capitalism. The sacred act depends less on technical and economic conditions than on the Communist party itself. The mission of the proletariat is transferred to the “party.” The “party,” much more so than capitalism, is the revolutionary agent par excellence. The “party line” has henceforth the same place in sacred history as that held by the “evolution of capitalism” in the determinist conception of social democracy.

The absolute value of the end justifies cynicism in the means of attaining it. Since nothing surpasses in worth the revolutionary goal, since ethical rules have only a historical basis and are stamped with their class origins, the believer uses with a good conscience any means, however abhorrent to traditional beliefs. The party has no obligation to the outside world, neither toward mankind nor toward national collectivities. Or rather the party has no other obligation than that of liberating the whole of mankind by its victory. It is fair to say that it is engaged, permanently, in a life-and-death struggle from which it must emerge victorious since the dialectic of history demands it and since otherwise history would have no meaning. Such a war eliminates all standards but that of efficiency. To deceive the enemy has always been recognized as conforming to the customs of war. To annihilate or liquidate hostile troops has since Napoleon, and perhaps much earlier, been the supreme ambition of the strategist.

Thus, millenarian politics, dreaming of the kingdom of God on earth or of the respect of man for man, bring mankind back to a stage prior to civilization, to the struggle of all against all. “Qui veut faire l’ange fait la bête.”

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I call conservative politics those that stress the persistence of a basic order, whether historical or eternal, and deny the possibility of a final regime that would overcome the contradictions of previous regimes and be immune to the constituent laws of human societies as such.

This definition is inevitably both complex and rather vague. This is because conservatism, in the meaning we are here giving the word, is above all antimillenarianism. Now, there are many ways to refute the no-

tion of an end to history. People who are loosely called conservative obviously fit into our framework; committed to a certain historical order, they do their utmost to preserve it, either by agreeing to reform or, on the other hand, trying to undo reforms that challenge the integrity of the order they seek to defend or restore.

Since they do not concede an end to history, it cannot in its totality have meaning or unity. Political history is seen as consisting of a plurality of regimes, each with its virtues and defects; or of cycles, different regimes succeeding each other with a more or less obvious regularity or necessity; or of incessant struggle between natural disorder and the will for order, each successful period marking a temporary and precarious victory of the forces of order; or, finally, of variations on a simple theme, with all societies displaying the same fundamental characteristics, whatever the diversity of their concrete forms. Montesquieu, Vico, Maurras, and the Machiavellian tradition (as interpreted by Burnham)² can be taken to represent these four possible approaches.

Logically, there are two fundamental kinds of conservatism or negations of millenarianism. One argues that the contradictions within regimes are insurmountable; the other, that there is an eternal order to life in general that survives all revolutions. The theory of insurmountable contradictions and the theory of an eternal order both rest on a certain view of human nature. Millenarianism always implies, in one way or another, that man, by his own creative effort or by grace from on high, is capable of eliminating his imperfections. Conservatism, on the other hand, recognizes a basic human nature that determines the characteristics of man in society.

In spite of logic, conservatives are not always more tolerant than millenarians. Often, a doctrinal relativism propels them into a practical dogmatism. From conservative they become revolutionary.

Let us take, for example, conservatives who in France defend a specific historical order, the Ancien Régime. Once they have endowed this order with an exemplary value all attempts to transform it appear destructive. It is possible to judge the bourgeois order inferior aesthetically, or in terms of stability, to the order of the Ancien Régime, with its division into estates and its multiplicity of intermediary bodies, but one cannot doubt that the bourgeois order is a viable social structure, opposed to the hereditary, hierarchic structure of prerevolutionary France. However, having confused a particular order with eternally valid order, these conservatives become revolutionary in relation to the established one (which they call established disorder). This is why so many conservatives have become fascists.

The transition from conservatism to fascism is psychologically

² See J. Burnham, *The Machiavellians: Defenders of Freedom* (New York: John Day, 1943; Chicago: Regnery, 1962).

understandable. The main reason for this is that conservatives and fascists have the same enemies (liberals, plutocrats, Jews, parliamentarians). They have also some common claims (authority, organic coherence) and values (stability rather than social justice, power of the community rather than individual rights). Their ways of thinking likewise hold some similarities: historical consciousness rather than universal principles, opposition to abstract rationalism. But all of these common features should not mask a fundamental contradiction: fascism is a mass movement, a revolutionary movement and, at least in the form of national socialism, thoroughly anti-Christian. European conservatism is antirevolutionary and Christian. The conservative works to save and the fascist to destroy remnants of the traditional and hierarchical order spared by the bourgeois revolution.

Anyone wishing to preserve a historical order has to grapple with a contradiction: how is one to defend or restore, by nonrevolutionary means, a threatened or unsettled order? Conservative theory nearly always thrives when order is challenged. As long as it is taken for granted, no one thinks to curse it or exalt it. Conservatism is a rise in consciousness coinciding with a period in which order, whose guardian it claims to be, becomes the issue at stake. This leads to the constant temptation to suppress criticism, which leads the conservative to sacrifice at least a part of the liberalism he advocates. If a revolution has occurred, the conservative faces yet a more serious contradiction: one cannot restore a vanished order by conservative methods. To destroy the society that has replaced the order he intends to reestablish, the conservative must resort to revolutionary means. He comes closer and closer to the revolutionaries he denounces. Thus, monarchism became Caesarism; waiting for General Monck³ was transformed into nostalgia for a leader; and finally many conservatives participated in ventures that were to ruin European civilization.

Does the risk of such a fatal slippage disappear if a plurality of social orders is accepted? Does the recognition of the imperfection of man and societies—the basis of Machiavellian thought from Machiavelli to Pareto—lead to an effort to minimize such imperfection or, on the contrary, to an urge to manipulate the mechanism of human and social passions for the sole benefit of personal ambition? Neither empirically nor normatively does the theory of social order based on the theory of human nature imply a predetermined political doctrine.

Let us consider Machiavellianism as presented by Pareto. Any society includes a privileged minority holding key positions and consuming a disproportionate share of the national wealth. The behavior of the masses is determined not by logic or reason but by "residues" (that is to say, emo-

³ General George Monck, First Duke of Albemarle, was instrumental in restoring the monarchy of Charles II (1660) to the English throne.

tional patterns) more or less rationalized by "derivations." Any elite will do its utmost to guard its privileged position, using a variety of means ranging from force to cunning. Energetic minorities who do not find sufficient outlet for their talents within the existing society excite the masses to revolt with promises to end exploitation and bring about the era of equality. Once in power these minorities govern first of all for their own good and not necessarily for the good of all.

From such a conception one cannot derive an inevitable picture. But one can garner rules of human wisdom: if all elites are tempted to abuse their power, the most tolerable ones are those whose divisiveness deprives them of absolute authority. There is no perfect society, but there are degrees of imperfection. Often the prophets of the perfect society are precisely those who construct the most oppressive one. To attain an absolutely sound end, the prophets of the absolute require unlimited power. They persecute millions of human beings guilty of not recognizing in the new regime the accomplishment of the human vocation. A person with no other goal than to lessen as much as possible the ills inseparable from the human condition, and who does not forget the existence of wickedness, will do more for the welfare of his fellow humans. The breed of optimists produces the likes of Robespierre and Trotsky—the breed of pessimists a Talleyrand or a Louis Philippe.

Unfortunately, the Caesars also belong to the breed of pessimists. A wise tolerance is one of the inferences to be drawn from reflecting without illusions on the eternal order of human societies. It is not the only one. Since, we are told, the masses are the raw material of historical events, the clay that heroes model, should not the supreme goal be to construct one of those empires that arouse admiration throughout the centuries? A perishable empire to be sure: nothing that issues from history can resist history. Elites degenerate, peoples exhaust themselves, states crumble—such is fate. At least Caesar leaves his name in the annals of these great and precarious deeds, and sometimes, on the sand, the mark of his genius. Throughout the generations the monuments to his glory will bear witness to a will that, for a time, brought order to chaos.

In other words, if history has no final resting place, if states and civilizations follow each other, equally transient, equally imperfect, and perhaps also equally glorious, why worry about the lot of the multitudes, inevitably passive and sacrificed? Why be obsessed by the impossible goal of social justice? Man can somehow accomplish his highest vocation only by confronting destiny and overcoming it, at least in the narrow confines within which it is given to a mortal being to create—not for eternity but for a given time.

Theorists of Machiavellianism have perhaps for the most part been defenders of freedom, not its practitioners. They have been especially subject to the glorification of the will to power. Committed to action,

the Machiavellians seek to achieve for themselves the advantages of millenarianism, just as millenarianism does not hesitate to resort to the ways of cynicism. All means are good since the end is sacred, say the millenarians. The end must appear sacred since we must convince the crowd to accept any sacrifice to attain it, say the Machiavellians. Thus are born "natural millenarianisms," of which the credo of the Third Reich offers a striking example.

In strict logic, the ideal of the Third Reich cannot be construed as the equivalent of the goal of history. Unless all non-Germans are exterminated, the German race (assuming this term could have a precise meaning) will never be certain that its rule will last indefinitely. The thousand years of the Third Reich were reduced to twelve, but after all the Byzantine empire lasted a thousand years and no one perceives in it an absolute value. Conservatives are able to adopt the language of millenarianism because the masses are just as willing to commit themselves with enthusiasm to a temporal goal as to an absolute one. Those who believe in the eternal struggle of states and races can invite men to die for a lasting good, not for an absolute good. National socialist millenarianism—an answer to communist millenarianism—logically led straight to an apocalyptic catastrophe. It placed a prophetic vision of war side by side with a prophetic vision that, while awaiting the fulfillment of human history, involved perpetual war. It did not even have the virtue of compensating for actual war by predictions of future peace. A reading of Pareto would have revealed its inferiority. War regimes must lay claim to peace, oppressive regimes to freedom.



I call progressive politics those that refuse to proclaim exclusively either a final goal to history or its complete regularity and that allow for irregular and undefined transformations toward a goal situated on the horizon, this goal being justified by abstract principles.

As we have seen, millenarianism collides with a fundamental difficulty: either the end of history is defined concretely with a prosaic event becoming a final goal or it is defined abstractly and becomes a principle, a rational law. It is then necessary to determine, in a concrete situation, what is required by the principle one appeals to. These alternatives become inevitable once the rational dialectic and the dialectic of reality fail to merge.

On the other hand, conservatism succeeds in specifying the traits, so far constant, of human nature and society. But even if we should accept these constant features, there remains the task of determining at what level of generalization they should be considered. For instance, there will always be rulers and ruled: to what extent can the former be controlled by the latter? To what extent can the privileges of the rulers be reduced?

Now, it is precisely this margin for historical change that it is important to define, as soon as one contemplates the uncertainties not of theory but of action. The recognition of a plurality of regimes, each with its virtues and defects, leaves freedom of choice intact. If one admits that certain virtues (freedom of individuals, greatness of the community) are incompatible, each is left to make his choice alone, in any case an unsatisfactory one.

Progressivism does not deny the idea of regularity or even of a final goal for history, but it consciously formalizes the end and generalizes the regularities. The goal of history is not a concrete event, near at hand, defined by the socialization of the means of production or the seizure of power by the communists: it is an idea of Reason—with a capital R, in the Kantian sense—and can well serve as a criterion. This idea is formal and no more allows for specific political or historical policies than Kantian maxims give an individual specific advice on what he must do. The Kantian idea of a kingdom of ends helps only to judge different regimes and measure their imperfections. It has meaning only in relation to a conception—religious and perhaps philosophical—of the unity of mankind and consequently the possible unity of human history.

On the plane of reality, this idea does not deny in any way the experience of plurality: plurality of social regimes or of civilizations. Certainly man thinks and acts politically in relation to this multiple and contradictory reality.

We will leave aside the difficulty, classical for philosophy, of progression toward an inaccessible end. We will restrict ourselves to concrete difficulties. It is easy to trace the growth of knowledge, the accumulation of technical virtuosity. It is legitimate to note the expanding sphere within which men become aware of each other. Though they are still far from putting this recognition into practice, they no longer limit their notions of human solidarity to the frontiers, the community feeling, of a tribe, a people, or a race. Likewise, within a civilization one can clearly observe improvements in this or that area—the standard of living of the many, the freedom of individuals. But if progressivism, understood as a concern for improving certain institutions within a community, is a reasonable attitude, it does not expand into a total conception of history. For, once again, the virtues of political regimes are not all compatible. A certain degree of individual freedom implies a certain degree of economic inequality. The transition from one regime to another does not always result in the betterment of the existing order but rather the substitution of one order for another. Any kind of progressive politics implies the acceptance of certain institutions, prejudices, and traditions not because they conform to the idea of human society in general but because they are inseparable from an existing society in its present structure. Progressivism is a self-sufficient political idea so long as it functions in a stable society, one not aware of its uniqueness or prone to challenge its roots. At a time of

total confrontation between wills and doctrines, each with its freight of good and evil, progressivism is condemned to deplore human folly.

In calm and happy eras, each of these three attitudes has positive value and serves the common cause. Millenarianism teaches us never to be satisfied with what has been achieved; conservatism reminds us that through all the upheavals there are needs common to all societies and traditions that must be safeguarded; progressivism gives rise to statesmen who, between the dream of the ideal and the understanding of evil, seek the way of action, adapted at each moment to circumstances. In times of crisis, each of these attitudes takes on an extreme form, so that instead of combining they paralyze each other. Millenarians, instead of stimulating progressives, fight them without mercy, fearing that their reforms will delay the revolution. Conservatives, convinced that total subversion can be resisted only by refusing all concessions, denounce the progressives. Then deadly struggles ensue whose outcome demonstrates neither the worth of the victors nor the errors of the vanquished.

At the theoretical level, there is no further possibility of overcoming these conflicts. No philosophy of history can dogmatically dictate a political doctrine except by mystification (such as confusing a specific event with the goal of history). There is a need for the idea of a goal in history, but it should not be defined concretely in terms of institutions. Thus, when man must make temporal choices, he cannot escape from the conflict of values, the incompatibility between systems. Relativism is the authentic experience of political man. Without eliminating uncertainties, inseparable from this relativity, the religious man has the double advantage of never being completely committed to secular quarrels and of judging these in terms of absolute standards. Man without God risks his life for impure causes and cannot avoid doing so. He knows that humanity can create itself only through doubt and error. He acts not out of a will to be God but out of a wisdom that willingly falls short of the absolute. Atheist humanism can define itself only by accepting the limits of human existence.

13. The Social Responsibility of the Philosopher

THE PROBLEM OF THE social responsibility of the philosopher can be approached in two ways: either by considering philosophers or professors of philosophy as private individuals or by regarding them in their capacity as philosophers.

The first approach would, I fear, be sterile. It would mean indulging in solemn platitudes or pious exhortations. Professors of philosophy are good fathers, good husbands, good citizens. They work for peace, for the dignity of man, for mutual understanding. Agreement would be forthcoming all the more easily since each speaker would give the same words different meanings.

The second approach is the productive one, but difficult. One would have to determine wherein philosophy consists and from that infer the responsibility it assumes toward society.

I will examine here a few aspects of the social responsibility of the philosopher. What attitude does the philosopher as such take toward the polity, political parties, and historical conflicts?

The Technician, the Ideologue, and the Philosopher

The problem facing the philosopher in twentieth-century Europe was stated, with unsurpassable clarity, by the Greek thinkers of the fifth century before our era.

In Greece the city-states, which formed the framework of political

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