

Introduction to *The Philosopher and Power* by Panagiotis Kondylis

[Translated by C.F., ©, April 2018, from Kondylis Panajotis, „Einleitung“ [= “Introduction (or Preface)”], in Panajotis Kondylis (Hg.), *Der Philosoph und die Macht. Eine Anthologie* [= *The Philosopher and Power. An anthology*], xenomoi Verlag, Berlin, 2016, S. 7-39, first published in Panajotis Kondylis (Hg.), *Der Philosoph und die Macht (Anthologie)*, Hamburg: Junius, 1992, 259 S. („Einleitung“ S. 9-36), and also from Kondylis’s Greek version: Κονδύλης Παναγιώτης, «Οι Φιλόσοφοι και ἡ ἰσχὺς» [= “Philosophers and Power”] in Παναγιώτης Κονδύλης (ἐπιμ.), *Ἡ ἡδονή, ἡ ἰσχὺς, ἡ οὐτοπία* [= *Pleasure, power, utopia*], Ἐκδ. Στιγμή, Ἀθήνα, 1992, σσ. 49-103. The German book contains excerpts from the writings of all the philosophers referred to in Kondylis’s “Introduction” – eliminating the need for footnotes – whilst also making for a unique volume, which should be published in English in toto!]

Power [[Macht, ἰσχὺς]] was under a positive sign, i.e. had a positive omen or was spoken about positively, only by a few, of course notorious *philosophes maudits* [= *accursed or cursed philosophers*], who declared it to be the main theme or topic, and the central category of thought. The greater part of philosophers of course could not really help, loudly or softly, talking about power, however their attention was, in the process, turned not so much towards power itself in its ontological, anthropological and social-historical dimension, but rather towards finding strategies of its exorcism, neutralisation and taming. To these strategies belonged not only ethical accusation and prosecution, and the demand for the eradication of every [[kind and form of]] power through the erection of Utopia, not only the appeal to the containment and curtailment of the unbridled wielding of power (even if during half-resigned insight into the unavoidability of power’s use and misuse or abuse), not only the sublimation and idealisation of the factor of power through its extensive, far-reaching

spiritualisation – but also the readiness and willingness to comprehend Being and the World as power, provided that power as deepest texture and essence of Being – for instance, as God or as Absolute Spirit – from the beginning is interspersed with, and permeated by, the highest ethical norms, and consequently through its unfolding even helps these norms to victory, i.e. to be imposed on others. If one searches for the reasons for this behaviour of philosophers in their great majority, then one inevitably runs into understandable resentments and ill feelings of people who of course grant themselves in the self-built realm of ideas the highest rank, yet in the theatre of everyday life they are obliged to make do with rather outlying, remote places and positions, and moreover must not seldom bow and crawl before those ruling. As long as the kingdom of philosophers is not of this world, philosophy must more or less remain self-gratification [[= intellectual masturbation]]; the asserted superiority of the ethical spirit(-intellect) vis-à-vis an in itself blind power – or even the identification of the spirit(-intellect) with “true” power – is supposed in concreto to prove the superiority of those who possess this spirit(-intellect) and simultaneously want to reserve for themselves the right to judge who possesses spirit(-intellect) and who does not.

This interpretation and explanation, nonetheless, does not at all suffice in order to make the relationships between philosophy and power comprehensible in their complete great variety and multiformity, both from the point of view of the history of ideas, as well as from the perspective of social history. Since the formation of ethical-religious ideas and, at any rate, since the coming into being of high (advanced) cultures, power, dominance [[domination, rule, ruling over others, authority, legitimate domination, imperative control; Herrschaft, ἐξουσία]] and even organised [[physical]] violence [[Gewalt, βία]], do not have an effect or cannot act over the long run, and successfully or effectually, if they lack legitimation [[Legitimation, νομιμοποίηση]]. If man is verily a being,

which differs from other animals by means of that capacity, faculty and those powers, which one since time immemorial called “spirit(-intellect)”, then this means not least of all that the question of meaning and the question of power merge and fuse with each other at different levels and in different forms, that, therefore, whoever gives things their meaning wields power, and that whoever possesses power, or is the ruler, invokes the meaning of things, and meaning is instrumentalised. As producers and administrators [[managers]] of meaning, philosophers are also producers and administrators [[managers]] of power. The partly tragic and partly comical paradox of their situation consists in that they cannot transmute this power into their own social domination [[Herrschaft, κυριαρχία]] [[of others]], and accordingly dream about rulers philosophising one day rather than about philosophers ruling.

Between philosophy as self-gratification [[= intellectual masturbation]] in the sense explained above, and philosophy as the production of meaning and of power within the social division of labour, an insoluble contradiction therefore exists. Because the philosopher cannot himself determine who will make what usage of the products of his thought. If he could pass judgement on and decide about that, if he could, in other words, declare his own thought in his own interpretation to be the guiding principle of social action, then he would at least be the ruler de facto. If he is allowed to rule merely in the kingdom of (his) ideas, then the reason lies not least of all in that he no longer has the capability of bindingly interpreting his ideas as soon as they step onto and enter broader social terrain. This interpreting bindingly is incumbent on him or those who already rule socially or raise claims of domination taken seriously; in their interpretation, do philosophical ideas attain a broader impact. They attain a broader impact, that is, to the extent to which the game of social power and dominance permits and demands this. However, the game of social power and

dominance must permit and demand this provided that the question of power and of meaning belong together.

Irrespective of the reasons for its coming into being, philosophy has an effect only by legitimising power or dominance or related claims. Precisely this function belonging to it explains in the final analysis why it has until today for the most part devoted itself to the ethical coping with, transcending or taming of, the phenomena of power (i.e. with the assistance of ethical categories): only ethically legitimised power is able to exercise dominance, and only ethically legitimised power can support (or topple) an authority [[a regime of dominance; eine Herrschaft, μὴν ἐξουσία]]. Philosophy as such never talks of power unselfconsciously and impartially – that is, non-ethically, therefore without intentions in respect of power – but only very few philosophers did that. In our days, a freer tone indeed sometimes becomes audible, yet that is not due to a solution to, or untying of, the primordial bond between philosophy and ethical thought, but rather to the dissolution of the total traditional philosophical examination of themes and topics under the influence of the mass-democratic-postmodern thought style still being formed right now,ⁱ in which everything may be combined with everything with a carefree and irresponsible nonchalance to do whatever one wants.

I.

In the constellation of the history of ideas, in which the question of power was posed for the first time in its full philosophical intensity, both the possible basic positions, as well as the fundamental structure of the corresponding kinds of argumentation were already clearly delineated; that is why the confrontation between sophistry and Plato came to occupy a most eminent position within the

philosophical history of the question of power and of the history of philosophy in general. Because the Sophists, these *philosophes maudits* of antiquity, discovered the factor of power and developed their perception and theory on the contrast between *Nature* (or power) and *Nomos* [= *Law*] (or ethics), against the background of a comprehensive anti-metaphysical and relativistic positioning, whereby they really provoked a reversed Platonic binding of the primacy of the ethical to a metaphysics. Socrates was not first, as the at the latest since Cicero dominant legend wants it, but sophistry had already brought philosophy from the celestial heights of pre-Socratic speculation to the earthly lowlands, and turned a study of man in his cultural and political activity into the main task of thought. The precedence of the anthropological examination of the problem had to, in the course of this, lead to the anthropological precedence of the will to power. Because man left to fend for himself, man for whom the voice of the Gods falls silent as soon as he realises that the Gods are his own creations and creatures, man who creates and makes the laws which cannot stem directly from the womb of unspoilt Nature already because they unendingly vary from place to place and from time to time – this man can derive his life's vital energy, his social and also his ethical settings of aims and goals only from the will to power. Such thoughts and views naturally had to be imposed or crop up in Greece of the 5th century B.C.. Power in fact becomes a theoretical problem when the political question of power is open, when power and dominance lose their self-evidence and become prey, upon which anyone can pounce or hunt down. The social decline of the old aristocracy and the parallel rise of *homines novi* [= *new men*] – first of all as tyrants or as confidants of tyrants and then, namely after the prevailing of the demos [= common people as citizens of an ancient Greek city-state], as demagogues – brought about exactly such states of affairs. The Sophists did not sell merely a technique of power for cash to their power-hungry contemporaries, but offered new and pioneering or groundbreaking matters of concern; they mentally grasped in their way the

essence of their time, and passed from the grasping of the temporal and topical to the apprehension of the human.

The work of Thucydides, who was the most ingenious student of sophistry and perhaps the greatest historian who has ever lived, bears witness to the depth and fertility of this apprehension. This contemporary of the most renowned sophists, of the mature Socrates and of the young Plato, could follow the unfolding of the debate on power in an age in which the unfolding of striving for power itself reached a paroxysm of merciless violence. Still more vividly and graphically than the political struggle under the actual or nominal rule of the demos, war could now reveal what moves men, women and history. Thucydides devoted his life to the description of these driving forces in a great and multi-layered event. Human nature, driven by lust for power and greed, remains in his eyes a stable magnitude, and in this respect, peace can only be relative and war no surprise; however, only in the confusion and turmoil of war does it become evident upon what fragile foundations peace rests. When time-honoured, venerable institutions, or customs existing for a very long time, are thrown overboard without further ado, when the holy fetters of religion and of morals and ethics are suddenly ripped off, when even words change their meaning – then it becomes as clear as daylight that all this is artificial constructs, as well as statutes and institutions, not Nature.¹ Behind the torn mask of the statutes and institutions, the true face of Nature pushes its way out to the front: it is the face of the Athenians, who demand of Melians subjugation and

¹ The Greek version of Kondylis's introduction translated into English here includes the following footnote: "See the famous analysis of the pathology of war, *Επιγραφή Γ'*, 82-83 [= Thucydides, *Writing[s] = History of the Peloponnesian War*, Book III, Chapters 82-83]". (The translator urges the reader to find the passage online e.g. in the great Englishman Hobbes's translation at: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0247%3Abook%3D3%3Achapter%3D82>

and to study it carefully! It's one of the most important passages you will ever read describing "the human condition"). This footnote by Kondylis (up to "82-83" above) and all other footnotes by him for the Greek version of this introduction are in lieu of the introduction in the Greek version not being accompanied by the various philosophers' texts, as is the case in this English version, whereas the German version contains all of the relevant philosophers' texts.

submission. They do not do it with a bad conscience, they do not believe that they thereby are offending against or violating divine, godly order, because the divine or natural order, the inner law of Being is exactly the law of the stronger [[strongest]] [[group or individual]]. Only the weak(er) [[weakest]] derive from divine-natural order an ethics – ethics, however, as argument and weapon cannot be stronger than those who must seek refuge in it. Faith in the prevailing of ethical norms awakens merely empty hopes, propels towards desperate and self-destructive actions. The act or action was supposed to orientate itself towards the rules of prudence and wisdom, which have to serve the natural command of self-preservation. Of course, self-preservation has for its part a different meaning for the strong(er), who can only maintain his power by expanding it constantly, and for the weak(er), who saves himself by making concessions to the wishes and desires of the stronger.²

Thucydides's thought motifs are found, even though often in a caricaturish variation, in the speeches which Plato in his dialogues in turn puts in the mouth of the Sophists. In Plato's efforts to reduce sophistry to buyable, venal rhetoric and a technique of power, the antipathy of the aristocrat resonates against the morals and mores which, in his opinion, were brought into being after the rule of the demos, that is, against the irrational prevailing or unrestraint of reckless selfishness and lust for power, and, despicable, base hedonism. And although the structure of his philosophy does not least of all come out of his endeavour to confront and oppose sophistical anthropocentrism and relativism with ultimate, i.e. ontological and metaphysical arguments, he does not want to or cannot, nevertheless, take the Sophists completely seriously as thinkers. Thought, which revolves around power and striving for power, constitutes for him a superficial, frivolous theorisation of ruling and dominant democratic or tyrannical praxis, at any rate, philosophy it is not. Accordingly, Plato reserves the factor "power"

² Loc. cit., V, 85ff..

and “striving for power” the same bottommost tier in his ontological and anthropological ranking or hierarchy, which he assigns to the type [[as a specific group with common features which distinguishes it from other groups]] of the sophist, of the demagogue or of the tyrant in his ethical-social hierarchy or order of ranking. Striving after power and striving after pleasure [[lust, desire, appetite, craving]] are basically the same irrational [[unreasonable]] passion, they spring or bubble up from the same dark stratum of the human psyche, they are or represent, in short, the animal, the bestial in man. This extensive equating of pleasure and power through their common subordination to the animal-irrational element, has inside of the, since that time, predominant normativistic philosophising, formed an entire school of thought and was varied infinitely; since it was regarded as fundamental, thus in actual fact the validity or tenability of the normativistic position as such depends in large part on pleasure and power’s said equating’s stringency [[the general stability or validity of the normativistic positioning indeed depends to a large extent on the validity of the equating of pleasure and power (= Kondylis’s Greek text)]]]. In the conviction that this equating *eo ipso* furnishes proof for the philosophical untenability of sophistry, Plato, in any case, tried hard *e contrario* to accomplish the conceptual bringing out and processing of the difference between the Good (or Reason) and Pleasure (or Power).³

Also, the second more complicated train or line of thought which Plato has summoned against sophistry’s teaching of power, had an effect of pointing the way ahead in philosophical tradition. It is built on the just mentioned difference and says: whoever through his action has as his goal the mere satisfaction or gratification of his needs for pleasure and power, that person acts of course as he sees fit and as he likes, however at the same time there can be no talk of a true wanting, will or volition; true wanting or volition is distinguished by

³ See Socrates’s dialogue with Kallikles in *Gorgias*, 482c ff.. For the content of the next paragraph, see the dialogue between Socrates and Polos in *Gorgias*, esp. 466a ff..

orientation to the Idea of the Good, and consequently the absence of subjective arbitrariness and striving for power or power claims. Now a certain piquancy is not lacking, and one cannot help but smile, when one discerns and registers the sophisms which are latent or hiding in this argumentation against sophistry. The Good is defined by decree in an ethical-normative sense, its indivisibility and objectivity is axiomatically presumed, whereas the great variety and plethora of possible and attested notions and conceptions of the Good are driven back or displaced a limine into the realm of doxa [[δόξα]], that is, of merely personal opinion. Power sayings and slogans or axiomatic assertions and judgements of course articulate power claims, and in this case, things are not otherwise. Plato, incidentally, does not keep secret that he regards the determination and definition of the Good a matter not for anyone, rather an “expert”, whose identity is not difficult to guess, is required in relation to that. The shifting of undisguised striving after power to the animal level of striving after lust therefore makes the terrain free for a striving for power to unfold which must not be called striving for or after power at all. Because if striving for power is per definitionem equated with irrationality or unreasonableness, then likewise by definition it is excluded that Reason can be power, and that the invocation of Reason can be striving after power. More concretely: the theoretical decoupling of Reason from striving for power is tacitly projected in the psyche of that person who speaks in the name of Reason, so that already the fact that he speaks in the name of Reason frees him from every suspicion that he indulges in striving for, or the passion of, power. On the contrary, he can or appears to be led by “true wanting or volition”, and now can say to others what they have to do and what they have to leave or not do.

One would by no means be exaggerating if one wanted to support the view that Plato owes his central position inside of the philosophical tradition to the fact that he conceived of the decisive strategy for the raising or making of the

highest power claims during the simultaneous, emphatic rejection and repudiation of every striving after power and every form or kind of violence. This strategy has in the meantime served even power claims which came up or appeared in the name of the abolition of every form and kind of power and of dominance. For Plato himself, of course, such an abolition was in practice out of the question. Desirable, worthwhile and worth striving after for him was the organisation of power and dominance in accordance with the commands of the “true wanting or volition” looking up to, or oriented towards, the Idea of the Good. In the ideal case, the hierarchical structure of society would have to reflect the hierarchical structure of the strata of Being. The necessity of power and dominance, in the final analysis, resulted therefore from the hierarchical character of Being, i.e. from the ontological precedence of the Idea and of Reason vis-à-vis the sensorial world and the drive (urge or impulse). Aristotle similarly deduces this same necessity.⁴ Where several parts should constitute a unity or whole, there a hierarchisation into ruling or dominating, and, serving, subservient or servile, must also take place, which is in the interest of both sides; the lower tiers of the hierarchy benefit from their being controlled by the upper tiers in exactly the same sense as the body or flesh benefits from its management, direction or control by the soul, or, the faculty of desire or the desirous part of the soul benefits from its guidance by understanding. This crossing over or interweaving of ontology and ethics for the legitimisation of domination elucidates in itself how far away the thoughts world or ideological universe of ancient political philosophy is from the various kinds of self-evidence of our mass-democratic age. Should today the ethicisation of politics or the replacement of power by ethics as far as possible serve the dismantling of dominance, domination or authorityⁱⁱ, which is based on inequality, then the ethical shaping of politics meant for Plato and Aristotle the founding of

⁴ *Politics A*, 5-6 = 1254a 17- 1255b 15.

authority as dominance exclusively on that inequality which emerges from the (normatively understood) nature of things. Equality in the newer [[present-day]] anthropological sense is nearer to the perception of, or thoughts about, power of sophistry, however here [[in the case of sophistry]] equality also did not appear to be for instance a desirable social ideal or a recipe for the achievement of the common good or general bliss, but it meant that anyone can and is allowed to rule or dominate, only if he proves to be the most powerful, or the most proficient and worthy. The thus unethically understood equality of course corresponded for its part with the anti-metaphysical underpinning and justification of inequality amongst men.

The almost complete extermination of sophistical literature as well as the full [[gapless]] handing down or transmission of the Platonic writings unequivocally answer the question of what the ideological options and choices of organised societies must be, and what ideational weapons cut, slice, chop the sharpest and hardest, or are most effective, in the social struggle for power. Nonetheless, sophistical ideas carried on in weakened and modified forms, above all within the sceptical schools, a shadowy existence in the margins of society, and such sophistical ideas were apparently still in the epoch of Stoic predominance strong enough to be taken seriously as an opponent. Cicero, at any rate, felt obliged to take on Carneades and the latter's theory on the law [[justice, right]] of the strongest [[stronger]], in relation to which of course the parts of Cicero's work, which contain reference to Carneades's theory on the law of the strongest, were for the most part destroyed, and have to be reconstructed on the basis of passages and excerpts by Christian authors (above all Lactantius)⁵.

One does not have to specifically explain what impression thinking and theories of a sophistical provenance about power made on Christians. But the heathen or pagan *hubris* appeared to them just as impertinent, shameless and

⁵ *De re publica*, III, 21-22 = Lactantius, *Divinae Institutiones*, V, 16, 2-4.

inexcusable when it arrived on the scene not as naked, blatant striving for power, but in the guise of the search and desire for honour, fame and recognition. Such striving for power was in the ancient Greek code of aristocratic ethics absolutely at the top, and was also for the Romans, a sign of true manliness, familiar and legitimate. Xenophon's short work on tyranny gives an insight into its character and its place inside of the pagan value scale.⁶ The tyrant and his adviser are indeed in regard to many matters of a different opinion, and in general represent different life stances, yet they jointly and emphatically admit this: ambition distinguishes man in general from animals, and the superior man in particular from others. The tyrant's feeling of distress, misery and misfortune stems not least from the impossibility of knowing whether he is being granted genuine recognition and unconstrained praise; compliments and flattery cannot in fact satisfy true ambition.

II.

Augustine wanted therefore to hit the raw nerve of pagan culture and ethics when he turned with full force and all his rage against "thirst for fame", and traced it even in the stoically influenced Romans like Cicero. Thirst for domination and for fame brought about the imperium romanum [= Roman Empire], it motivated the commanding generals and the statesmen of the constantly expanding city, while at the same time it was accompanied by a permanent alliance with cunning, deceit and avarice. Roman power and glory, grandeur and magnificence were consequently built on sand, on purely earthly and transitory, perishable ambitions, in fact on sin. Because with the Fall of Man and Original Sin, the going berserk over or binge on power started in the

⁶ *Ἱέρων ἢ τυραννικὸς* = *Hiero the Tyrant*, VII, 1-6.

world, and indeed both in the external form of the naked, overt and unconcealed relationship of supra-ordination and subordination, namely of authority as dominance, as well as in the form of inner motivation, i.e. of striving after power. Man or pagan seeks in *statu isto* [= *the state or condition thither* (= over there on earth)] honour for himself, instead of subordinating his personal honour to God's honour. The Christian, who does the latter and exactly because of that differs essentially from the pagan, confers to power and authority as dominance a totally different meaning. He does not exercise it out of love or thirst for fame, but with the devotion of him who loves [[the lover]], who loving [[in love with]] fellow man, honours God. Authority as dominance is here care, concern and welfare; it gives orders to him, who as the stronger exercises care and welfare [[the stronger, who cares and provides welfare, gives orders]], and it obeys the weaker, to whom the care and welfare applies [[the weaker, who receives care and welfare, obeys]] – [[we can say that]] he who is justly giving the orders is in fact in a deeper sense he who is serving others.⁷

In the history of the Occident and of occidental culture, a drastic about-turn and transformation now comes to pass. In its frontal attack against the pagan value hierarchy, humility proved to be a highly effective polemical concept. Humility wanted, nonetheless, to put pagan power and authority as dominance out of action, not to abolish or remove power and authority in general from the world, because then Christians would have to renounce and do without power, authority and dominance too. Whilst now the Christian, impelled by and out of the logic of his polemics against pagans, has to declare that he himself does not have, and also does not want, any power, he is forced to derive the power and authority which has nevertheless befallen him and he possesses, from God, in fact whilst making God out to be the single source of power and authority as dominance: God must be all-powerful, omnipotent, if the party of humility is

⁷ *De civitate dei*, V, 12-13, and XIX, 14-16.

supposed to rule on earth. God's omnipotence reaches in the history of ideas its zenith at the moment in which it is assigned [[God undertakes]] the task of distributing power and authority amongst men, and men are called upon to wield power and authority as dominance in the name of God. Consequently, God's omnipotence becomes a political issue of the first order. Because it does not exclude the humble and meek from earthly, worldly office and dignity, it does not even abolish those important and sometimes or often also decisive spaces for wielding power, which are found away from office and dignity, but it forces humans in relation to that, to conduct their power struggles (nominally) on the terrain of the theological art of interpretation. The will of that all-mighty, omnipotent God, who alone can grant power, should now be interpreted; the powerful or the ruler is henceforth he who is capable of bindingly interpreting the will of all-mighty God. If all power is concentrated in God, then it is no wonder that the discussion about striving for power ceases to be the anthropologically anchored motive for acting. Interest now rather applies to the question as to whether for instance God gives precedence to the pope or the emperor. Both one and the other must in accordance with the logic of the new history of ideas and of the social-historical constellation, draw their power from God's will – or more precisely, interpret or read their power inside of or into God's will, so that their power is deduced from it. God's omnipotence had to openly or tacitly be shoved or pushed aside so that power in its human immanence could become the main theme or topic of conversation again. This exactly happened in the 17th century and once again in the 19th century, when God, already in a coma for a long time, drew his last breath.

God's omnipotence was not theologically unproblematic. The Christian God had to be good and just, if power, which was wielded on earth in his name, for its part – subject to human weakness and defectiveness or imperfection – wanted to lay claim to the same qualities of goodness and justness, and in this

way be legitimised. Omnipotence, however, in itself means necessarily neither unending goodness nor perfect justice. It can disregard or ride roughshod over goodness and play mischievous or malicious games with Nature and man, or else it follows the laws of ethics and of natural necessity so meticulously that doubts have to crop up over God's sovereign freedom of movement. The chasm between a divine, godly omnipotence, which could degenerate into logically or ethically unbound and unbridled arbitrariness, and an activity of God, which exactly because of the lack of any possibility for arbitrariness raised the suspicion of God's activity not being all-powerful and consequently also unable to bring about the creation of a perfect or at any rate better world – this chasm had to be bridged, especially since the Averroistic binding of God to necessity began to gain adherents. (Ironically, God's binding to necessity was taken on centuries later in a modified form by late Scholastics in their struggle against the voluntarism of protestant theology). The, of its essence, and organic common bond and interweaving of omnipotence and goodness remained, in the process, a normative article of faith; it was not to be proved.

Thomas Aquinas⁸ supported the view that whoever cannot sin at all must be all-mighty and omnipotent, since the weakening or waning of activity comes from sin – that was then, however, a reformulation of the question rather than an answer: it was not exactly explained why all-mighty God cannot sin, why sin, and not for instance goodness, is able to weaken activity. On the other hand, he asserted that divine wisdom (and goodness) are not restricted by the present order of things, but can just as well create another order. In that case however, the texture, constitution or composition of order, and the content of values, would have to look different, although order and values as such would still have to exist as absolute magnitudes. If good, logical or necessary is that which God's will as such announces on each and every respective occasion, then God

⁸ *Summa theologica*, I, qu. 25, art. 3-5.

must be comprehended voluntaristically. That was the reasonable conclusion, which Duns Scotus drew. His distinction between God's *potentia absoluta* and *potentia ordinata* [= *absolute power* and *orderly, regulated, arranged or systematic power*] put the present natural and ethical order under the sword of Damocles of divine will and of divine freedom. Because he who cannot create or make the law in accordance with his own free will is bound to the ruling, dominant law.⁹

This theory on the mode of the godly, divine wielding of power remained not uninfluenced by the *legibus solutus-maxim* [[*legibus solutus* = released from or not bound by the laws]] of the *légistes* [[jurists, legalists, legal experts or specialists in law]], and for its part found expression or manifested itself in many cases and in many ways in the controversies becoming all the more intense over the meaning and limits of worldly sovereign domination or dominating authority. Bodin and Hobbes, who conceptually outlined and synopsised the new-times perception of political sovereignty, gladly followed and endorsed this definition and consequently carried forward, i.e. promoted, the secularisation of theological thought significantly.

III.

Power could as an immanent and fundamental given fact of human life move back to the centre of attention of philosophical reflection only when the omnipotence of the transcendental personal God either disintegrated and collapsed or ended up becoming irrelevant theoretically. This turn or about-face occurred with the programmatic endeavouring of the (radical wing of) new-times rationalism to put aside the ontological difference between transcendence

⁹ *Sententiarum*, lib. I, dist. XLIV.

and immanence, and to substitute the primacy of theology with the primacy of anthropology. If the world is not preserved through the direct or indirect effect of a transcendental omnipotence or omnipotent being which transcends the world, then the world must preserve itself and be able to move of its own power and force. Self-preservation and self-motion now turn into, out of the inner logic of the new-times approach, the central motifs of thought, notwithstanding how far every philosopher wanted to go down the path traced out by that thought in terms of ultimate consistency. In any case, the materialistic matter of concern or tendency to ascribe to matter the capacity for, and capability of, motion [[movement]] and thought, was a thoroughly legitimate conclusion of the unfolding of the history of ideas since the 16th century. In the, from now on, field of anthropology autonomised vis-à-vis the old transcendence, the idea of self-preservation had to come to the fore with a special impetus. God's omnipotence by definition encompassed His ability for self-preservation since nobody or nothing could endanger the preservation of the all-powerful Being. For finite man, however, self-preservation meant a constant effort to elude or escape from dangers, to which all that is finite is exposed; power, which must inhere in self-preservation if this self-preservation is supposed to succeed at all, is consequently of necessity dynamised, it becomes striving after power or will to power, which constantly searches for and seeks new unfolding space and must, in the process, give rise to struggles.

In Hobbes, that is the thinker who carried out the paradigm shift with extraordinary logical consistency, the indicated common bond or parallelism of the ontological and of the anthropological levels, as well as the flowing or ending up of their restructuring into or in the idea of power, can be observed very well. The crumbling of transcendence takes place here via the new teaching or theory of motion, which abolishes the traditional metaphysical priority of stillness, repose or rest vis-à-vis motionⁱⁱⁱ and consequently deprives

from the in itself motionless *primum movens* [= *prime mover* = first cause]], the justification for existence. In this way, everything which was connected with the transcendental realm of stillness, that is, with the fixedness or firmness of the *formae substantiales* [= *substantial forms* = the essence of things with no relation to the accident of things = general principles of purpose = ideas, God as eternal and worldly things as temporal]], or with the permanence of the *causae finales* [= *final causes* = telos, end]], collapses – everything is now *actus* [= *act*, action, doing, deed, acting]], *ἐνέργεια* [= *energy*]], whereas Aristotelian *potentia*, *δύναμις* [= *power* or *force*] is replaced by power in the new-times sense, which unceasingly unfolds, without teleologically set or predetermined aims or goals. If transferred to the realm of human affairs, this means that the idea of an unshakable and unalterable highest Good and an assured and conclusive bliss [[happiness, felicity, fortune, good luck]] must be bid farewell to and forgotten. Also, here everything is motion – and the infinite motion of the human as man, and of human affairs in general, is called striving after power. Power can be kept in check, reined in only through greater power, and be made harmless; the state must, that is, above all be sovereign power if it wants to put an – by the way, temporary, provisional and precarious – end to the war of all against all, which elementary striving for power triggers.¹⁰

Starting from analogous world-theoretical presuppositions, Spinoza comes to similar anthropological and political conclusions, although the paradigm shift is effected by him not via Galilean physics, but through the radicalisation of traditional and conventional ontological conceptuality. Nonetheless, talk of the omnipotence of God changes its meaning thoroughly and radically, when the Christian perception and conception of creation is shelved or closed as a matter for reflection or discussion. The thereby brought about discontinuance of the separation between From There (i.e. That World or Life) and From Here (i.e.

¹⁰ See mainly *Leviathan*, X-XI = *English Works*, ed. by W. Molesworth, v. III, p. 74 ff., 85ff..

This World or Life) gave rise to the identity of God and Nature, and transforms God's omnipotence into the capacity and force of Nature for preserving itself as an independent, self-contained Whole. Self-preservation and power coincide, both at this level as well as at the level of individual, isolated things. These indeed draw their own power from the essence-like, intrinsic omnipotence of God or of Nature, but not in the sense that they accept and preserve their power from the outside and in retrospect, but in the sense that they have power and must strive after power only because they make up the constituent elements of a Whole, whose essence lies in absolute ontological independence and self-containment, that is, in absolute power.¹¹

Hobbes and Spinoza still represent the New Times in their innocence. With that intellectual uprightness, rectitude and honesty, which presumably perhaps only solitary spirits can allow themselves, they draw from the basic ontological premises of new-times rationalism the ultimate conclusions, and in the intoxication of logical consistency, which as passionate thinkers thrills them and carries them away, they care little about the ethical scandal, which they put and set up in the world. That is why they must be turned into or regarded as *philosophes maudits* [= (*ac*)*cursed philosophers*], precisely when new-times rationalism, through the so-called Enlightenment, captured and embraced the broader educated strata and put its opponents on the defensive. To be pushed through and imposed socially, however, it had to energetically rid itself of, or repudiate and disclaim, the suspicion of nihilism, and outbid the theologians at the auction of values. If striving after power is seen as the fundamental anthropological given fact, then ethical relativism can hardly be avoided, since norms and values must be interpreted as functions of social power and social authority as dominance. That is why as a rule (i.e. apart from complicated exceptions in the history of ideas like for instance Kant), it has been thus: the

¹¹ See mainly *Ethica*, I, Prop. XI, Dem. & Schol.; I, Prop. XXXIV; III, Prop. VI-VII; IV, Prop. XX. Also *Tractatus Politicus*, I, §§ 1, 5; II, §§ 1-14.

more ethically engaged and involved Enlightenment thinkers operated or appeared in philosophical politics, the more intensely and fiercely did they put Hobbes and “pessimistic” anthropology generally, under fire.

Above all, regarding this, Rousseau articulates the public opinion of the Enlightenment mainstream by pursuing of course a logically questionable dual strategy. In order to be able to dispute the anthropological provenance and rootedness of striving for power, he attributes the evils flowing from this provenance and rootedness to the effects of human cohabitation and confines the actual state of nature to a situation patently constructed *ad hoc*, in which every man was supposed to have lived absolutely isolated; the joining or a society with a single other man is enough to spark off war against a third party. Not only, therefore, is the thus understood state of nature simply postulated by Rousseau; also, the decisive qualitative leap, during which the mere joining together or union of two “by nature friendly and timorous” men makes war against a third party, likewise by nature a friendly and timorous man, possible, is not at all thematised (i.e. made a subject of discussion) and explained. On the basis of what dialectic(s) does the mere adding of qualitatively equivalent units bring about such a drastic transformation of their common quality? What more could one then wish for as material for the building of a harmonious society, if not by nature friendly and timorous men? The sudden change from natural peace to artificial, that is, societally determined war is obviously more difficult to explain than that self-regulation of striving for power, to which this self-regulation, according to Hobbes’s view, the striving for power has recourse, forced by angst or fear before death and the rational calculation or weighing up of risk and benefit bound to that, in order to pave the way for a pacified, peaceful society. Rousseau remains far off such a nuanced way of looking at the factor “self-preservation” or “power”. The second aspect of his argumentative strategy against Hobbes consists exactly in that he – in the spirit of the Platonic

tradition – lumps together greed, violence, lust and mania for destruction, war, authority as dominance, and power, in order to thereafter accuse Hobbes, on the basis of this equating and confusing, of absurdity: because if striving after power did not manifest itself in anything other than war and death, then, in the event Hobbes’s anthropology was true and correct, mankind would have had to have actually self-destructed and perished long ago.¹²

In Helvétius, who certainly stood to one side or simply outside of the Enlightenment mainstream, and indeed, as it seemed at that time, in alarming proximity to scepticism or even nihilism, we encounter an essentially different argumentative strategy. Helvétius wants to serve the normative aims of the Enlightenment not through the disavowal of an uncouth, but through the affirmation of a differentiated and refined, striving after power. In the course of this, he proceeds similarly to many contemporary ethicists, who of course regarded self-love as the fundamental drive, urge or impulse of the human psyche, however at the same time, they distinguished between blind or egoistical and enlightened self-love, and believed that the latter led to altruism when it sees that one’s own well-being is best catered to within the general [[dimension or sphere]]. Since striving for power means not simply lust and mania for destruction, but principally desire or longing for recognition and endeavouring to obtain social prestige and or authority [[Ansehen, κῦρος]], it can be channelled in such a way that it sets virtue as its aim. The condition for that is of course that society bestows upon the virtuous person recognition and prestige. The critical point ultimately therefore is the character and options or choices of the lawgiver. *His* task or mission does not lie in the daemonisation or the suppression of man’s natural drives, urges and impulses, but rather in their serious consideration, analysis and sensible, correct steering. Thus, striving for

¹² See a typical formulation of Rousseau’s argumentation against Hobbes in the excerpt *Que l’état de guerre naît de l’état social*; it is contained in *Oeuvres Complètes*, Introduction, présentation et notes de Michel Launay, v. II, Paris 1971, pp. 381-387.

power (as social prestige and or authority) can be played off against (anti-social) striving for power, and a functioning equilibrium achieved.¹³ Only a (form of) power which is not balanced out by any other (form of) power can degenerate into violence. It is known what importance, value or status this notion had also within the political philosophy of the Enlightenment. In Diderot's article about authority (dominance or dominion) [[Autorität, ἐξουσία]]¹⁴, the major commonplaces of those times and that line of thought are found again. Legal (political) power is only limited, restricted power, it exists on the basis of a contract for the common good's sake and for the maintenance of society. Legal limited power is therefore the organ of social self-preservation, whereas boundless, limitless or usurped tyrannical power demolishes and ruins society.

It would now be a mistake to one-sidedly comprehend the literal apotheosis of power on the part of Hegel as the rejection of the liberal matters of concern and sympathies of the Enlightenment mainstream. The apotheosis of power's spiritual(-intellectual) starting point is to be sought rather in a basic line or school of thought, or intellectual(-spiritual) direction, of the late German Enlightenment, which turned down and rejected (Kantian) dualism and endeavoured to "lift (i.e. abolish or cancel)", inside of large-scale monistic syntheses, that which in Enlightenment agnosticism seemed relativistic or nihilistic. The overcoming of dualism undertaken was not limited to the sector of ontology, where it was carried out under the influence of a direct or indirect spiritualisation(-intellectualisation) of matter, but it stretched to ethics and to history, where it took the form of the putting aside of the separation of Is (Being) and Ought. That meant: the Ought is no norm, which is extrinsic to the Is (Being) and as a result must bring the Is (Being) under its violence and force, control, authority, dominance, if it wants to be realised (this Enlightenment perception of the Ought would have to end in revolutionary terror), but the

¹³ *De l'homme*, IV, 10-14 = *Oeuvres Complètes*, Paris 1795, v. VIII, p. 266ff., and v. IX, 1ff..

¹⁴ *Autorité*; it is contained in *Oeuvres Complètes*, éd. par J. Assézat, v. XIII, p. 391ff..

Ought inheres in the Is (Ought), it constitutes, as it were, the driving or motive force and the soul of the Is (Being). That of course sounds strange, because everyday experience teaches that in the (social and historical) Is (Being), injustice, pain, dolour and the reckless striving for power dominate. Hegel's answer to this aporia is a radical theodicy. Whoever revolts against the harshness of the court of world history, whoever despairs in the face of the seeming imponderability of events and things that happen, and in the face of the randomness of the actors, he raises his private – moral and other, remaining – preferences to the yardstick for the judgement and evaluation of things, he does not grasp the inner truth of the external irrational prevailing and ruling of power, that is, he does not comprehend world History in its essential divineness, and is not capable of tracing God inside History or even view History as God himself. Power is, according to that, not merely an in itself dead instrument in the hands of a personal God or a personified History. Rather it represents and constitutes the essence of Being itself, which is not simply there, present in lethargic, idle immobility or immovability, but consists exactly in a self-unfolding pushed along or propelled by its own original, primordial power; this self-unfolding, at the logical-ontological level, steers on or tends towards conceptual Totality, and at the historical level towards the realisation of freedom. Thus seen, power *is* everywhere, in Nature, in History and not least of all in Logic as the unfolding of God's thought. It must, therefore, be especially thematised (i.e. made the subject of discussion) or become the object of negotiation just as little as Ought; power's essence and having an effect or action become visible in the description of the dialectical peripeteias, transformations and mutations of Is (Being), of power's own accord, and its higher, even though often pitiless morals and ethics are justified by the outcome of these same peripeteias, transformations and mutations.¹⁵

¹⁵ This analysis refers mainly to the following passages: *Die Verfassung Deutschlands* as it is published in *Schriften zur Politik und Rechtsphilosophie*, ed. by G. Lasson, Leipzig 1913, pp. 89, 98-101; *Die Vernunft in der*

The paradoxical, yet nevertheless existing great common denominator between Hegel and Nietzsche consists in that in both (as, besides, already in Hobbes and Spinoza), the putting first of the idea of power takes place against the backdrop of the putting aside of the old Transcendence and on the basis of the unification of the world. Hegel can of course call his unified Is (Being) “God”, because he, with that, wants to intimate that at the end of the dialectical progress of the Absolute Spirit, the most vivid and alive ideas of Christianity are finished and become complete in their continuing development or evolution through the New Times’ principle and idea of freedom. Nietzsche, on the other hand, must announce God’s death as the consequence of the unification of the Is (Being), because he wants to replace the idea of progress with the eternal recurrence or return of the same, and in the course of this, go back to the Heathen-Pagan-Anti-Christian. Nietzsche, nevertheless, does not scoop out, i.e. take up or draw, his idea and thoughts regarding power directly or exclusively from antiquity, although he is very much aware of the standpoint and positionings of Thucydides and of the Sophists; over and above those sources, he sharpens his knowledge through the study of the power game between humans in the French moralists (especially La Rochefoucauld), and he also absorbs Enlightenment ideas (e.g. from Helvétius).

The programmatic formulation of Nietzsche’s philosophy of power, nonetheless, takes place at a time in which the influence of natural-scientific perceptions on him is particularly strong. That is why talk of will to power in Nietzsche’s late work becomes fuzzy, hazy, blurred already because such talk refers undifferentiatedly to phenomena of inorganic and organic, animal and human nature, embracing every kind of effect and countereffect, and consequently is supposed to substitute the physical concept of force [[Kraftbegriff]]. Man becomes the bearer of the will to power as the constituent

Geschichte, ed. by G. Lasson, Leipzig 1930, pp. 24-25; *Wissenschaft der Logik*, ed. by G. Lasson, Hamburg 1934, v. II, pp. 214-216, 242-243.

part of a universe, in which this will dominates everywhere and at all times. Through that, the concept of power loses hermeneutic precision with regard to the human level, in order to serve as a solution to, or key term for, the reevaluation of the values Nietzsche had in mind, that is, as a new normativity. Nietzsche, as a prophet of a new future, is anxious and desires to give again to the will to power its natural innocence, that is, the absolutely non-ethical or extra-ethical innocence of whatever happens in nature, and in principle detaches this will to power precisely therefore from the specifically human, from intellectual(-spiritual) functions and historically determined cultural interrelations, correlations and contexts.¹⁶

Nietzsche distinguishes therefore between healthy-innocent and unhealthy (diseased, morbid or pathological) will to power, which dries out and withers life – in the same sense, incidentally, as he contrasts bad nihilism to a good nihilism. He still held in the middle phase of his work religion and ethics to be forms of the will to power or life-preserving lies, however, after he transfers and projects the will to power, in its elementary innocence, inside the whole universe, and consequently de-humanises the will to power, i.e. subtracts its particular human features, and physicalises and biologises it, i.e. turns it into a physical and biological magnitude, such lies are not for him simply life-preserving any more, but inimical to life, degenerating. In the pathos, emotionalism and passion of an ultimately normativistic reversal of normativism, Nietzsche does not notice that he can conceive and gain an innocent (that is, having taken root in the non-ethical cosmos) will to power, only through the humanisation of the cosmos [[= turning the cosmos into humans]], i.e. through an anthropomorphism, in regard to which he discovers the will to power in nature only because he already knows about the will to

¹⁶ As is known, the Nietzschean philosophy of will to power is collected and rearranged almost exclusively on the basis of the textual remnants of the 1880s. For my discussion, I refer to *Werke*, ed. by K. Schlechta, München 1966, v. III, esp. pp. 455, 457, 489, 503, 519, 522-525, 542, 608, 675, 679-680, 688, 690, 704-705, 737, 750-751, 768, 854-855, 887-889, 916-917.

power from the study of human culture. However, power and willing power [[= the will to power]] in the specific sense only exist in the human universe – and if they exist only here, then they cannot appear in some kind of natural innocence, but only with all the cunning, guile, duplicity and deceitfulness, with all the artistry and skills of transformation, metamorphosis, disguise and rationalisation of the intellect(-spirit). If, in other words, the will to power is decoupled from Is (Being) and from Nietzsche's ontology, then it can take only those forms which Nietzsche more or less regards as degenerate. Even the archaic-robust forms of wielding power and authority as dominance, of which he sometimes enthuses and goes into raptures, are, either way, based on ethical-religious forms of legitimation, and in the course of this, invoked or appealed to a common good, howsoever understood.

Nietzsche's incapability, despite all the delicate observations in the field of individual psychology, to apprehend the mechanisms of social power and authority as dominance concretely and against the background of a likewise concrete multi-dimensional anthropology, nourishes his belief in the possibility of a non-ethical-innocent power or in a prevailing of such power. Yet innocence was irrevocably lost already at the very beginning of culture; culture started with the adoption, assumption and acceptance of a meaning, and since then it reserves for the founder or donor, the custodian and protector or the interpreter of the meaning of things, the uppermost rank in the social hierarchy. The capacity, capability or function creating meaning and taking precautions for the future, that is, that which is called "spirit", dynamises the biologically determined striving for, and drive of, self-preservation to an almost boundless extent, and turns such a striving for, and drive of, self-preservation into the striving for power of beings of culture or civilised beings, which unfolds, acts and fights first of all at the level of the aforementioned life-preserving lies [[necessary for the preservation of life]].

IV.

The philosophical discussion or debate regarding power in the 20th century can be divided *grosso modo* into three groups. First, it is a matter of investigations which are oriented towards anthropological question formulations and deal directly or indirectly, positively or negatively, with Nietzsche's perception of the innate will to power; thereupon, the phenomenon of power is discussed under the influence and in the light of the experiences with respect to so-called "totalitarianisms"; and finally, the theme or topic of power is brought up by sociologising philosophers, whose way of looking at things is moulded or stamped by the, in Western mass democracies, predominant theoretical points of view and emancipatory cares and concerns. Concerning the first group, there can be no talk that Nietzsche's theorem was embraced by or made a school amongst philosophical anthropologists, even by or amongst those who accepted the existence of innate drives (urges or impulses). Thus, Scheler believes that already in the "sensorial feelings" and the "impulses (drives or urges)", which precede the intellectual(-spiritual) acts of personality, the consciousness of the Ought emerges; this again interweaves with the principle of solidarity, to which every struggle is subordinated, since struggle can only take place in the framework of existing commonalities or an existing human community. The struggle is therefore the external dimension, solidarity the internal and deeper dimension. Through this way of looking at things, a ranking or hierarchisation of biological magnitudes comes into being, which paves the way for ethics in the proper sense.¹⁷ Plessner accentuated matters somewhat differently, for whom solidarity and struggle or friendship and enmity are equally original, and reciprocally determined functions, of the striving for power. However, the

¹⁷ *Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die materiale Wertethik*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. by M. Scheler, v. II, Bern-München 1966, pp. 282-88.

definition or determination of man as power does not amount here to a deduction of human action or activity from a rigid structure of drives, urges, impulses, but it denotes something else: man is in his essence power, because he is an open immanence or an open question; he must therefore decide in favour of this open possibility and against another open possibility, and therein he is characterised by a Can, i.e. an ability to do something. During the execution of a decision taken, power as Can (an ability to do something) turns into the struggle for power, which for its part requires the distinction between friend and foe. Plessner stresses that the friend-foe-relation stretches or extends to all sectors of life, both to public as well as private, however, he simultaneously wants to call anthropology, which puts this relation at the centre of attention, a political anthropology.¹⁸ From that one must infer a very broadly understood concept of politics, whose dubiousness can only be hinted at here.

The definition or determination of the essence of man as will to power can be disputed or contested most consistently where the openness or infinite malleability of human nature through the rejection of every teaching or theory of instinct and drive, urge or impulse is justified. This rejection could be expressed more emphatically by schools and lines of thought which were inclined towards an analytical philosophising, that is, did not want to know of monistic and substantialistic interpretations both in the ontological as well as in the psychological domain. Before such a theoretical backdrop, Dewey holds the reduction of psychical activities to classes of instincts to be a false simplification of the speculatively proceeding spirit(-intellect), i.e. a false simplification foreign to actual facts. Whereupon he then logically advances to the dissolution of the instinct of self-preservation into an amount, a lot or set of individual acts, which make self-preservation as a whole possible. Just as little is there for him a generalised will to power. Activity or doing on each and every

¹⁸ *Macht und menschliche Natur*, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, v. V, Frankfurt a.M. 1981, pp. 188-196.

respective occasion always remains decisive, during which power is not striven for, but rather already existing power is used.¹⁹ In succeeding Dewey, Gehlen likewise stressed the crossing over, interweaving or intersecting of the impulse (drive or urge) vis-à-vis (the drawing, i.e. obtaining, of) power, prestige and or authority etc. with the execution process or carrying out of concrete acting or acts; a power struggle unfolds only via the issues of interest on each and every respective occasion, and via the actions related to them.²⁰ The power struggle is not therefore excluded eo ipso if one puts aside or does not accept the existence of the power drive, urge or impulse. Dewey himself opines that inhibitions in respect of activity because of external factors would, in relation to that, force one's own power to be more intensely brought to bear, that is, to want (to expand one's) power. It depends on the social conditions whether striving after power and the power struggle come into being or not. Consequently, we return to the good lawgiver and to Helvétius's problem – bearing in mind the taking root of pragmatism in Enlightenment formulations of the question, not without reason.

Without making use of the term “power”, Kojève creatively made good use of Hegelian conceptuality and impressively outlined the question of power and of the power struggle. The tight connection of this question with the question of the human specific feature in comparison to the (rest of the) animal kingdom places here – differently to Nietzsche's late ontological approach – the analysis entirely at the level of human culture and human history, whilst at the same time, the teaching or theory of drives, urges, impulses tacitly undergoes in part a modification, in part a neutralisation. In place of the drive, urge or impulse, namely desire steps in, which as such of course stems from man's biological texture or composition, however, desire's specifically human character leaves

¹⁹ *Human nature and conduct* (1922) = *The Middle Works*, ed. by Jo Ann Boydston, v. XII, Carbondale and Edwardsville, III., 1983, p. 97 ff..

²⁰ *Urmensch und Spätkultur*, Frankfurt a. M. – Bonn 1964, pp. 67-69.

the animal element far behind, i.e. it goes way beyond the animal element, and even demands the sacrifice of the animal element (that is, biologically understood self-preservation). In the often seemingly futile, fruitless and useless desiring of that which others desire – and indeed simply because they desire it – , in the desire for recognition and in a struggle for prestige, of and for life and death, the human being is constituted as self-consciousness, and with him, History too, whose end, ultimate or final goal or aim must, as a result, be determined by this constitution of the human being.²¹

Since for Kojève that which was acted out in our century [[= the 20th century]] materialised the end of History discernible already since Hegel and by Hegel, he could serenely follow and face the events and things that happened and derive no ethical concepts or conceptual plans and recipes from his analysis of the phenomenon of power. For most other philosophers, the question was posed differently. The 20th century seemed to have unleashed power in its full daemonic nature [[daemony]], and it was sought that diagnoses and strategies of stemming, curbing and getting this daemonic nature of power under control, to some extent, be brought into line and harmonised with one another. Two basic positionings announced their presence in the course of this: on the one hand, that which saw power in its at all times possible crossing over, interweaving or intersecting with authority as dominance and violence, and wanted to prevent the degeneration of power into arbitrariness through institutionalised controls inside of a freely constituted polity or political community; on the other hand, that which indeed affirmed and approved of such controls just as much, but simultaneously was still much closer to the Platonic tradition by identifying “bad” or inauthentic power with violence and arbitrariness, and by reserving the concept of “true” power for the process of free subjugation through persuasion.

²¹ *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, Paris 1947, p. 11 ff..

As a representative of the former position, Russell formulates a theory of power, which differs from the Hobbesian theory of power only with regard to the political-normative conclusions or findings: where Hobbes has in mind the monopolisation of political power for the purpose of social peace, Russell wishes for its restriction or limitation through democratic control. The ontological and anthropological premises are, however, by and large the same, something which perhaps corresponds to the logic of the history of ideas: because Russell's logical atomism demarcated itself from the substantialistic philosophical thought of the 19th century *mutatis mutandis* in the same sense as Hobbes's mechanicism had done so against scholastic metaphysics and physics. For Russell, power in society is the same as energy in nature (let us remind ourselves of the interrelation between the Hobbesian teaching of power and of motion). It can therefore take just as many forms as energy, and in all, from suggestion up to naked violence, it strives for the same thing, namely the pushing through and imposition of the will standing behind it. On the other hand – and here the agreement with Hobbes again arises very clearly – (boundless, unlimited) striving after power remains a specifically human quality, since animals make do, and are content with, the satisfaction of their biological needs.²²

Ricoeur does not think otherwise regarding the uncancellability or irrevocability of the striving for power and the factor of power, although with him the anthropological background is not expounded in detail. He obviously, however, accepts such a background, because his argumentation is directed against the Marxist deduction of the political and politics from the economic and the economy, which was supposed to imply that the putting aside or eliminating of economically determined class conflicts would of itself remove politics as power and dominance from the world. The autonomy of the political

²² *Power*, London 1938, ch. 1 and 2.

emphasised by Ricoeur means, on the contrary, the political's anchoring in deeper lying strata of the human, i.e. man in general. The human element is of course concretised in history, and indeed in the form of political and state organisation, which of necessity yields and constitutes the unfolding space of Evil. What remains to be recommended under these circumstances is the search for institutional techniques in order to put a stop to the misuse and abuse of power.²³ Kuhn, who typically makes the Weberian definition of the state his own just like Ricoeur, expects just as little as this French philosopher an abolition of power and violence by the realisation of Utopia, and accordingly restricts himself to the demand for the limiting of the possibilities of coercion or compulsion and of the exercising of violence, within political organisation. Power is for him in general the ability to bring about desired effects and results, and he wishes that these effects and results should be mediated and achieved through the free conviction and decision of those upon whom power is wielded. In the state's power construct or structure, power and violence are unavoidably mixed with each other; the paradox that the state realises, and at the same time threatens, freedom cannot be resolved, by-passed or surpassed. Because here also in the background stands human nature, which is always prone to the "pervertibility of the spirit(-intellect)".²⁴

If the three above-mentioned authors support and advocate the institutional curbing or containment of power exactly because of its actual or potential degeneration into arbitrary dominance and violence, then Jaspers and Arendt want to establish guarantees against violence already in the conceptual run-up to such violence, i.e. they desire in advance conceptual protection against violence. For that purpose, there should be in principle, programmatic dissociation of power and violence, and indeed in the form of a spiritualisation of power. The different terminology, which they use, cannot conceal the commonality of the

²³ *Histoire et vérité*, Paris 1964, p. 260ff..

²⁴ *Der Staat. Eine philosophische Darstellung*, München 1967, pp. 109-115.

approach. Jaspers indeed in many cases brings power with dominance and violence together, however, to this network or mesh he contrasts authority [[Autorität, κύρος = κῦρος]], which, as he says, has true power only when it is the bearer of truth, although, admittedly, powerless truth in itself still does not yield, produce or create any authority. Social living together or co-existence must ultimately be founded on such authority, if Jaspers's view holds up and applies that coherence between men is not brought about through dominance, but through "inner factors".²⁵ The same dualism of "inner", or ethically higher and external (instrumental) factors dominates or governs Arendt's thinking when she completely separates power and violence from each other. Her concept of power, otherwise, is not far removed from "authority" of Jaspers, because she defines power as a collective meeting of minds or collective agreement and understanding, which coheres a group or holds a group together. However, authority does not, as Arendt says, need coercion or compulsion; the collective can only possess power, yet authority can likewise lie in corporations, unions or associations of people and institutions, not only in individuals. This conceptual fluctuation already points to the logical and sociological gap or hole in Arendt's analysis. Actually such an analysis thereby only enables power and violence to be comprehended as polar opposites, because it weeds out or eliminates the intermediate link, limb, tier or grade of dominance, which can neither do without or lack legitimation, nor violence.²⁶

Arendt finds fault with or blames the tradition of political thought for the unreflected (i.e. not reflected upon or intellectually processed) or very easy, uncritical identification of power and violence, without seeing or realising that this identification stems from a common and very familiar topos or commonplace of normativistic thought since Plato, who re-emerges in every contradistinction on every occasion of "good" or "just", and, "bad" or violent

²⁵ *Von der Wahrheit*, München 1947, pp. 366-369, 767-770.

²⁶ *Macht und Gewalt*, München 1970, p. 45ff..

wielding of power, and also underlies and inspires Arendt's definitions of the concept of power (and of violence). In any case, she makes a gross mistake when she attributes the aforementioned identification to Max Weber. Because Weber does not connect or combine violence with power in general, but with the state and (authority as) dominance; for him, power in itself is amorphous, and as such is not an object or subject matter of sociological analysis, although he uses the term freely and loosely in order to outline or describe the aim of political struggle.²⁷ If one overlooks the exercising of (authority as) dominance, one therefore defines power too broadly ("meeting of minds or agreement and understanding"), and violence too narrowly ("instrumentally"), then one can easily assert that power has nothing to do with violence, and violence does not in the least belong to, or characterise, the deeper essence of the politically organised collective (or community). Naturally, no polity or political community can survive, for a long time, the daily exercising of violence to a great extent, that is, the raging of permanent civil war,— however, just as little can a polity or political community exist without the constant threat of violence, without an internal organisation and division of labour which allows it to translate or turn the constant threat of violence promptly into action, i.e. the use of violence. High cultures or developed civilisations have hitherto hardly existed without the institutional exercising of violence, and that of course cannot be a coincidence. The constant threat of violence can indeed rest or be based on the broadest "meeting of minds", and as such is "power" in Arendt's sense, yet on the other hand, the fact remains revealing and instructive for the character of political and social organisation, that hitherto no meeting of minds was achieved in regard to the opposite – that is, in regard to the renunciation or relinquishment of every threat of violence –. The meeting of minds, upon which this organisation is actually founded in the long term, contains a limine the

²⁷ *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, Tübingen 1922, pp. 28-29, 603 ff..

threat of violence and the possibility of the exercising of violence, as e.g. the daily detention or arrest of people proves in every state and country, without exception. Arendt's saying that violence is or becomes applied where there is no power any more, constitutes, therefore, an empty or meaningless truism or tautology, which is based on definitional manipulation, namely, on the substitution of the term "(authority as) dominance" by the term "power".

The theoretically confusing and misleading, and historically-sociologically infertile effacement or obliteration of the conceptual boundary between power and authority as dominance also characterises Foucault's approach,²⁸ although here the elimination of the concept of authority as dominance serves the convergence or approaching, better than the contrasting, of power and violence. Foucault is undoubtedly right with regard to his basic thesis that power is neither a massive essentiality (i.e. a self-contained and tangible entity or being), nor is it located or situated exclusively in certain political bearers, but it penetrates and permeates the whole of society and constitutes a net or network of relations or a correlation of forces. But that does not mean anything other than only that power in itself is amorphous and must be crystallised in innumerable, different forms. Underneath this crystallisation, i.e. if there is no such crystallisation, power can be the object or subject matter of anthropological and psychological, but hardly historical investigations; Foucault himself can in his search for, and investigation of, the microcosm of power, barely discover smaller particles than facilities (establishments or institutions) like the clinic or prison. With that, however, the problem just begins and is simply touched upon. Because there are greater and smaller, heavier and lighter, more complicated and simpler crystals of power, and the differences or the transitions amongst them require macroscopic analysis (too) in order to be

²⁸ Better still than in the introductory chapters of the work *Histoire de la Sexualité*, Foucault synthesised his views in a lecture he gave at Sorbonne in June of 1976; I have in mind its German translation in the collection *Dispositive der Macht*, Berlin 1978, pp. 79-88.

explained. Foucault's definition of the state as the institutional integration or unification of power relations suggests that he has in mind an additive and quantitative relationship, and explains neither the social hierarchisation of power relations and of facilities and institutions, nor the existence of power relations outside of the institutional grip or control of the state – something of course which is due to the above-mentioned obliteration of the conceptual boundary between power and authority as dominance.

Moreover, the microphysical way of looking at power is by no means suitable for the reconstruction and analysis of the coming into being, of the character and of the decline of social formations; in fact, it obtains a meaning only through the inclusion of its findings in a broader framework, as, by the way, Foucault's constant in themselves very schematic excursus, i.e. digressions, regarding the general tendencies of this or that epoch indirectly attests. Of these excursus' anthropological blindness, there cannot again be talk without going into the structuralistic background and attendant presuppositions. In general, it can be said that Foucault's microphysics constitutes less an advance in understanding, and more an ideological reflection of mass-democratic relations, conditions and circumstances in the West, which are characterised by the interweaving of private and public spheres, and the bidding farewell to traditional notions and representations of authority as dominance. The selective, point-by-point perception of power [[The perception of the relations of power (power relations) as a dotted line or row or intermittent series of sporadic points]], represents at the level of theory, the weakening of time-honoured institutions and the dissolution of collective subjects, that is, the great process of atomisation, or the splitting and segmentation of the collective body into individuals, at the level of social praxis. Power as a problem is shifted or displaced in everyday life and in the network of relations between humans to the extent that political struggle on a grand scale or in grand style becomes

obsolete and the wish for self-realisation takes its place in a small or narrow circle. Obstacles or taboos, which stand in the way of self-realisation, awaken likewise in that small or narrow circle, which the microphysics of power is supposed to apprehend. In this way, oppression is experienced and lived in the affluent society – and in this way, he is declared a great philosopher, who promotes or fosters liberation through the unmasking of the mechanisms standing behind such oppression.

V.

It would be pointless and illusionary from the vast majority of philosophers, who do not want to be *philosophes maudits*, to expect or desire that they ever loosen, disengage or disconnect their reflections on power, dominance (authority) and violence from the question of meaning and norms, that is, in the final analysis, from ideological undertakings in regard to legitimation. The production of meaning is the power claim of philosophers, and the social pushing through or imposition of this production of meaning their lone chance, opportunity or possibility, on whatever roundabout ways or detours and via whatever adaptations, to wield power in society. This, nonetheless, should not allow one to think it is right to speak ill of philosophers for that reason, especially when one knows of the ubiquity and of the widely branching-out games of the striving after power. The paradox of their situation or position – which they must of course, under the circumstances of culture, share with many others – consists in that they must externalise their striving after power as the theoretically founded renunciation of every selfish or expedient striving for power or of striving for power in general.

These theoretical kinds of founding have hitherto been grouped principally around two theses. On the one hand, it was often disputed or doubted that striving for power belongs to human nature, if one means with that a primordial drive, urge or impulse for the absolute domination of other humans. Logically, however, it is not at all necessary to accept the existence of ineradicable and aggressive *drives, urges and impulses* of power in order to ascertain the always ubiquitous having an effect of the *striving* after power. To striving after power, the logic of the situations, in which social activity takes place in human societies, push – and this logic cannot be canceled out or abolished as long as humans are simply interested in their self-preservation. Culture and the, through culture, effected ideational redoubling, diversion and channeling or neutralisation of biological factors²⁹ have turned self-preservation into a very complicated and multi-layered task, not least of all because they connected self-preservation and the question of meaning very tightly to each other. The causes or sources (surfaces) of friction must multiply to the extent that self-preservation becomes a multi-dimensional undertaking. Moreover, the process of self-preservation, as Hobbes knew, is dynamised by means of the specifically human ability of imagining or picturing future situations and taking precautions for merely possible situations. One would have to accept a pre-established harmony of spirits(-intellects), that is of ways of thinking or mind-sets, of wishes and of passions, in order to exclude, under these conditions, conflicts, even extreme conflicts. That is exactly the reason why ethicists, moralists and moral philosophers want to pinpoint and behold the essence of man in his Reason, and over and above that, stress the uniformity and bindedness of the capacity for Reason in contrast to the many questions and matters of taste. Even if they were right, one would social-ethically be stuck, or the issue of social

²⁹ [[= Die Kultur und die durch sie bewirkte Verdoppelung, Umleitung oder Neutralisierung der biologischen Faktoren = Ὁ πολιτισμὸς καὶ τὸ κεντρικὸ πολιτισμικὸ φαινόμενο τοῦ ἰδεατοῦ ἀναδιπλασιασμοῦ, τῆς μετοχέτευσης ἢ τῆς ἐξουδετέρωσης τῶν βιολογικῶν παραγόντων]] [translator's footnote of Kondylis's German and Greek wording of this crucial phrase.]

ethics would not be promoted, as long as the solution to the most important questions and problems was not entrusted by all people, without exception, to Reason.

The assertion that Reason can overcome striving for power because it differs in its essence from this striving for power, constitutes the second basic thesis of normativistic philosophising, which, as we know, dominates the scene since Plato. Striving after power is, as is said, a dark drive, urge or impulse or an irrational need, which belongs together with the short-sighted wish for sensorial pleasure, and just like this sensorial pleasure, should and can be controlled by the superior rational spirit(-intellect). Nonetheless, things are precisely the other way around. The will to power is – differently to what Nietzsche thought – a specifically human phenomenon precisely because the specific feature of man lies in that which we are in the habit of calling “spirit(-intellect)” or “Reason”. Striving for power with a certain, even small social claim cannot unfold and be activated when the subject concerned is not capable of foregoing the immediate satisfaction of pleasure, and in general subordinate, whilst planning and looking ahead, short-term wishes to long-term (settings of) aims or objectives. Of course, to ethicists and moral philosophers the ascertainment appears to be a monstrous, dreadful or outrageous paradox that the spirit(-intellect) strives after power and dominance not otherwise than the spirit(-intellect) which proceeds methodically wanting to live in, or dedicate itself to exercising, virtue. In order to be able to elude this paradox, they have as ever and always put a lot of effort into showing or drawing clear boundaries between normative and instrumental Reason. But such boundaries could only be drawn only if it were absolutely impossible to instrumentalise ethical norms for the purposes of power. And exactly this is – as is known, demonstrable and proved – by no means the case.

ⁱ 1992 [translator's endnote].

ⁱⁱ Clearly here „Herrschaft“, «ἐξουσία» is best translated as “authority” because Kondylis’s macro-historical view of the history of ideas and social history sees “authority” as not yet completely undermined to denote and connote something much less stronger than “dominance”, as would become apparent in the West particularly after the cultural revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, and especially at the time of this translation in 2018 [translator's endnote].

ⁱⁱⁱ The Greek text reads: “... the traditional metaphysical priority of motion vis-à-vis stillness”, which surely must be a (very strange (negligent?)) error of some kind (e.g. the printer misunderstood Kondylis’s notoriously difficult to read handwriting of the manuscript), because later in the passage it is indicated that stillness had always been a concomitant of transcendence etc., unless the matter at hand can be viewed from both points of view by reversing stillness and motion, which it can, and Kondylis has chosen different approaches for the German and Greek texts (= possible, but unlikely), or, I am missing something entirely (= possible or probable) [translator's endnote].