HISTORY AND POWER

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Power, both in the physical sense and in the socio-political sense, has been a major preocupation of modern thought. So has the study of history. But while major attention has been given to development of an adequate theoretical basis for the comprehension of the nature of physical energy and its efficient release to meet human needs, the corresponding study of the theoretical basis of social power has received relatively little and rather superficial attention from sociologists and political scientists, and very little from historians.

In the United States, such political scientists as Harold Lasswell, Gabriel Almond, and Charles Merriam, 1 have given considerable attention to the process by which power structures have emerged; but they have largely overlooked the question of the nature of this power. Approaching social and political phenomena as aspects of human behavior, within a generally behaviorial psychology, they have correctly looked for the roots of social behavior in human (behaviorial) psychology. Rarely, if at all, does one find a serious query as to the role of historical consciousness or memory in the process of forming the social power which gives effect to these social processes, in the nature of its human basis, or in the manner of its release for action. There are exceptions, of course, and some of these will be noted. But in general, one may see, in the middle years of the twentieth century a tendency to reject not only the importance of a theory of power, as such, but even more significantly, the importance of the historical element in power. It is the author's argument in this essay that consciousness of history by an individual, a society, or a nation is the secret of the capacity of an individual or of a society or of a nation to release in a politically effective manner the potential power for social action that each person or group possesses.

The nineteenth century developed such a theory, one which had a historical basis and content quite distinct from any historical content to be found in political theory today. A romantic idealist like Thomas Carlyle, could base

¹ See Harold D. Lasswell, *The Analysis of Political Behavior* (1948); Gabriel A. Almond and James S. Coleman, eds. *The Politics of the Developing Areas* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1960).

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power more frankly, though still rationally on spiritual forces in the sense of beliefs:

Now, of all feelings, states, principles, call it what you will in man's mind, is not Belief the clearest, strongest; against which all others contend in vain? Belief is, indeed, the beginning and the first condition of all spiritual Force whatsoever: only in so far as Imagination, were it but momentarily, is believed, can there be any rise or meaning in it, any enjoyment of it.²

Both Marxists and Comtians thought of power as generated in an abstract and rational sense within, if not actually from historical processes, and as directed toward historical ends-the ends toward which history moved. The poet, Ralph Waldo Emerson expressed a similar view in his poem

HISTORY

There is no great and no small To the Soul that maketh all: And where it cometh, all things are; And it cometh every where.

I am owner of the sphere, Of the seven stars and the solar year, Of Caesar's hand, and Plato's brain, Of Lord Christ's heart, and Shakespeare's strain.

Under the impact of twentieth century scientific and skeptical thought (Einstein and Freud), this kind of historical idea has tended to disappear from the theory of social power, within even the limited attention given to the subject. Historical truth has not only become social myth, but has come to be treated as such. As a result, although modern states hold unprecedented power in their hands, the power of bringing on world cataclysm, and although they have greater consciousness of power than in the past, they seem to have less real understanding of the directions in which this power can be released effectively for the attainment of human aspirations. It is the view expressed in this paper that modern states stand in grave danger of loosing this power in world cataclysm precisely because they have lost faith in their concepts of the origin, nature, and ends of social power—essentially a problem of historical knowledge and understanding.

The twentieth century question has two poles: (1) The theory and technology of nuclear energy confronts us with the need for a reappraisal of our concepts of political power, while (2) the profound 20th century intellectual argument over man's nature and that of his world, including the nature and meaning of history, requires an appraisal from the standpoint of its historical dimensions. We begin with this second aspect of the question.

² Biography (in volume of Critical and Miscellaneous Essays, Carlyle's "Collected Works." (New York: John Balder, 1885), p. 61.

THE PROBLEM OF THE HISTORIAN

The history of nations and civilizations once provided the guiding star for students of sociology and politics. Today the historical element, for many students of society, tends to be reduced to the status of myth, useful for propaganda, but no longer a real guide to policy. Twentieth century science and skepticism have seemingly emasculated history as the scientific and positivist history of an earlier age did religion. As history becomes myth it loses its power. This process took place in the great empires and civilizations of the past. It is happening in ours today. This change has tones of irony and, in a certain sense, an appearance of poetic justice in an age as dedicated to historical scholarship as the present. So we contemplate the fate of an unhappy age, abounding in knowledge of the past, which builds its faith on doubt in agony and, hence, is tempted to embrace the fallacy of searching for the movement or direction of power (for motion is as characteristic of social power as of physical energy) in power itself.

Even a moment's consideration will suggest an element of oversimplification in the above lines. They are not really meant as an analysis, but merely a statement of the question to which we now turn. They were intended merely to suggest a rough delineation of a problem which may be more accurately subsumed in the following series of questions. Must history be dismissed as a myth to be used and propagated from a power basis? Is history without significant meaning, force, and direction? Or does it still, after the bombardment endured from modern skepticism, enclose a certain modicum of that truth which is social energy in the sense of purposeful direction and which is faith in human destiny, even though expressed in symbolic terms? If history has this element of power, what is its nature? What gives it power? Or, again, what is power if divorced from historical meaning? Stated in other words the problem of power and of history as myth is this: Does power have its roots in history? Is history a fourth dimension of power, a directional dimension which points the ends of strategy and the sources of the power which strategy directs? Is it a fifth -spiritual- dimension? Or is it, as a social myth lacking in rational meaning, merely a reflection of reality and not real knowledge --merely another instrument of power to be used and not a real element of power itself? Are present day power conflicts to be understood as the conflict of historical forces? Or are we to understand that the outcome of the power conflict will merely alter the myth -not the reality? If this dichotomy is not valid, what then is the true relationship between what we call power and what we call history?

THE BEMIS-RUSK DIALOGUE

The late Samuel Flagg Bemis, diplomatic historian, in his presidential address to the American Historical Association in December, 1961, after

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remarking that "historians debate about the philosophy of history and philosophers reason about the meaning of history," turned to the more practical task of the practising historian, making a brilliant review of the diplomatic history of the United States, as he saw it, in relation to the changing power situation. Professor Bemis wrote that "the measurement of American foreign policy in space and time throughout our history offers little precedent for meeting the challenge of revolutionary changes in today's global picture". But he insisted upon what he called "one thing sure: the unchanging value of our inheritance of freedom". In conclusion, he insisted that the problem for the future historian would be to decide "whether the people of this and allied governments had, as well as the power and unity, the social discipline, the spirit of sacrifice, the nerve and the courage to guard for themselves and their posterity the Blessings of Liberty". One may be permitted to note that Professor Bemis seemed to end much as he began -speaking as a historian philosophizing as to values, meanings, and ends; and as a philosopher speculating on meaning in history. He comes out saying that history gives us a value system, but that it does not predict the future for us.

Professor Bemis was answered by Dean Rusk, a political scientist then practicing the political art as Secretary of State. Rusk's basic answer to the diplomatic historian's question, far from denying the historical basis of power, was to insist upon the importance of clarity in objectives if the necessary will and nerve to act is to be maintained. He might have been defining power when he said, "The danger of war is greatest when potential enemies are in doubt about the capacity of nations to defend their vital interests, about their will to defend them, or about how they define their vital interests." 8

But, perhaps, before analyzing the problem itself, the author may be forgiven adding a personal dimension to the question in order to make clear the sense in which approach to the problem is essentially historical in the philosophical sense, and to warn readers of the limitations imposed by my personal bias. On the eve of World War II, I spoke to the students of Hiram College on the subject, "Things I Seem to Remember from the Study of History." Pointing out that another world war seemed imminent, though in a logical sense unnecessary, I added that it would result, as in the past, from a failure to consolidate the power diplomacy needs for success. I suggested that the United States probably could not escape being drawn into it, not because we lacked freedom of choice but because of our inability to use our power effectively to mediate in the conflict. This failure, I said, as my notes show, also resulted from our not having consolidated our power. A few years later, just after Pearl Harbor, in another address I borrowed a theme from Arnold Toynbee, speaking on "This Schism of

3 "American Foreign Policy and the Blessings of Liberty", American Historical Review, vol. LXVII, núm. 2 (Jan. 1962), pp. 291-305. Quotations are from p. 305.

the Soul." By this I meant the [North] American faltering of belief in the historical concepts of the American tradition, particularly those of the [North] American revolution, a faltering of belief which could result in world holocaust.

A few years later, immediately after World War II, discussing the newly announced Truman Doctrine, in another lecture I commented upon the failure of alliances and leagues of the past —mobilizations of power not imbued with a sense of historical change— to halt the spread of revolutionary movements which expressed historical forces. Borrowing a phrase of the poet. Vachel Lindsay. I spoke of the revolutionary forces as flaming with "the whimsical various fire, in the rhymes and ideas of men, exploding and writhing again, borne a red wind round the world, consuming the lies in its mirth". Shortly after, in 1947, I urged upon the History Department of the American University the need for directing attention to the questions raised by the waxing argument over the theory and philosophy of history. Since that date. I have tried to lead students to study the philosophy of history in the sense of thinking about the nature of history, historical change, causation and historical process, historical knowledge, and historical meaningall of these in some meaningful relation to the capacity of our society and institutions to act in the interest of humanity and in accordance with humane values. This adds up to considering history as an element of social power.

POWER: ITS NATURE

In proceeding further to the question of a historical philosophy of power, or of history in a theory of power, three questions require our attention. The first of these is the question of the nature of power itself, how it is produced, and how it is used. The second is the question we have already considered, of the nature of history, including the assumptions necessary for an understanding of historical knowledge and historical meaning. The third and final question is that of the relationship of history to power, and the questions this relationship may raise in formulating a theory of political power.

Few scholars in the United States have directed their attention to the nature of social power and fewer still have studied the relationship of history to power in any such theory. The Czech-American historian, Hans Kohn, has shown and understanding of the historical nature of the power of the nation state, pointing out that Napoleon set the example of "collective" power. The German-American Hans J. Morgenthau, in his *Politics Among Nations*, as a political realist, discusses the increase of war potential from the Renaissance to the twentieth century as the release of potential power. Donald James Puchala, in a recent work on international politics, has distinguished between what he calls "gross national power" and "externally projected power", but

⁴ Nationalism, its Meaning and History, New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1955, p. 29. ⁵ (4th ed. New York, Knopf, 1967), pp. 350-370.

fails to note the historical element involved in this release or "projection" of power. 6

There is a notable record in Spanish America, beginning with the Argentine "generation of 1837" of concern for history as a source of the power behind laws and institutions. In the twentieth century such "institutional historians" as Rafael Altamira of Spain, Ricardo Levene of Argentina, and Silvio Zavala of Mexico have continued the tradition.

José Ortega y Gasset and the Revista de Occidente gained wide attention to "historical vitalism" as the basis of a philosophy of law; his theory of the generations was in effect an historical explanation of the way in which "social power" was generated and released. This element of Ortega's thought continues to find brilliant expression among a group of "Ortegans", particularly the notable philosopher of law, Luis Recaséns Siches, both in his Filosofía del Derecho and in his Sociología: Recaséns sees history, in the sense of historical consciousness, as potential power. Law becomes for him an essential ingredient of this power by organizing it and giving it legitimacy. At the same time, history gives law the power to do so. 7

Upon turning to the question of the problem of power as such, one is surprised at first to note, despite the tendency to reject the relevance of history, the extent to which current theories of power contain a historical element, frequently in one or another of the nineteenth century forms. The French theorist, Bertrand Jouvenal, for example, traces the "natural history" of power in generally positivist terms, although in many respects he is an existentialist rebel against positivism. Like Charles Beard, Jouvenal concludes that power tends to evolve into the absolute. The very title of his work shows this general approach: Du pouvoir: histoire naturelle de sa croissance. Writing in 1945, he concluded that not war itself, nor the warrior, was the cause of the contemporary totality of power:

Non certes, car si nous ordonnons en série chronologique les guerres qui ont déchiré notre monde occidental pendant pres d'une millénaire, il nous apparait de façon saisissante que de l'une à l'autre le coefficient de participation de la société au conflit a été constamment croissant, et que notre Guerre Totale n'est que l'aboutissment d'une progression incessant vers ce terme logique, d'un progrès ininterrompu de la guerre. 8

(Certainly not, for if we place in chronological order the wars which have beset our western world during more than a millenium, it will appear to us in striking fashion that from one to the other the degree of participation of the society in the conflict has been increasing constantly, and that our Total War is only the culmination of a constant progression toward the logical end of an uninterrupted increase of war.)

8 (Genève: Constant Bourquin, 1945), p. 14.

⁶ International Politics Today. New York: Dodd Mead, 1971, pp. 176 ff.

⁷ Tratado general de sociología, cuarta edición. México, Editorial Porrúa, 1961, pp. 587-588. Recaséns makes forty-five explicit references to Ortega in his Tratado general de filosofía del derecho, segunda edición. México, Editorial Porrúa, 1961.

Jouvenal is difficult to understand at this point. But what I read is a disillusioned and discerning critic, essentially a neo-idealist, still captive to the positivist concept of natural history. He is a kind of Cassandra, predicting cataclysm, who fixes the blame for the ills of the twentieth century on eighteenth century rationalism and individualism, the influence of which, ironically, he does not himself escape. Hence his only conclusion is to be a rebel, in a sense, against himself, falling back, as did Spengler and others, on a kind of organismic cycle of life and death: a cycle based upon some mysterious unknown laws.

Savons-nous si les sociétés ne sont pas régies dans leur marche par des lois inconnues? S'il leur apartient d'éviter les fautes dont elles meurent? Si elles n'y sont point acheminées par l'élan même qui les porta à leur maturité? Si leur floraison et leur fructification ne s'accomplissent pas au prix d'un eclatement des formes ou s'était accumulée leur vigueur? Feu d'artifice qui ne laisserait après lui qu'une mass amorphe, promise au despotisme ou a l'anarchie...⁹

[Are we sure societies are not ruled in their course by certain unknow laws? Whether they can avoid the ills of which they die? Wheter they are not led there (death) by the very elan which carries them to maturity? Whether their flourishing and fruit bearing is not accomplished at the price of the explosion (eclatement) of the forms in which their energy was built up? A feu d'artifice which leaves behind only an amorphous mass, the promise of despotism or anarchy.]

THE POWER TO CHANGE

Presumably, in the all too limited discussion of theories of power, such as those cited, one finds more agreement on the characteristics and manifestations of power than in respect to its nature, its sources, and the manner in which it is released or used. Most would agree that power has dimensions of space and time. Whether or not the Einstein's formula for energy $(E = MC^2)$ is an equally valid formula for measuring social or political power may be argueble. But certainly the concept of time and relative direction are elements injected into the current discussion of political power, much of which would seem to assume that it is valid. It may be well to note, however, that the Einstein formula for power has a constant in the square of the speed of light (C^2) . It is valid to assume that this constant in relation to social power corresponds to the element of motion. In relation to history, may it be thought of as historical consciousness of motion toward an end, that is to say direction, though the end is necessarily relative to the position in time and space, not absolute?

In considering further the applicability of the Einstein formula we could agree, presumably, that political power, like physical energy, is seen in the

9 (Genève: Constant Bourquin, 1945), p. 560.

capacity for work. May we also agree that it manifests itself in the obedience of individuals or groups to command and that this obedience derives in part from confidence in the source from which the command comes in its various forms: primitive magic or religion, as in the legend of the golden bough, deification of the leader, in charisma or messianism, as well as in the more rational forms of faith and confidence. We should probably agree, also, that power is structured (has form) in legal and social institutions and laws. We might also agree that direction is inherent in the structure of power, in accordance with the concept of Leibnitz that each form has its own motion.

The problem of a theory of power in its historical relationship embraces, at least, (1) the relationships of the elements enumerated in the preceding paragraph, (2) the question of the sources and inner nature of political power as such, (3) the question of the manner in which power is released ("triggered" to borrow a currently popular word), (4) the question of an element of direction inherent in the nature of power (inertia). John Bartlett Martin, President Kennedy's Ambassador in the Dominican Republic at the time of the election of Juan Bosch (1962), and who later tried unsuccessfully to mediate in the civil war following Bosch's overthrow, made this interesting observation on the limitations of effective power. "Force alone", he wrote, "is not power. Force may be unlimited. But power is always narrowly limited". 10 The semantics of this statement are puzzling; but the point Martin seems to be making is that effective power is always limited by the conditions under which it is used and rarely, if ever, approaches in extent the potential power that exists. The proposition I would advance quite simply is that any examination of such questions should be made against the perspective of, or in conjunction with, an inquiry into some of the questions examined in a philosophy of history, since the various possible theoretical positions as to the effectiveness of political power inevitably make assumptions as to the nature and relevance or irrelevance of history to its use.

HISTORY AS MYTH

Any serious consideration of history as an element of power must deal with the question of history considered as myth. The German-American philosopher, Ernst Casirer, in his *The Myth of the State*, ¹¹ as well as in his earlier writings, has called our attention dramatically to the "new" influence of mythical thought. By this he seems to mean the preponderance of mythical and irrational elements over rational elements in the substance, as against the form, of modern social thought and political systems. Casirer sees this as alarming, differing sharply in this respect from other twentieth century

¹⁰ Overtaken by Events. New York: Doubleday, 1966, p. 594. 11 (New Haven: Yale University, c. 1946, 1961 edition). p. 3.

thinkers who are influenced along lines of psychoanalytical and related patterns of cultural anthropological thought to view the change with less alarm. It would not be doing violence to Casirer's thought to say he would lead us to state at least one aspect of the problem as follows: Is power in any essential sense derived from history, or is history simply the myth, the instrumentality, and the form through which power is released?

At first glance the problem might seem to be resolved by the simple rational expedient of recognizing history as a fourth dimension of power in the Einstein relativity sense —the time dimension, or the concept of a continuum essential to any concept of motion. It is certainly going too far to say, as H. G. Wells once did in his typically flippant manner, that God exists in time but not in matter or space. 12 But one may well recognize a certain equivalency between time and space (and see history) in the sense of historical consciousness and historical values, as a dimension of power. Adopting this view of history as a fourth dimension may help to clarify the problem, yet it does not solve it. The problem as to the mysterious nature of this time element remains; more specifically we still have the question as to whether it is anything more than the abstract idea of time. Assuredly, so far as rational scientific thought can grapple with the question, extension in time, like extension in space, is always relative to certain moments in time and space, those from which the observer receives his impressions, gathers his data, and reaches his conclusions.

This relativist concept found a few early expressions in the nineteenth century. But for most historians it came as a traumatic experience in the twentieth century when Bertrand Russell presented his popular explanation of Einstein's theory. With one devastating blow the rejection of the idea of inevitable progress toward definable human and social ends seemed to destroy not only the basis of the historian's art but the underpinning of all social science as well. The concepts of relativism, reflected by or paralleled in, the psychology of Freud and Jung, together with the existentialism of Wilhelm Dilthey and others, by reducing the ends of history to relativist dimensions in time and space, while making a myth of history, forced those seeing the perfect society as a logical end of the historical process, to look for their utopia after the end of history (other worldly) rather than in history.

HISTORICAL CAUSATION AND TELEOLOGY

All causal thinking, that is to say all thinking in relation to dynamics and processes, i.e., the dynamics of power, in so far as it is rational (and for some even when irrational), must be related to ends. How can one conceive of cause except in relation to the effect of power, or of motion without reference to direction of energy? The weak links in the commonly

12 Lovat Dickson, H. G. Wells. New York: Atheneum, 1969, p. 268.

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accepted logical analysis of cause are numerous and obvious. For example, what universal principle, what power, requires us to think of cause in reference to some "normal course of events", and without asking the question how one event leads to the next, or what power moves it, and how? The sum of our knowledge in respect to causal thinking would seem to be just where it was at the time of the argument over the Ptolemaic and Copernican theories of the universe. We resolve the question by preferring the simpler to the more complicated explanation, or in history by Polybius' simple concept of destiny in relation to the rise of Rome.

The question of the ends of history, one that has been central to the twentieth century argument over the philosophy of history, is not without meaning in respect to a theory of power. Many students, when confronted with the contemporary existentialist-relativist thought patterns, with their denial of inevitable progress, feel the impossibility of escaping the new logic. They have therefore grasped one or the other of the horns of the dilemma with which they are confronted, without really attempting to resolve or transcend it. Some persons of the new-orthodox religious persuation have taken refuge in fundamental religious beliefs. Others, more sanguine, have resorted to cyclical patterns, or have escaped into cynicism or nihilism. Few who followed any of these two latter routes have stopped to realize that their behavior exemplified the very fallacy against which they rebelled -the Cartesian-Lockian-Berkleyan fallacy of the dichotomy of spirit and matter. Few have realized that in the path they chose they were guilty of the very rationalism they derided. Nor have they found the way to understanding the dynamic and directional function of history in a theory of power.

Conclusions

This is not the place to expound either a philosophy of history or a definitive theory of power. But the foregoing remarks may justify the statement of a few positions and some assumptions with which the author approaches the problem. First, contrary to the general trend of twentieth century thought, the author insists that history has meaning, and that an important part of this meaning relates to power. Historians of the past, no less than other scholars and scientists, have been guilty of a great sin of presumption in rejecting this meaning. There is as much, perhaps more, meaning in history than in any other branch of knowledge.

A few more specific principles may be mentioned. First, change is real, for being is eleatic. Second, the essence of history is idea or thought, embracing all of being, including reason, passion, action, life, and death. Third, history, as Ortega would say, embraces a series of beliefs, expressions of states of being, and their meanings. In the fourth place, history is expressed in patterns of being-thought-action, combining, in Emerson's phrase "Caesar's hand and Plato's brain."

In accordance with this view of history it is necessary to reject not only the Cartesian dichotomy of matter and reason, but also the more specific and influential (for the social sciences) dialectical expressions of Cartesian dichotomy in Hegel and Marx. ¹³ The supposed idea of Nietzche that God is dead, in so far as it is presumed to be atheist, must go, along with the Augustinian concept of the two cities, in so far as it is assumed to be a kind of theory of inevitable progress. Most historians, like most political scientists, properly cling to remnants of Hegelianism or Marxism, preferring to think in dialectical and rationalist terms, but must now assume a human faculty of reason, if they are to do so, which modern psychology rejects. If Kruschev had only known that it was (the nineteenth century) Marx and Hegel who should be buried, he might have been less certain about burying the West. § These are the defects in Hegelian dialectical thought which should cause it to be revised:

- 1. Its rationalism, derived from a faculty psychology and the Cartesian concept of reason, does not accord with our knowledge of psychology.
- 2. Its rejection of, or subordination to, the logico-rationalist-Cartesian concept of the Platonic element of right reason. This was a Cartesian fallacy.
- 3. Its assimilation of human history to natural history, which rejects the human character of man.
- 4. Its consequent concept that the end of human history in absolute reason (absolute power?), is the child of the preceding errors.

The current "realist" concept of power, as exemplified in thinking about international relations, errs not so much in the quantitative as in the qualitative sense. All of us would doubtless agree that warfare requires the coordination of tactics, strategy, and policy at the political level. But the "realists" today. such as Hans Morgenthau and Henry A. Kissinger, while fully aware of this doctrine, would seem to be tempted, through lack of concern with the ends of power and through preoccupation with power itself and with related strategic problems, to neglect adequate attention to the integral relation of tactics and ends to his appraisal of power. Here it is that the need for essential concern with a philosophy of history enters. But philosophy of history alone cannot supply the need. A philosophy of history is merely the form within which historical knowledge and the meaning of history find purposeful expression in the present. An adequate theory of the value of power as human energy is also important. Prem Nath, the eminent historian of India, has correctly observed that "until the teleological in history is properly grasped, and in full relationship to the present and the past, no headway can be made in our insight of the dynamics of society". 14 Thus

¹⁸ See G. W. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*. New York, Dover Publications, 1956.

¹⁴ Prem Nath, "Philosophy and Social Change", Darshana International: Dr. S. Radhakrishnon Souvenir Volume. Moradabad, India, 5 September, 1964, pp. 295-302.

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the Einstein theory alone is not adequate for social power. To it must be added historical consciousness and the element of psychology. Gerard Lauzun writes that Freud early became aware "that the secret of power was not to be found in force, and that the politician was ultimately greater than the soldier". ¹⁵

I would end with the warning, previously given, to avoid history which finds expression within a theory embracing either horn of the dilemma previously mentioned: either the cycle of no ends or the theory of the ends after history. If history is a succession of faiths, religion is of the essence, and God returns to history. Man then finds valid human ends in human history, even though they may not be the final ends of God's universe.

These human ends are in certain fundamental respects the source of political power that may be effectively released. They are the forms within which that power may be released. But they are also something more; in being the ends toward which power directs itself, they are an essential ingredient as well as a dimension of that power.

¹⁵ Sigmund Freud, The Man and His Theories. Patrick Evans, trans. New York, Fawcett World Library, 1965, p. 15. Original French edition was published in Paris by Pierre Seghers in 1962.