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HANNAH
ARENDT

Edited with an Introduction by

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HANNAH ARENDT

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PART VI

REVOLUTION AND
PRESERVATION

What Is Freedom?

I

To raise the question, what is freedom? seems to be a hopeless enterprise. It is as though age-old contradictions and antinomies were lying in wait to force the mind into dilemmas of logical impossibility so that, depending which horn of the dilemma you are holding on to, it becomes as impossible to conceive of freedom or its opposite as it is to realize the notion of a square circle. In its simplest form, the difficulty may be summed up as the contradiction between our consciousness and conscience, telling us that we are free and hence responsible, and our everyday experience in the outer world, in which we orient ourselves according to the principle of causality. In all practical and especially in political matters we hold human freedom to be a self-evident truth, and it is upon this axiomatic assumption that laws are laid down in human communities, that decisions are taken, that judgments are passed. In all fields of scientific and theoretical endeavor, on the contrary, we proceed according to the no less self-evident truth of *nihil ex nihilo*, of *nihil sine causa*, that is, on the assumption that even "our own lives are, in the last analysis, subject to causation" and that if there should be an ultimately free ego in ourselves, it certainly never makes its unequivocal appearance in the phenomenal world, and therefore can never become the subject of theoretical ascertainment. Hence freedom turns out to be a mirage the moment psychology looks into what is supposedly its innermost domain; for "the part which force plays in nature, as the cause of motion, has its counterpart in the mental sphere in motive as the cause of conduct."¹ It is true that the test of causality—the predictability of effect if all causes are known—cannot be applied to the realm of human affairs; but this practical unpredictability is

From *Between Past and Future*. This essay is a revised version of "Freedom and Politics: A Lecture," *Chicago Review* 14/1 (Spring 1960).

no test of freedom, it signifies merely that we are in no position ever to know all causes which come into play, and this partly because of the sheer number of factors involved, but also because human motives, as distinguished from natural forces, are still hidden from all onlookers, from inspection by our fellow men as well as from introspection.

The greatest clarification in these obscure matters we owe to Kant and to his insight that freedom is no more ascertainable to the inner sense and within the field of inner experience than it is to the senses with which we know and understand the world. Whether or not causality is operative in the household of nature and the universe, it certainly is a category of the mind to bring order into all sensory data, whatever their nature may be, and thus it makes experience possible. Hence the antinomy between practical freedom and theoretical non-freedom, both equally axiomatic in their respective fields, does not merely concern a dichotomy between science and ethics, but lies in everyday life experiences from which both ethics and science take their respective points of departure. It is not scientific theory but thought itself, in its pre-scientific and pre-philosophical understanding, that seems to dissolve freedom on which our practical conduct is based into nothingness. For the moment we reflect upon an act which was undertaken under the assumption of our being a free agent, it seems to come under the sway of two kinds of causality, of the causality of inner motivation on one hand and of the causal principle which rules the outer world on the other. Kant saved freedom from this twofold assault upon it by distinguishing between a "pure" or theoretical reason and a "practical reason" whose center is free will, whereby it is important to keep in mind that the free-willing agent, who is practically all-important, never appears in the phenomenal world, neither in the outer world of our five senses nor in the field of the inner sense with which I sense myself. This solution, pitting the dictate of the will against the understanding of reason, is ingenious enough and may even suffice to establish a moral law whose logical consistency is in no way inferior to natural laws. But it does little to eliminate the greatest and most dangerous difficulty, namely, that thought itself, in its theoretical as well as its pre-theoretical form, makes freedom disappear—quite apart from the fact that it must appear strange indeed that the faculty of the will whose essential activity consists in dictate and command should be the harbinger of freedom.

To the question of politics, the problem of freedom is crucial, and no political theory can afford to remain unconcerned with the fact that this problem has led into "the obscure wood wherein philosophy has lost its way."² It is the contention of the following considerations that the reason for this obscurity is that the phenomenon of freedom does not appear in

the realm of thought at all, that neither freedom nor its opposite is experienced in the dialogue between me and myself in the course of which the great philosophic and metaphysical questions arise, and that the philosophical tradition, whose origin in this respect we shall consider later, has distorted, instead of clarifying, the very idea of freedom such as it is given in human experience by transposing it from its original field, the realm of politics and human affairs in general, to an inward domain, the will, where it would be open to self-inspection. As a first, preliminary justification of this approach, it may be pointed out that historically the problem of freedom has been the last of the time-honored great metaphysical questions—such as being, nothingness, the soul, nature, time, eternity, etc.—to become a topic of philosophic inquiry at all. There is no preoccupation with freedom in the whole history of great philosophy from the pre-Socratics up to Plotinus, the last ancient philosopher. And when freedom made its first appearance in our philosophical tradition, it was the experience of religious conversion—of Paul first and then of Augustine—which gave rise to it.

The field where freedom has always been known, not as a problem, to be sure, but as a fact of everyday life, is the political realm. And even today, whether we know it or not, the question of politics and the fact that man is a being endowed with the gift of action must always be present to our mind when we speak of the problem of freedom; for action and politics, among all the capabilities and potentialities of human life, are the only things of which we could not even conceive without at least assuming that freedom exists, and we can hardly touch a single political issue without, implicitly or explicitly, touching upon an issue of man's liberty. Freedom, moreover, is not only one among the many problems and phenomena of the political realm properly speaking, such as justice, or power, or equality; freedom, which only seldom—in times of crisis or revolution—becomes the direct aim of political action, is actually the reason that men live together in political organization at all. Without it, political life as such would be meaningless. The *raison d'être* of politics is freedom, and its field of experience is action.

This freedom which we take for granted in all political theory and which even those who praise tyranny must still take into account is the very opposite of "inner freedom," the inward space into which men may escape from external coercion and *feel* free. This inner feeling remains without outer manifestations and hence is by definition politically irrelevant. Whatever its legitimacy may be, and however eloquently it may have been described in late antiquity, it is historically a late phenomenon, and it was originally the result of an estrangement from the world in

which worldly experiences were transformed into experiences within one's own self. The experiences of inner freedom are derivative in that they always presuppose a retreat from the world, where freedom was denied, into an inwardness to which no other has access. The inward space where the self is sheltered against the world must not be mistaken for the heart or the mind, both of which exist and function only in interrelationship with the world. Not the heart and not the mind, but inwardness as a place of absolute freedom within one's own self was discovered in late antiquity by those who had no place of their own in the world and hence lacked a worldly condition which, from early antiquity to almost the middle of the nineteenth century, was unanimously held to be a prerequisite for freedom.

The derivative character of this inner freedom, or of the theory that "the appropriate region of human liberty" is the "inward domain of consciousness,"³ appears more clearly if we go back to its origins. Not the modern individual with his desire to unfold, to develop, and to expand, with his justified fear lest society get the better of his individuality, with his emphatic insistence "on the importance of genius" and originality, but the popular and popularizing sectarians of late antiquity, who have hardly more in common with philosophy than the name, are representative in this respect. Thus the most persuasive arguments for the absolute superiority of inner freedom can still be found in an essay of Epictetus,⁴ who begins by stating that free is he who lives as he wishes, a definition which oddly echoes a sentence from Aristotle's *Politics* in which the statement "Freedom means the doing what a man likes" is put in the mouths of those who do not know what freedom is.⁵ Epictetus then goes on to show that a man is free if he limits himself to what is in his power, if he does not reach into a realm where he can be hindered.⁶ The "science of living"⁷ consists in knowing how to distinguish between the alien world over which man has no power and the self of which he may dispose as he sees fit.⁸

Historically it is interesting to note that the appearance of the problem of freedom in Augustine's philosophy was thus preceded by the conscious attempt to divorce the notion of freedom from politics, to arrive at a formulation through which one may be a slave in the world and still be free. Conceptually, however, Epictetus's freedom which consists in being free from one's own desires is no more than a reversal of the current ancient political notions, and the political background against which this whole body of popular philosophy was formulated, the obvious decline of freedom in the late Roman Empire, manifests itself still quite clearly in the role which such notions as power, domination, and property play in it.

According to ancient understanding, man could liberate himself from necessity only through power over other men, and he could be free only if he owned a place, a home in the world. Epictetus transposed these worldly relationships into relationships within man's own self, whereby he discovered that no power is so absolute as that which man yields over himself, and that the inward space where man struggles and subdues himself is more entirely his own, namely, more securely shielded from outside interference, than any worldly home could ever be.

Hence, in spite of the great influence the concept of an inner, non-political freedom has exerted upon the tradition of thought, it seems safe to say that man would know nothing of inner freedom if he had not first experienced a condition of being free as a worldly tangible reality. We first become aware of freedom or its opposite in our intercourse with others, not in the intercourse with ourselves. Before it became an attribute of thought or a quality of the will, freedom was understood to be the free man's status, which enabled him to move, to get away from home, to go out into the world and meet other people in deed and word. This freedom clearly was preceded by liberation: in order to be free, man must have liberated himself from the necessities of life. But the status of freedom did not follow automatically upon the act of liberation. Freedom needed, in addition to mere liberation, the company of other men who were in the same state, and it needed a common public space to meet them—a politically organized world, in other words, into which each of the free men could insert himself by word and deed.

Obviously not every form of human intercourse and not every kind of community is characterized by freedom. Where men live together but do not form a body politic—as, for example, in tribal societies or in the privacy of the household—the factors ruling their actions and conduct are not freedom but the necessities of life and concern for its preservation. Moreover, wherever the man-made world does not become the scene for action and speech—as in despotically ruled communities which banish their subjects into the narrowness of the home and thus prevent the rise of a public realm—freedom has no worldly reality. Without a politically guaranteed public realm, freedom lacks the worldly space to make its appearance. To be sure it may still dwell in men's hearts as desire or will or hope or yearning; but the human heart, as we all know, is a very dark place, and whatever goes on in its obscurity can hardly be called a demonstrable fact. Freedom as a demonstrable fact and politics coincide and are related to each other like two sides of the same matter.

Yet it is precisely this coincidence of politics and freedom which we cannot take for granted in the light of our present political experience.

The rise of totalitarianism, its claim to having subordinated all spheres of life to the demands of politics and its consistent nonrecognition of civil rights, above all the rights of privacy and the right to freedom from politics, makes us doubt not only the coincidence of politics and freedom but their very compatibility. We are inclined to believe that freedom begins where politics ends, because we have seen that freedom has disappeared when so-called political considerations overruled everything else. Was not the liberal credo, "The less politics the more freedom," right after all? Is it not true that the smaller the space occupied by the political, the larger the domain left to freedom? Indeed, do we not rightly measure the extent of freedom in any given community by the free scope it grants to apparently nonpolitical activities, free economic enterprise or freedom of teaching, of religion, of cultural and intellectual activities? Is it not true, as we all somehow believe, that politics is compatible with freedom only because and insofar as it guarantees a possible freedom *from* politics?

This definition of political liberty as a potential freedom from politics is not urged upon us merely by our most recent experiences; it has played a large part in the history of political theory. We need go no farther than the political thinkers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, who more often than not simply identified political freedom with security. The highest purpose of politics, "the end of government," was the guaranty of security; security, in turn, made freedom possible, and the word "freedom" designated a quintessence of activities which occurred outside the political realm. Even Montesquieu, though he had not only a different but a much higher opinion of the essence of politics than Hobbes or Spinoza, could still occasionally equate political freedom with security.⁹ The rise of the political and social sciences in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has even widened the breach between freedom and politics; for government, which since the beginning of the modern age had been identified with the total domain of the political, was now considered to be the appointed protector not so much of freedom as of the life process, the interests of society and its individuals. Security remained the decisive criterion, but not the individual's security against "violent death," as in Hobbes (where the condition of all liberty is freedom from fear), but a security which should permit an undisturbed development of the life process of society as a whole. This life process is not bound up with freedom but follows its own inherent necessity; and it can be called free only in the sense that we speak of a freely flowing stream. Here freedom is not even the nonpolitical aim of politics, but a marginal phenomenon—which somehow forms the boundary government should not overstep unless life itself and its immediate interests and necessities are at stake.

Thus not only we, who have reasons of our own to distrust politics for the sake of freedom, but the entire modern age has separated freedom and politics. I could descend even deeper into the past and evoke older memories and traditions. The pre-modern secular concept of freedom certainly was emphatic in its insistence on separating the subjects' freedom from any direct share in government; the people's "liberty and freedom consisted in having the government of those laws by which their life and their goods may be most their own: 'tis not for having share in government, that is nothing pertaining to them"—as Charles I summed it up in his speech from the scaffold. It was not out of a desire for freedom that people eventually demanded their share in government or admission to the political realm, but out of mistrust in those who held power over their life and goods. The Christian concept of political freedom, moreover, arose out of the early Christians' suspicion of and hostility against the public realm as such, from whose concerns they demanded to be absolved in order to be free. And this Christian freedom for the sake of salvation had been preceded, as we saw before, by the philosophers' abstinence from politics as a prerequisite for the highest and freest way of life, the *vita contemplativa*.

Despite the enormous weight of this tradition and despite the perhaps even more telling urgency of our own experiences, both pressing into the same direction of a divorce of freedom from politics, I think the reader may believe he has read only an old truism when I said that the *raison d'être* of politics is freedom and that this freedom is primarily experienced in action. In the following I shall do no more than reflect on this old truism.

I I

Freedom as related to politics is not a phenomenon of the will. We deal here not with the *liberum arbitrium*, a freedom of choice that arbitrates and decides between two given things, one good and one evil, and whose choice is predetermined by motive which has only to be argued to start its operation—"And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover,/ To entertain these fair well-spoken days,/ I am determined to prove a villain,/ And hate the idle pleasures of these days." Rather it is, to remain with Shakespeare, the freedom of Brutus: "That this shall be or we will fall for it," that is, the freedom to call something into being which did not exist before, which was not given, not even as an object of cognition or imagination, and which therefore, strictly speaking, could not be known. Action,

to be free, must be free from motive on one side, from its intended goal as a predictable effect on the other. This is not to say that motives and aims are not important factors in every single act, but they are its determining factors, and action is free to the extent that it is able to transcend them. Action insofar as it is determined is guided by a future aim whose desirability the intellect has grasped before the will wills it, whereby the intellect calls upon the will, since only the will can dictate action—to paraphrase a characteristic description of this process by Duns Scotus.¹⁰ The aim of action varies and depends upon the changing circumstances of the world; to recognize the aim is not a matter of freedom, but of right or wrong judgment. Will, seen as a distinct and separate human faculty, follows judgment, i.e., cognition of the right aim, and then commands its execution. The power to command, to dictate action, is not a matter of freedom but a question of strength or weakness.

Action insofar as it is free is neither under the guidance of the intellect nor under the dictate of the will—although it needs both for the execution of any particular goal—but springs from something altogether different which (following Montesquieu's famous analysis of forms of government) I shall call a principle. Principles do not operate from within the self as motives do—"mine own deformity" or my "fair proportion"—but inspire, as it were, from without; and they are much too general to prescribe particular goals, although every particular aim can be judged in the light of its principle once the act has been started. For, unlike the judgment of the intellect which precedes action, and unlike the command of the will which initiates it, the inspiring principle becomes fully manifest only in the performing act itself; yet while the merits of judgment lose their validity, and the strength of the commanding will exhausts itself, in the course of the act which they execute in cooperation, the principle which inspired it loses nothing in strength or validity through execution. In distinction from its goal, the principle of an action can be repeated time and again, it is inexhaustible, and in distinction from its motive, the validity of a principle is universal, it is not bound to any particular person or to any particular group. However, the manifestation of principles comes about only through action, they are manifest in the world as long as the action lasts, but no longer. Such principles are honor or glory, love of equality, which Montesquieu called virtue, or distinction or excellence—the Greek *ἀεὶ ὀπιστεύειν* ("always strive to do your best and to be the best of all"), but also fear or distrust or hatred. Freedom or its opposite appears in the world whenever such principles are actualized; the appearance of freedom, like the manifestation of principles, coincides with the performing act. Men *are* free—as distinguished from their possessing the gift

for freedom—as long as they act, neither before nor after; for to *be* free and to act are the same.

Freedom as inherent in action is perhaps best illustrated by Machiavelli's concept of *virtù*, the excellence with which man answers the opportunities the world opens up before him in the guise of *fortuna*. Its meaning is best rendered by "virtuosity," that is, an excellence we attribute to the performing arts (as distinguished from the creative arts of making), where the accomplishment lies in the performance itself and not in an end product which outlasts the activity that brought it into existence and becomes independent of it. The virtuoso-ship of Machiavelli's *virtù* somehow reminds us of the fact, although Machiavelli hardly knew it, that the Greeks always used such metaphors as flute-playing, dancing, healing, and seafaring to distinguish political from other activities, that is, that they drew their analogies from those arts in which virtuosity of performance is decisive.

Since all acting contains an element of virtuosity, and because virtuosity is the excellence we ascribe to the performing arts, politics has often been defined as an art. This, of course, is not a definition but a metaphor, and the metaphor becomes completely false if one falls into the common error of regarding the state or government as a work of art, as a kind of collective masterpiece. In the sense of the creative arts, which bring forth something tangible and reify human thought to such an extent that the produced thing possesses an existence of its own, politics is the exact opposite of an art—which incidentally does not mean that it is a science. Political institutions, no matter how well or how badly designed, depend for continued existence upon acting men; their conservation is achieved by the same means that brought them into being. Independent existence marks the work of art as a product of making; utter dependence upon further acts to keep it in existence marks the state as a product of action.

The point here is not whether the creative artist is free in the process of creation, but that the creative process is not displayed in public and not destined to appear in the world. Hence the element of freedom, certainly present in the creative arts, remains hidden; it is not the free creative process which finally appears and matters for the world, but the work of art itself, the end product of the process. The performing arts, on the contrary, have indeed a strong affinity with politics. Performing artists—dancers, play-actors, musicians, and the like—need an audience to show their virtuosity, just as acting men need the presence of others before whom they can appear; both need a publicly organized space for their "work," and both depend upon others for the performance itself. Such a

space of appearances is not to be taken for granted wherever men live together in a community. The Greek polis once was precisely that "form of government" which provided men with a space of appearances where they could act, with a kind of theater where freedom could appear.

To use the word "political" in the sense of the Greek polis is neither arbitrary nor far-fetched. Not only etymologically and not only for the learned does the very word, which in all European languages still derives from the historically unique organization of the Greek city-state, echo the experiences of the community which first discovered the essence and the realm of the political. It is indeed difficult and even misleading to talk about politics and its innermost principles without drawing to some extent upon the experiences of Greek and Roman antiquity, and this for no other reason than that men have never, either before or after, thought so highly of political activity and bestowed so much dignity upon its realm. As regards the relation of freedom to politics, there is the additional reason that only ancient political communities were founded for the express purpose of serving the free—those who were neither slaves, subject to coercion by others, nor laborers, driven and urged on by the necessities of life. If, then, we understand the political in the sense of the polis, its end or *raison d'être* would be to establish and keep in existence a space where freedom as virtuosity can appear. This is the realm where freedom is a worldly reality, tangible in words which can be heard, in deeds which can be seen, and in events which are talked about, remembered, and turned into stories before they are finally incorporated into the great storybook of human history. Whatever occurs in this space of appearances is political by definition, even when it is not a direct product of action. What remains outside it, such as the great feats of barbarian empires, may be impressive and noteworthy, but it is not political, strictly speaking.

Every attempt to derive the concept of freedom from experiences in the political realm sounds strange and startling because all our theories in these matters are dominated by the notion that freedom is an attribute of will and thought much rather than of action. And this priority is not merely derived from the notion that every act must psychologically be preceded by a cognitive act of the intellect and a command of the will to carry out its decision, but also, and perhaps even primarily, because it is held that "perfect liberty is incompatible with the existence of society," that it can be tolerated in its perfection only outside the realm of human affairs. This current argument does not hold—what perhaps is true—that it is in the nature of thought to need more freedom than does any other activity of men, but rather that thinking in itself is not dangerous, so that

only action needs to be restrained: "No one pretends that actions should be as free as opinions."¹¹ This, of course, belongs among the fundamental tenets of liberalism, which, its name notwithstanding, has done its share to banish the notion of liberty from the political realm. For politics, according to the same philosophy, must be concerned almost exclusively with the maintenance of life and the safeguarding of its interests. Now, where life is at stake all action is by definition under the sway of necessity, and the proper realm to take care of life's necessities is the gigantic and still increasing sphere of social and economic life whose administration has overshadowed the political realm ever since the beginning of the modern age. Only foreign affairs, because the relationships between nations still harbor hostilities and sympathies which cannot be reduced to economic factors, seem to be left as a purely political domain. And even here the prevailing tendency is to consider international power problems and rivalries as ultimately springing from economic factors and interests.

Yet just as we, despite all theories and isms, still believe that to say "Freedom is the *raison d'être* of politics" is no more than a truism, so do we, in spite of our apparently exclusive concern with life, still hold as a matter of course that courage is one of the cardinal political virtues, although—if all this were a matter of consistency, which it obviously is not—we should be the first to condemn courage as the foolish and even vicious contempt for life and its interests, that is, for the allegedly highest of all goods. Courage is a big word, and I do not mean the daring of adventure which gladly risks life for the sake of being as thoroughly and intensely alive as one can be only in the face of danger and death. Temerity is no less concerned with life than is cowardice. Courage, which we still believe to be indispensable for political action, and which Churchill once called "the first of human qualities, because it is the quality which guarantees all others," does not gratify our individual sense of vitality but is demanded of us by the very nature of the public realm. For this world of ours, because it existed before us and is meant to outlast our lives in it, simply cannot afford to give primary concern to individual lives and the interests connected with them; as such the public realm stands in the sharpest possible contrast to our private domain, where, in the protection of family and home, everything serves and must serve the security of the life process. It requires courage even to leave the protective security of our four walls and enter the public realm, not because of particular dangers which may lie in wait for us, but because we have arrived in a realm where the concern for life has lost its validity. Courage liberates men from their worry about life for the freedom of the world. Courage is indispensable because in politics not life but the world is at stake.

I I I

Obviously this notion of an interdependence of freedom and politics stands in contradiction to the social theories of the modern age. Unfortunately it does not follow that we need only to revert to older, pre-modern traditions and theories. Indeed, the greatest difficulty in reaching an understanding of what freedom is arises from the fact that a simple return to tradition, and especially to what we are wont to call the great tradition, does not help us. Neither the philosophical concept of freedom as it first arose in late antiquity, where freedom became a phenomenon of thought by which man could, as it were, reason himself out of the world, nor the Christian and modern notion of free will has any ground in political experience. Our philosophical tradition is almost unanimous in holding that freedom begins where men have left the realm of political life inhabited by the many, and that it is not experienced in association with others but in intercourse with one's self—whether in the form of an inner dialogue which, since Socrates, we call thinking, or in a conflict within myself, the inner strife between what I would and what I do, whose murderous dialectics disclosed first to Paul and then to Augustine the equivocalities and impotence of the human heart.

For the history of the problem of freedom, Christian tradition has indeed become the decisive factor. We almost automatically equate freedom with free will, that is, with a faculty virtually unknown to classical antiquity. For will, as Christianity discovered it, had so little in common with the well-known capacities to desire, to intend, and to aim at, that it claimed attention only after it had come into conflict with them. If freedom were actually nothing but a phenomenon of the will, we would have to conclude that the ancients did not know freedom. This, of course, is absurd, but if one wished to assert it he could argue what I have mentioned before, namely, that the idea of freedom played no role in philosophy prior to Augustine. The reason for this striking fact is that, in Greek as well as Roman antiquity, freedom was an exclusively political concept, indeed the quintessence of the city-state and of citizenship. Our philosophical tradition of political thought, beginning with Parmenides and Plato, was founded explicitly in opposition to this polis and its citizenship. The way of life chosen by the philosopher was understood in opposition to the βίος πολιτικός, the political way of life. Freedom, therefore, the very center of politics as the Greeks understood it, was an idea which almost by definition could not enter the framework of Greek philosophy. Only when the early Christians, and especially Paul, discovered a kind of freedom which had no relation to politics, could the concept of freedom

enter the history of philosophy. Freedom became one of the chief problems of philosophy when it was experienced as something occurring in the intercourse between me and myself, and outside of the intercourse between men. Free will and freedom became synonymous notions,¹² and the presence of freedom was experienced in complete solitude, "where no man might hinder the hot contention wherein I had engaged with myself," the deadly conflict which took place in the "inner dwelling" of the soul and the dark "chamber of the heart."¹³

Classical antiquity was by no means inexperienced in the phenomena of solitude; it knew well enough that solitary man is no longer one but two-in-one, that an intercourse between me and myself begins the moment the intercourse between me and my fellow men has been interrupted for no matter what reason. In addition to this dualism which is the existential condition of thought, classical philosophy since Plato had insisted on a dualism between soul and body whereby the human faculty of motion had been assigned to the soul, which was supposed to move the body as well as itself; and it was still within the range of Platonic thought to interpret this faculty as a rulership of the soul over the body. Yet the Augustinian solitude of "hot contention" within the soul itself was utterly unknown, for the fight in which he had become engaged was not between reason and passion, between understanding and θυμός,¹⁴ that is, between two different human faculties, but it was a conflict within the will itself. And this duality within the self-same faculty had been known as the characteristic of thought, as the dialogue which I hold with myself. In other words, the two-in-one of solitude which sets the thought process into motion has the exactly opposite effect on the will; it paralyzes and locks it within itself; willing in solitude is always *velle* and *nolle*, to will and not to will at the same time.

The paralyzing effect the will seems to have upon itself comes all the more surprisingly as its very essence obviously is to command and be obeyed. Hence it appears to be a "monstrosity" that man may command himself and not be obeyed, a monstrosity which can be explained only by the simultaneous presence of an I-will and an I-will-not.¹⁵ This, however, is already an interpretation by Augustine; the historical fact is that the phenomenon of the will originally manifested itself in the experience that what I would I do not, that there is such a thing as I-will-and-cannot. What was unknown to antiquity was not that there is a possible I-know-but-I-will-not, but that I-will and I-can are not the same—*non hoc est velle, quod posse*.¹⁶ For the I-will-and-I-can was of course very familiar to the ancients. We need only remember how much Plato insisted that only those who knew how to rule themselves had the right to rule others and

be freed from the obligation of obedience. And it is true that self-control has remained one of the specifically political virtues, if only because it is an outstanding phenomenon of virtuosity where I-will and I-can must be so well attuned that they practically coincide.

Had ancient philosophy known of a possible conflict between what I can and what I will, it would certainly have understood the phenomenon of freedom as an inherent quality of the I-can, or it might conceivably have defined it as the coincidence of I-will and I-can; it certainly would not have thought of it as an attribute of the I-will or I-would. This assertion is no empty speculation; even the Euripidean conflict between reason and θυμός both simultaneously present in the soul, is a relatively late phenomenon. More typical, and in our context more relevant, was the conviction that passion may blind men's reason but that once reason has succeeded in making itself heard there is no passion left to prevent man from doing what he *knows* is right. This conviction still underlies Socrates' teaching that virtue is a kind of knowledge, and our amazement that anybody could ever have thought that virtue was "rational," that it could be learned and taught, arises from our acquaintance with a will which is broken in itself, which wills and wills-not at the same time, much rather than from any superior insight in the alleged powerlessness of reason.

In other words, will, will-power, and will-to-power are for us almost identical notions; the seat of power is to us the faculty of the will as known and experienced by man in his intercourse with himself. And for the sake of this will-power we have emasculated not only our reasoning and cognitive faculties but other more "practical" faculties as well. But is it not plain even to us that, in the words of Pindar, "this is the greatest grief: to stand with his feet outside the right and the beautiful one knows [forced away], by necessity"?¹⁷ The necessity which prevents me from doing what I know and will may arise from the world, or from my own body, or from an insufficiency of talents, gifts, and qualities which are bestowed upon man by birth and over which he has hardly more power than he has over other circumstances; all these factors, the psychological ones not excluded, condition the person from the outside as far as the I-will and the I-know, that is, the ego itself, are concerned; the power that meets these circumstances, that liberates, as it were, willing and knowing from their bondage to necessity is the I-can. Only where the I-will and the I-can coincide does freedom come to pass.

There exists still another way to check our current notion of free will, born of a religious predicament and formulated in philosophical language, against the older, strictly political experiences of freedom. In the revival of political thought which accompanied the rise of the modern

age, we may distinguish between those thinkers who can truly be called the fathers of political "science," since they took their cue from the new discoveries of the natural sciences—their greatest representative is Hobbes—and those who, relatively undisturbed by these typically modern developments, harkened back to the political thought of antiquity, not out of any predilection for the past as such but simply because the separation of church and state, of religion and politics, had given rise to an independent secular, political realm such as had been unknown since the fall of the Roman Empire. The greatest representative of this political secularism was Montesquieu, who, though indifferent to problems of a strictly philosophic nature, was deeply aware of the inadequacy of the Christian and the philosophers' concept of freedom for political purposes. In order to get rid of it, he expressly distinguished between philosophical and political freedom, and the difference consisted in that philosophy demands no more of freedom than the exercise of the will (*l'exercice de la volonté*), independent of circumstances and of attainment of the goals the will has set. Political freedom, on the contrary, consists in being able to do what one ought to will (*la liberté ne peut consister qu' à pouvoir faire ce que l'on doit vouloir*—the emphasis is on *pouvoir*).¹⁸ For Montesquieu as for the ancients it was obvious that an agent could no longer be called free when he lacked the capacity to do—whereby it is irrelevant whether this failure is caused by exterior or by interior circumstances.

I chose the example of self-control because to us this is clearly a phenomenon of will and of will-power. The Greeks, more than any other people, have reflected on moderation and the necessity to tame the steeds of the soul, and yet they never became aware of the will as a distinct faculty, separate from other human capacities. Historically, men first discovered the will when they experienced its impotence and not its power, when they said with Paul: "For to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not." It is the same will of which Augustine complained that it seemed "no monstrousness [for it] partly to will, partly to nill"; and although he points out that this is "a disease of the mind," he also admits that this disease is, as it were, natural for a mind possessed of a will: "For the will commands that there be a will, it commands not something else but itself. . . . Were the will entire, it would not even command itself to be, because it would already be."¹⁹ In other words, if man has a will at all, it must always appear as though there were two wills present in the same man, fighting with each other for power over his mind. Hence, the will is both powerful and impotent, free and unfree.

When we speak of impotence and the limits set to will-power, we

usually think of man's powerlessness with respect to the surrounding world. It is, therefore, of some importance to notice that in these early testimonies the will was not defeated by some overwhelming force of nature or circumstances; the contention which its appearance raised was neither the conflict between the one against the many nor the strife between body and mind. On the contrary, the relation of mind to body was for Augustine even the outstanding example for the enormous power inherent in the will: "The mind commands the body, and the body obeys instantly; the mind commands itself, and is resisted."²⁰ The body represents in this context the exterior world and is by no means identical with one's self. It is within one's self, in the "interior dwelling" (*interior domus*), where Epictetus still believed man to be an absolute master, that the conflict between man and himself broke out and that the will was defeated. Christian will-power was discovered as an organ of self-liberation and immediately found wanting. It is as though the I-will immediately paralyzed the I-can, as though the moment men *willed* freedom, they lost their capacity to *be* free. In the deadly conflict with worldly desires and intentions from which will-power was supposed to liberate the self, the most willing seemed able to achieve was oppression. Because of the will's impotence, its incapacity to generate genuine power, its constant defeat in the struggle with the self, in which the power of the I-can exhausted itself, the will-to-power turned at once into a will-to-oppression. I can only hint here at the fatal consequences for political theory of this equation of freedom with the human capacity to will; it was one of the causes why even today we almost automatically equate power with oppression or, at least, with rule over others.

However that may be, what we usually understand by will and will-power has grown out of this conflict between a willing and a performing self, out of the experience of an I-will-and-cannot, which means that the I-will, no matter what is willed, remains subject to the self, strikes back at it, spurs it on, incites it further, or is ruined by it. However far the will-to-power may reach out, and even if somebody possessed by it begins to conquer the whole world, the I-will can never rid itself of the self; it always remains bound to it and, indeed, under its bondage. This bondage to the self distinguishes the I-will from the I-think, which also is carried on between me and myself but in whose dialogue the self is not the object of the activity of thought. The fact that the I-will has become so power-thirsty, that will and will-to-power have become practically identical, is perhaps due to its having been first experienced in its impotence. Tyranny at any rate, the only form of government which arises directly out of the I-will, owes its greedy cruelty to an egotism utterly absent from the

utopian tyrannies of reason with which the philosophers wished to coerce men and which they conceived on the model of the I-think.

I have said that the philosophers first began to show an interest in the problem of freedom when freedom was no longer experienced in acting and in associating with others but in willing and in the intercourse with one's self, when, briefly, freedom had become free will. Since then, freedom has been a philosophical problem of the first order; as such it was applied to the political realm and thus has become a political problem as well. Because of the philosophic shift from action to will-power, from freedom as a state of being manifest in action to the *liberum arbitrium*, the ideal of freedom ceased to be virtuosity in the sense we mentioned before and became sovereignty, the ideal of a free will, independent from others and eventually prevailing against them. The philosophic ancestry of our current political notion of freedom is still quite manifest in eighteenth-century political writers, when, for instance, Thomas Paine insisted that "to be free it is sufficient [for man] that he wills it," a word which Lafayette applied to the nation-state: "*Pour qu'une nation soit libre, il suffit qu'elle veuille l'être.*"

Obviously such words echo the political philosophy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who has remained the most consistent representative of the theory of sovereignty, which he derived directly from the will, so that he could conceive of political power in the strict image of individual will-power. He argued against Montesquieu that power must be sovereign, that is, indivisible, because "a divided will would be inconceivable." He did not shun the consequences of this extreme individualism, and he held that in an ideal state "the citizens had no communications one with another," that in order to avoid factions "each citizen should think only his own thoughts." In reality Rousseau's theory stands refuted for the simple reason that "it is absurd for the will to bind itself for the future";²¹ a community actually founded on this sovereign will would be built not on sand but on quicksand. All political business is, and always has been, transacted within an elaborate framework of ties and bonds for the future—such as laws and constitutions, treaties and alliances—all of which derive in the last instance from the faculty to promise and to keep promises in the face of the essential uncertainties of the future. A state, moreover, in which there is no communication between the citizens and where each man thinks only his own thoughts is by definition a tyranny. That the faculty of will and will-power in and by itself, unconnected with any other faculties, is an essentially nonpolitical and even anti-political capacity is perhaps nowhere else so manifest as in the absurdities to which Rousseau was driven and in the curious cheerfulness with which he accepted them.

Politically, this identification of freedom with sovereignty is perhaps the most pernicious and dangerous consequence of the philosophical equation of freedom and free will. For it leads either to a denial of human freedom—namely, if it is realized that whatever men may be, they are never sovereign—or to the insight that the freedom of one man, or a group, or a body politic can be purchased only at the price of the freedom, i.e., the sovereignty, of all others. Within the conceptual framework of traditional philosophy, it is indeed very difficult to understand how freedom and non-sovereignty can exist together or, to put it another way, how freedom could have been given to men under the condition of non-sovereignty. Actually it is as unrealistic to deny freedom because of the fact of human non-sovereignty as it is dangerous to believe that one can be free—as an individual or as a group—only if he is sovereign. The famous sovereignty of political bodies has always been an illusion, which, moreover, can be maintained only by the instruments of violence, that is, with essentially nonpolitical means. Under human conditions, which are determined by the fact that not man but men live on the earth, freedom and sovereignty are so little identical that they cannot even exist simultaneously. Where men wish to be sovereign, as individuals or as organized groups, they must submit to the oppression of the will, be this the individual will with which I force myself, or the “general will” of an organized group. If men wish to be free, it is precisely sovereignty they must renounce.

I V

Since the whole problem of freedom arises for us in the horizon of Christian traditions on one hand, and of an originally anti-political philosophic tradition on the other, we find it difficult to realize that there may exist a freedom which is not an attribute of the will but an accessory of doing and acting. Let us therefore go back once more to antiquity, i.e., to its political and pre-philosophical traditions, certainly not for the sake of erudition and not even because of the continuity of our tradition, but merely because a freedom experienced in the process of acting and nothing else—though, of course, mankind never lost this experience altogether—has never again been articulated with the same classical clarity.

However, for reasons we mentioned before and which we cannot discuss here, this articulation is nowhere more difficult to grasp than in the writings of the philosophers. It would of course lead us too far to try to distill, as it were, adequate concepts from the body of non-philosophical

literature, from poetic, dramatic, historical, and political writings, whose articulation lifts experiences into a realm of splendor which is not the realm of conceptual thought. And for our purposes this is not necessary. For whatever ancient literature, Greek as well as Latin, has to tell us about these matters is ultimately rooted in the curious fact that both the Greek and the Latin language possess two verbs to designate what we uniformly call "to act." The two Greek words are *ἀρχεῖν*: to begin, to lead, and, finally, to rule; and *πράττειν*: to carry something through. The corresponding Latin verbs are *agere*: to set something in motion; and *gerere*, which is hard to translate and somehow means the enduring and supporting continuation of past acts whose results are the *res gestae*, the deeds and events we call historical. In both instances action occurs in two different stages; its first stage is a beginning by which something new comes into the world. The Greek word *ἀρχεῖν*, which covers beginning, leading, ruling, that is, the outstanding qualities of the free man, bears witness to an experience in which being free and the capacity to begin something new coincided. Freedom, as we would say today, was experienced in spontaneity. The manifold meaning of *ἀρχεῖν* indicates the following: only those could begin something new who were already rulers (i.e., household heads who ruled over slaves and family) and had thus liberated themselves from the necessities of life for enterprises in distant lands or citizenship in the polis; in either case, they no longer ruled, but were rulers among rulers, moving among their peers, whose help they enlisted as leaders in order to begin something new, to start a new enterprise; for only with the help of others could the *ἀρχων*, the ruler, beginner and leader, really act, *πράττειν*, carry through whatever he had started to do.

In Latin, to be free and to begin are also interconnected, though in a different way. Roman freedom was a legacy bequeathed by the founders of Rome to the Roman people; their freedom was tied to the beginning their forefathers had established by founding the city, whose affairs the descendants had to manage, whose consequences they had to bear, and whose foundations they had to "augment." All these together are the *res gestae* of the Roman republic. Roman historiography therefore, essentially as political as Greek historiography, never was content with the mere narration of great deeds and events; unlike Thucydides or Herodotus, the Roman historians always felt bound to the beginning of Roman history, because this beginning contained the authentic element of Roman freedom and thus made their history political; whatever they had to relate, they started *ab urbe condita*, with the foundation of the city, the guaranty of Roman freedom.

I have already mentioned that the ancient concept of freedom played

no role in Greek philosophy precisely because of its exclusively political origin. Roman writers, it is true, rebelled occasionally against the anti-political tendencies of the Socratic school, but their strange lack of philosophic talent apparently prevented their finding a theoretical concept of freedom which could have been adequate to their own experiences and to the great institutions of liberty present in the Roman *res publica*. If the history of ideas were as consistent as its historians sometimes imagine, we should have even less hope of finding a valid political idea of freedom in Augustine, the great Christian thinker who in fact introduced Paul's free will, along with its perplexities, into the history of philosophy. Yet we find in Augustine not only the discussion of freedom as *liberum arbitrium*, though this discussion became decisive for the tradition, but also an entirely differently conceived notion which characteristically appears in his only political treatise, in *De Civitate Dei*. In the *City of God* Augustine, as in only natural, speaks more from the background of specifically Roman experiences than in any of his other writings, and freedom is conceived there not as an inner human disposition but as a character of human existence in the world. Man does not possess freedom so much as he, or better his coming into the world, is equated with the appearance of freedom in the universe; man is free because he is a beginning and was so created after the universe had already come into existence: [*Initium*] *ut esset, creatus est homo, ante quem nemo fuit.*²² In the birth of each man this initial beginning is reaffirmed, because in each instance something new comes into an already existing world which will continue to exist after each individual's death. Because he *is* a beginning, man can begin; to be human and to be free are one and the same. God created man in order to introduce into the world the faculty of beginning: freedom.

The strong anti-political tendencies of early Christianity are so familiar that the notion of a Christian thinker's having been the first to formulate the philosophical implications of the ancient political idea of freedom strikes us as almost paradoxical. The only explanation that comes to mind is that Augustine was a Roman as well as a Christian, and that in this part of his work he formulated the central political experience of Roman antiquity, which was that freedom *qua* beginning became manifest in the act of foundation. Yet I am convinced that this impression would considerably change if the sayings of Jesus of Nazareth were taken more seriously in their philosophic implications. We find in these parts of the New Testament an extraordinary understanding of freedom, and particularly of the power inherent in human freedom; but the human capacity which corresponds to this power, which, in the words of the Gospel, is capable of removing mountains, is not will but faith. The work of faith, actually its

product, is what the gospels called "miracles," a word with many meanings in the New Testament and difficult to understand. We can neglect the difficulties here and refer only to those passages where miracles are clearly not supernatural events but only what all miracles, those performed by men no less than those performed by a divine agent, always must be, namely, interruptions of some natural series of events, of some automatic process, in whose context they constitute the wholly unexpected.

No doubt human life, placed on the earth, is surrounded by automatic processes—by the natural processes of the earth, which, in turn, are surrounded by cosmic processes, and we ourselves are driven by similar forces insofar as we too are a part of organic nature. Our political life, moreover, despite its being the realm of action, also takes place in the midst of processes which we call historical and which tend to become as automatic as natural or cosmic processes, although they were started by men. The truth is that automatism is inherent in all processes, no matter what their origin may be—which is why no single act, and no single event, can ever, once and for all, deliver and save a man, or a nation, or mankind. It is in the nature of the automatic processes to which man is subject, but within and against which he can assert himself through action, that they can only spell ruin to human life. Once man-made, historical processes have become automatic, they are no less ruinous than the natural life process that drives our organism and which in its own terms, that is, biologically, leads from being to non-being, from birth to death. The historical sciences know only too well such cases of petrified and hopelessly declining civilizations where doom seems foreordained, like a biological necessity, and since such historical processes of stagnation can last and creep on for centuries, they even occupy by far the largest space in recorded history; the periods of being free have always been relatively short in the history of mankind.

What usually remains intact in the epochs of petrification and foreordained doom is the faculty of freedom itself, the sheer capacity to begin, which animates and inspires all human activities and is the hidden source of production of all great and beautiful things. But so long as this source remains hidden, freedom is not a worldly, tangible reality; that is, it is not political. Because the source of freedom remains present even when political life has become petrified and political action impotent to interrupt automatic processes, freedom can so easily be mistaken for an essentially nonpolitical phenomenon; in such circumstances, freedom is not experienced as a mode of being with its own kind of "virtue" and virtuosity, but as a supreme gift which only man, of all earthly creatures, seems to have received, of which we can find traces and signs in almost all his activities,

but which, nevertheless, develops fully only when action has created its own worldly space where it can come out of hiding, as it were, and make its appearance.

Every act, seen from the perspective not of the agent but of the process in whose framework it occurs and whose automatism it interrupts, is a "miracle"—that is, something which could not be expected. If it is true that action and beginning are essentially the same, it follows that a capacity for performing miracles must likewise be within the range of human faculties. This sounds stranger than it actually is. It is in the very nature of every new beginning that it breaks into the world as an "infinite improbability," and yet it is precisely this infinitely improbable which actually constitutes the very texture of everything we call real. Our whole existence rests, after all, on a chain of miracles, as it were—the coming into being of the earth, the development of organic life on it, the evolution of mankind out of the animal species. For from the viewpoint of the processes in the universe and in nature, and their statistically overwhelming probabilities, the coming into being of the earth out of cosmic processes, the formation of organic life out of inorganic processes, the evolution of man, finally, out of the processes of organic life are all "infinite improbabilities," they are "miracles" in everyday language. It is because of this element of the "miraculous" present in all reality that events, no matter how well anticipated in fear or hope, strike us with a shock of surprise once they have come to pass. The very impact of an event is never wholly explicable; its factuality transcends in principle all anticipation. The experience which tells us that events are miracles is neither arbitrary nor sophisticated; it is, on the contrary, most natural and, indeed, in ordinary life almost commonplace. Without this commonplace experience, the part assigned by religion to supernatural miracles would be well-nigh incomprehensible.

I chose the example of natural processes which are interrupted by the advent of some "infinite improbability" in order to illustrate that what we call real in ordinary experience has mostly come into existence through coincidences which are stranger than fiction. Of course the example has its limitations and cannot be simply applied to the realm of human affairs. It would be sheer superstition to hope for miracles, for the "infinitely improbable," in the context of automatic historical or political processes, although even this can never be completely excluded. History, in contradistinction to nature, is full of events; here the miracle of accident and infinite improbability occurs so frequently that it seems strange to speak of miracles at all. But the reason for this frequency is merely that historical processes are created and constantly interrupted by human initiative, by

the *initium* man is insofar as he is an acting being. Hence it is not in the least superstitious, it is even a counsel of realism, to look for the unforeseeable and unpredictable, to be prepared for and to expect "miracles" in the political realm. And the more heavily the scales are weighted in favor of disaster, the more miraculous will the deed done in freedom appear; for it is disaster, not salvation, which always happens automatically and therefore always must appear to be irresistible.

Objectively, that is, seen from the outside and without taking into account that man is a beginning and a beginner, the chances that tomorrow will be like yesterday are always overwhelming. Not quite so overwhelming, to be sure, but very nearly so as the chances were that *no* earth would ever rise out of cosmic occurrences, that *no* life would develop out of inorganic processes, and that *no* man would emerge out of the evolution of animal life. The decisive difference between the "infinite improbabilities" on which the reality of our earthly life rests and the miraculous character inherent in those events which establish historical reality is that, in the realm of human affairs, we know the author of the "miracles." It is men who perform them—men who because they have received the twofold gift of freedom and action can establish a reality of their own.

Notes

1. I follow Max Planck, "Causation and Free Will" (in *The New Science*, New York, 1959) because the two essays, written from the standpoint of the scientist, possess a classic beauty in their nonsimplifying simplicity and clarity.
2. *Ibid.*
3. John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*.
4. See "On Freedom" in *Dissertationes*, book IV, 1, § 1.
5. 1310a25 ff.
6. *Op. cit.*, § 75.
7. *Ibid.*, § 118
8. §§ 81 and 83.
9. See *Esprit des Lois*, XII, 2: "*La liberté philosophique consiste dans l'exercice de la volonté. . . . La liberté politique consiste dans la sûreté.*"
10. *Intellectus apprehendit agibile antequam voluntas illud velit; sed non apprehendit determinate hoc esse agendum quod apprehendere dicitur dictare.* Oxon. IV, d. 46, qu. 1, no. 10.
11. John Stuart Mill, *op. cit.*
12. Leibniz only sums up and articulates the Christian tradition when he writes: "*Die Frage, ob unserem Willen Freiheit zukommt, bedeutet eigentlich nichts anderes, als ob ihm Willen zukommt. Die Ausdrücke 'frei' und 'willensgemäss' besagen dasselbe.*" (*Schriften zur Metaphysik I*, "Bemerkungen zu den cartesischen Prinzipien." Zu Artikel 39.)

13. Augustine, *Confessions*, book VIII, ch. 8.
14. We find this conflict frequently in Euripides. Thus Medea, before murdering her children, says: "and I know which evils I am about to commit, but θυμός is stronger than my deliberations" (1078 ff.); and Phaedra (*Hippolytus*, 376 ff.) speaks in a similar vein. The point of the matter is always that reason, knowledge, insight, etc., are too weak to withstand the onslaught of desire, and it may not be accidental that the conflict breaks out in the soul of women, who are less under the influence of reasoning than men.
15. "Insofar as the mind commands, the mind wills, and insofar as the thing commanded is not done, it wills not," as Augustine put it, in the famous ch. 9 of book VIII of the *Confessions*, which deals with the will and its power. To Augustine, it was a matter of course that "to will" and "to command" are the same.
16. Augustine, *ibid.*
17. Pythian Ode IV, 287–289:

φαντι δ'έμμεν
 τουτ' άνιαρότατον καλα γινώσηοντ' ανάγκα
 έκτός έχειν πόδα.

18. *Esprit des Lois*, XII, 2 and XI, 3.
19. *Op. cit.*
20. *Ibid.*
21. See the first four chapters of the second book of *The Social Contract*. Among modern political theorists, Carl Schmitt is the most able defender of the notion of sovereignty. He recognizes clearly that the root of sovereignty is the will: Sovereign is who wills and commands. See especially his *Verfassungslehre*, München, 1928, pp. 7 ff., 146.
22. Book XII, ch. 20.