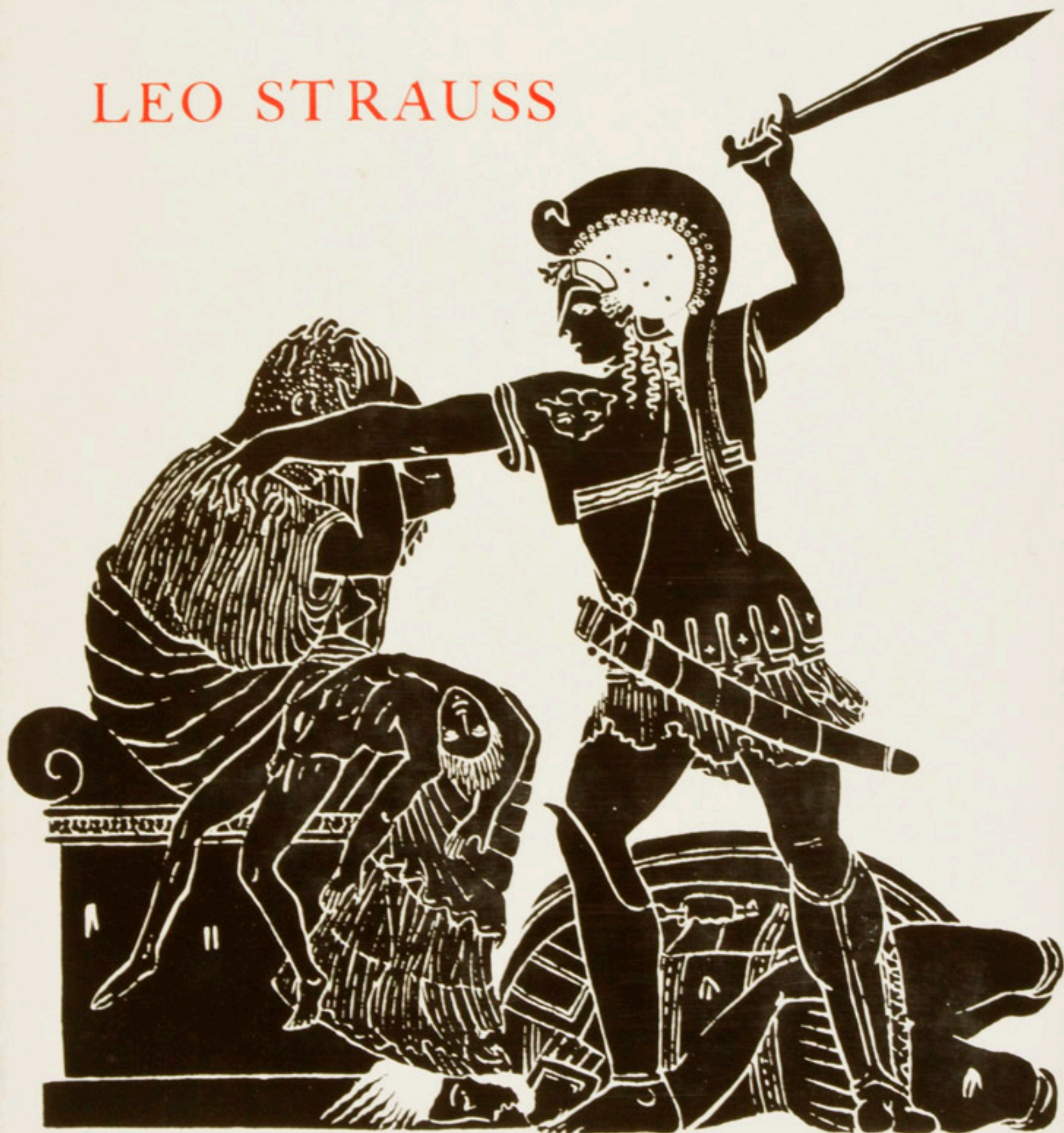


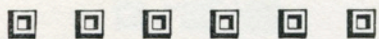
On Tyranny

Revised and Enlarged

A study of Xenophon's *Hiero*,
Alexandre Kojève's critique of that study
and the author's reply,
and a new translation of the *Hiero* itself

LEO STRAUSS





On Tyranny

Revised and Enlarged

BY LEO STRAUSS

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occupied within republican virtue by courage is occupied within the virtue befitting the subjects of the excellent tyrant by moderation which is produced by fear.³⁵ But one has no right to assume that the virtue befitting the subjects of a good tyrant is meant to be inferior in dignity to republican virtue. How little Xenophon believed that virtue is impossible without freedom is shown most strikingly by his admiration for the younger Cyrus whom he does not hesitate to describe as a "slave."³⁶

If gentlemen can live happily under a beneficent tyrant, tyranny as corrected according to Simonides' suggestions might seem to live up to Xenophon's highest political standard. To see at once that this is the case, one merely has to measure Simonides' excellent tyrant by the criterion set forth in Xenophon's, or Socrates', definition of the good ruler. The virtue of the good ruler consists in making happy those he rules. The aim of the good ruler can be achieved by means of laws—this was done, according to Xenophon, in the most remarkable manner in Lycurgus' city—or by rule without laws, i.e., by tyranny: the beneficent tyrant as described by Simonides makes his city happy.³⁷ It is certainly most significant that, as regards the happiness achieved by means of laws, Xenophon can adduce an actual example (Sparta), whereas as regards the happiness achieved by tyranny, he offers no other evidence than the promise of a poet. In other words, it is of very great importance that, according to Xenophon, the aim of the good ruler is much more likely to be achieved by means of laws than by means of absolute rule. This does not do away, however, with the admission that, as a matter of principle, rule of laws is not essential for good government.

Xenophon does not make this admission in so many words. He presents Simonides as describing tyranny at its best and as declaring that the tyrant can make his city happy. Considering the situation in which Simonides expounds his views of tyranny, the objection is justified that what he says serves the purpose of comforting a somewhat disturbed tyrant or at any rate is said *ad hominem* and ought not to be taken as expressing directly Xenophon's own views. We have therefore to consider whether the thesis that tyranny can live up to the highest political standard is defensible on the basis of Xenophon's, or Socrates', political philosophy.

To begin with, it must appear most paradoxical that Xenophon should have had any liking whatsoever for tyranny however good.

Tyranny at its best is still rule without laws and, according to Socrates' definition, justice is identical with legality or obedience to laws.³⁸ Thus tyranny in any form seems to be irreconcilable with the requirement of justice. On the other hand, tyranny would become morally possible if the identification of "just" and "legal" were not absolutely correct, or if "everything according to law were (only) *somehow* (*πως*) just."³⁹ The laws which determine what is legal are the rules of conduct upon which the citizens have agreed.⁴⁰ "The citizens" may be "the multitude" or "the few"; "the few" may be the rich or the virtuous. That is to say, the laws, and hence what is legal, depend on the political order of the community for which they are given. Could Xenophon or his Socrates have believed that the difference between laws depending on a faulty political order and laws depending on a good political order is wholly irrelevant as far as justice is concerned? Could they have believed that rules prescribed by a monarch, i.e., not by "the citizens," cannot be laws?⁴¹ Besides, is it wholly irrelevant for justice whether what the laws prescribe is reasonable or unreasonable, good or bad? Finally, is it wholly irrelevant for justice whether the laws enacted by the legislator (the many, the few, the monarch) are forcibly imposed on, or voluntarily agreed to by, the other members of the community? Questions such as these are not raised by Xenophon, or his Socrates, but only by Xenophon's young and rash Alcibiades who, however, was a pupil of Socrates at the time when he raised those questions; only Alcibiades, and not Socrates, is presented by Xenophon as raising the Socratic question, "What is law?"⁴² Socrates' doubt of the unqualified identification of justice and legality is intimated, however, by the facts that, on the one hand, he considers an enactment of the "legislator" Critias and his fellows a "law" which, he says, he is prepared to obey; and that, on the other hand, he actually disobeys it because it is "against the laws."⁴³ But apart from the consideration that the identification of "just" and "legal" would make impossible the evidently necessary distinction between just and unjust laws, there are elements of justice which necessarily transcend the dimension of the legal. Ingratitude, e.g., while not being illegal, is unjust.⁴⁴ The justice in business dealings—Aristotle's commutative justice proper—which is possible under a tyrant, is for this very reason not essentially dependent on law. Xenophon is thus led to suggest another definition,

which he ever wrote to a "stranger," a man who does not have citizen responsibilities and who, in addition, voices the praise of tyranny not publicly but in a strictly private conversation with a tyrant, and for a purpose which supplies him with an almost perfect excuse. Socrates did not consider it good that the wise man should be simply a stranger;⁵⁶ Socrates was a citizen-philosopher. He could not, therefore, with propriety be presented as praising tyranny under any circumstances. There is no fundamental difference in this respect between Xenophon and Plato. Plato entrusted his discussion of the problematic character of the "rule of laws" to a stranger: Plato's Socrates is as silent about this grave, not to say awe-inspiring, subject as is Xenophon's Socrates.⁵⁷ Simonides fulfills in the *Corpus Xenophonticum* a function comparable to that fulfilled in the *Corpus Platonicum* by the stranger from Elea.



V

THE TWO WAYS OF LIFE

THE PRIMARY SUBJECT of the conversation described in the *Hiero* is not the improvement of tyrannical government, but the difference between tyrannical and private life with regard to human enjoyments and pains. The question concerning that difference is identical, in the context, with the question as to whether tyrannical life is more choiceworthy than private life or *vice versa*. Insofar as "tyrant" is eventually replaced by "ruler," and the life of the ruler is the political life in the strict sense,¹ the question discussed in the *Hiero* concerns the relative desirability of the life of the ruler, or of political life, on the one hand, and of private life on the other. But however the question discussed in the dialogue may be formulated, it is in any case only a special form of the fundamental Socratic question of how man ought to live, or of what way of life is the most choiceworthy.²

In the *Hiero*, the difference between the tyrannical and the private life is discussed in a conversation between a tyrant and a private man. This means that the same subject is presented in two different manners. It is presented most obviously by the explicit and thematic statements of the two characters. Yet none of the two characters can be presumed to have stated exactly what Xenophon thought about the subject. In addition, the two characters cannot be presumed to have stated exactly what they themselves thought about it: Hiero is afraid of Simonides, and Simonides is guided by a pedagogic

("while being happy, you will not be envied") might very well mean "being powerful and wealthy"²⁰ and that tyrants are superior to private men in regard to power and wealth as not even Hiero can deny. For Simonides might have understood by happiness continuous joy or contentment.²¹ Suffice it to say that precisely on account of the essential ambiguity of "being happy" the purport of Simonides' final sentence depends decisively on its second part, viz., the expression "you will not be envied." What this expression means for the decision of the crucial issue becomes clear if we remind ourselves of the following facts: that the purpose of the *Hiero* is to contrast the ruler, not simply with private men in general, but with the wise; that *the* representative of wisdom is Socrates; and that Socrates was exposed, and fell victim, to the envy of his fellow citizens. If the beneficent ruler can be "happy" without being envied, whereas even Socrates' "happiness" was accompanied by envy,²² the political life, the life of the ruler or of the tyrant, would seem to be unambiguously superior to the life of the wise man. It would seem then that Simonides' praise of tyranny, in spite of his ironical overstatements and his pedagogic intention, is at bottom serious. True happiness—this seems to be Xenophon's thought—is possible only on the basis of excellence or superiority, and there are ultimately only two kinds of excellence—the excellence of the ruler and that of the wise man. All superior men are exposed to envy on account of their excellence. But the ruler, as distinguished from the wise man, is able to do penance for his superiority by becoming the servant of all his subjects: the hardworking and beneficent ruler, and not the retiring wise man, can put envy at rest.²³

This must be taken with a grain of salt. It goes without saying that the prospect by means of which Simonides attempts to educate Hiero is incapable of fulfillment. Xenophon knew too well that if there are any forms of superiority which do not expose their possessors to envy, political power, however beneficent, would not be one of them. Or, to put it somewhat differently, if it is true that he who wants to receive kindness must first show kindness, it is not certain that his kindness will not be requited with ingratitude.²⁴ The thought that a superior man who does not successfully hide his superiority would not be exposed to envy is clearly a delusion. It forms the fitting climax of the illusory image of the tyrant who is happy

permanent armed force which would serve as the nucleus of an army mobilized in case of war (ch. x). The tyrant, moreover, ought not to disarm his subjects, but introduce obligatory military service and turn to general mobilization, if necessary. Finally, he ought to spend a part of his "personal" fortune for the common good and construct public buildings rather than palaces. Generally speaking, the tyrant would gain the "affection" of his subjects by making them happier and by treating "his country as his household, his fellow citizens as his comrades" (ch. xi). cf. Irish.
a. G. Parisi-
Strauss

It can be understood that Xenophon might have considered all this utopian. The fact is, he knew only tyrannies exercised for the advantage of an already established social class, or for the sake of personal or familial ambitions, or with the vague idea of doing better than any others, though wanting the same thing as they did. He had not seen "tyrannies" exercised in the service of truly revolutionary political, social, or economic ideas (in the service, that is, of rational objectives, radically different from anything already existing) with a national, racial, imperial, or humanitarian grounding. But it is surprising to see our contemporary—Strauss—sharing, as it seems, this way of looking at things. Personally, I do not accept Strauss' position because in my opinion the utopia of Simonides-Xenophon has been *realized* by modern "tyrannies" (by Salazar, for example). And it is possible that what was utopian in the time of Xenophon could have been realized later precisely because the time necessary for the conclusion of the "current business" of which I spoke above has elapsed, business which one was obliged to conclude before one could even begin to take the measures prerequisite to the realization of the ideal suggested by Simonides. But does it follow that these tyrannies are [philosophically] justified by Xenophon's dialogue? Must one say that the modern "tyrant" has been able to realize the "philosophic" ideal of tyranny without having relied upon the advice of the wise man, or must it be admitted that he has been able to do so only because a Simonides once advised a Hiero? Parisistras

I will try below to answer the second question. As for the first, to answer that we shall have to go to the heart of the matter.

At the culmination of the dialogue (ch. vii), Simonides explains to Hiero that his grievances against tyranny are worthless, since the

Hiero confuses spontaneously accorded "sexual love" with the "affection" of his subjects who "recognize" him. Simonides corrects him by making him see that the tyrant as such is interested not in his "lovers" but in his subjects taken as citizens. But Simonides maintains the idea of "affection" (ch. xi). Moreover, Hiero would like to be made happy by his tyranny and by "honors" in general, and Simonides tells him that he will be "happy" (the last sentence of the dialogue) if he follows his advice and thereby obtains the "affection" of his fellow citizens. Now it is quite clear that tyranny or political action in general can, as such, engender neither "love" nor "affection" nor "happiness," for these three phenomena imply elements which have nothing to do with politics: a mediocre politician can be the object of an intense and authentic "affection" on the part of his fellow citizens, just as a great statesman may be universally admired without arousing love of any kind, and the most complete political success is perfectly compatible with a profoundly unhappy private life. And so it is better to stick to the precise formula of Hegel, who talks not of "affection" or "happiness" but of "recognition" and of "satisfaction," which comes from "recognition." For the desire to be "recognized" in one's reality and in one's eminent human dignity (by those whom one "recognizes in return") is actually, as I believe, the ultimate motive of all *emulation* among men and hence of all political *struggle*, including that which leads to tyranny. And the man who has satisfied this desire by his own action is, by that very fact, "satisfied," whether he is happy or not, beloved or not.

We may acknowledge then that the tyrants (and Hiero himself) will seek, before anything else, Hegelian "recognition." We may likewise acknowledge that Hiero, not having obtained this recognition, is really not "satisfied" in the full sense of that word. We thus understand why he listens to the advice of the wise man who, by indicating the means of obtaining "recognition," promises him "satisfaction."

Moreover, Hiero and Simonides know very well what is involved. Hiero would like his subjects "willingly to yield him the right of way" (ch. vii, second paragraph) and Simonides promises him that if he follows his advice his subjects will "obey him *without being constrained*" (ch. xi, second paragraph). This is to say that the

two of them look to authority.¹ For to get oneself "recognized" by someone, while inspiring in him neither fear (in the final analysis, fear of violent death) nor love—this, in his eyes, is to have *authority*. To acquire authority in the eyes of someone is to make him recognize this authority. Now a man's authority (that is to say, in the final analysis, his eminently human value, though not necessarily his *superiority*), is *recognized* by another when his advice or his orders are followed or executed not because this other man cannot do otherwise (physically, or through fear, or as a result of any other "passion"), but because he spontaneously considers them worthy of being followed or executed—and this not because he himself recognizes their intrinsic value, but only because it is *that man* who tells him (like an oracle); that is to say, precisely because he recognizes the "authority" of him who tells him. We may thus acknowledge that Hiero, exactly like any political man, has actively sought his tyranny because he wanted (consciously or not) to impose his exclusive *authority* on his fellow citizens.

We can believe Hiero then when he says he is not "satisfied." His enterprise has indeed failed, since he confesses that he must have recourse to *force*, to the exploitation of his subjects' fear (of death). But Hiero certainly exaggerates (and, according to Strauss, he does so voluntarily, to discourage from tyranny any possible rivals, Simonides in particular) when he says that he does not get *any* "satisfaction" from his "tyranny" because he enjoys *no* authority and governs *solely* through terror. For, contrary to a rather common prejudice, such a situation is absolutely impossible. Pure terror presupposes force alone—in the final analysis, physical force. By his physical force alone a man can dominate children, old men, and

¹ Hiero (*ibid.*), it is true, would like his subjects to "crown him for his *virtue*" and he believes that at the present time they condemn him "on account of his *injustice*." But "injustice" disturbs him only to the extent that it prevents his being "recognized," and it is only in order to obtain "recognition" that he would practice "virtue." In other words, "virtue" and "justice" are for him only means of imposing his *authority* on his subjects; they are not ends in themselves. What follows shows that Simonides' attitude is exactly the same: the tyrant must be "virtuous" and "just" in order to win the "affection" of his subjects; in order, that is, to do the things that will make his subjects obey "without being constrained," and—finally—in order to be "happy without being envied." This attitude is hardly "Socratic." We may recognize, with Strauss, that Simonides, as an advisor to a tyrant, adopts Hiero's point of view only for pedagogical reasons, without himself as a wise man sharing it.

some women, at the outside two or three adults; but he cannot in this way impose himself for long on a group of able-bodied men, however small. This is to say that "despotism" in the precise sense is possible only within some isolated family, and that the head of any state always has recourse to something besides his own force. In fact, a political chief always has recourse to his *authority*, and it is by his authority that he holds his power. The whole question is: By *whom* is this authority recognized and who "obeys him without constraint"? Indeed, the authority of a chief of state may be recognized either by a more or less extensive majority of the citizens or by a more or less restricted minority. Until very recently, it was not believed possible to speak of tyranny in a pejorative sense except where a minority (guided by an authority that it alone recognizes) directs by force or by "terror" (exploiting, that is, the fear of death) the majority of the citizens. Of course, only those citizens recognized as such by the state were taken into account. For no one criticizes, even today, the governing of children or criminals or madmen by force, nor was the forcible governing of women, slaves, or metics, for example, ever criticized in the past. But this way of looking at things, while logically possible, does not in fact correspond to men's natural reactions. Men have finally become aware of this; and recent political experiences, such as the present polemic between "Western" and "Eastern" democrats, have made it possible to give a more adequate definition of tyranny.

In fact, it is *tyranny* (in the morally neutral sense of the word) when a fraction of the citizens (it matters little whether it be a majority or a minority) imposes its ideas and acts on all the other citizens, which are determined by an authority which it recognizes spontaneously but which it has not succeeded in making the others recognize; and where it does so without "coming to terms" with these others, without seeking any "compromises" with them, and without taking into account their ideas and desires (determined by another authority recognized by these others). Quite plainly this fraction can do this only through force or terror, by playing in the last analysis on the fear that the others have of the violent death which the former can inflict on them. One can say, then, that in this situation the others are "enslaved," since they behave in fact like slaves who are ready to do anything to save their lives. And it

seeks "glory" and consequently could be fully "satisfied" only by the recognition of his authority in a universal and homogeneous State—would be willing to give "realistic" and "concrete" advice by explaining to the tyrant who consciously accepts the ideal of "universal recognition" how one could attain this ideal, taking as his point of departure the *existing* state of things, and attain it better and faster than would be possible by the measures which this tyrant is taking, the tyrant would then have been perfectly able to accept and follow his advice openly. In any case, the refusal of the tyrant would then be absolutely "unreasonable" or "unjustified" and would not raise any questions of principle.

The question that we must still resolve is whether or not the wise man as wise man *can* do anything but talk of a political "ideal," and whether or not he *wants* to leave the domain of "utopia" and "general or abstract ideas" and, by giving the tyrant some "realistic" advice, confront the concrete reality.

To be able to answer this question, it is necessary to distinguish carefully between the wise man properly so-called and the philosopher, for the situation is far from being the same in both cases. In order to simplify things, I will speak only of the latter. Anyway, neither Xenophon nor Strauss seems to admit the existence of the former. By definition, the philosopher does not possess Wisdom (the plenitude of self-consciousness—in fact omniscience); but (a Hegelian would have to qualify, at a given epoch) he is further advanced on the road which leads to Wisdom than any non-philosopher, and "noninitiate," the tyrant included. Also by definition, the philosopher is supposed to "dedicate his life" to the quest for wisdom.

It is in taking this double definition as our point of departure that we must ask ourselves "Can the philosopher govern man or participate in his government, in particular by giving concrete political advice to the tyrant, and does he want to?"

Let us first ask ourselves whether he can—or, more exactly, if he has, as philosopher, any advantage over the "noninitiate" (and the tyrant is a noninitiate) when it comes to questions of government.

I believe that the negative response which is so habitually made is based on a misunderstanding, on a total misapprehension of what philosophy is and what the philosopher is.

more of these traits are the philosopher's pure
philosopher - not even for his sake, good
for mankind.

For the purpose at hand it will be sufficient for me to recall three distinctive traits of the philosopher as opposed to the "uninitiate." In the first place, the philosopher is more expert in the art of *dialectic* or *discussion* in general: he sees better than his "uninitiate" interlocutor the insufficiencies of the other's argument, and he knows better how to make the most of his own arguments and how to refute the objections of others. In the second place, the art of dialectic enables the philosopher to free himself from *prejudices* further than the "uninitiate": he is thus more open to reality as it is, and he is less dependent on the way in which men, at a given historical moment, imagine that it is. In the third place, and finally, since he is more open to the real, he more closely approaches the concrete than the "uninitiate," who confines himself to abstractions, without, moreover, being aware of their abstract, even unreal, character.²

Now these three distinctive traits of the philosopher are so many advantages which he has in principle over the "uninitiate" when it comes to governing.

Strauss points out that Hiero, in recognizing Simonides' dialectical superiority, is suspicious of him, seeing in him a potential and formidable rival. And I think that Hiero is right. In point of fact, governmental action within an already constituted State is purely *discursive* in its origin, and the philosopher who is a past master of discourse or "dialectic" can just as well become master of the government. If Simonides was able to beat Hiero in their oratorical jousting, if he was able to "maneuver" him as he pleased, there is no reason at all why he could not beat him and outmaneuver him in the domain of politics; and, in particular, there is no reason why he could not

² This assertion appears paradoxical only if one does not bear in mind the precise sense of the words "concrete" and "abstract." One enters the "abstract" when one "neglects" or *abstracts* certain elements implied in the "concrete," that is, in the real. Thus, for example, one speaks of a tree abstracting from everything which is not it (the earth, the air, the planet Earth, the solar system, etc.), one is speaking of an abstraction which does not exist in reality (for the tree can exist only if there is the earth, the air, the rays of the sun, etc.). Hence all the particular sciences each have, in varying degrees, to do with abstractions. Similarly, an exclusively "national" political policy is necessarily abstract (exactly as a "pure" political policy which would, for example abstract from religion or art). The isolated "particular" is by definition *abstract*. It is precisely in seeking the concrete that the philosopher rises to the level of the "general ideas" which the "uninitiate" pretends to disdain.

replace him at the head of the government—should he ever feel the desire.

If the philosopher took power by means of his “dialectic,” he would exercise it better than any “uninitiate” whatsoever—and this not only because of his greater dialectical facility: his government would be better on account of the relative absence of *prejudices* and because of the relatively more *concrete* character of his thought.

Of course, when it is simply a matter of preserving an established state of things, without proceeding to “structural reform” or to “revolution,” the *unconscious* application of generally accepted prejudices does not present any major disadvantage. This is to say that in such situations one can, with no great harm, forego having philosophers in or near power. But where “structural reforms” or “revolutionary action” are objectively possible and hence necessary, the philosopher is particularly able to put them into operation or to give advice in this regard since, as opposed to the “uninitiate” ruler, he knows that what has to be reformed or combated are only prejudices; that is, something unreal and hence relatively unresistant.

Finally, in a “revolutionary” era as well as in a “conservative” period, it is always preferable for the rulers not to lose sight of the *concrete* reality. This reality, to be sure, offers extremely heavy going. This is why, in order to understand it with a view to its domination, the man of action is obliged (since he thinks and acts in time) to simplify it through abstractions: he makes cuts and isolates certain parts or certain aspects by “abstracting” them from the rest and treating them “in themselves”; but there is no reason to suppose that the philosopher would be unable to do as much. One could reproach him for his predilection for “general ideas,” as is generally done, only if they prevented him from seeing the particular *abstractions* that the “uninitiate” wrongly calls “concrete cases.” But such a reproach, if it were justified, could only be made against the contingent errors of the man, not against him as a philosopher. As such, the philosopher knows how to handle abstractions just as well as, if not better, than the “uninitiate.” But since he is aware of the fact that he has proceeded to an *abstraction*, he will be able to handle the “particular case” better than the “uninitiate” who believes that what is involved is a *concrete* reality which really is isolated from the rest and can be treated as such. The philosopher will thus see the

philosopher = quest for wisdom: as though S. had
not shown that precisely this is futile.

implications of the particular problem which escape the "uninitiate": he will see *farther* than the "uninitiate" in space as well as in time.

For all these reasons, to which many more could have been added, I believe, with Hiero, Xenophon, and Strauss, and contrary to a commonly accepted opinion, that the philosopher is perfectly capable of taking power and governing, or of participating in government—for example, by giving political advice to the tyrant.

The whole question then is whether or not he *wants* to. Now it is enough to ask this question (keeping in mind the *definition* of the philosopher) to perceive that it is extremely complex, in fact insoluble.

The complexity and the difficulty of this question consist in the banal fact that man *needs time* to think and to act and that the time he has at his disposal is in fact very limited.

It is this double fact—the essential temporality and finitude of man—which forces him to make a *choice* among his various existential possibilities (and gives *liberty* a *raison d'être*, rendering it, moreover, ontologically possible). In particular, it is on account of his own temporality and finitude that the philosopher is obliged to *choose* between the quest for wisdom, and (for example) political activity—even if this means only advising the tyrant. At first glance, in conformity to the very definition of the philosopher, he will devote "his whole time" to the quest for Wisdom, that being his supreme goal and value. He will renounce then not only "vulgar pleasures" but also all *action* properly so-called, including that of government, direct or indirect. Such was, at all events, the attitude taken by the "Epicurean" philosophers; and it is this "Epicurean" attitude which inspired the popular image of the philosophical existence. According to this image, the philosopher lives "outside the world": he retires into himself, isolates himself from other men, and has no interest in public life; he devotes all his time to the quest for "truth," which is pure "theory" or "contemplation" with no necessary ties to "action" of any kind. To be sure, a tyrant can get in the way of this philosopher. But such a philosopher would not get in the tyrant's way, for he does not have the slightest desire to meddle in the tyrant's affairs, even to the extent of merely advising him. All that this philosopher asks of the tyrant, the only thing that he "advises" him, is that he not concern himself with the life of the

philosopher—which is entirely devoted to the quest for a purely *theoretical* “truth” or an “ideal” of a strictly isolated life.

In the course of history two principal variants of this “Epicurean” attitude can be discerned. The pagan or aristocratic Epicurean, who is more or less rich, or in any case does not work for a living (generally finding a Maecenas to support him), isolates himself in a garden, which he would like the government to treat as an inviolable castle—from which, moreover, he will not make a single “sortie.” The Christian or bourgeois Epicurean, the more or less poor intellectual who must do something (write, teach, etc.) to assure his subsistence, cannot permit himself the luxury of the aristocratic Epicurean’s “splendid isolation.” So he replaces the private “garden” by what Pierre Bayle has so well described as the “Republic of Letters.” Here the atmosphere is less serene than in the “garden”; the struggle for life, “economic competition,” here reigns as master. But the enterprise remains essentially “peaceful” in the sense that the “bourgeois republican,” exactly like the “aristocratic chatelain” is ready to renounce all *active* interference in public affairs, asking in exchange that he be “tolerated” by the tyrant or the government: it should leave him in peace and permit him to exercise without encumbrance his trade of thinker, orator, or writer, it being understood that his thoughts, speeches (lectures or seminars), and writings will remain purely “theoretical” and he will do nothing which could lead directly or indirectly to any *action* in the proper sense of the term, and in particular to any kind of *political* action.

Of course, it is practically impossible for the philosopher to keep this (generally sincere) promise of noninterference in affairs of state, and this is why rulers, tyrants first of all, are always suspicious of these Epicurean “republics” or “gardens.” But this does not interest us at the moment. It is the attitude of the philosopher which does concern us, and that of the Epicurean appears to us at first sight irrefutable; implied, in fact, in the very definition of philosophy.

But at first sight only. For in fact the Epicurean attitude derives from the definition of philosophy as the quest for Wisdom or Truth only if one makes a supposition with regard to the latter which in no sense goes without saying, and which, from the point of view of the Hegelian conception, is even fundamentally erroneous. Actually, in order to justify the absolute *isolation* of the philosopher, it is necessary to maintain that Being is essentially immutable in itself,

eternally identical with itself, and completely revealed for all eternity in and by an intelligence perfect from the outset—this sufficient revelation of the nontemporal totality of Being is the Truth. Man (the philosopher) can *at any moment* participate in this Truth: whether consequent to an action coming from the Truth itself (divine revelation), or by his own individual effort of comprehension (Platonic “intellectual intuition”), an effort conditioned by nothing but the innate “talent” of the man who undertakes it and which depends neither on the localization of this man in space (in the state) nor on his position in time (in history). If this is the case, the philosopher can and must isolate himself from the changing and tumultuous world (which is only pure appearance), and live in a tranquil “garden,” or in case of real necessity, within a “Republic of Letters” where the intellectual disputes still are less “disturbing” than the political struggles outside. It is in the quietude of this isolation, in this total lack of interest in his fellows and in the whole of “society,” that the absolutely *egoistic* philosopher has the greatest chance of attaining the truth, to the quest for which he has decided to dedicate his whole life.³

But if one does not accept this *theistic* conception of Truth (and of Being), if one accepts the radical Hegelian atheism according to which Being itself is essentially temporal (Being-Becoming) and creates itself insofar as it is discursively revealed in the course of history (or insofar as it *is* history: revealed Being=Truth=Man=History), and if one does not want to sink into skeptical relativism which ruins the very idea of Truth and thus ruins the quest for it or philosophy, it is necessary to flee the absolute solitude and isolation of the “garden” as well as the restricted society (relative solitude and isolation) of the “Republic of Letters,” and, like Socrates, frequent not the “trees and cicadas” but the “citizens of the City” (cf. *Phaedrus*). If Being creates itself, (“becomes”) in the course of history, it is not by isolating oneself from history that one can reveal it (transform it by discourse into Truth that man possesses in the form of Wisdom). To do this the philosopher must, on the contrary, participate in history, and then one cannot see why he ought

³ Strauss, in agreement with Xenophon, seems to admit this radical egoism of the philosophical existence. He says in fact that “the wise man is as self-sufficient as is humanly possible.” The wise man is thus absolutely “disinterested” *vis-à-vis* other men.

not participate in it *actively*, for example by giving advice to the tyrant, given that he is, as a philosopher, more able to govern than any "uninitiate." The only thing which could keep him from it is lack of time. And so we come to the fundamental problem of the philosophical life, which the Epicureans wrongly believed they had disposed of.

I shall return later to this Hegelian problem of the philosophical existence. For the moment we must take a somewhat closer look at the Epicurean attitude. For it is open to criticism, even allowing the theistic conception of Being and Truth. Indeed, it involves and presupposes a most contestable conception of *Truth* (although generally recognized by pre-Hegelian philosophy), according to which "subjective certainty" (*Gewissheit*) coincides everywhere and always with "objective truth" (*Wahrheit*): one is supposed actually to possess the Truth (or a truth) as soon as he is subjectively "sure and certain" that he has it (by having a "clear and distinct idea," for example).

In other words, the isolated philosopher must necessarily hold that the necessary and sufficient criterion of truth consists in the feeling of "evidentness" which is supposed to be given by the "intellectual intuition" of the real and of Being, or which accompanies "clear and distinct ideas" or "axioms," or which is associated from the beginning with divine revelation. This criterion of "evidentness" was accepted by all "rationalist" philosophers from Plato to Husserl, passing by way of Descartes. Unfortunately it is itself not in the least bit "evident," and I think that it is invalidated by the sole fact that there have always been on earth *illuminati* and "false prophets" who have never had the least doubt concerning the truth of their "intuitions" or of the authenticity of the "revelations" they have received in one form or another. In short, the subjective "evidentness" that an "isolated" thinker might sense is invalidated as a criterion for Truth by the sole fact of the existence of madness or lunacy, which, as correct deduction from subjectively "evident" first principles, can be "systematic" or "logical."

Strauss seems to follow Xenophon (and the ancient tradition in general) in justifying (explaining) the indifference (the "egoism") and the pride of the *isolated* philosopher by the fact that he knows something more—and something different—than the "uninitiate" he disdains. But the lunatic who believes that he is made out of glass, or

who identifies himself with God the Father or Napoleon, also believes that he knows something more than anyone else. And we can assess his knowledge as lunacy or madness only because he is *entirely alone* in taking this knowledge (subjectively "evident," moreover) for a truth, the other lunatics themselves refusing to believe it. Likewise, it is only by seeing our ideas shared by others (or at least by *an* other) or accepted by them as debatable (even if only as erroneous ideas) that we can be sure of not finding ourselves in the domain of lunacy (though still not at all sure of being in the domain of Truth). Consequently, the Epicurean philosopher, entirely isolated in his "garden," could never know if he has attained Wisdom or sunk into lunacy, and as a philosopher he would then have to flee the "garden" and his solitude. In fact, recalling his Socratic origins, the Epicurean does not live in absolute solitude and receives into his "garden" certain philosophical *friends* in order to discuss things with them. From this point of view there is then no essential difference between the "Republic of Letters" of the bourgeois intellectual and the aristocratic "garden": the difference lies only in the number of the "elect." The "garden" and the "Republic," where one "discusses" from morning till night, both give a sufficient guarantee against the danger of lunacy. Although by taste, and as a result of their profession itself, the "lettered citizens" are never in agreement among themselves, they will always be unanimous when it comes to sending one of their number, properly, to an asylum. Thus, perhaps in spite of appearances, in the "garden" or in the "Republic," one can be sure of meeting only persons who are sometimes odd but essentially of sound mind (and only feigning madness on occasion to appear "original").

But the fact that one is never alone there is not the only thing the "garden" has in common with the "Republic." There is also the fact that the "mob" is excluded from it. To be sure, a "Republic of Letters" is generally more populated than an Epicurean "garden." But there is in either case a relatively small "elite" which has a marked tendency to withdraw into itself and to exclude the "uninitiated."

Here again Strauss seems to follow Xenophon (who is in agreement with the ancient tradition) and to justify this kind of behavior. The wise man, he says, "is satisfied with the approval of a small minority." He seeks only the approval of those who are

"worthy," and this cannot but be a very small number. Thus the philosopher will have recourse to *esoteric* instruction (preferably oral) which permits him, among other things, to choose the "better," while eliminating the "limited" who are incapable of understanding the dissimulated allusions and tacit implications.

I must say that here again I differ from Strauss and the ancient tradition that he would like to follow, and which rests, in my opinion, on an aristocratic *prejudice* (which characterizes, perhaps, a *conquering* people). For I believe that the idea and the practice of the "intellectual elite" involves a very serious danger that the philosopher as such should want to avoid at any cost.

The danger run by dwellers in various "gardens," "academies," "lyceums," and "Republics of Letters" stems from what is called the "cloistered mind." To be sure, the "cloister," which is a society, does exclude *lunacy*—which is essentially asocial. But far from excluding *prejudices*, it tends on the contrary to cultivate them by perpetuating them: it can easily happen that only those are admitted to the intimacy of the cloister who accept the prejudices on which the cloister prides itself. Now, philosophy is by definition something other than Wisdom: it necessarily involves "subjective certainties" which are not *the* Truth; or in other words are "prejudices." The duty of the philosopher is to abandon these prejudices as quickly and completely as possible. Any society which is closed upon itself and adopts a doctrine, any elite selected on the grounds of the teaching of some doctrine, tends to consolidate the prejudices involved in this doctrine. The philosopher who shuns prejudices would, then, have to try to live in the outside world (in the "market place" or "in the street," like Socrates) rather than in a "sect" or "cloister," whether "republican" or "aristocratic."⁴

Dangerous under any supposition, the sectarian or *cloistered* life is completely unacceptable for the philosopher who recognizes, with Hegel, that reality (at least *human* reality) is not given once and for all, but created itself in the course of time (at least in the course of *historical* time). For if this is the case, sooner or later the members of the cloister, isolated from the rest of the world and not really taking part in public life in its historical evolution, will be "left

⁴ As Queneau has recalled in *les Temps Modernes*, the philosopher is essentially a "voyou." (The French "voyou," which means a thug or hooligan, comes from the word "voie," meaning road or street. Hence anyone who hangs out in the streets may be called a "voyou."—Trans. note.)

behind by events." Thus, even what was "true" at a given time can later on become "false"—that is, transformed into a "prejudice," and only those in the cloister will fail to notice it.

But the question of the philosophical "elite" can be treated fundamentally only in the context of the general problem of "recognition" as related to the philosopher. Indeed, it is in this perspective that the question is raised by Strauss himself. And it is from this point of view that I should now like to speak.

According to Strauss, the essential difference between Hiero, the tyrant, and Simonides, the philosopher, lies in this: Hiero would like "to be *loved* by *human beings* as such," while Simonides "is satisfied by the admiration, the praise, the approval of a *small minority*." It is to win his subjects' *love* that Hiero must become their *benefactor*; Simonides lets himself be admired without *doing* anything to gain this admiration. In other words, Simonides is admired solely for his own *perfection*, while Hiero would like to be loved for his benefactions, even without being himself perfect. This is why the desire for admiration, apart from the desire for love, is "the natural foundation of the predominance of the desire for one's own perfection," while the need for love does not encourage a desire for self-perfection and hence is not a "philosophical" desire.

This conception of the difference between the philosopher and the tyrant (which is, indeed, neither Strauss' nor, according to him, Xenophon's) does not seem to me to be satisfactory.

If one recognizes (with Goethe and Hegel) that a man is *loved* solely because he *is* independent of what he *does* (a mother loves her son in spite of his faults), while "admiration" or "recognition" are evoked only by the *actions* of him one "admires" or "recognizes," it is clear that the tyrant—and the statesman in general—seeks *recognition* and not *love*: *love* thrives in the family, and it is to seek not the love, but the *recognition* of the citizens in the state that the young man leaves his family and devotes himself to the public life. It is rather Simonides, who would seek love if he had truly wanted to have a positive (even absolute) value attributed, not to his *acts*, but to his (perfect) *being*. But in fact it is nothing like that. Simonides wants to be admired for his *perfection* and not for his *being*, pure and simple—whatever that may be. Now love is precisely characterized by the fact that it attributes, *without reason*, a positive value to the beloved or to the *being* of the beloved. It is just this

viewpoint there is no essential difference between the tyrant and the philosopher. It is probably for this reason that Xenophon (according to Strauss) and Strauss himself do not align themselves with Simonides. According to Strauss, Xenophon opposes to Simonides Socrates, who is not in the least interested in "the admiration or the praise of others," while Simonides is interested only in that. And one has the impression that Strauss agrees with this Socratic attitude: to the extent that the philosopher seeks recognition and admiration, he is supposed to consider only his own recognition of his own value and his own admiration for himself.

As for me, I confess that I do not understand this very well, and I do not see how this could make it possible to find an *essential* difference between the philosopher (or the wise man) and the tyrant (or the statesman in general).

If one takes the attitude of Xenophon-Strauss' Socrates literally, one falls back again to the case of the *isolated* philosopher who is completely disinterested in the opinion that other men have of him. This attitude is not in itself contradictory ("absurd"), if the philosopher believes that he may attain the Truth by some direct personal revelation of Being or by an individual revelation proceeding from a transcendent God. But if he does believe this, he will have no philosophically valid reason for *communicating* his knowledge (orally or in writing) to others (unless it be for the purpose of obtaining their "recognition" or admiration, which is excluded by definition). Hence if he is truly a philosopher, he will not do so (the philosopher does not act "without a reason"). Hence we will know nothing about him; we will not even know whether or not he exists and, consequently, we will not know whether he is a philosopher or simply a lunatic. In my opinion, moreover, he will not even know it himself, since he will be deprived of any sort of social testing or criticism which alone is capable of weeding out "pathological" cases. In any event, his "solipsist" attitude, which excludes discussion, would be fundamentally anti-Socratic.

Let us grant then that "Socrates," who "discusses" with others, is in the highest degree interested in the opinion that others hold or will hold about what he says and does, at least to the extent to which they are, according to him, "competent." If "Socrates" is a true philosopher, he progresses toward wisdom (which implies knowledge and "virtue") and he is aware of his progress. If he is not

as though the person in discussing some-
thing is interested only in what others
think of him -- and not of the subject --

perverted by the prejudice of Christian humility to the point of being hypocritical with himself, he will be more or less *satisfied* with this progress, which is to say with himself: let us say, without being afraid of the word, that he will, more or less *admire* himself (above all if he considers himself more "advanced" than the *others*). If those who express opinions about him are "competent," they will appreciate him in the same way he appreciates himself (supposing that he is not deluding himself). That is to say, if they are not blinded by envy they will admire him to the same extent he admires himself. And if "Socrates" is not a "Christian," he will acknowledge (to himself and to others) that the admiration of others brings (a certain) "satisfaction" and (a certain) "pleasure." To be sure, this does not mean that the fact of his having (consciously) made progress on the road to Wisdom does not bring "Socrates" pleasure and satisfaction independent of that brought by the admiration of others and his right to admire himself: everyone is aware of the "pure" joy that comes from the acquisition of knowledge, and they are all aware of the "disinterested satisfaction" that comes from the feeling of "duty done." And neither can one say that it is *in principle* impossible to seek knowledge and do one's duty without having as the motive the pleasure which results from it. Is it really impossible to devote oneself to sport just for "the love of it," and without especially seeking, in a *competition*, the "pleasure" which comes from the "glory of the victor"?

On the contrary, it can be said that all of these things are in fact inseparable. Certainly "in theory" all sorts of subtle distinctions are possible, but "in practice" there is no way of eliminating one of these elements while retaining the others. This is to say that there can be no verifying experiment in this area and hence, in the scientific sense of the term, nothing can be *known* about the question.

It is known that there are pleasures which have nothing to do with knowledge or virtue. It is also known that men have at times renounced these pleasures to devote themselves fully to the quest for truth or the exercise of virtue. But since this quest and this exercise are in fact inseparably linked with *sui generis* "pleasures," there is absolutely no way of knowing if in fact it is a choice between different "pleasures" which makes them act this way, or a choice between "pleasure" and "duty" or between "pleasure" and "knowledge." Now these *sui generis* "pleasures" are in turn *inseparably*

linked with the specific "pleasure" which comes from self-satisfaction or self-admiration: whatever the Christians say, one cannot be wise and virtuous (that is, in fact wiser and more virtuous than others, or at least certain others) without deriving therefrom a certain "satisfaction" and a sort of "pleasure."⁵ Thus one cannot know whether in fact the "primary motive" of conduct is the "pure" joy which comes from Wisdom (knowledge + virtue), or whether it is the "pleasure," at times condemned, which comes from the Wise Man's self-admiration (conditioned or not by the admiration in which he is held by others).

*penite
un-
Socrates*

The same ambiguity appears when one considers "Socrates" in his relations with others. We have accepted the fact that he is interested in the opinion others have of him to the extent that it enables him to test whether or not the opinion he has of himself is well founded. But all the rest is ambiguous. One can maintain, as Xenophon-Strauss seem to, that Socrates is interested only in the "theoretical" judgments made about him by others and is completely indifferent to the *admiration* they may have for him: he derives his "pleasure" only from *self-admiration* (which determines, or only accompanies, his philosophical activity). But one might just as well say that the self-admiration of a man who is not mad implies and necessarily presupposes the admiration of others; that a "normal" man cannot be truly "satisfied" with himself without being not merely judged, but also "recognized" by the others or at least by certain others. One might even go so far as to say that the pleasure involved in self-admiration is relatively valueless when compared with that derived from the admiration of others. These are some of the *possible* psychological analyses of the phenomenon of "recognition," but since there is no possibility of making experiments in separating

⁵ Moreover, the Christians only succeeded in "spoiling this pleasure" by playing on the disagreeable sentiment which appears in the form of "jealousy" or "envy," among others: one is discontent with himself (at times he even despises himself) when he is "worse than another." Now the Christian always has at his disposal Another Who is better than he, this Other being God Himself, Who, to facilitate the comparison, made Himself man. To the extent that this man to whom he compares himself and whom he tries in vain to imitate is for him a God, the Christian feels neither "envy" nor "jealousy" toward him, but limits himself to the pure and simple "inferiority complex" which is nonetheless sufficient to prevent him from recognizing his own wisdom or virtue and rejoicing in it.

them, it is impossible to come to any definite decision in favor of any one of them.

Certainly it would be quite wrong to suppose that "Socrates" seeks knowledge and exercises virtue *solely* for the sake of the recognition of others. For experience shows that science may be pursued out of pure love even on a desert isle with no hope of return, and that "virtue" may be practiced without witness (human or even divine), simply from fear of falling in one's own estimation. But nothing prevents us from asserting that, when "Socrates" *communicates* with others and exercises his virtue *publicly*, he does so not only for the purpose of testing himself but also (and perhaps even above all) for the sake of outward "recognition." By what right can we say that he does not seek this "recognition," since in fact he *necessarily* finds it?

To tell the truth, all these distinctions make sense only if one accepts the existence of a God who sees clearly into the hearts of men and judges them according to their intentions (which may, moreover, be unconscious). If one is truly an atheist, none of this makes sense. For, evidently, only introspection could then provide the elements of an answer. Now, as long as a man is alone in knowing something, he can never be sure that he truly *knows* it. If, as a consistent atheist, one replaces God (taken as consciousness and will surpassing individual human consciousness and will) by Society (the State) and History, one must say that whatever is, in fact, out of the range of social and historical verification is forever relegated to the domain of *opinion* (*doxa*).

This is why I do not agree with Strauss when he says that Xenophon posed the problem of the relationship between pleasure and virtue in a radical way. I do not agree for the simple reason that I do not think that (from the atheistic point of view) there is a problem there which could be resolved by some form of knowledge (*epistēmē*). More exactly, this problem could be solved in several possible ways, none of which would be truly *certain*. It is impossible to know whether the philosopher (wise man) seeks knowledge and practices virtue "for themselves" (or "out of duty") or whether he does it for the sake of the "pleasure" (joy) he derives from doing so, or—finally—whether he acts in this way in order to feel admiration for himself (conditioned or not by admiration on the part of others). This question obviously cannot be settled "from outside," and thus

gessane
unklar
das ist
Hörsen

there is no way of verifying the "subjective certainty" given by introspection; nor will there be any way of deciding between these "certainties" if they are discordant.⁶

What should be remembered in all that has gone before is that the "Epicurean" conception of certain philosophers is in no way warranted by a total and consistent system of thought. This conception becomes contestable as soon as one takes account of the problem of "recognition," as I have just done, and it is unreliable even when one limits oneself to the problem of the criterion of truth, as I did at first.

To the extent that the philosopher sees in "discussion" (dialogue, dialectic) a method of investigation and a criterion of truth, he must necessarily "educate" his interlocutors. And we have seen that he has no reason to limit *a priori* the number of his possible interlocutors. This is to say that the philosopher must be a pedagogue and try to extend his pedagogical activity without limit (directly or indirectly). In so doing, he will sooner or later encroach on the field of action of the statesman or tyrant who are themselves, more or less consciously, also "educators."

As a general rule, the interference of the philosopher's pedagogical activity with that of the tyrant takes the form of a more-or-less acute conflict. "Corruption of the youth" was the principal charge in Socrates' indictment. The philosopher-pedagogue thus will naturally be inclined to try to influence the tyrant (or government

⁶ Observation of "conduct" cannot *settle* the question. But the fact remains that in observing philosophers (for want of wise men) one does not really have the impression that they are insensitive to praise, or even to flattery. One can even say that they are, like all intellectuals, more vain on the whole than men of action. And, moreover, one can readily see why. Men do a particular thing in order to *succeed* or "to win success" (and not to fail). Now, the success of an undertaking based on action may be measured by its objective "good results" (a bridge which does not collapse, a business that makes money, a war won, a state that is strong and prosperous, etc.), independent of the opinion that others have of it, while the success of a book or of an intellectual discourse is nothing but the recognition of its value by others. The intellectual depends then very much more than the man of action (the tyrant included) on the admiration of others, and he is more sensitive than the latter to the absence of this admiration. Without it, it is absolutely impossible for him to admire himself with any valid reason, while the man of action can admire himself on account of his objective—even solitary—"successes." And this is why, as a general rule, the intellectual who does nothing but talk and write is more vain than the man who, in the full sense of the word, acts.

in general) with a view to obtaining from him the creation of conditions which permit the exercise of philosophical pedagogy. But in fact the state is itself a pedagogical institution. The pedagogy exercised and controlled by the government constitutes an integral part of governmental activity in general, and it is determined by the very structure of the state. Consequently, to want to influence the government with a view to the establishment or toleration of a philosophical pedagogy is to want to influence the government in general—to want to determine or codetermine its policy as such. The philosopher cannot give up pedagogy; in fact, the “success” of his philosophical pedagogy is the sole “objective” criterion of the truth of the philosopher’s doctrine: the fact of his having disciples (in a broad or narrow sense) is his guarantee against the danger of lunacy, and the “success” of his disciples in private and public life is the “objective” proof of the (relative) “truth” of his doctrine, at least in the sense of its adequacy to the given historical reality.

If one wants something more than the subjective criteria of “evidentness” and “revelation” (which do not exclude the danger of lunacy), then it is impossible to be a philosopher without at the same time wanting to be a philosophical *pedagogue*. And if the philosopher does not want artificially or unduly to restrict the extent of his pedagogical activity (and thereby risk being subject to the prejudices of the cloister), he will necessarily have a marked tendency to participate, one way or another, in government as a whole, so that the state may be organized and governed in such a way that his philosophical pedagogy is possible and effectual.

It is probably for this reason (more or less consciously acknowledged) that most philosophers, the greatest included, have given up their “Epicurean” isolation and undertaken some sort of political activity, either by personal interventions or by means of their writings. Plato’s voyages to Syracuse and the collaboration between Spinoza and DeWitt are well-known examples of direct intervention. And it is well known that nearly all philosophers have published works dealing with the State and with government.⁷

But it is here that there appears the conflict determined by the temporality and finitude of man of which I spoke above. On the one hand, the supreme goal of the philosopher is the quest for Wisdom or Truth; and this quest, by definition never completed by a philoso-

⁷ The case of Descartes is too complicated to discuss here.

pher, is supposed to take *all of his time*. On the other hand, the governing of a State, however small it may be, also requires time—and a great deal of it. To tell the truth, the governing of a state also takes all of a man's time.

Not being able to devote *all their time* to philosophy and government together, philosophers have generally sought a compromise solution. While wishing to concern themselves with politics, they did not relinquish their strictly philosophical concern and consented only to limit a little the time that they devoted to it. This being the case, they gave up the idea of taking the government of the State in hand and satisfied themselves with devoting the small amount of time which they took away from philosophy to the *advice* they gave (orally or in writing) to the rulers of the day.

Unfortunately, this compromise proved unworkable. To be sure, philosophy did not greatly suffer from the political “distractions” of philosophers. But the direct and immediate effect of their political advice was exactly nil.

To tell the truth, the philosophers who were satisfied with giving written—indeed “bookish”—advice did not take their setback as a tragedy. Generally speaking, they had enough good sense not to expect that the powers of their world would read their writings, and even less that they would be inspired by them in their daily tasks. In resigning themselves to a purely scriptural activity they were already resigned to seeing this activity for the time being politically ineffectual. But those who deigned to take the trouble of giving political advice personally may have taken rather badly the lack of eagerness with which their advice was followed, and they may have had the impression of having truly “wasted their time.”

Of course, we do not know Plato's reactions after his Sicilian failure. The fact that he renewed his abortive attempt seems to show that, in his opinion, the blame had to be shared and that he himself, acting differently, could have done better and had better results. But the common opinion of more-or-less philosophical intellectuals generally heaps opprobrium and contempt on these reticent rulers. I persist in believing that they are entirely wrong in so doing.

To begin with, there is a tendency to blame the “tyrannical” character of the government which is not sensitive to philosophical advice. It seems to me that the philosopher is in a particularly bad

position to criticize tyranny as such. On the one hand the philosopher-advisor is, by definition, in a great rush: he would like very much to contribute to the reform of the state, but he would like to do so while losing the least possible amount of time. If he wants to succeed *quickly* he will have to address himself to the tyrant in preference to the democratic leader. Actually, philosophers who want to *act* in the political present have, through all time, been drawn to tyranny. When there was a powerful and effective tyrant contemporary with the philosopher, it is precisely on him that the latter lavished his advice, even if the tyrant lived in a foreign land. On the other hand, one can scarcely imagine a philosopher himself becoming a statesman (*per impossibile*) except in the shape of some sort of "tyrant." In a hurry to get politics "over with" and return to more noble occupations, he will scarcely be endowed with any exceptional political patience. Despising the "great mass," indifferent to its praises, he will not want patiently to play the role of a "democratic" ruler, attentive to the opinions and desires of the "mob" and the "active partisans." Moreover, how could he *rapidly* fulfill his program of reforms (which is necessarily radical and opposed to the commonly accepted ideas) without having recourse to political procedures which have always been burdened with the name of "tyranny"? In fact, as soon as a philosopher, not occupying himself with affairs of state, so oriented one of his disciples, this latter—Alcibiades, for example—immediately had recourse to typically "tyrannical" methods. Inversely, when a statesman openly attached himself to a philosophy, it was as a "tyrant" that he acted in accordance with it, just as energetic "tyrants" have generally had philosophical origins, more or less direct, and more or less conscious and avowed.

In short, of all possible statesmen, it is the tyrant who is incontestably the most apt to receive and apply the advice of the philosopher. If, having received the advice, he does not apply it, then it must be that he has very good reasons for not doing so. In my opinion these reasons would be, moreover, even more valid in the case of a "nontyrannical" ruler.

I have already indicated what these reasons are. A statesman, whoever he may be, is intrinsically unable to follow "utopian" advice: since he can *act* only in the *present* he cannot take ideas into consideration which have no direct ties with the given concrete situation.

or hypocritical to submit "general ideas" to the tyrant and to give him "utopian" advice, the philosopher, resigning, would leave the tyrant "in peace" and would spare him any further advice *and any further criticism*: especially in the case in which he knows that the tyrant is pursuing the same goal that he himself pursued during his career as advisor—a career he voluntarily ruined.

This is to say that the conflict of the philosopher faced with the tyrant is nothing else than the conflict of the intellectual faced with action or, more exactly, faced with the inclination, or even the necessity, of acting. This conflict is, according to Hegel, the only authentic tragedy that is played in the Christian or bourgeois world: the tragedy of Hamlet and of Faust. It is a *tragic* conflict because it is a conflict with no way out, a problem with no possible solution.

Faced with the impossibility of acting politically without giving up philosophy, the philosopher gives up political action. But has he reasons for doing it?

The preceding considerations can by no means be used to "justify" this choice. By definition the philosopher ought not make up his mind without "sufficient reason," nor take a position which is "unjustifiable" within the context of a system of coherent thought. It thus remains for us to see how the philosopher could, in his own eyes, "justify" his renunciation of political *action* in the precise sense of the term.

The first "justification" one would be tempted to make is easy: the fact that he has not solved a problem need not disturb the philosopher. Unlike a wise man, who possesses Wisdom, the philosopher lives in a world of questions which, for him, remain open. To be a philosopher, it is enough if he is aware of the existence of these questions and if he . . . *tries* to solve them. The best method to use (according to the Platonists, at least) is that of "dialectic"—"meditation" tested and stimulated by "dialogue." In other words, the best method is "discussion." In our case, instead of giving political advice to the tyrant of the day or, on the contrary, giving up all criticism of the existing government, the philosopher could then be satisfied with "discussing" the question of knowing whether he himself ought to govern or whether he ought only to advise the tyrant; or whether he ought not rather abstain from all political action, and even give up all concrete criticism of the government, devoting all his time to theoretical pursuits of a more "elevated"

and less "mundane" character. What philosophers have forever been doing is discussing this question. In particular, it is what Xenophon has done in his dialogue, Strauss in his book, and I myself in the present critical essay. Thus everything seems to be going along very nicely.

All the same, one cannot help being a bit disappointed by the fact that this "discussion" of the problem which engrosses us, having gone on for more than two thousand years, has not led to any *solution* whatever.

Perhaps one could try to *resolve* the question, going beyond *discussion* with philosophers and employing the "objective" method used by Hegel, in order to arrive at "indisputable" solutions.

This is the method of *historical verification*.

For Hegel, the outcome of the classical "dialectic" of the "dialogue," that is, the victory gained in a purely *verbal* "discussion," is not a sufficient criterion of the truth. In other words, discursive "dialectic" as such cannot, according to him, lead to any *definitive* solution of a problem (any solution, that is, which remains invariable for *all* time to come). This is for the simple reason that if one is content to *talk* one will never be able definitively to "eliminate" either the contradictor or, consequently, the contradiction itself, for to *refute* someone is not necessarily to *convince* him. "Contradiction" or "controversy" (between Man and Nature on the one hand, between men, or rather between a man and his social and historical milieu, on the other) can be "dialectically done away with" (that is, *done away with* insofar as they are "false," but *preserved* insofar as they are "true," and *raised* to a higher level of "discussion") only to the extent that they are played out on the *historical* terrain of *active social* life where one argues by *acts* of Labor (against Nature) and Struggle (against men). To be sure, Truth emerges from this active "dialogue," this historical dialectic, only at the moment when the latter is completed, that is to say, at the moment when history comes to its final conclusion in and by the universal and homogeneous state which, implying the "satisfaction" of the citizens, excludes all possibility of any negating *action* and hence of all *negation* in general and, consequently, of any new "discussion" of what has already been established. But, even without wishing to assume with the author of the *Phenomenology*

If history is virtually "over" and it is history
that solves all problems, there is no philo-
sophy as more - hence its problems are also "over."

of *Mind* that history is today already virtually "over," one can say that if the "solution" to a problem has in fact been historically or socially "valid" for the whole duration of time up to the present, one has the *right*, until (historical) *proof* to the contrary, to consider it philosophically "valid," in spite of the philosophers' continuance of the "discussion." In doing so, it can be assumed that history, at the opportune moment, will take it upon itself to put an end to the indefinite continuation of the "philosophical discussion" of a problem that it has already virtually "resolved."

Let us see then if the comprehension of our past history permits us to resolve the problem of the relation between wisdom and tyranny and to determine thus the "reasonable," that is to say "philosophical," conduct which the philosopher ought to maintain toward government.

A priori it seems plausible that history should be able to resolve the question or conflict that the *individual* meditations of philosophers (mine included) have been unable to decide up until now. Indeed, we have seen that this conflict itself, as well as its "tragic" character, has its source in the fact of *finitude*, the fact, that is, of the *finite temporality* of man in general and of the philosopher in particular. If he were *eternal*, in the sense that he did not need time to act and think, or had an unlimited amount of time at his disposal in which to do it, the question would never even arise (just as it never arises for God). Now, history *transcends* the finite duration of man's individual existence. To be sure, it is not "eternal" in the classical sense of the term, since it is only the integration with respect to time of *temporal* acts and thoughts. But if one holds, with Hegel (and anyone who would like to be able to hold, as he does, that there is a meaning and direction to history, and that there is such a thing as historical progress, ought to have agreed with him on this point), that history can be completed in and by itself, and that "absolute knowledge" (= wisdom or discursive truth) results from the "comprehension" or "explanation" of history as integral (or integrated in and by this very knowledge) by a "coherent discourse" (*Logos*) which is "circular" or "uni-total" in the sense that it exhausts all the possibilities (assumed to be *finite*) of "rational" thought (that is, thought which is not in itself contradictory)—if one grants all this, I say, one can equate history (completed and integrated in and by "absolute" discursive knowledge) and *eternity*,

lasted to the present, but the universal *Church*, which is an entirely different thing from a *state*, properly speaking. One can say then that it is only the *philosophical* idea going back to Socrates which, when all is said and done, acts *politically* on earth and which continues today to determine the political acts and entities aiming at the actualization of the *universal* state or empire.

But the political goal that humanity is at present pursuing (or combating) is not only that of the politically universal state; it is just as much the socially *homogeneous* state or "classless society."

Here again the remote origins of the political idea are found in the *religious* universalist conception which is already found in Ikhnaton and culminates in St. Paul. It is the idea of the *fundamental equality* of all those who believe in a single God. This transcendental conception of social equality differs radically from the Socratic-Platonic conception of the identity of beings having the same *immanent* "essence." For Alexander, a disciple of the Greek philosophers, the Hellene and the barbarian have the same title to political citizenship in the Empire, to the extent that they HAVE the same human (moreover, rational, logical, discursive) "nature" (= essence, idea, form, etc.) or are "essentially" *identified* with each other as the result of a direct (= "immediate") "mixture" of their innate qualities (realized by means of biological union). For St. Paul there is no "essential" (irreducible) difference between the Greek and the Jew because they both can BECOME Christians, and this not by "mixing" their Greek and Jewish "qualities" but by *negating* them both and "synthesizing" them in and by this very negation into a homogeneous unity not innate or given, but (freely) *created* by "conversion." Because of the *negating* character of the Christian "synthesis," there are no longer any incompatible "qualities" or "contradictory" (= mutually exclusive) "qualities." For Alexander, a Greek philosopher, there was no possible "mixture" of Masters and Slaves, for they were "opposites." Thus his *universal* state, which did away with *race*, could not be *homogeneous* in the sense that it would equally do away with "class." For St. Paul, on the contrary, the negation (*active* to the extent that "faith" is an *act*, being "dead" without "acts") of the opposition between pagan mastery and servitude could engender an "essentially" *new* Christian unity (which is, moreover, active or acting, or "emotional," and not purely rational or discursive, that is, "logical") which could serve as the

basis not only for political *universality* but also for the social *homogeneity* of the state.

But in fact, universality and homogeneity on a transcendental, theistic, religious foundation did not and could not engender a State, properly speaking. They served as the foundation only for the "mystical body" of the universal and homogeneous *Church*, and they are supposed to be fully actualized only in the *beyond* (in the "Kingdom of Heaven," provided one abstracts from the *permanent* existence of hell). Guided solely by the double influence of ancient pagan *philosophy* and Christian *religion*, politics has in fact pursued only the goal of the *universal* State, without, moreover, ever having attained it up to now.

But in our time the universal and *homogeneous* state has also become a *political* goal. Now here again, politics is a tributary of *philosophy*. To be sure, this philosophy (being the *negation* of religious Christianity) is in turn a tributary of St. Paul (who, since "negated," must have been presupposed). But it is only from the moment when modern philosophy could *secularize* (= rationalize, transform into coherent discourse) the religious Christian idea of human homogeneity that this idea could have a real *political* bearing.

In the case of social homogeneity, the relations between philosophy and politics are less direct than in the case of political universality, but they are, on the other hand, absolutely certain. In the case of universality, we know only that the statesman who actualized the first effective step had been educated by a disciple at the second remove from the theoretical initiator and we can only assume the filiation of ideas. In the case of homogeneity, we know, on the other hand, that there was a filiation of ideas in spite of the absence of a direct oral tradition. The tyrant who here inaugurated the *real* political movement consciously followed the instruction of the intellectual who deliberately transformed, with an eye to its political application, the idea of the philosopher in such a way that it ceased to be a "utopian" ideal (wrongly conceived, moreover, as describing an already existing political reality: the empire of Napoleon) and became a political theory on the basis of which one could give concrete advice to tyrants, advice which they could follow. Thus, while recognizing that the tyrant "deformed" (*verkehrt*) the philosophical idea, we know that he did so only in

whom does he mean? Stalin?

beyond either this reality itself or the philosophical idea which corresponds to it. In order that there be "going beyond" or philosophical *progress* toward Wisdom (= Truth), the political given (which *can* be negated) must be actually *negated* by action (Struggle and Labor), so that a new historical or political (that is to say human) reality may, in the first place, be *created* in and by this same active negation of the already existing and philosophically comprehended real, and, afterward, comprehended within the framework of a new philosophy. This new philosophy will preserve only that part of the old which has survived the test of the creative political negation of the historical reality which corresponded to it; and it will transform or "sublimate" the part preserved, synthesizing it (in and by a coherent discourse) with its own revelation of the new historical reality. It is only by proceeding in this way that philosophy will make its way toward absolute knowledge or Wisdom: which it will be able to attain only when it has accomplished all possible active (political) negations.

In short, if philosophers gave no political advice at all to statesmen, in the sense that it would be impossible to draw from their ideas (directly or indirectly) any political teaching whatsoever, there would be no historical *progress*, and hence no history in the proper sense of the word. But if the statesmen did not, by daily political action, at some time actualize this "advice," grounded in philosophy, there would be no philosophical *progress* (toward Wisdom or Truth) and hence no philosophy in the precise sense of this term. *Any* number of books called "philosophical" would of course be written but there would never be *the* book ("bible") of Wisdom which could *definitively* replace the one with that title which we have had for some two thousand years. Now, wherever it has been a matter of actively negating a given political reality in its very "essence," we have in the course of history always seen the appearance of political *tyrants*. One can say then that if the appearance of the reforming tyrant is inconceivable without the prior existence of the philosopher, the coming of the wise man must necessarily be preceded by the revolutionary political action of the tyrant (who will realize the universal and homogeneous State).

Be that as it may, when I confront the reflections inspired by Xenophon's dialogue and by Strauss' interpretation with the lessons

which emerge from history, I have the impression that the relations between the philosopher and the tyrant have always, in the course of historical evolution, been "reasonable": on the one hand the "reasonable" advice of philosophers has always been *sooner or later* actualized by the tyrants; on the other hand, the philosophers and the tyrants have always behaved toward each other "conformably to reason."

The tyrant is perfectly right in not trying to apply a utopian philosophical theory, that is, a philosophical theory without direct ties to the political reality with which the tyrant has to deal: for the tyrant has no time to fill up the *theoretical* lacunae between utopia and reality. As for the philosopher, he too is right when he refuses to push his theories to the point where they meet the questions raised by current political affairs: if he did, he would have no more time for philosophy; he would cease to be a philosopher and then he would no longer have any right to give *politico-philosophical* advice to the tyrant. The philosopher is right in leaving the responsibility for reconciling his philosophical ideas and the political reality on the theoretical level to a pleiad of intellectuals of all tendencies (more or less spread out in time and space); the intellectuals are right in harnessing themselves to this task and, should the case arise, in giving advice to tyrants when they have reached the level of the concrete problems posed by current political affairs with their theories; the tyrant is right in following this advice (and in listening to it) only when it has reached this level. In short, in historical *reality* all behave in a *reasonable* way, and it is by behaving in a *reasonable* way that they all at last obtain, directly or indirectly, *real* results.

It would, on the other hand, be perfectly *unreasonable* for the statesman to want to deny the philosophical value of a theory only because it cannot be applied to a given political situation (which, of course, does not mean that the statesman may not have politically valid reasons for forbidding this theory within the context of that situation). It would be just as *unreasonable* for the philosopher to condemn tyranny "on principle," since a "tyranny" can be "condemned" or "justified" only within the context of a concrete political situation. Speaking generally, it would be *unreasonable* if the philosopher should, in terms of his philosophy alone, wish to criticize in any way whatsoever the concrete political measures taken by the

statesman, tyrant or not, especially in the case in which he takes them so that the very ideal recommended by the philosophers may be actualized in the future. In either case the judgments passed on the philosophy or the policy would be *incompetent* judgments. Now, as such, this judgment would be more excusable (but not more justified) in the mouth of the "uninitiate" statesman or tyrant, "unreasonable" by definition, than in that of the philosopher. As for the "mediating" intellectuals, they would be *unreasonable* if they did not recognize the right of the philosopher to judge the philosophical value of their theories or the right of the statesman to select those of them which he judges actualizable under the given circumstances and discard the rest—even "tyrannically."

Speaking generally, it is history itself which attends to "judging" (by "results" or "success") the acts which statesmen or tyrants perform (consciously or not) in terms of the ideas of philosophers, adapted for practice by intellectuals.

precisely for this reason, the first article of the constitution of the Republic of Letters stipulates that no philosophic persuasion must be taken too seriously or that every philosophic persuasion must be treated with as much respect as any other. The Republic of Letters is relativistic. Or if it tries to avoid this pitfall, it becomes eclectic. A certain vague middle line, which is perhaps barely tolerable for the most easy-going members of the different persuasions if they are in their drowsiest mood, is set up as The Truth or as Common Sense; the substantive and irrepressible conflicts are dismissed as merely "semantic." Whereas the sect is narrow because it is passionately concerned with the true issues, the Republic of Letters is comprehensive because it is indifferent to the true issues: it prefers agreement to truth or to the quest for truth. If we have to choose between the sect and the Republic of Letters, we must choose the sect. Nor will it do that we abandon the sect in favor of the party or more precisely—since a party which is not a mass party is still something like a sect—of the mass party. For the mass party is nothing but a sect with a disproportionately long tail. The "subjective certainty" of the members of the sect, and especially of the weaker brethren, may be increased if the tenets of the sect are repeated by millions of parrots instead of by a few dozens of human beings, but this obviously has no effect on the claim of the tenets in question to "objective truth." Much as we loathe the snobbish silence or whispering of the sect, we loathe even more the savage noise of the loudspeakers of the mass party. The problem stated by Kojève is not then solved by dropping the distinction between those who are able and willing to think and those who are not. If we must choose between the sect and the party, we must choose the sect.

But must we choose the sect? The decisive premise of Kojève's argument is that philosophy "implies necessarily 'subjective certainties' which are not 'objective truths' or, in other words, which are prejudices." But philosophy in the original meaning of the term is nothing but knowledge of one's ignorance. The "subjective certainty" that one does not know coincides with the "objective truth" of that certainty. But one cannot know that one does not know without knowing what one does not know. What Pascal said with antiphilosophic intent about the impotence of both dogmatism and skepticism, is the only possible justification of philosophy which as

can be characterized by "love" and the ruler by "honor." But if, as we have seen, the philosopher is related to the ruler in a way comparable to that in which the ruler is related to the family man, there can be no difficulty in characterizing the ruler, in contradistinction to the philosopher, by "love" and the philosopher by "honor." Furthermore, prior to the coming of the universal state, the ruler is concerned with, and cares for, his own subjects as distinguished from the subjects of other rulers, just as the mother is concerned with, and cares for, her own children as distinguished from the children of other mothers; and the concern with, or care for, what is one's own is what is frequently meant by "love." The philosopher on the other hand is concerned with what can never become private or exclusive property. We cannot then accept Kojève's doctrine regarding love. According to him, we love someone "because he *is* and independently of what he *does*." He refers to the mother who loves her son in spite of all his faults. But, to repeat, the mother loves her son, not because he is, but because he is her own, or because he has the quality of being her own. (Compare Plato, *Republic* 330c3-6.)

But if the philosopher is radically detached from human beings as human beings, why does he communicate his knowledge, or his questionings, to others? Why was the same Socrates, who said that the philosopher does not even know the way to the market place, almost constantly in the market place? Why was the same Socrates, who said that the philosopher barely knows whether his neighbor is a human being, so well informed about so many trivial details regarding his neighbors? The philosopher's radical detachment from human beings must then be compatible with an attachment to human beings. While trying to transcend humanity (for wisdom is divine) or while trying to make it his sole business to die and to be dead to all human things, the philosopher cannot help living as a human being who as such cannot be dead to human concerns, although his soul will not be in these concerns. The philosopher cannot devote his life to his own work if other people do not take care of the needs of his body. Philosophy is possible only in a society in which there is "division of labor." The philosopher needs the services of other human beings and has to pay for them with services of his own if he does not want to be reproved as a thief or fraud. But man's need for other men's services is founded on the fact that

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man is by nature a social animal or that the human individual is not self-sufficient. There is therefore a natural attachment of man to man which is prior to any calculation of mutual benefit. This natural attachment to human beings is weakened in the case of the philosopher by his attachment to the eternal beings. On the other hand, the philosopher is immune to the most common and the most powerful dissolvent of man's natural attachment to man, the desire to have more than one has already and in particular to have more than others have; for he has the greatest self-sufficiency which is humanly possible. Hence the philosopher will not hurt anyone. While he cannot help being more attached to his family and his city than to strangers, he is free from the delusions bred by collective egoisms; his benevolence or humanity extends to all human beings with whom he comes into contact. (*Memorabilia* I 2.60-61; 6.10; IV 8.11.) Since he fully realizes the limits set to all human action and all human planning (for what has come into being must perish again), he does not expect salvation or satisfaction from the establishment of the simply best social order. He will therefore not engage in revolutionary or subversive activity. But he will try to help his fellow man by mitigating, as far as in him lies, the evils which are inseparable from the human condition. (Plato, *Theaetetus* 176a5-b1; *Seventh Letter* 331c7-d5; Aristotle, *Politics* 1301a39-b2.) In particular, he will give advice to his city or to other rulers. Since all advice of this kind presupposes comprehensive reflections which as such are the business of the philosopher, he must first have become a political philosopher. After this preparation he will act as Simonides did when he talked to Hiero, or as Socrates did when he talked to Alcibiades, Critias, Charmides, Critobulus, the younger Pericles and others.

The attachment to human beings as human beings is not peculiar to the philosopher. As philosopher, he is attached to a particular type of human being, namely to actual or potential philosophers or to his friends. His attachment to his friends is deeper than his attachment to other human beings, even to his nearest and dearest, as Plato shows with almost shocking clarity in the *Phaedo*. The philosopher's attachment to his friends is based in the first place on the need which arises from the deficiency of "subjective certainty." Yet we see Socrates frequently engaged in conversations from which he cannot have benefited in any way. We shall try to explain what

ficiency of "subjective certainty" or by ambition, to strive for universal recognition. His friends alone suffice to remedy that deficiency, and no shortcomings in his friends can be remedied by having recourse to utterly incompetent people. And as for ambition, as a philosopher, he is free from it.

According to Kojève, one makes a gratuitous assumption in saying that the philosopher as such is free from ambition or from the desire for recognition. Yet the philosopher as such is concerned with nothing but the quest for wisdom and kindling or nourishing the love of wisdom in those who are by nature capable of it. We do not have to pry into the heart of any one in order to know that, insofar as the philosopher, owing to the weakness of the flesh, becomes concerned with being recognized by others, he ceases to be a philosopher. According to the strict view of the classics he turns into a sophist. The concern with being recognized by others is perfectly compatible with, and in fact required by, the concern essential to the ruler who is the ruler of others. But concern with being recognized by others has no necessary connection with the quest for the eternal order. Therefore, concern with recognition necessarily detracts from the singleness of purpose which is characteristic of the philosopher. It blurs his vision. This fact is not at variance with the other fact that high ambition is frequently a sign by which one can recognize the potential philosopher. But to the extent to which high ambition is not transformed into full devotion to the quest for wisdom, and to the pleasures which accompany that quest, he will not become an actual philosopher. One of the pleasures accompanying the quest for truth comes from the awareness of progress in that quest. Xenophon goes so far as to speak of the self-admiration of the philosopher. This self-admiration or self-satisfaction does not have to be confirmed by the admiration of others in order to be reasonable. If the philosopher, trying to remedy the deficiency of "subjective certainty," engages in conversation with others and observes again and again that his interlocutors, as they themselves are forced to admit, involve themselves in self-contradictions or are unable to give any account of their questionable contentions, he will be reasonably confirmed in his estimate of himself without necessarily finding a single soul who admires him. (Consider Plato, *Apology of Socrates* 21d1-3.) The self-admiration of the philosopher is in this respect