

Font Size: [A](#) [A](#) [A](#)

The New York Review of Books

A Special Supplement: Reflections on Violence

Hannah ArendtFEBRUARY 27, 1969 ISSUE

I

These reflections were provoked by the events and debates of the last few years, as seen against the background of the twentieth century. Indeed this century has become, as Lenin predicted, a century of wars and revolutions, hence a century of that violence which is currently believed to be their common denominator. There is, however, another factor in the present situation which, though predicted by nobody, is of at least equal importance. The technical development of implements of violence has now reached the point where no political goal could conceivably correspond to their destructive potential or justify their actual use in armed conflict. Hence, warfare—since times immemorial the final merciless arbiter in international disputes—has lost much of its effectiveness and nearly all of its glamor. “The apocalyptic” chess game between the superpowers, that is, between those that move on the highest plane of our civilization, is being played according to the rule: “if either ‘wins’ it is the end of both.”¹ Moreover the game bears no resemblance to whatever war games preceded it. Its “rational” goal is mutual deterrence, not victory.

Since violence—as distinct from power, force, or strength—always needs *implements* (as Engels pointed out long ago),² the revolution in technology, a revolution in tool-making, was especially marked in warfare. The very substance of violent action is ruled by the question of means and ends, whose chief characteristic, if applied to human affairs, has always been that the end is in danger of being overwhelmed by the means, which it both justifies and needs. Since the end of human action, in contrast with the products of fabrication, can never be reliably predicted, the means used to achieve political goals are more often than not of greater relevance to the future world than the intended goals. Moreover, all violence harbors within itself an element of arbitrariness; nowhere does Fortuna, good or ill luck, play a more important role in human affairs than on the battlefield; and this intrusion of the “Random Event” cannot be eliminated by game theories but only by the certainty of mutual destruction. It seems symbolic of this all-pervading unpredictability that those engaged in the perfection of the means of destruction have finally brought about a level of technical development where their aim,

namely warfare, is on the point of disappearing altogether.³

No one concerned with history and politics can remain unaware of the enormous role violence has always played in human affairs; and it is at first glance rather surprising that violence has so seldom been singled out for special consideration.⁴ This shows to what extent violence and its arbitrary nature were taken for granted and therefore neglected; no one questions or examines what is obvious to all. Whoever looked for some kind of sense in the records of the past was almost bound to look upon violence as a marginal phenomenon. When Clausewitz calls war “the continuation of politics with other means,” or Engels defines violence as the accelerator of economic development,⁵ the emphasis is on political or economic continuity, on continuing a process which is determined by what preceded violent action. Hence, students of international relations have held until very recently that “it was a maxim that a military resolution in discord with the deeper cultural sources of national power could not be stable,” or that, in Engels’s words, “wherever the power structure of a country contradicts its economic development” political power with its means of violence will suffer defeat.⁶

Today all these old verities about the relation of war and politics or about violence and power no longer apply. We know that “a few weapons could wipe out all other sources of national power in a few moments,”⁷ that biological weapons are devised which would enable “small groups of individuals...to upset the strategic balance” and be cheap enough to be produced by “nations unable to develop nuclear striking forces,”⁸ that “within a very few years” robot soldiers will have made “human soldiers completely obsolete,”⁹ and that, finally, in conventional warfare the poor countries are much less vulnerable than the great powers precisely because they are “underdeveloped” and because technical superiority can “be much more of a liability than an asset” in guerrilla wars.¹⁰

What all these very uncomfortable novelties add up to is a reversal in the relationship between power and violence, foreshadowing another reversal in the future relationship between small and great powers. The amount of violence at the disposal of a given country

may no longer be a reliable indication of that country's strength or a reliable guarantee against destruction by a substantially smaller and weaker power. This again bears an ominous similarity to one of the oldest insights of political science, namely that power cannot be measured by wealth, that an abundance of wealth may erode power, that riches are particularly dangerous for the power and well-being of republics.

The more doubtful the outcome of violence in international relations, the more it has gained in reputation and appeal in domestic affairs, specifically in the matter of revolution. The strong Marxist flavor in the rhetoric of the New Left coincides with the steady growth of the entirely non-Marxian conviction, proclaimed by Mao Tsetung, "Power grows out of the barrel of a gun." To be sure, Marx was aware of the role of violence in history, but this role was to him secondary; not violence but the contradictions inherent in the old society brought about its end. The emergence of a new society was preceded, but not caused, by violent outbreaks, which he likened to the labor pangs that precede, but of course do not cause, the event of organic birth.

In the same vein, Marx regarded the state as an instrument of violence at the command of the ruling class; but the actual power of the ruling class did not consist of nor rely on violence. It was defined by the role the ruling class played in society, or more exactly, by its role in the process of production. It has often been noticed, and sometimes deplored, that the revolutionary Left, under the influence of Marx's teachings, ruled out the use of violent means; the "dictatorship of the proletariat"—openly repressive in Marx's writings—came after the revolution and was meant, like the Roman dictatorship, as a strictly limited period. Political assassination, with the exception of a few acts of individual terror perpetuated by small groups of anarchists, was mostly the prerogative of the Right, while organized armed uprisings remained the specialty of the military.

On the level of theory, there were a few exceptions. Georges Sorel, who at the beginning of the century tried a combination of Marxism with Bergson's philosophy of life—which on a much lower level of sophistication shows an odd similarity with Sartre's current amalgamation of existentialism and Marxism—thought of class struggle in military terms; but he ended by proposing nothing more violent than the famous myth of the general strike, a form of action which we today would rather think of as belonging to the arsenal of nonviolent politics.

Fifty years ago, even this modest proposal earned him the reputation of being a fascist, his enthusiastic approval of Lenin and the Russian Revolution notwithstanding. Sartre, who in his Preface to Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* goes much further in his glorification of violence than Sorel in his famous *Reflections on Violence*—further than Fanon himself whose argument he wishes to bring to its conclusion—still mentions "Sorel's fascist utterances." This shows to what extent Sartre is unaware of his basic disagreement with

Marx on the question of violence, especially when he states that “irrepressible violence...is man recreating himself,” that it is “mad fury” through which “the wretched of the earth” can “become men.”

These notions are all the more remarkable since the idea of man creating himself is in the tradition of Hegelian and Marxian thinking; it is the very basis of all leftist humanism. But according to Hegel, man “produces” himself through thought,¹¹ whereas for Marx, who turned Hegel’s “idealism” upside down, it was labor, the human form of metabolism with nature, that fulfilled this function. One may argue that all notions of man-creating-himself have in common a rebellion against the human condition itself—nothing is more obvious than that man, be it as a member of the species or as an individual, does *not* owe his existence to himself—and that therefore what Sartre, Marx, and Hegel have in common is more relevant than the specific activities through which this non-fact should have come about. Still, it is hardly deniable that a gulf separates the essentially peaceful activities of thinking or laboring and deeds of violence. “To shoot down a European is to kill two birds with one stone...there remains a dead man and a free man,” writes Sartre in his Preface. This is a sentence Marx could never have written.

I quote Sartre in order to show that this new shift toward violence in the thinking of revolutionaries can remain unnoticed even by one of their most representative and articulate spokesmen.¹² If one turns the “idealistic” *concept* of thought upside down one might arrive at the “materialistic” *concept* of labor; one will never arrive at the notion of violence. No doubt, this development has a logic of its own, but it is logic that springs from experience and not from a development of ideas; and this experience was utterly unknown to any generation before.

The pathos and the *élan* of the New Left, their credibility as it were, are closely connected with the weird suicidal development of modern weapons; this is the first generation that grew up under the shadow of the atom bomb, and it inherited from the generation of its fathers the experience of a massive intrusion of criminal violence into politics—they learned in high school and in college about concentration and extermination camps, about genocide and torture, about the wholesale slaughter of civilians in war, without which modern military operations are no longer possible even if they remain restricted to “conventional” weapons.

The first reaction was a revulsion against violence in all its forms, an almost matter-of-course espousal of a politics of nonviolence. The successes of this movement, especially with respect to civil rights, were very great, and they were followed by the resistance movement against the war in Vietnam which again determined to a considerable degree the climate of opinion in this country. But it is no secret that things have changed since then, and it would be futile to say that only “extremists” are yielding to a glorification of

violence, and believe, with Fanon, that “only violence pays.”¹³

The new militants have been denounced as anarchists, red fascists, and, with considerably more justification, “Luddite machine smashers.”¹⁴ Their behavior has been blamed on all kinds of social and psychological causes, some of which we shall have to discuss later. Still, it seems absurd, especially in view of the global character of the phenomenon, to ignore the most obvious and perhaps the most potent factor in this development, for which moreover no precedent and no analogy exist—the fact that, in general, technological progress seems in so many instances to lead straight to disaster, and, in particular, the proliferation of techniques and machines which, far from only threatening certain classes with unemployment, menaces the very existence of whole nations and, conceivably, of all mankind. It is only natural that the new generation should live with greater awareness of the possibility of doomsday than those “over thirty,” not, because they are younger but because this was their first decisive experience in the world. If you ask a member of this generation two simple questions: “How do you wish the world to be in fifty years?” and “What do you want your life to be like five years from now?” the answers are quite often preceded by a “Provided that there is still a world,” and “Provided I am still alive.”

To be sure, the recent emphasis on violence is still mostly a matter of theory and rhetoric, but it is precisely this rhetoric, shot through with all kinds of Marxist leftovers, that is so baffling. Who could possibly call an ideology Marxist that has put its faith, to quote Fanon, in “the classless idlers,” believes that “in the lumpen-proletariat the rebellion will find its urban spearhead,” and trusts that the “gangsters light the way for the people”?¹⁵ Sartre in his great felicity with words has given expression to the new faith. “Violence,” he now believes, on the strength of Fanon’s book, “like Achilles’ lance, can heal the wounds that it has inflicted.” If this were true, revenge would be the cure-all for most of our ills. This myth is more abstract, further removed from reality than Sorel’s myth of a general strike ever was. It is on a par with Fanon’s worst rhetorical excesses, such as, “Hunger with dignity is preferable to bread eaten in slavery.” No history and no theory are needed to refute this statement; the most superficial observer of the processes in the human body knows its untruth. But had he said that bread eaten with dignity is preferable to cake eaten in slavery, the rhetorical point would have been lost.

If one reads these irresponsible and grandiose statements of these intellectuals—and those I quoted are fairly representative, except that Fanon still manages to stay closer to reality than most of them—and if one looks at them in the perspective of what we know about the history of rebellions and revolutions, it is tempting to deny their significance, to ascribe them to a passing mood, or to the ignorance and nobility of sentiment of those who are exposed to unprecedented events without any means to handle them mentally, and who therefore have revived thoughts and emotions which Marx had hoped to have buried forever. For it is certainly nothing new that those who are being violated dream of violence,

that those who are oppressed “dream at least once a day of setting” themselves up in the oppressor’s place, that those who are poor dream of the possessions of the rich, that the persecuted dream of exchanging “the role of the quarry for that of the hunter,” and the last of the kingdom where “the last shall be first, and the first last.”¹⁶

The great rarity of slave-rebellions and of uprisings among the disinherited and downtrodden is notorious; on the rare occasions when they occurred it was precisely “mad fury” that turned dreams into nightmares for everybody, and in no case, so far as I know, was the force of mere “volcanic” outbursts, as Sartre states, “equal to that of the pressure put on” the oppressed. To believe that we deal with such outbursts bursts in the National Liberation Movements, and nothing more, is to prophesy their doom—quite apart from the fact that the unlikely victory would not result in the change of the world (or the system) but only of its personnel. To think, finally, that there is such a thing as the “Unity of the Third World” to which one could address the new slogan in the era of decolonization, “Natives of all underdeveloped countries unite!” (Sartre) is to repeat Marx’s worst illusions on a greatly enlarged scale and with considerably less justification.

There still remains the question why so many of these new preachers of violence have remained unaware of their decisive disagreement with the teachings of Karl Marx, or, to put it another way, why they cling with such stubborn tenacity to concepts which are not only refuted by actual events but are clearly inconsistent with their own politics. For although the one positive political slogan the new movement has put forth, the claim for “participatory democracy,” which has echoed around the globe and which constitutes the most significant common denominator of the rebellions in the East and the West, derives from the best in the revolutionary tradition—the council system, the always defeated but only authentic outgrowth of all revolutions since the eighteenth century—it cannot be found in nor does it agree, either in word or in substance, with the teachings of Marx and Lenin, both of whom aimed at a society in which the need for public action and participation in public affairs would have “withered away,” along with the state itself.

(It is true that a similar inconsistency could be charged to Marx and Lenin themselves. Didn’t Marx support and glorify the Paris Commune of 1871, and didn’t Lenin issue the famous slogan of the Russian Revolution, “All power to the *soviets*”? But Marx thought of the Commune not as a new form of government but as a necessarily transitory organ of revolutionary action, “the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economic emancipation of labor,” a form which, according to Engels, was identical with “the dictatorship of the Proletariat.” The case of Lenin is more complicated. Still, it was Lenin who emasculated the *soviets* and finally gave all power to the Party.)

Because of its curious timidity in theoretical matters, which contrasts oddly with its bold courage in practice, the slogan of the New Left has remained in a declamatory stage, to be

invoked like a charm against both Western representative democracy, which is about to lose even its merely representative function to the huge party machines that “represent” not the party membership but its functionaries, and the Eastern one-party bureaucracies, which rule out participation on principle. I am not sure what the explanation of these inconsistencies will eventually turn out to be; but I suspect that the deeper reason for this loyalty to a typical nineteenth-century doctrine has something to do with the concept of Progress, with the unwillingness to part with this notion that has always united Liberalism, Socialism, and Communism, but has nowhere reached the level of plausibility and sophistication we find in the writings of Karl Marx. (For inconsistency has always been the Achilles’ heel of liberal thought; it combined an unswerving loyalty to Progress with a no less strict refusal to look upon History in Marxian and Hegelian terms, which alone could justify this belief.)

The notion that there is such a thing as Progress for mankind as a whole, that it is the law which rules all processes in the human species, was unknown prior to the eighteenth century and became an almost universally accepted dogma in the nineteenth. The same idea both informed Darwin’s biological discoveries, whereby mankind owed its very existence to an irrepressible forward movement of Nature, and gave rise to the new philosophies of History, which, since Hegel, have understood progress expressly in terms of organic development. Marx’s idea, borrowed from Hegel, that every old society harbors the seeds of its successors as every living organism harbors the seeds of its offspring is indeed not only the most ingenious but the only possible conceptual guarantee for the sempiternal continuity of Progress in History.

To be sure, a guarantee which in the final analysis rests on not much more than a metaphor is not the most solid basis to erect a doctrine upon, but this, unhappily, Marxism shares with a great many other doctrines in philosophy. Its great advantage becomes clear as soon as one compares it with other concepts of History—such as the rise and fall of empires, the eternal recurrence of the same, the haphazard sequence of essentially unconnected events—all of which can just as well be documented and justified, but none of which will guarantee a continuum of linear time and hence a continuous progress in history. And the only competitor in the field, the ancient notion of a Golden Age at the beginning, from which everything else is derived, implies the rather unpleasant certainty of continuous decline.

There are, however, a few melancholy side effects in the reassuring idea that we need only march into the future, which we can’t help doing anyhow, in order to find a better world. There is, first of all, the simple fact that this general future of mankind has nothing to offer the individual life, whose only certain future is death. And if one leaves this out of account and thinks only in generalities, there is the obvious argument against progress that,

in the words of Herzen, “Human development is a form of chronological unfairness, since latecomers are able to profit by the labors of their predecessors without paying the same price,”¹⁷ or, in the words of Kant, “It will always remain bewildering...that the earlier generations seem to carry on their burdensome business only for the sake of the later...and that only the last should have the good fortune to dwell in the [completed] building.”¹⁸

However, these disadvantages, which were only rarely noticed, are more than outweighed by the enormous advantage that Progress not only explains the past without breaking up the time continuum, but can also serve as a guide for action into the future. This is what Marx discovered when he turned Hegel upside down: he changed the direction of the historian’s glance; instead of looking toward the past, he now could confidently look into the future. Progress gives an answer to the troublesome question: And what shall we do now? The answer, on the lowest level, says: Let us develop what we have into something better, greater, etc. (The liberals’ at first glance irrational faith in growth, so characteristic of all our present political and economic theories, depends on this notion.) On the more sophisticated level of the Left, it tells us to develop present contradictions into their inherent synthesis. In either case we are assured that nothing altogether new and unexpected can happen, nothing but the “necessary” results of what we already know.¹⁹ How reassuring that, in Hegel’s words, “nothing else will come out but what was already there.”²⁰

I don’t need to add that all our experiences in this century, which has constantly confronted us with the totally unexpected, stand in flagrant contradiction to these notions and doctrines, whose very popularity seems to consist in offering a comfortable, speculative or pseudo-scientific, refuge from reality. But since we are concerned here primarily with violence I must warn against a tempting misunderstanding. If we look upon history as a continuous chronological process, violence in the shape of war and revolution may appear to constitute the only possible interruptions of such processes. If this were true, if only the practice of violence would make it possible to interrupt automatic processes in the realm of human affairs, the preachers of violent actions would have won an important point, although, so far as I know, they never made it. However, it is the function of all action, as distinguished from mere behavior, to interrupt what otherwise would have proceeded automatically and therefore predictably. And the distinction between violent and non-violent action is that the former is exclusively bent upon the destruction of the old and the latter chiefly concerned with the establishment of something new.

II

It is against the background of these experiences that I propose to raise the question of violence in the political realm. This is not easy; for Sorel’s remark sixty years ago, that “The problems of violence still remain very obscure,”²¹ is as true today as it was then. I

mentioned the general reluctance to deal with violence as a separate phenomenon in its own right, and I must now qualify this statement. If we turn to the literature on the phenomenon of power, we soon find out that there exists an agreement among political theorists from Left to Right that violence is nothing more than the most flagrant manifestation of power. "All politics is a struggle for power; the ultimate kind of power is violence," said C. Wright Mills, echoing, as it were, Max Weber's definition of the state as the "rule of men over men, based on the means of legitimate, i.e. allegedly legitimate, violence."²²

The agreement is very strange; for to equate political power with "the organization of violence" makes sense only if one follows Marx's estimate of the state as an instrument of suppression in the hands of the ruling class. Let us therefore turn to authors who do not believe that the body politic, its laws and institutions, are merely coercive superstructures, secondary manifestations of some underlying forces. Let us turn, for instance, to Bertrand de Jouvenel, whose book, *Power*, is perhaps the most prestigious and, anyway, the most interesting recent treatise on the subject. "To him," he writes, "who contemplates the unfolding of the ages war presents itself as an activity of States *which pertains to their essence*."²³ But would the end of warfare, we are likely to ask, mean the end of States? Would the disappearance of violence in the relationships between States spell the end of power?

The answer, it seems, would depend on what we understand by power. De Jouvenel defines power as an instrument of rule, while rule, we are told, owes its existence to "the instinct of domination."²⁴ As he writes, "To command and to be obeyed: without that, there is no Power—with it no other attribute is needed for it to be The thing without which it cannot be: that essence is command." If the essence of power is the effectiveness of command, then there is no greater power than that which grows out of the barrel of a gun. Bertrand de Jouvenel and Mao Tse-tung thus seem to agree on so basic a point in political philosophy as the nature of power.

These definitions coincide with the terms which, since Greek antiquity, have been used to define the forms of government as the rule of man over man—of one or the few in monarchy and oligarchy, of the best or the many in aristocracy and democracy, to which today we ought to add the latest and perhaps most formidable form of such dominion, bureaucracy, or the rule by an intricate system of bureaux in which no men, neither one nor the best, neither the few nor the many, can be held responsible, and which could be properly called the rule by Nobody. Indeed, if we identify tyranny as the government that is not held to give account of itself, rule by Nobody is clearly the most tyrannical of all, since there is no one left who could even be asked to answer for what is being done. It is this state of affairs which is among the most potent causes for the current world-wide rebellious unrest.

Moreover, the force of this ancient vocabulary has been considerably strengthened by more modern scientific and philosophical convictions concerning the nature of man. The many recent discoveries of an inborn instinct of domination and an innate aggressiveness in the human animal were preceded by very similar philosophic statements. According to John Stuart Mill “the first lesson of civilization [is] that of obedience,” and he speaks of “the two states of the inclinations...one the desire to exercise power over others; the other...disinclination to have power exercised over themselves.”²⁵ If we would trust our own experiences in these matters, we should know that the instinct of submission, an ardent desire to obey and be ruled by some strong man, is at least as prominent in human psychology as the will-to-power, and politically perhaps more relevant.

A German saying that whoever wants to command must first learn how to obey points to the psychological truth in these matters, namely, that the will-to-power and the will-to-submission are interconnected; conversely, a strong disinclination to obey is usually accompanied by an equally strong repugnance to dominate and command. It is indeed bitter to obey, but from this it does not follow that to rule others is a pleasure. Historically speaking, the ancient institution of slave economy would be inexplicable on these grounds. For its express purpose was to liberate the citizens from the burden of household affairs and to permit them to enter the public life of the community where all were equals; if it were true that nothing is sweeter than to give commands and to rule others, the master would never have left his household.

However, there exists another tradition and another vocabulary no less old and time-honored than the one mentioned above. When the Athenian city-state called its constitution an isonomy or the Romans spoke of the *civitas* as their form of government, they had in mind another concept of power, which did not rely upon the command-obedience relationship. It is to these examples that the men of the eighteenth-century revolutions turned when they ransacked the archives of antiquity and constituted a republic, a form of government, where the rule of law, resting on the power of the people, would put an end to the rule of man over man, which they thought was “a government fit for slaves.” They too, unhappily, still talked about obedience—obedience to laws instead of men; but what they actually meant was the support of the laws to which the citizenry had given its consent.²⁶

Such support is never unquestioning, and as far as reliability is concerned it cannot match the indeed “unquestioning obedience” that an act of violence can exact—the obedience every criminal can count on when he snatches my pocketbook with the help of a knife or robs a bank with the help of a gun. It is the support of the people that lends power to the institutions of a country, and this support is but the continuation of the consent which brought the laws into existence to begin with. (Under conditions of representative government the people are supposed to rule those who govern them.) All political

institutions are manifestations and materializations of power; they petrify and decay as soon as the living power of the people ceases to uphold them. This is what Madison meant when he said, “all governments rest on opinion,” a statement that is no less true for the various forms of monarchies than it is for democracies. The strength of opinion, that is, the power of the government, is “in proportion to the number with which it is associated”²⁷.

Indeed, it is one of the most obvious distinctions between power and violence that power always stands in need of numbers, whereas violence relying on instruments up to a point can manage without them. A legally unrestricted majority rule, that is, a democracy without a constitution, can be very formidable indeed in the suppression of the rights of minorities and very effective in the suffocation of dissent without any use of violence. Undivided and unchecked power can bring about a “consensus” that is hardly less coercive than suppression by means of violence. But that does not mean that violence and power are the same.

It is, I think, a rather sad reflection on the present state of political science that our language does not distinguish between such key terms as power, strength, force, might, authority, and, finally, violence—all of which refer to distinct phenomena. To use them as synonyms not only indicates a certain deafness to linguistic meanings, which would be serious enough, but has resulted in a kind of blindness with respect to the realities they correspond to. Behind the apparent confusion lies a firm conviction that the most crucial political issue is, and always has been, the question of Who rules Whom? Only after one eliminates this disastrous reduction of public affairs to the business of dominion will the original data concerning human affairs appear or rather reappear in their authentic diversity.

It must be admitted that it is particularly tempting to think of power as a matter of command and obedience, and hence to equate power with violence, when discussing what is only one of power’s special provinces, namely, the power of government. Since in foreign relations as well as in domestic affairs violence is used as a last resort to keep the power structure intact against individual challengers—the foreign enemy, the native criminal—it looks indeed as though power, relying on violence, were the velvet glove which may or may not conceal an iron hand. However, upon closer inspection the assumption loses much of its plausibility. For our purpose, it is perhaps best illustrated by the phenomenon of revolution.

III

Since the beginning of the century, theoreticians have told us that the chances of revolution have significantly decreased in proportion to the increased destructive capacities of weapons at the unique disposition of governments. The history of the last seventy years,

with its extraordinary record of successful and unsuccessful revolutions, tells a different story. Were people mad who even tried against such overwhelming odds? How can an even temporary success be explained? The fact is that the gap between state-owned means of violence and what people can muster by themselves—from beer bottles to Molotov cocktails and guns—has always been so enormous that technical improvements make hardly any difference. Textbook recommendations of “how to make a revolution” in an orderly progress from dissent to conspiracy, from resistance to armed uprising, are all based on the mistaken notion that revolutions are being “made.” In a contest of violence against violence the superiority of the government has always been absolute; but this superiority lasts only so long as the power structure of the government is intact—that is, so long as commands are obeyed and the army or police forces are prepared to risk their lives and use their weapons.

When this is no longer the case the situation changes abruptly. Not only is the rebellion not put down, the arms themselves change hands—sometimes, as in the Hungarian Revolution, within a few hours. (We should understand this after years of futile fighting in Vietnam where, prior to the full-scale Russian aid, the National Liberation Front for a long time fought us with weapons that were made in the United States.) Only after the disintegration of the government in power has permitted the rebels to arm themselves can one speak of an “armed uprising,” which often does not take place at all or occurs when it is no longer necessary. Where commands are no longer obeyed, the means of violence are of no use. Hence obedience is not determined by commands but by opinion, and, of course, by the number of those who share it. Everything depends upon the power behind the violence. The sudden dramatic breakdown of power, which ushers in revolutions, reveals in a flash how civil obedience—to the laws, to the rulers, to the institutions—is but the outward manifestation of support and consent.

Where power has disintegrated revolutions are possible but not necessary. We know of many instances when utterly impotent regimes were permitted to continue in existence for long periods of time—either because there was no one to test their strength and to reveal their weakness or because they were lucky enough not to be engaged in war and suffer defeat. For disintegration often becomes manifest only in direct confrontation; and even then, when power is already in the street, some group of men, prepared for such an eventuality, is needed to pick it up and assume responsibility.

We have recently witnessed how the relatively harmless, essentially non-violent French students’ rebellion was sufficient to reveal the vulnerability of the whole political system, which rapidly disintegrated before the astonished eyes of the young rebels. Without knowing it they had tested the system; they intended no more than to challenge the ossified university system, and down came the system of governmental power together with that of the huge party bureaucracies—“*une sorte de désintégration de toutes les hiérarchies.*”²⁸ It

was a textbook case of a revolutionary situation which did not develop into a revolution because there was nobody, least of all the students, who was prepared to seize power and the responsibility that goes with it.

Nobody except, of course, De Gaulle. Nothing was more characteristic of the seriousness of the situation than his appeal to the army, his ride to see Massu and the generals in the dark of the night, a walk to Canossa if there ever was one in view of what had happened only a few years before. But what he sought and received was support, not obedience, and the means to obtain it were not commands but concessions.²⁹ If commands had been enough he would never have had to leave Paris.

No government exclusively based upon the means of violence has ever existed. Even the totalitarian ruler needs a power basis, the secret police and its net of informers. Only the development of robot soldiers, which would eliminate the human factor completely and, conceivably, permit one man with a pushbutton at his disposal to destroy whomever he pleases could change this fundamental ascendancy of power over violence. Even the most despotic domination we know of, the rule of master over slaves, who always outnumbered him, did not rest upon superior means of coercion as such but upon a superior organization of power, that is, upon the organized solidarity of the masters.³⁰

Single men without others to support them never have enough power to use violence. Hence, in domestic affairs, violence functions indeed as the last resort of power against criminals or rebels—that is, against individuals who, as it were, refuse to be overpowered by the consensus of the majority. And even in actual warfare, we have seen in Vietnam how an enormous superiority in the means of violence can become helpless if confronted with an ill-equipped but well organized opponent who is much more powerful. This lesson, to be sure, could have been learned since the beginnings of guerrilla warfare, which is at least as old as the defeat of Napoleon's still unvanquished army in Spain.

To switch for a moment to conceptual language: Power is indeed of the essence of all government, but violence is not. Violence is by nature instrumental; like all means, it always stands in need of guidance and justification through the end it pursues. And what needs justification through something else cannot be the essence of anything. The end of war is peace; but to the question, And what is the end of peace?, there is no answer. Peace is an absolute, even though in recorded history the periods of warfare have nearly always outlasted the periods of peace. Power is in the same category; it is, as the saying goes, “an end in itself.” (This, of course, is not to deny that governments pursue policies and employ their power to achieve prescribed goals. But the power structure itself precedes and outlasts all aims, so that power, far from being the means to an end, is actually the very condition that enables a group of people to think and act according to means and ends.) And since government is essentially organized and institutionalized power, the current question, What

is the end of government?, does not make much sense either. The answer will be either question-begging—to enable men to live together—or dangerously utopian: to promote happiness or to realize a classless society or some other nonpolitical ideal, which if tried out in earnest can only end in the worst kind of government, that is, tyranny.

Power needs no justification as it is inherent in the very existence of political communities; what, however, it does need is legitimacy. The common usage of these two words as synonyms is no less misleading and confusing than the current equation of obedience and support. Power springs up whenever people get together and act in concert, but it derives its legitimacy from the initial getting together rather than from any action that then may follow. Violence needs justification and it can be justifiable, but its justification loses in plausibility the farther away its intended end recedes into the future. No one will question the use of violence in self-defense because the danger is not only clear but present, and the end to justify the means is immediate.

IV

Power and violence, though they are distinct phenomena, usually appear together. Up to now, we have discussed such combinations and found that, wherever they are so combined, power is the primary and predominant factor. The situation, however, is entirely different when we deal with them in their pure states—as for instance in cases of foreign invasion and occupation. The difficulties of achieving such domination are very great indeed, and the occupying invader will try immediately to establish Quisling governments, that is, to find a native power base with which to support his dominion. The head-on clash between Russian tanks and the entirely non-violent resistance of the people in Czechoslovakia is a textbook case of a confrontation of violence and power in their pure states.

But while this kind of domination is difficult, it is not impossible. Violence, we must remember, does not depend on numbers or opinion but on implements, and the implements of violence share with all other tools that they increase and multiply human strength. Those who oppose violence with mere power will soon find out that they are confronted not with men but with men's artifacts, whose inhumanity and destructive effectiveness increase in proportion to the distance that separates the opponents. Violence can always destroy power; out of the barrel of a gun grows the most effective command, resulting in the most instant and perfect obedience. What can never grow out of it is power.

In a head-on clash between violence and power the outcome is hardly in doubt. If Gandhi's enormously powerful and successful strategy of non-violent resistance had met with a different enemy—Stalin's Russia, Hitler's Germany, even pre-war Japan, instead of England—the outcome would not have been decolonization but massacre and submission. However, England in India or France in Algeria had good reasons for their restraint. Rule

by sheer violence comes into play where power is being lost; it is precisely the shrinking power of the Russian government, internally and externally, that became manifest in its “solution” of the Czechoslovak problem—just as it was the shrinking power of European imperialism that became manifest in the alternative of decolonization or massacre.

To substitute violence for power can bring victory, but its price is very high; for it is not only paid by the vanquished, it is paid by the victor in his own power. The much-feared boomerang effect of the “government of subject races” (Lord Cromer) upon the home government during the imperialist era meant that rule by violence in far-away lands would end by affecting the government of England, that the last “subject race” would be the English themselves. It has often been said that impotence breeds violence, and psychologically this is quite true. Politically, loss of power tempts men to substitute violence for power—we could watch this process on television during the Democratic Convention in Chicago³¹—and violence itself results in impotence.

Nowhere is the self-defeating factor in the victory of violence over power more evident than in the use of terror for purposes of maintaining domination, about whose weird successes and eventual failures we know perhaps more than any generation before us. Terror is not the same as violence; it is rather the form of government that comes into being when violence, having destroyed all power, does not abdicate but, on the contrary, remains in full control. It has often been noticed that the effectiveness of terror depends almost entirely on the degree of social atomization, the disappearance of every kind of organized opposition, which must be achieved before the full force of terror can be let loose. This atomization—an outrageously pale, academic word for the horror it implies—results finally in a total loss of power.

The decisive difference between totalitarian domination based on terror, and tyrannies and dictatorships, established by violence, is that only the former turns not only against its enemies but against its friends and supporters as well, being afraid of all power, even the power of its friends. The climax of terror is reached when the police state begins to devour its own children, when yesterday’s executioner becomes today’s victim. And this is also the moment when power disappears entirely. There exist now a great many plausible reasons to explain the de-Stalinization of Russia—none, I believe, so compelling as the realization by the Stalinist functionaries themselves that a continuation of the regime would lead, not to an insurrection, against which terror is indeed the best safeguard, but to a paralysis of the whole country.³²

To sum up: politically speaking, it is not enough to say that power and violence are not the same. Power and violence are opposites; where the one rules absolutely, the other is absent. Violence appears where power is in jeopardy, but left to its own course its end is the disappearance of power. This implies that it is not correct to say that the opposite of

violence is nonviolence: to speak of nonviolent power is actually redundant. Violence can destroy power; it is utterly incapable of creating it. Hegel's and Marx's great trust in the dialectical "power of negation," by virtue of which opposites do not destroy but smoothly develop into each other because contradictions promote and do not paralyze development, rests on a much older philosophical prejudice, the prejudice that evil is no more than a privative modus of the good, that good can come out of evil, that, in short, evil is but the temporary manifestation of a still hidden good. Such time-honored opinions have become dangerous. They are shared by many who have never heard of the names Hegel or Marx, for the simple reason that they inspire hope and dispel fear—a treacherous hope used to dispel legitimate fears. By this, I don't mean to equate violence with evil; I only want to stress that violence can't be derived from its opposite, which is power, and that in order to understand it for what it is, we shall have to examine its roots and causes.

V

That violence often springs from rage is a commonplace, and rage can indeed be irrational and pathological, but so can every other human affect. It is no doubt possible to create conditions under which men are dehumanized—such as concentration camps, torture, famine, etc.—but this does not mean that they become animal-like; and, under such conditions, not rage and violence but their conspicuous absence is the clearest sign of dehumanization. For rage is by no means an automatic reaction to misery and suffering as such; no one reacts with rage to a disease beyond the powers of medicine or to an earthquake, or, for that matter, to social conditions which seem to be unchangeable. Only where there is reason to suspect that conditions could be changed and are not, does rage arise. Only when our sense of justice is offended do we react with rage.

To resort to violence in view of outrageous events or conditions is enormously tempting because of the immediacy and swiftness inherent in it. It goes against the grain of rage and violence to act with *deliberate* speed; but this does not make it irrational. On the contrary, in private as well as public life there are situations in which the very swiftness of a violent act may be the only appropriate remedy. The point is not that this will permit us to let off steam—which indeed can be equally well done by pounding the table or by finding another substitute. The point is that under certain circumstances violence, which is to act without argument or speech and without reckoning with consequences, is the only possibility of setting the scales of justice right again. (Billy Budd striking dead the man who bore false witness against him is the classic example.) In this sense, rage and the violence that sometimes, not always, goes with it belong among the "natural" human emotions, and to cure man of them would mean nothing less than to dehumanize or emasculate him.

Rage and violence turn irrational only when they are directed against substitutes, and this,

I am afraid, is precisely what not only the psychiatrist and polemologists, concerned with human aggressiveness, commend, but what corresponds, alas, to certain moods and unreflected attitudes in society at large. We all know, for example, that it has become rather fashionable among white liberals to react against “black rage” with the cry, We are all guilty, and black militants have proved only too happy to accept this “confession” and to base on it some of their more fantastic demands.

Where all are guilty, however, no one is; confessions of collective guilt are always the best possible safeguard against the discovery of the actual culprits. In this particular instance, it is in addition a dangerous and obfuscating escalation of racism into some higher, less tangible regions: The real rift between black and white is not healed when it is being translated into an even less reconcilable conflict between collective innocence and collective guilt. It is racism in disguise and it serves quite effectively to give the very real grievances and rational emotions of the Negro population an outlet into irrationality, an escape from reality.

Moreover, if we inquire historically into the causes that are likely to transform the *engagés* into the *enragés*, it is not injustice that ranks first but hypocrisy. Its momentous role in the later stages of the French Revolution, when Robespierre’s war upon hypocrisy transformed the “despotism of liberty” into the Reign of Terror, is too well known to be repeated here; but it is important to remember that this war had been declared long before by the French moralists, who saw in hypocrisy the vice of all vices and found it the one ruling supreme in “good society,” which somewhat later was called bourgeois society.

There are not many authors of rank who glorified violence for violence’s sake; but these few—Sorel, Pareto, Fanon—were motivated by a much deeper hatred for bourgeois society and were led to a much more radical break with its moral standards than the conventional Left, which was chiefly inspired by compassion and a burning desire for justice. To tear the mask of hypocrisy from the face of the enemy, to unmask him, his devious machinations and manipulations that permit him to rule without using violent means, that is, to provoke action even at the risk of annihilation so that the truth may come out—these are still among the strongest motives in today’s violence on the campuses and in the streets. And this violence again is not irrational. Since men live in a world of appearances, hence depend upon manifestation, hypocrisy’s conceits—as distinguished from temporary ruses, followed by disclosure in due time—cannot be met with what is recognized as reasonable behavior. Words can be relied upon only so long as one is sure that their function is to reveal and not to conceal. It is the semblance of rationality, rather than the interests behind it, that provokes rage. To respond with reason when reason is used as a trap is not “rational”; just as to use a gun in self-defense is not “irrational.”

Although the effectiveness of violence, as I remarked before, does not depend on numbers—one machine-gunner can hold hundreds of well-organized people at bay—it is

nonetheless the case that its most dangerously attractive features come to the fore in collective violence. It is perfectly true, as Fanon writes, that in military as well as revolutionary action “individualism is the first [value] to disappear”³³; in its stead, we find a kind of group coherence which is more intensely felt and proves to be a much stronger, though less lasting, bond than all the varieties of friendship, civil or private:³⁴ “the practice of violence binds men together as a whole, since each individual forms a violent link in the great chain, a part of the great organism of violence which has surged upward.”³⁵

These words of Fanon point to the well-known phenomenon of brotherhood on the battlefield, where often the noblest, most selfless deeds are daily occurrences. Of all equalizers, death seems to be the most potent one in the few extraordinary situations in which it is permitted to play a political role. The experience of death, whether the experience of dying or the inner awareness of one’s own mortality, is perhaps the most antipolitical experience there is, in so far as it is usually faced in complete loneliness and impotence, signifying that we shall leave the company of our fellow men and with it that being-together and acting in concert which make life worthwhile.

But death faced collectively and in action changes its countenance; now it is as though nothing is more likely to intensify our vitality than its proximity. Something we are usually hardly aware of, that our own death is accompanied by the potential immortality of the group to which we belong and, in the final analysis, of the species, moves into the center of our experience, and the result is that it is as though Life itself, the immortal life of the species, nourished as it were by the sempiternal dying of its individual members, is “surging upward,” is actualized in the practice of violence.

It would be wrong, I think, to speak here of mere emotions. What is important is that these experiences, whose elementary force is beyond doubt, have never found an institutional, political expression. No body politic I know of was ever founded on the equality before death and its actualization in violence,³⁶ But it is undeniably true that the strong fraternal sentiments, engendered by collective violence, have misled many good people into the hope that a new community together with a “new man” will arise out of it. The hope is an illusion for the simple reason that no human relationship is more transitory than this kind of brotherhood, which can be actualized only under conditions of immediate danger to life.

This, however, is but one side of the matter. Fanon concludes his praising description of the experiences in the practice of violence by remarking that in this kind of struggle the people realize “that life is an unending contest,” that violence is an element of life. Doesn’t it follow that praise of life and praise of violence are the same? Sorel, at any rate, thought along these lines sixty years ago. The bourgeoisie, he argued, had lost the “energy” to play its role in the antagonism of classes; only if the proletariat could be persuaded to use violence in order to reaffirm class distinctions and awaken the fighting spirit of the

bourgeoisie could Europe be saved.³⁷

Hence long before Konrad Lorenz discovered the life-promoting function of aggressiveness in the animal kingdom, violence was praised as a manifestation of the life force, and specifically of its creativity. Sorel, inspired by Bergson's *élan vital*, aimed at a philosophy of creativity designed for "producers" and polemically directed against the consumer society and its intellectuals; both groups, he felt, were parasites.

Fanon, who had an infinitely more intimate experience of the practice of violence than any of its other glorifiers, past or present, was greatly influenced by Sorel's equation of violence, life and creativity, and we all know to what extent this old combination has survived in the rebellious state of mind of the new generation—their taste for violence again is accompanied by a glorification of life, and it frequently understands itself as the necessarily violent negation of everything that stands in the way of the will-to-live. And this seemingly so novel biological justification of violence is again not unconnected with the most pernicious elements in our oldest tradition of political thought. According to the traditional concept of power, which, as we saw, was equated with violence, power was expansionist by nature, it has, as de Jouvenel has argued, "an inner urge to grow," it was creative because "the instinct of growth is proper to it."³⁸

Just as in the realm of organic life everything either grows or declines and dies, so in the realm of human affairs power supposedly can sustain itself only through expansion; otherwise it shrinks and dies. "That which stops growing begins to rot," said a Russian in the entourage of Catherine the Great, "The people erect scaffolds, not as the moral punishment of despotism, but as the *biological* penalty for weakness" (my italics). Revolutions, therefore, we are told, were directed against the established powers "only to the outward view." Their true "effect was to give Power a new vigor and poise, and to pull down the obstacles which had long obstructed its development."³⁹ When Fanon is speaking of the "creative madness" present in violent action, he is still thinking along the lines of this tradition.⁴⁰

Nothing, I think, is more dangerous theoretically than this tradition of organic thought in political matters, in which power and violence are interpreted in biological terms. In the way these terms are understood today, life and life's alleged creativity, are their common denominator so that the precedence of violence is justified on the ground of creativity. The organic metaphors with which our entire present discussion of these matters, especially the riots, is shot through—the notion of a "sick society," of which the riots are symptoms as fever is a symptom of disease—can only promote violence in the end. Thus the debate between those who propose violent means to restore "law and order" and those who propose nonviolent reforms begins to sound ominously like a discussion between two physicians who debate the relative advantages of surgical as opposed to medical treatment

of their patient. The sicker the patient is supposed to be, the more likely that the surgeon will have the last word.

Moreover, so long as we talk about these matters in non-political, biological ways, the glorifiers of violence will have the great advantage to appeal to the undeniable fact that, in the household of nature, destruction and creation are but two sides of the natural process, so that collective violent action, quite apart from its inherent attraction, may appear as natural a prerequisite for the collective life of mankind as the struggle for survival and violent death for the continuing life in the animal kingdom.

No doubt, the danger of being carried away by the deceptive plausibility of organic metaphors is particularly great where the racial issue is involved. Racism, white or black, is fraught with violence by definition because it objects to natural organic facts—a white or black skin—which no persuasion and no power can change; all one can do, when the chips are down, is to exterminate their bearers. Violence in interracial struggle is always murderous, but it is not “irrational”; it is the logical and rational consequence of racism, by which I do not mean some rather vague prejudices on either side but an explicit ideological system.

Prejudices, as distinguished from both interests and ideologies, may yield under the pressure of power—as we have seen during the years of a successful civil rights movement that was entirely nonviolent. But while boycotts, sit-ins, and demonstrations were adequate in eliminating discriminatory laws and ordinances, they proved utter failures and became counter-productive when confronted with social conditions—the stark needs of the black ghettos on one side, the overriding interests of the lower-income groups with respect to housing and education on the other. All this mode of action could do, and did, was to bring these conditions into the open, into the street, where the basic irreconcilability of interests was dangerously exposed.

But even today's violence, black riots and the much greater potential violence of the white backlash, are not yet manifestations of racist ideologies and their murderous logic. The riots, as has recently been stated, are “articulate protests against genuine grievances”⁴¹; “indeed restraint and selectivity—or...rationality are certainly among [their] most crucial features.”⁴² And much the same is true for the backlash phenomena. It is not irrational for certain interest groups to protest furiously against being singled out to pay the full price for ill-designed integration policies whose consequences their authors can easily escape.⁴³ The greatest danger is rather the other way round: since violence always needs justification, an escalation of the violence in the streets may bring about a truly racist ideology to justify it, in which case violence and riots may disappear from the streets and be transformed into the invisible terror of a police state.

Violence, being instrumental by nature, is rational to the extent that it is effective in

reaching the end which must justify it. And since when we act we never know with any amount of certainty the eventual consequences of what we are doing, violence can remain rational only if it pursues short-term goals. Violence does not promote causes, it promotes neither History nor Revolution, but it can indeed serve to dramatize grievances and to bring them to public attention. As Conor Cruise O'Brien once remarked, "Violence is sometimes needed for the voice of moderation to be heard." And indeed, violence, contrary to what its prophets try to tell us, is a much more effective weapon of reformers than of revolutionists. (The often vehement denunciations of violence by Marxists did not spring from humane motives but from their awareness that revolutions are not the result of conspiracies and violent action.) France would not have received the most radical reform bill since Napoleon to change her antiquated education system without the riots of the French students, and no one would have dreamed of yielding to reforms of Columbia University without the riots during the spring term.

Still, the danger of the practice of violence, even if it moves consciously within a non-extremist framework of short-term goals, will always be that the means overwhelm the end. If goals are not achieved rapidly, the result will not merely be defeat but the introduction of the practice of violence into the whole body politic. Action is irreversible, and a return to the status quo in case of defeat is always unlikely. The practice of violence, like all action, changes the world, but the most probable change is a more violent world.

Finally, the greater the bureaucratization of public life, the greater will be the attraction of violence. In a fully developed bureaucracy there is nobody left with whom one could argue, to whom one could present grievances, on whom the pressures of power could be exerted. Bureaucracy is the form of government in which everybody is deprived of political freedom, of the power to act; for the rule by Nobody is not no-rule, and where all are equally powerless we have a tyranny without a tyrant. The crucial feature in the students' rebellions around the world is that they are directed everywhere against the ruling bureaucracy. This explains, what at first glance seems so disturbing, that the rebellions in the East demand precisely those freedoms of speech and thought that the young rebels in the West say they despise as irrelevant. Huge party machines have succeeded everywhere to overrule the voice of the citizens, even in countries where freedom of speech and association is still intact.

The dissenters and resisters in the East demand free speech and thought as the preliminary conditions for political action; the rebels in the West live under conditions where these preliminaries no longer open the channels for action, for the meaningful exercise of freedom. The transformation of government into administration, of republics into bureaucracies, and the disastrous shrinkage of the public realm that went with it, have a long and complicated history throughout the modern age; and this process has been considerably accelerated for the last hundred years through the rise of party bureaucracies.

What makes man a political being is his faculty to act. It enables him to get together with his peers, to act in concert, and to reach out for goals and enterprises which would never enter his mind, let alone the desires of his heart, had he not been given this gift—to embark upon something new. All the properties of creativity ascribed to life in manifestations of violence and power actually belong to the faculty of action. And I think it can be shown that no other human ability has suffered to such an extent by the Progress of the modern age.

For progress, as we have come to understand it, means growth, the relentless process of more and more, of bigger and bigger. The bigger a country becomes in population, in objects, and in possessions, the greater will be the need for administration and with it, the anonymous power of the administrators. Pavel Kohout, the Czech author, writing in the heyday of the Czech experiment with freedom, defined a “free citizen” as a “Citizen-Co-ruler.” He meant nothing else but the “participatory democracy” of which we have heard so much in recent years in the West. Kohout added that what the world, as it is today, stands in greatest need of may well be “a new example” if “the next thousand years are not to become an era of supercivilized monkeys.”⁴⁴

This new example will hardly be brought about by the practice of violence, although I am inclined to think that much of its present glorification is due to the severe frustration of the faculty of action in the modern world. It is simply true that the riots in the ghettos and the rebellions on the campuses make “people feel they are acting together in a way that they rarely can.”⁴⁵ We don’t know if these occurrences are the beginnings of something new—the “new example”—or the death pangs of a faculty that mankind is about to lose. As things stand today, when we see how the super-powers are bogged down under the monstrous weight of their own bigness, it looks as though the “new example” will have a chance to arise, if at all, in a small country, or in small, well-defined sectors in the mass-societies of the large powers.

For the disintegration processes, which have become so manifest in recent years—the decay of many public services, of schools and police, of mail delivery and transportation, the death rate on the highways and the traffic problems in the cities—concern everything designed to serve mass society. Bigness is afflicted with vulnerability, and while no one can say with assurance where and when the breaking point has been reached, we can observe, almost to the point of measuring it, how strength and resiliency are insidiously destroyed, leaking, as it were, drop by drop from our institutions. And the same, I think, is true for the various party systems—the one-party dictatorships in the East as well as the two-party systems in England and the United States, or the multiple party systems in Europe—all of which were supposed to serve the political needs of modern mass societies, to make representative government possible where direct democracy would not do because “the room will not hold all” (John Selden).

Moreover, the recent rise of nationalism around the globe,, usually understood as a world-wide swing to the right, has now reached the point where it may threaten the oldest and best established nation states. The Scotch and the Welsh, the Bretons and the Provençals, ethnic groups whose successful assimilation had been the prerequisite for the rise of the nation state, are turning to separatism in rebellion against the centralized governments of London and Paris.

Again, we do not know where these developments will lead us, but we can see how cracks in the power structure of all but the small countries are opening and widening. And we know, or should know, that every decrease of power is an open invitation to violence—if only because those who hold power and feel it slipping from their hands have always found it difficult to resist the temptation of substituting violence for it.

Copyright applied for by the “Journal of International Affairs,” School of International Affairs, Columbia University.

Letters

The Technocratic Mind June 19, 1969

The Technocratic Mind June 19, 1969

- 1 Harvey Wheeler, “The Strategic Calculators,” in Nigel Calder, *Unless Peace Comes*, New York, Viking, 1968, p. 109.↵
- 2 *Herrn Eugen Dührings Umwälzung der Wissenschaft*, (1878) Part II, Ch. 2.↵
- 3 As General André Beaufre points out (“Battlefields of the 1980s,” in Calder, *op. cit.*, p. 3): Only “in those parts of the world not covered by nuclear deterrence” is war still possible, and even this “conventional warfare,” despite its horrors, is actually already limited by the ever-present threat of escalation into nuclear war. The chief reason why warfare is still with us is neither a secret death wish of the human species nor an irrepressible instinct of aggression nor, finally and more plausibly, the serious economic and social dangers inherent in disarmament, but the simple fact that nothing to substitute for this final arbiter in international affairs has yet appeared on the political scene.↵
- 5 See Engels, *op. cit.*, Part II, Ch. 4.↵
- 6 Wheeler, *op. cit.*, p. 107 and Engels, *op. cit.*, *loc. cit.*↵
- 7 Wheeler, *op. cit.*, *loc. cit.*↵
- 8 Nigel Calder, “The New Weapons,” in *op. cit.*, p. 239.↵
- 9 M. W. Thring, “Robots on the March,” in Calder, *op. cit.*, p. 169.↵
- 10 Vladimir Dedijer, “The Poor Man’s Power,” in Calder, *op. cit.*, p. 29.↵
- 11 It is quite suggestive that Hegel speaks in this context of “*Sichselbst-produzieren*.” See *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, ed. Hoffmeister, p. 114.↵

12 The New Left's unconscious drifting away from Marxism has been duly noticed. See especially recent comments on the student movement by Leonard Schapiro in *The New York Review of Books* (December 5, 1968) and *La Révolution Introuvable*, Paris, 1968, by Raymond Aron. Both consider the new emphasis on violence as a kind of backsliding either to pre-Marxian utopian socialism (Aron) or to the Russian anarchism of Nechaev and Bakunin (Schapiro), who "had much to say about the importance of violence as a factor of unity, as the binding force in a society or group, a century before the same ideas emerged in the works of Jean-Paul Sartre and Frantz Fanon." Aron writes in the same vein: "*Les chantres de la révolution de mai croient dépasser le marxisme; ils oublient un siècle d'histoire.*" (p. 14). To a non-Marxist such a reversion would of course hardly be an argument; but for Sartre, who for instance writes, "revisionism is reversion to pre-Marxism and *therefore untenable*" (my italics), it must constitute a formidable objection.

Sartre himself, in his *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, gives a kind of Hegelian explanation for his espousal of violence. His point of departure is that "need and scarcity determined the Manicheistic basis of action and morals" in present history, "whose truth is based on scarcity [and] must manifest itself in an antagonistic reciprocity between classes." Under such circumstances, violence is no longer a marginal phenomenon. "Violence and counterviolence are perhaps contingencies, but they are contingent necessities, and the imperative consequence of any attempt to destroy this inhumanity is that in destroying in the adversary the inhumanity of the contra-man, I can only destroy in him the humanity of man, and realize in me his inhumanity. Whether I kill, torture, enslavement aim is to suppress his freedom—it is an alien force, *de trop*." His model for a condition in which "each one is one too many. Each is *redundant* for the other," are the members of a bus queue who obviously "take no notice of each other except as a number in a quantitative series." He concludes, "They reciprocally deny any link between each of their inner worlds." From this, it follows that praxis "is the negation of alterity, which is itself a negation"—a highly welcome conclusion since the negation of a negation is an affirmation.

The flaw in the argument seems to me obvious. There is all the difference in the world between "not taking notice" and "denying," between "denying any link" with somebody and "negating" his otherness; and there is still a considerable distance to travel from this theoretical "negation" until any sane person will arrive at killing, torturing, and enslaving.

All the above quotations are drawn from R. D. Laing, and D. G. Cooper, *Reason and Violence: A Decade of Sartre's Philosophy, 1950-1960*, London, 1964, Part III. This seems fair since Sartre in his Foreword to the book says: "*J'ai lu attentivement l'ouvrage que vous avez bien voulu me confier et j'ai eu le grand plaisir d'y trouver un exposé très clair et très fidèle de ma pensée.*"

↩

13 Page 61. I am using Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) because of its great influence on the present student generation. Fanon himself, however, is much more doubtful about violence than his admirers. It seems that only the first chapter of the book, "Concerning Violence," has been widely read. Fanon knows of the "unmixed and total brutality [which], if not immediately combated, invariably leads to the defeat of the movement within a few weeks." Grove Press edition, 1968, p. 147. ↩

14 Nathan Glazer, in an article on "Student Power at Berkeley" in *The Public Interest* (Special Issue, *The Universities*, Fall, 1968) writes: "The student radicals remind me more of the Luddite machine smashers than the Socialist trade unionists who achieved citizenship and power for workers," and he concludes from this impression that Zbigniew Brzezinski (in an article about Columbia in *The New Republic*, June 1, 1968) may have been right in his diagnosis: "Very frequently revolutions are the last spasms of the past, and thus are not really revolutions but counterrevolutions, operating in the name of revolutions." Isn't this bias in favor of marching forward at any price rather odd in two authors who are generally considered to be conservatives? And isn't it even more odd that Glazer should remain unaware of the decisive differences between manufacturing machinery in early nineteenth-century England and the hardware developed in the middle of the twentieth century, much of which is for destruction and not for production and can't even be smashed by the rebels for the simple reason that they know neither where it is located nor how to smash it? ↩

15 Fanon, *op. cit.*, pp. 130, 129, and 69, respectively. ↩

16 Fanon, *op. cit.*, pp. 37ff. and 53. ↩

17 Alexander Herzen is quoted here from Isaiah Berlin's "Introduction" to Franco Venturi, *Roots of Revolution*, New York, Grosset and Dunlap,

1966.↵

18 Kant, "Idea for a Universal History with Cosmopolitan Intent," Third Principle.↵

19 For an excellent discussion of the obvious fallacies in this position, see Robert A. Nisbet, "The Year 2000 and All That," in *Commentary*, June 1968, and the ill-tempered critical remarks in the September issue.↵

20 Hegel, *op. cit.*, pp. 100ff.↵

21 Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, "Introduction to the First Publication" (1906), New York, Collier Books, 1961, p. 60↵

22 C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite*, New York, 1956, p. 171. Max Weber, in the first paragraph of *Politics as a Vocation* (1921). Weber seems to have been aware of his agreement with the Left. He quotes in this context Trotsky's remark in Brest-Litovsk, "Every state is based on violence" and he adds, "This is indeed true."↵

23 Bertrand de Jouvenel, *Power: The Natural History of its Growth* (1945), 1952, p. 122.↵

24 *Ibid.*, p. 93.↵

25 John Stuart Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government* (1861).↵

26 The sanctions of the laws, which, however, are not their essence, are directed against those citizens who—without withholding their support—wish to make an exception from the law for themselves; the thief still expects the government to protect his newly acquired property. It has been noted that in the earliest systems of law there were no sanctions whatsoever. (See Jouvenel, *op. cit.*, p. 276.) The punishment of the lawbreaker was banishment or outlawry; by breaking the law, the criminal had put himself outside the community constituted by it.↵

28 Raymond Aron, *op. cit.*, p. 41.↵

29 The price De Gaulle had to pay for the army's support was public rehabilitation of his enemies—amnesty for General Salan, return of Bidault, return also of Colonel Lacheroy, sometimes called "the torturer in Algeria." Not much seems to be known about the negotiations. One is tempted to think that the recent rehabilitation of Pétain, again glorified as the "victor of Verdun" and, more importantly, the incredible, blatantly lying statement immediately after, which blamed the Communist Party for what the French now call *les évènements*, were part of the bargain. God knows, the only reproach the government could have addressed to the Communist Party and the trade-unions was that they lacked the power to prevent *les évènements*.↵

30 In ancient Greece, such an organization of power was the polis whose chief merit, according to Xenophon, was that it permitted the "citizens to act as bodyguards to one another against slaves." *Hiero*, IV, 3.↵

31 It would be interesting to know if, and to what extent, the alarming rate of unsolved crimes is matched not only by the well-known spectacular rise in criminal offenses but also by a definite increase in police brutality. The recently published *Uniform Crime Report for the United States* (Federal Bureau of Investigation, US Department of Justice, 1967) gives no indication how many crimes are actually solved—as distinguished from "cleared by arrest"—but does mention in the Summary that police solutions of serious crimes declined in 1967 by 8%. Only 21.7% (or 21.9%) of all crimes are "cleared by arrest," and of these only 75% could be turned over to the courts and only about 60% of those were found guilty! Hence, the odds in favor of the criminal are so high that the constant rise in criminal offenses seems only natural. Whatever the causes for the spectacular decline of police efficiency, the decline of police power is evident and with it the likelihood of increased brutality.↵

32 Solzhenitsyn, in *The First Circle*, shows in detail how attempts at rational economic development were wrecked by Stalin's methods, and one hopes that this book will put to rest the myth that terror and the enormous loss in human lives were the price that had to be paid for rapid industrialization of the country. Rapid progress was made after Stalin's death, and what is striking in Russia today is that the country is still backward not only in comparison with the West but with most of the satellite countries. In Russia itself, there seems to be not much illusion left on this point, if there ever was any. The younger generation, especially the veterans of the Second World War, knows very well that only a miracle saved Russia from defeat in 1941, and that this miracle was the brutal fact that the enemy turned out to be even worse than the native

ruler. What then turned the scales was that police terror abated under the pressure of the national emergency; the people, left to themselves, could again gather together and generate enough power to defeat the foreign invader. When they returned from prisoner-of-war camps or from occupation duty they were promptly sent to long years in labor and concentration camps in order to break them from the habits of freedom. It is precisely this generation that tasted freedom during the war and the terror afterward that is challenging the tyranny of the present regime.↵

33 Fanon, *op. cit.*, p. 47.↵

34 J. Glenn Gray, *The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle*, Harper Torchbook, is most perceptive and instructive on this point. It should be read by everyone interested in the practice of violence.↵

35 Fanon, *op. cit.*, p. 93.↵

36 It is also noteworthy that death as an equalizer plays hardly any role in political philosophy, although human mortality—the fact that men are “mortals,” as the Greeks used to say—was understood as the strongest motive for political action in pre-philosophic political thought. It was the certainty of death that made men seek immortal fame in deed and word and that prompted them to establish a body politic which was potentially immortal. Hence, politics was precisely a means to escape from equality before death into a distinction which would assure some measure of deathlessness. Hobbes is the only political philosopher in whose work death in the form of fear of violent death plays a crucial role. But it is not equality before death that is decisive for Hobbes, but equality of ability to kill and the resulting equality of fear that persuades men in the state of nature to bind themselves into a Commonwealth.↵

37 Sorel, *op. cit.*, Ch. 2, “On Violence and the Decadence of the Middle Classes.”↵

38 Jouvenel, *op. cit.*, pp. 114 and 123 respectively.↵

39 *Ibid.*, pp. 187-88.↵

40 Fanon, *op. cit.*, p. 95.↵

41 Robert M. Fogelson, “Violence as Protest,” in *Urban Riots: Violence and Social Change*, Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science, Columbia University, 1968.↵

42 *Ibid.* See also the excellent article, “Official Interpretation of Racial Riots” by Allan Silver in the same collection.↵

43 Stewart Alsop in a perceptive column, “The Wallace Man,” in *Newsweek*, October 21, 1968, makes the point: “It may be illiberal of the Wallace man not to want to send his children to bad schools in the name of integration, but it is not at all unnatural. And it is not unnatural either for him to worry about the “molestation” of his wife, or about losing his equity in his house, which is all he has.” Alsop also quotes the most effective statement of George Wallace’s demagoguery: “There are 535 members of Congress and a lot of these liberals have children, too. You know how many send their kids to the public schools in Washington? Six.”↵

44 See Günter Grass, Pavel Kohout, *Briefe über die Grenze*, Hamburg, 1968, pp. 88 and 90 respectively.↵

45 Herbert J. Gans, “The Ghetto Rebellions and Urban Class Conflict,” in *Urban Riots, op. cit.*↵