4. Perfectionism and Utopia

What has always made the State into a hell on earth has been precisely man's attempt to make it into his heaven.

—Hölderlin

4.1 *The Misunderstanding of Deontology*

Thus far my keynote has been that democracy is endangered not by realism but by "bad realism," by a misplaced and misapplied realism. My keynote now is, symmetrically, that democracy is endangered not by idealism but by "bad idealism," by perfectionism. The two arguments are complementary: Bad realism is reinforced by bad idealism, and vice versa. At the same time, if perfectionism is abated, hyperrealism is also abated. In the cases of Croce, Pareto, and Mosca, it is clear that these authors reacted, first and foremost, to a bombastic rhetoric of democracy and that a more sober picture of an "imperfect democracy" would have blunted their arrows. In the case of Michels, it was an "impossible democracy" that led him to disavow the very possibility of any democracy.[1] Much of the antidemocratic literature either arises from, or is accredited by, similar backgrounds. It is the formula *vox populi vox dei*,[2] that the voice of the people is the voice of God, that prompts the rebuttal *vox populi vox diaboli*, that it is the voice of the devil.[3]

Just as a bad realism implies that there is a correct realism, so to speak of bad idealism implies that there is a correct idealism. Our problem is thus to underpin the difference between perfectionism (an excessive and misunderstood idealism), on the one hand, and the appropriate use and understanding of ideals, on the other.

Every discussion of democracy basically revolves around three concepts: popular sovereignty, equality, and self-government. These concepts are interrelated. The people are sovereign in that they are equally sovereign (unequal sovereignty would imply that some people are sovereign and other people are not). And who is sovereign is not the object but the subject of government—hence, self-government. These implications can be pressed further. To exemplify, if all are to be sovereign, the implication can well be that self-government

has to replace government (over the people); if all are equally sovereign, this postulates equal power, that is, isocracy; and from equal power one may also infer, albeit with some stretching, equality in general, or equality *tout court.* The question is: What is the exact nature of these concepts? Certainly they can be conceived descriptively. In such case popular sovereignty is little more than a principle of legitimacy, equality may be narrowed down to equal voting, and self-government will probably be confined to microdemocracies. However, the concepts in question are generally developed and conceived normatively. In the latter case they constitute the basic ingredients of the deontology of democracy. And the present argument assumes that popular sovereignty, equality, and self-government cannot be fruitfully discussed and employed unless we establish *(a)* that they are normative ideals; and, concurrently, *(b)* what is the nature, function, and purpose of ideals.

The first step—establishing that an ideal is an ideal—appears to be, at first, a trivial one. Not so, as the debate on equality, a debate that has gone on from time immemorial, well goes to show. Jefferson's classic formula was "All men are created equal."[4] For Jefferson this was a "self-evident truth." Now, whatever the nature of self-evident truths, what is very evident is that his proposition is constructed syntactically as a statement of fact. It can only be defended, however, if reformulated prescriptively, or normatively, as follows: Thou shalt consider all men *as if* they were created equal. Of course, Jefferson was right (candor apart) in presenting this imperative as he did, since a self-evident truth is more effective than an exhortation. Yet, when the truth value of Jefferson's formula is questioned, then the objection should be met correctly. It is not a fact that all men are equal. Rather, the fact is that they are not equal but very different. Except that equality is, first and foremost, a value principle that commands rules of behavior such as that we must recognize ourselves in the other; or that it is our duty to treat others as our equals, not as our inferiors. There is no need to dwell on how much our civilization owes to these maxims. The point is simply that an elementary correction can cut short a fruitless argument. The statement "men are not equal" can be accepted as a fact by any democrat because it does not constitute an objection.[5]

The next step is to inquire into the nature and function of ideals. As the inquiry unfolds it will also appear that the perfectionist is precisely someone who takes ideals for something they are not, who pays little attention to the necessary *décalage* between ideals and practice and, by the same token, who does not know how to turn, or how to apply, prescriptions to reality. The perfectionist characteristically attends to the maximization of ideals—his foot is always on the accelerator—without being in control of the ideals that he propounds.

4.2 *Myth and Utopia Reconsidered*

While the misuse of realism goes back a long way and has possibly reached a point of exhaustion, the misuse of idealism is of relatively recent vintage and seems to be still striving for fulfillment. Two developments strike me as bearing out the heightening of perfectionism. The first is the passage from a contemplative to an "activistic perfectionism." The second, and concurrent one, is the withering away of the sense of "the impossible."

In the realm of contemplation the longing for, and the design of, an ideal world, indeed of an *ideal counterworld,* is possibly as old as humankind. Plato laid down the blueprint of this kind of mental exercise; and the state of nature doctrine also provided, from the Middle Ages up to Rousseau, an ideal parameter not only for evaluating the real world but also (in its natural rights development) for establishing values in the real world. In both cases, a state of perfection was discovered by, and coincided with, a state of contemplation. It is true that Plato moved to Syracuse in the hope of actualizing his ideal city. But his first visit in Sicily ended with his being sold as a slave in the marketplace of Egina; and his last one might have ended worse. In any event, Plato's solution was the philosopher-king. As for the state of nature, it was conceived, in the main, as a lost paradise. If and when heavenly cities were actively sought and established (as when Münster was proclaimed "New Jerusalem"), they were the children of chiliastic surges, of eschatologic expectations. Throughout the Middle Ages and all the way up to the Puritan saints in arms, the mobilizing force was religion, not Plato's *eídos.* Actually it was not until Marx that the philosopher-king (king on account of being philosopher) was upturned into the "revolutionary philosopher."[6] With the young Marx it is still the philosopher who is in charge because it is the philosopher who knows "what is rational"; but the philosopher must be a revolutionary, for it is revolutionary action that renders "real" what is rational. Thus with Marx perfectionism ceases to be an intellectual perfectionism, and a *perfectionistic activism* enters the realm of politics. Even so, more than a century had to go by for this process to gain momentum; the revolutionary philosopher obtained mass audiences and became a real mobilizing force only in the 1960s.[7] This vintage is indeed a recent one.

The other side of the same coin can be detected in the withering away of the sense of the impossible. It might be said that perfectionism advances as "impossibles" retreat. A development symptomatically revealed, I submit, by the alteration in meaning of the concept of utopia.

Utopia was a term coined by Thomas More (as a simple transliteration of the Greek form) to connote a fiction that had "no place," that is, a non-

existent world. Since More had a critical and constructive purpose in mind in describing his imaginary island, his non-existent was not declared a non-possible. Yet the word inaugurated a mode of thought on the force, the semantic force, of its prefix, of its *no.* The utopian who neither calls nor conceives himself as being such—from Plato to Campanella—*hopes* in his perfect world. The utopian who calls himself such may *desire* his perfect world but does not believe in its realization.[8] The avowed utopian *uses* his utopia (for some purpose) but does not actually *will* it. Thus, what makes "utopia" distinctive—vis-à-vis "myth," on the one hand, and "idealism," on the other—is precisely that a utopian state of affairs is not only in *no* place but also in *no* time, in *no* future. In short, utopia is a *non-existent* in that it is a *non-possible.* This is not only the meaning retained by the word in ordinary usage but also the meaning that renders the term useful in our thinking.

Karl Mannheim was probably the author who was most influential in destroying the signification that prompted More to coin "utopia." Utopia, for Mannheim, is simply a state of mind that "transcends" existing reality in a revolutionary direction. But to speak of a state of mind that transcends what exists in a given time is not saying much, for in one sense or another the mind always transcends the existent. If we proceed to the *differentiam,* the specificity of Mannheim's utopia is to be found in its "revolutionary function." This is confirmed by the fact that states of mind that transcend the immediate situation in a conservative sense are called by Mannheim "ideologies." In sum, Mannheim makes utopia into nothing more than the counterpart of ideology, placing revolutionary ideologies (rechristened utopias) on one side, and conservative ideologies (ideologies pure and simple) on the other.[9]

Now, if the above is what we should understand when saying utopia, utopias are no longer utopias, that is, mental fictions located nowhere.[10] And if the word utopia is divested of its specific, original meaning-function, one can well say, with Oscar Wilde, that "progress is the realization of utopias,"[11] with Lamartine that "it is possible that the utopias of today may become the realities of tomorrow,"[12] with Mannheim that "utopias are often only premature truths,"[13] and with Marcuse that "the path to socialism may proceed from science to utopia and not from utopia to science."[14] By manipulating meanings and definitions one can prove anything. However, the net result of the argument that "everywhere we see utopianism become reality"[15] is the exclusion from our political vocabulary of the term that eminently signifies the *unrealizable.* If we define utopia in a non-utopian way, we are left without a name to indicate the politically impossible.[16]

Do we possess a fall-back position? For instance, can "utopia" be replaced by "myth"? Not quite, I would say. Myth does point to some kind of unreal-

ity, but it makes little sense to say that a myth is "impossible." This implication falls beyond the semantic horizon of the term, which points, rather, to a make-believe. Note, in this connection, that a myth believer is not the victim of a deceit, since he chooses to believe in it. So, while a myth has no empirically verifiable existence, its kind of unreality is elusive and shades into some kind of belief reality. Even so, if a person asserts, for instance, that democracy is a myth or speaks of the myths of democracy, the ordinary listener is entitled to understand that democracy is some kind of imaginary entity. However, just as utopia no longer means utopia, myth no longer means myth (in the sense in which the term has long been used) to authors such as MacIver or Lasswell and Kaplan. To MacIver, myth is a neutral term that "abjures all reference to truth and falsity" and that covers all "value beliefs and notions that men hold"; hence everything is myth—except techniques.[17] On these premises, democracy too falls under the label "myth of democracy."[18] And in their proposed framework for political inquiry Lasswell and Kaplan follow suit. Under the caveat that "the term myth is not to be interpreted as necessarily imputing a fictional, false, or irrational character of the symbols," their definition is as follows: "The *political myth* is the pattern of the basic political symbols current in a society." Thus, the authors illustrate, "the present concept is close to a number of others . . . Marx's 'ideology,' Sorel's 'myth,' Mosca's 'political formula,' Pareto's 'derivations,' Mannheim's 'ideology' and 'utopia.' "[19] The collection of references is dazzling and confirms that myth is, in this usage, just about everything. Inter alia, and certainly, popular sovereignty, equality, and self-government are myths. Does this provide new insights?

I think not. To the contrary, the net result of bringing almost everything under "myth" is to create a haze in which analytic tools are of no avail. In particular, and with respect to my central concern, under this treatment there is no way of differentiating the proper from the erroneous use of ideals, that is, of looking into how ideals relate to reality. Be that as it may, the question was whether "myth" provided a fall-back position for conveying the meaning of "no place," for indicating non-existents not predicated for existence. Having just seen that the destiny of the word myth closely parallels the destiny of the word utopia,[20] the conclusion is rejoined that throughout the current vocabulary of politics we no longer dispose of a term for "the impossible"; and if the impossible is unnamed, it also ceases to delimit "the possibles." The Promethean myth exits from mythology and enters history.

We live in a time in which scientific circumspection and scientistic euphoria both concur, paradoxically enough, in shading off the utopian into the merely improbable. Owing to scientific caution, we have made a point of never

saying "impossible" and of speaking only of degrees of probability or improbability. And owing to scientistic optimism, we have come to believe that, in principle, nothing is impossible. Having lightly conjoined technical with ethical progress, the perfectibility of science with the perfectibility of humanity, our age reveres limitlessness—we are relying more and more on the expectations of a future of *unlimited possibilities.* Of course, if everything is possible, we no longer need a term to indicate the impossible. But if we renounce the term and the impossibilities remain, we are apt to drown in utopia before we know it. I take it, therefore, that we still need to use utopia in the core meaning in which the word was conceived. But I shall also propose an adjustment.

Let then the definition be: Utopia is the contradictory claim of imagining an "impossible reality" for the purpose of realizing it. The above definition maintains the original connotation of the term; adds, I trust, to its sharpness; and updates the concept in that it reflects the transition from an intellectualistic, contemplative utopianism to an activistic, will-based utopianism. Utopia is no longer an intellectual game and an object of contemplation. The twentieth-century utopian has become a man of action. In this new light, or along this new dimension, we are immediately confronted by the question: How can we know what is utopian?

As phrased, the question addresses a purely logical argument. We are in fact asking ourselves, How can we establish a priori what is possible and what is not? Still more pointedly, Is there a *logical structure* that represents an absolute impossibility, that is, impossibilities that are not contingent on time and place? Let me first take up this formidable question in the setting of life experience, that is, of the personal experiences that defy verbal pyrotechnics and the masqueradings of the verbalist. For instance, has anybody ever succeeded in having his cake and eating it? I believe not. The dictum that you cannot have a cake and eat it points to an absolute impossibility that has never been and will never be falsified. In like manner we can confidently assert that it is impossible to sleep when awake, to spend and save the same money, or to take two roads at the same time. Unquestionably, all these are unconditional impossibilities. Can it be maintained that what applies to the personal experience of "each body" no longer applies to the "allbody," that is, to history? For all we know, the opposite is far more likely to be true. What is still possible on a small scale often becomes unmanageable, and thus less possible, on a larger scale. Magnitudes add, rather than remove, complications and obstacles. The real difference, when we pass from the circumstances of everyday life to political impossibilities, is that the latter are far more difficult to pin down. There are two reasons for this. First, in our personal experience impossibility is generally revealed immediately and directly to us,

as an impossibility to *do,* whereas in politics it is revealed late, indirectly, and as an event-related impossibility to *obtain.* But the fundamental reason is that the possibles-impossibles of politics escape control because the *discourse on politics escapes control.* By burying facts under verbal veils, false victories are easily made to seem real victories, and failure is easily vindicated as success. By incessantly repeating that history is a sequence of impossibilities that were made possible, or a cemetery of utopias that were realized, we have persuaded ourselves that this is truly the case. But I have yet to find an author who seriously spells out in which actual instances this has been so. Waiting for such probing, I am struck by how scarcely populated that cemetery remains.

The decisive question remains whether there is a logical structure that yields, in politics as well as in any context, an absolute impossibility. I submit that the reply is yes. Utopianism consists of *practical contradictions* whose logical formulation is this: One cannot obtain *more* of two things that require *contrary actions.* I say practical contradictions—this being the crucial clause—because sheer logical contradictions made of sheer words can be construed as easily as we breathe. The contradictions must bear, then, on *courses of action.* Note, also, that two goals may be declared contradictory and yet afford tradeoffs. In this case, however, the logical structure of the argument is: One can obtain *more* of one thing if one demands *less* of its contrary. Thus one can still eat more of a cake and have less of it. The impossibility arises, and is unconditional, when one wants, all in one, *more* eating and *more* cake. So, it is perfectly possible to identify a utopia, the non-realizable, in time and ahead of time.

The foregoing represents the logical structure of what we often call "dilemmas" of politics, of the grand dilemmas whose solution is compared by Rousseau to the squaring of the circle. We shall encounter many of these grand dilemmas as we proceed. At the moment it should be understood that the preceding argument does not imply that all impossibilities must be conceived and argued in that mold—as I shall go on to show.

4.3 *Self-Government and the Politically Impossible*

Let us take Marx's utopia, which was to be achieved by the replacement of representative democracy by a literal self-government arising from the withering away of the state. In my opinion, we are justified in considering Marx's self-government an unfounded hypothesis located nowhere, the absolute impossibility of which can be demonstrated a priori.

Self-government is conceptually easy to define: It consists of governing ourselves by ourselves. When the notion is applied to the real world, how-

ever, it must be weighed empirically. This weighing is required to establish the *intensity* of a self-government, that is, whether and to what extent the word applies (to its referents) in a strong or feeble meaning. For the simplicity of the argument I shall say that a self-government is at maximal intensity, or all the more intense, the more closely a governing corresponds to what the word literally says. Conversely, a self-government is at minimal intensity when the referent bears only a very loose and distant resemblance to what "governing" conveys. Now, it is clearly the case that the intensity of a self-government (as defined) varies in relation to its *extension.* In the first instance let this extensiveness be identified as a spatial extension, as a size.[21] On these premises I advance the following proposition:

> The *intensity* of self-government attainable stands in *inverse relation* to the *extension* of self-government demanded.

Let us demonstrate, starting from the hypothesis of maximal intensity. If we think of self-government in the intense, i.e., strong and literal sense of the term, we are referring either to individual inner self-government (self-determination) or to the perfect despot. In either case we have maximal intensity—the maximum self-government possible—because the extension is zero (self-government *in interiore hominis).* Let us next introduce a small extension such as the space of the *polis,* the ancient Greek city. In this case self-government will display less intensity, that is, it will have to be interpreted in a less exacting and less literal sense than before. By saying self-government we now refer, at best, to a rapid and comprehensive rotation between power holders and power addressees. As Aristotle said, in ancient democracies the citizens governed themselves in the sense that all governed and were governed in turn. Proceeding a step farther, let us assume that self-government is to function over a region or a large city. In this case the extension of self-government sought is already such as to permit only a metaphorical use of the concept. At this point self-government basically means being governed from nearby instead of afar; the term still is meaningful only in contradistinction to centralization. The self-government in question actually denotes autonomous local governments, which can be called self-governing only in that they permit a greater degree of self-government than political systems characterized by centralization. However, the local government of a large city is already a system of indirect government; it is not a self-governing but a representative democracy in which we are governed by intermediaries. So, here self-government ends—when the word means what it says.

What do we mean, then, when the term self-government is applied to the extension of sizable nation-states? In this case it is hard to see how the

citizens could govern themselves in any meaningful sense of the expression[22]—unless we mean something else, either control over government or a state of national independence. I have no quarrel, provided that it remains clear that neither independence from other countries nor control over the government is the same as self-government. I do, however, object to any further stretching. In particular, the ultimate design of a world system of billions of people who govern themselves united into a single self-governing system may warm our hearts but simply ignores the problem of intensity, that is, that only a zero intensity of "self" can correspond to the extension "world." In that imaginary self-government there will be nothing remotely resembling the faintest imitation of *selves* who *govern.*[23]

Until now I have referred to size. But self-government involves not only a spatial but a temporal extension, a time dimension. The philosopher (the pure theorist) need not concern himself with either the duration or the chronological order of his referents. The reason for this is that a philosophic inquiry concerns atemporal relations, logical and not chronological sequences. But when we come to the empirical level, duration and chronological order do count. Operatively speaking, we cannot do first what has to be done afterward, and there are many things that we can do for a short time but not forever. Let us, therefore, move from extension in space (size) to extension in time (duration). If so, our proposition may be reformulated as follows:

> The *intensity* of self-government possible stands in *inverse relation* to the *duration* of self-government demanded.

This means that a maximal intensity of self-government, such as we have in moments of heroic or revolutionary tension, can correspond only to a minimal duration. In outlining his ideal democracy Marx took the revolutionary episode of the Paris Commune of 1871 as a model.[24] But can one project a minimal time span into a sort of eternity, into the Hegelian end of history? Can it be overlooked, that is, that the high degree of intensity of the Paris experiment in the self-government of the proletariat (under emergency, siege conditions) lasted for a very short time? Marx's entire political prophecy—a stateless society with literal self-government—rests not only on "the fallacy of the dramatic instance" but even more on what may be called "the fallacy of timelessness." In Marx, and in the communist theory of society in general, an *intensity flash* is construed as being continuously and endlessly reproducible over time, in total disregard of the most unfailing of all the experiences of humankind, namely, that duration brings about routine, that honeymoons are not eternal. We can run for hours, but not for years; we can swim for a day, but not endlessly. Marx even failed to suspect—we must assume from

his writings—that the intensity of a self-government covaries negatively with both its extension in space (Paris, after all, is not France) and its duration in time. As a philosopher speculating about a timeless and placeless self-government of the proletariat, Marx is interesting. But as a *revolutionary philosopher* bent on changing the real world, he is an unalloyed utopian. His political design of replacing governments by self-governing was impossible then as it is now, and will be just as impossible forever.

Formerly our ancestors relied too much on argument and too little on testing, and exaggerated the "impossible" vis-à-vis the "improbable." Nowadays we have gone to the opposite extreme of saying improbable even when we should say impossible. No doubt, if everything must be proved by evidence and experiment and nothing can be demonstrated by argument, then the range of discourse has to be limited to mere probables, to statements and predictions whose truth value can only be that they are likely or unlikely. But evidence and experiment cannot replace argument any more than the latter are a substitute for the former. Impossibilities—I insist—can and must be demonstrated by argument. If we are mistaken, this can again be discovered by argument. But let us not wait for utopia-provoked disasters to occur in order to acknowledge that impossibles exist.

4.4 *The Role of Ideals*

I have dwelt on the conditions that favor the heightening of perfectionism. If the very prediction of impossibles is declared impossible, inflated and utopian ideals are left to prosper unbridled. This adds to the reasons for inquiring about the nature of deontological discourse, for understanding what ideals *are for* and thus for mastering the relationship between ideals and the realm of practice.

Benjamin Constant, who was deeply aware of this problem because it had been *the* problem exploded by the French Revolution, sought to solve it by means of *intermediary principles,* that is, by interposing a mediant term between "first principles" and reality. He wrote: "When we toss into the midst of a society of men a principle divorced from all the intermediary principles that bring it down to us and adapt it to our situation, we create great disorder; because when this principle is torn from all its links and deprived of all its supports . . . it destroys and overthrows. But it is the fault not of the first principle but of our ignorance of the intermediary principles."[25] In the final analysis the problem undoubtedly is, as Constant saw, to adapt the absoluteness of principles to the real world by submitting the deontology to an intermediary reelaboration. And Constant was perfectly right when he stressed

that "each time a principle . . . seems inapplicable, it is because we do not know the intermediary principle which contains the means of application."[26] But I would like to take up the argument at an earlier point. Before dealing with the applicative passage, we must be clearheaded about its beginning.

Constant said "principles," and I have spoken somewhat interchangeably of ideals, norms, prescriptions, and values. Norms and prescriptions do not pose problems in the sense that they can be imputed to, and derived from, values and/or ideals. Values ultimately are, instead, intractable entities. But is it necessary for us to get involved in the question, What are values? At this stage I think not.[27] I think not because we can do just as well, if not better, by replacing "values" with "ideals"—and ideals are much easier to handle and explain. Ideals are born from our dissatisfaction with reality and thus represent, in their genesis, a *reaction to* what is.[28] If so, ideals can be defined as pictures of a desirable or desired state of affairs that never coincides—by definition—with an existent state of affairs. From their etiology one can equally derive that ideals counteract and/or combat reality. That is, ideals accompany the vicissitudes of history, ever present as their non-acquiescent, countervailing, or adversary element.

Are ideals realizable? The question can be answered affirmatively, but can also be answered negatively. An ideal *can be* realized if we mean that ideals are realizable *in part.* Conversely, an ideal *cannot be* realized if we mean that ideals are realizable *in full.*

The assertion that ideals *are* realizable (in part) is hardly disputable. The assertion is true not only in the obvious sense that ideals have, in general, an efficacy but also in the sense that we do find ideals actually implanted in the real world. Liberal democracy eminently attests to a realization of a set of ideals. The disputation begins, then, when we assert that ideals *are not* realizable in full, that is, neither literally nor to a fully satisfying extent. Yet this negation is consistent with the preceding affirmation. When we say that ideals never are (in fact) and cannot be (in principle) fully and adequately realized, we are simply saying and assuming that ideals are destined to *remain ideals.* An ideal is an ideal precisely in that it is not realized, in that it transcends the existent. The point is, in itself, an obvious one—but its implications are less obvious. Furthermore, from the vantage point that ideals cannot be *literally* realized, we can correctly appreciate how ideals are in fact managed or mismanaged.

That ideals are destined to remain what they are implies that ideals are not meant to become facts—exactly in the sense and precisely for the same reason that an *ought* is not meant to be an *is.* The ulterior and more provocative implication is that ideals are destined, literally speaking, *not to succeed.* At first view, this may seem a paradoxical assertion. Yet it goes to explain what ideals *are for*—their reason for being—and why they are employed as they are. Ideals always smack of *hybris,* they are always excessive. This is as it should be, since ideals are designed to overcome resistances. But if this is so, then to assert that ideals are destined not to succeed is a way of assessing how ideals function and are "functional" to their *telos,* to their end purpose. To be sure, from the vantage point of *effectiveness* the actor is required to perceive his ideals *as if* they were meant for realization. But from the vantage point of the observer the *function* of ideals is to challenge facts. And the truth of the matter is, I shall contend, that ideals better reality precisely when they are not meant *as a* reality.

That an ideal is not meant to replace what is real amounts also to suggesting that if, as a reduction to the absurd, it were possible to convert ideals *exactly* into realities, perhaps we would not cherish them anymore. Ideals warm our hearts as they remain at a distance. The rewards are often in the striving more than in the achievement. "Is there anything in life so disenchanting as attainment?" Robert Louis Stevenson's question was rhetorical. To quote him again: "To travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive."[29] Literal equality, as exemplified by billiard balls, would be, in all likelihood, as displeasing as the inequalities it opposes. Nothing is more boring, more insipid, than utopia, as one discovers when reading how life passes in utopias. Guns (our ideals) are useful to win battles; but we do not fight a war to win guns. Or do we?

So, ideals are realizable but are also non-realizable. Having established in what sense ideals cannot pass into reality, we may now confront the question: How do ideals pass into reality—to the extent that they do—with what end results? We are back to the problem of Benjamin Constant, except that I shall seek a *conversion rule* rather than specific "intermediary principles."

4.5 *Maximization, Opposite Danger, and Inverted Results*

In the preceding discussion the role or function of ideals has been described as reactive, polemical, countervailing, adversary. Admittedly these are very general qualifications. But in order to be more specific we must introduce the contexts, the factual settings, within which ideals perform; and we must distinguish, at the minimum, between the democratic ideal *without* a democratic system and the democratic ideal *within* a democracy.

In the first setting (outside of democracy) the democratic ideal performs as an adversary ideal; its overriding purpose is *negation,* the overthrow of the political system that it fights; and the more the ideal is maximized, the

greater, possibly, its efficacy. In an autocratic context, then, democratic perfectionism serves its purpose. A purpose that is "realized" when a democracy takes the place of its defeated adversary. That democracy, no doubt, will be a highly imperfect realization of the ideal; nonetheless, it cannot be disclaimed as a non-democracy, for it was actually set up by a democratic deontology. So, in the new context the deontology no longer confronts an enemy but the polity that it has in fact generated. This difference cannot be ignored—it makes all the difference—and is actually reflected in a new role and configuration of the deontological pressure.

The normative or prescriptive definition of democracy characteristically establishes, in the new setting, ideal standards, ideal yardsticks, for evaluating and monitoring the real-world accomplishments of democracies. This layout is distinctive in two major respects. First, the evaluation is "critical" and is not, or no longer, inimical, adversarial, or of "negation." Second, the ideal standards in question do not idealize *other* worlds, replacement worlds, but *their* world. Therefore they are to be construed as "constructive ideals," in the sense specified by Dennis Thompson: Picture a state of affairs intended to be realizable incrementally, "by trends and non-radical reforms." Still more pointedly, "to justify a claim that a constructive ideal is realizable, we need evidence to reveal trends which, if continuing, tend to realize the ideal; and to suggest that certain non-radical reforms, if effected, tend to realize the ideal."[30] Thompson perceptively brings out here the point at which ideals *interact with,* rather than *react to,* the real world. This does not mean that ideals can ever and entirely be subdued by findings. Nonetheless, an ideal cannot claim to be constructive unless it listens to, and learns from, experience and evidence. This is the test of its *constructiveness.*

In the light of our previous analysis the foregoing demonstrates how ideals *can* be realized and furthered. What remains to be seen is at which point, or under what form, ideals *cannot* pass into reality and become self-denying.

The setting is now one in which the ideals of democracy deal with their own creature; therefore, the strategy that applies when democracy is only an adversary ideal no longer applies. It is no longer true, that is, that ideals can be safely maximized beyond measure. To the contrary, if the deontology remains unchanged, it begins operating in reverse. When, *within* a democracy, we retain the democratic ideal in its extreme form, it begins to work *against* the democracy it has generated; it produces inverted results. That is why, as Herz points out, "political idealism has its time of greatness when it is in opposition to decadent political systems. It degenerates as soon as it attains its final goal; and in victory it dies."[31] The frequency of that parable does not attest, however, to a historical inevitable. It attests, rather, to an incessant,

and self-reproducing, mismanagement of ideals. The question thus turns to their management.

Since ideals are demands designed to meet resistances, the demand is constructive when gauged to the resistance. In rule form, the logic underlying the successful application of a deontology to the real world can be rendered as follows: *To the extent that an ideal is converted into reality, to the same extent it must become feedback monitored.* Let this be called the "feedback rule." Let it also be noted that in the light of such rule the problem no longer is *maximization* but *optimization.*

The democratic principle in its pure, maximal state calls for "all power to all the people." But, as we know, this pure principle establishes only a titular right and is of no help whatsoever in implementing the entitlement with the exercise of power.[32] So, here we need the intermediary principles spoken of by Constant. The intermediary principle discovered thus far is representation (as actualized in the *garantiste* structures of the constitutional state). What does representation accomplish? What does it bring about? First, it reduces power to *less power;* in a system of representative government nobody is in a position to exercise an absolute (i.e., limitless) power. Second, and concurrently, in a system of representative government the people actually exercise power (political power) by being able to *control and change* the people in power. With all of this, it is still the case that the original principle is far from being fulfilled: The people still do not exercise power in any full or literal sense of the expression. What do we do next? The temptation, and indeed the easy path, is to repropose the principle in its purity. If so, the intermediary structures (the representative state) are no longer seen as means of implementation and appreciated for what they have achieved; they are perceived, rather, as obstacles and thereby dismissed as impediments along the path of the realization of the ideal. But if we take this course, then the ideal starts operating in the reverse, destructively instead of constructively.

Note that the principle as such, in its literal wording, does not point to a limitation of power: "All power" is a limitless power. This is right in the oppositional setting in which the principle was conceived; but, in victory, "all power to the people" no longer has the effect of limiting power; its actual effect is to affirm an absolutist principle. The rebuttal is that while the absolutism of an autocrat is bad, the absolutism of the people is good. Maybe. The point remains that the principle attributes only a titular right. Therefore a maximization of the ideal that disdains, and rejects as an impediment, the intermediary structures that deal with the exercise can only generate, as such, an absolute power *in the name* of the people. So, the ideal has, in the end, destroyed its creature. Let us, then, start again from the beginning.

The beginning is, very plainly, that the sine qua non condition for the people to "have power" in any meaningful sense of the expression is that they impede any unlimited power. This is the condition that must be intransigently respected throughout our efforts to maximize the ideal, that is, throughout efforts to add more power to the power that the people actually wield. In terms of our feedback rule this entails that the principle "all power to the people" must be gradually modified, as a democracy develops itself, into the principle *all power to nobody.*

It may be argued that the feedback rule overturns the maximization into a minimization of ideals. It seems to me, however, that it is equally true, and perhaps even more appropriate, to speak in this connection of *optimization.* Also, the transformation of the letter of an ideal may not be at all a transformation of its meaning function, of its "spirit." The democratic principle was conceived as a battle cry, and the battle cry against absolute power is "all power to us." But when that battle is over, if we stick to the letter of that principle, we lose the concrete benefits that it was truly intended to achieve. If, then, we do not want our ideal to die in victory, we must never lose sight of the "opposite danger."[33] Since the battle cry "all power to us" is tied to the enemy it was combating, unless it is gradually converted into the principle that *nobody* should have *all* power, it will simply bring a reinforced absolutism back to life. Its practical effects will be the exact opposite of its intended effects.

We endlessly hear talk of ideals being betrayed. If ideals are, by definition (in the definition given), destined not to succeed, then the perfectionist will always and easily discover in anybody else a traitor to ideals. However, the perfectionist too is, in his manner, a traitor to ideals: By sticking to their letter, the perfectionist betrays their intent. Ideals can be betrayed in many ways, and the most insidious one consists of ignoring that the meaning-function of ideals changes as their real-world environment changes. There are not only many ways of betraying ideals but also of being betrayed by ideals. One of them, and probably the surest one, is the way of the perfectionist.

4.6 *The Revolution as Myth*

Until now I have considered how the ideals *of democracy* may be either constructive or destructive vis-à-vis their own creature. I have not envisaged, that is, the ideals that propose a *replacement world,* a better world intended to supersede liberal democracy both in its reality and in its values. To be sure, in a time of democratic confusion a replacement world can always be declared "more democratic." Yet there is little doubt that not only the real-world de-

mocracies but also their ideals are fundamentally rejected by the people who at different points in time have variously identified themselves with communist-type replacement worlds. The idols—Stalin, Mao, Castro, Ho Chi Minh—eventually fall, fail, or are dismissed by their successors. They still attest to a wholesale rejection that has entered our time, that precedes the surge of the 1960s, and that remains with us, if abated, in its aftermath.

It would be ludicrous to seek a monocausal explanation of this rejection. Even if the argument is confined, as it is here, to the ambit of the Western democratic world, certainly many factors enter the passage from democracy to, say, post-democracy. Perfectionism is only one of such factors. Still, it is an unduly neglected one—and this consideration prompts me to insist on it. I have been saying that perfectionist attempts at realizing ideals literally are inevitably bound to fail and, indeed, to boomerang. This outcome feeds, in turn, a vicious vortex. To the extent that the perfectionist attributes failure to the intrinsic wickedness of the present-day world, he is easily led to become a preacher, when not a practitioner, of violence. Indeed, in the present-day world the cult of violence finds little support among realists; it is almost entirely the brood of idealists.[34] But the blame can also be put, disjointly or concurrently, on the ideals. Since the attempt to enforce utopian ideals never succeeds, the perfectionist may also come to disbelieve the ideals of democracy. If so, he seeks replacement worlds, either by imagining future ones or attributing imaginary virtues to existing negations of his own world. In either case, his solution becomes "revolution" and revolutionary violence.

The word revolution (like the word democracy) is being stretched to almost no end.[35] How is one to distinguish a revolution, on the one hand, from uprisings, rebellions, revolts, insurrections, civil wars, and, on the other hand, from palace revolts, coups d'état, and military coups? Certainly a revolution is not a mere coup; it is also more than an uprising triggered by famine, poverty, or intolerable oppression, that is to say, more than a revolt or an insurrection. And while a revolution may bring about a civil war (between revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries), in themselves civil wars need not display revolutionary characteristics and may simply end in secession. In its distinctiveness, then, "revolution" is a violent, mass-supported seizure of power that entails a basic restructuring of the polity. This is, to be sure, a strict political definition of the *revolutionary act*—not of revolution-and-after, of revolution as an extended or even near-endless process. Whether the revolutionary event also enforces *ex post* a basic socioeconomic restructuring of society is immaterial to the political definition.[36] The one defining property that distinguishes *ex ante* a revolution from other mass and violence-based occurrences is a belief basis: A revolution is such in that it is belief-mobilized and affirms

a set of counter-beliefs (vis-à-vis the regime it overthrows). What, then, are the characteristics of the revolutionary subcultures of our time? The question specifically addresses, remember, the point at which our (Western) perfectionists give up the furthering of democracy and seek a better world in the very replacement of democracy. The divide is, of course, in the mode of enactment, in the advocacy of revolutionary violence. But the revolutionary subculture of our time is also characterized by novel and somewhat unique traits.

Formerly, revolutions were conceived as rebellions against tyranny. Today, they are conceived by the revolutionary *groupuscules* as embodying an intrinsic soteriological value.[37] Revolution is beautiful in itself. This type of revolutionary has no need to explain why he revolts; he revolts anyhow, unqualifiedly, on the grounds that revolutionary destruction is in itself *creative.* If so, it becomes unnecessary to inquire into what the postrevolutionary replacement worlds look like and, concurrently, into their feasibility. Are these replacement worlds impossible or possible, utopian or not? Engels left us with the magniloquent sentence that, after the proletarian revolution, communism "is the ascent of man from the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of freedom."[38] Marx left us with the utopia derived from the Paris Commune. A long time has since gone by, and what is supposed to come "after the revolution" remains—in its configuration—a well-kept secret. If one wants, Mao added to the picture the "cultural revolution"; but this is only the same thing over and over again: the permanence of revolution. And in Mao's case the Great Leap Forward turned out to be a great leap backward. So, we are left with one discovery: revolution itself in its alleged creativeness. We must, therefore, settle for what we have. But what is it, precisely, that we have?

Among the three categories under scrutiny—ideal, utopia, and myth—the last, it seems to me, has the best fit for how our revolutionaries conceive revolution. Of course, we may say that revolution is an ideal; but surely not in the sense in which equality or liberty are spoken of as ideals. Ideals describe a desirable end state and are required to have a positive layout, whereas the notion of revolution unfolds itself in the negative. On the other hand, when we speak of revolution as a utopia, it is clear that reference is made not to revolutions themselves (they occur all the time and everywhere), but to their aftermath and outcome. With respect, then, to the revolution in itself, the telling category is "myth." As indicated earlier, the term myth is commonly understood as, and associated with, a make-believe that is also a belief-reality. However, the term also obtains special, ad hoc meanings, such as the one proposed by Georges Sorel.

Sorel is the author who present-day eulogists of revolution cite least. This is a pity on two counts. In the first place, Sorel was in many ways the first

major incarnation, after Marx, of the revolutionary philosopher.[39] In the second place, and even more to the point, he is the one author who does sustain with argument, not just by slogans, the attribution of a constructive value to revolutionary violence. To Sorel, utopia was the last manifestation of faith in reason, whereas myth was the rebellion against reason. Hence he conceived and advocated the general strike—the self-liberating act of the proletariat—precisely as a "myth." His myth was, then, a global intuition that coincided with an act of the will. And it was to be a truly liberating force because it would enable the proletariat to act without helpers. A myth-driven proletariat would dispose not only of past but also of incumbent masters, namely, of self-proclaimed vanguards. It may be said that here utopia reenters. It does not matter, for the point of interest is that Sorel's political myth is the collective, deliberate, *willed expectation* of the event that the expectation in fact generates; and this is very much the way in which the "myth" of revolution is employed and deployed by present-day Western revolutionaries.

Still, to understand the mythical use, in Sorel's sense, of the notion of revolution does not even begin to demonstrate the alleged creativity of revolution. On what grounds have we come to take for granted, in many intellectual quarters, that revolutions are, as such, "creative"? If we pause to think, this is not at all a self-evident assumption. To the contrary, it is an utterly counterintuitive presumption. Revolutionary action is warlike action; it kills, destroys, and conquers at gunpoint. If anything, it can be argued that revolutions are even worse than wars. When a war is over, it is over. Whoever has survived, whether winner or loser, switches back to a different, much preferred state: a state of peace. Revolutions, especially the total "extended" revolutions of our time, tend to be endless. After ten, twenty, fifty years, people are still thrown into concentration camps, arrested and sentenced "in the name of revolution," and politics continues to display the naked brutality of a war against enemies.[40] So, where is the creativity, in what does it consist? In Hegel war is compared to a wind that blows over a marsh, substituting clean air for the miasma. That much can also be said—here the analogy holds well—of revolutions. But this is a temporary benefit; the wind falls, and the miasma reappears. In behalf of the creativity of war the strong argument is that war efforts stimulate technological discovery and its rapid exploitation. However, since revolutions are not won on technological grounds (the insurgents do not win because their weaponry is a more sophisticated one), it is very dubious whether revolutions stimulate technological advance. From this latter vantage point war fares better than revolution. On the other hand, the revolutionaries may have a point if they say that war kills indiscriminately, whereas they kill the right people. Even so, and again, where is the creativity?

The answer ends up by being of this sort: It cannot be doubted that the English and, even more, the French revolutions have created the present-day Western civility,[41] and that the Russian and some subsequent communist revolutions have generated new worlds. Nothing of the above can be doubted; but the instances in question do not attest, in truth, to a creativity of the revolutionary act as such. These revolutions exploded the obstacles and removed the impediments to the potentialities that not only gave cause to the conflagration but that subsequently delivered the goods. Per se, the merit of a revolutionary destruction—for destruction it is—is only to permit a reconstruction. But if no reconstructive potential precedes the revolution, no new positive construction (that is, reconstruction) can follow the revolution. *Something must preexist* the revolutionary act in order to come into existence after it.

The benefits that followed from the French Revolution were all spelled out in the demands that "caused" the 1789-94 events, that is, they all derive from seeds that came to maturity during the Enlightenment. There was no utopia in what Locke and Montesquieu had conceived, in their liberal civility; and these (not Terror) became, during the nineteenth century, the realizations of the 1789 revolution. The argument is not dissimilar if we turn to Russia. There is no question that well before 1917 Russian society disposed of, and displayed, outstanding capacities. At the turn of the century Russian mathematicians were in the forefront of mathematics, and if the military capabilities attest, as they generally do, to the state of technology, then the estimate of the experts was, just before the outbreak of World War I, that by 1917 Russia would have attained a military might equal to that of Germany. Estimates aside, by 1914 Russia had become the fourth industrial power of the world. While, then, the Soviet revolution was constructive in destroying the tzarist impediment, it remains an open question whether Russians might have not progressed far more than they actually have without stumbling, with Stalin, into another blocking system.[42] That question will never be solved. But the sure thing is that the Soviet revolution was preceded by a wealth of societal capabilities without which its distinctive creature would simply have been another experience and form of Terror.

The point is, then, that revolutions are creative not because of an intrinsic creativeness of the revolutionary act as such—this is the myth—but because they liberate creative forces that are otherwise impeded. In particular, revolutions create a better polity if, and only if, somebody has in mind, before the revolution, what is to be done after the revolution. Their political creativity hinges on having a feasible, or at least credible, replacement world in sight. This is no longer the case with the present-day revolutionary subculture. It is no wonder that the rebel in arms is enchanted with Marcuse's

dictum that the path to socialism may well be from science to utopia. This is all the layout he has. He is a utopian without a utopia. And the reasons for this predicament of his—an entirely novel one—are not far to seek.

When liberal democracies became established on the basis of universal or near-universal suffrage, it came to be generally believed that revolutions had lost their reason for being. The "end of revolutions" prophecy has since been devastatingly disappointed; yet the underlying argument has a logical force that is less easily defeated. Nondemocratic systems are *rigid* systems, that is, they dispose of no built-in mechanisms for either changing themselves or responding to demands for change. Rigid systems, therefore, can only be broken; and this means that they ultimately call for a revolutionary overthrow (unless wars happen to achieve the same purpose). Democracy is, instead, a characteristically *flexible* system. Above all, or first, democracy is a procedure for processing whatever a society demands, whatever comes up through "voice" and with voice. Even so, democracies do succumb.[43] Yet democracy has taken its revenge on the revolutionaries that sought its overthrow; it has preempted them. The present-day revolutionary subculture is left to believe in a better world mysteriously and miraculously resulting from a creativity that revolutions per se surely do not have. It is small wonder, therefore, that the present-day replacement worlds should remain as empty as they are. The creativity of the Cambodian revolution (despite the ideas absorbed by its leaders at the Sorbonne) consists only of a massacre; when a void preexists, an even greater void follows. *Ex nihilo, nihil fit*—out of nothing, nothing comes.

4.7 *Ideals and Evidence*

It has been shown that ideals are realizable but also non-realizable, that ideals can be betrayed but can also betray, and that ideals can be either constructive or destructive. From now onward I shall deal with the *constructiveness of ideals.*[44] Implicitly, when not explicitly, I shall ask over and over again whether, and how, ideals are best put to constructive, as against self-defeating, use. The question is: What renders an ideal amenable to successful management, to success in application?

It was indicated earlier, in the light of our feedback rule, that the test of the constructiveness of ideals resides in how ideals relate to evidence. But while ideals have been inspected at length, "evidence" has not. It is expedient, as I have done thus far, to counterpoise ideals and facts, just as it is expedient to counterpoise ideas and reality. Under this formulation, we seemingly have a symmetry. Yet these elements are intrinsically very different. Ideals and ideas[45] are *in* our heads and fully coincide with their mental representations.

Facts and reality are simply *out there.* In truth, then, so-called facts are *experi-*
ence and evidence about facts—and that is quite another matter. Furthermore,
very little of this experience and evidence is based on personal knowledge;[46]
most of it consists, instead, on *reports about* experience and evidence. Even
so ideas and facts, ideals and reality, do have—above and beyond their intrin-
sic differences—one crucial element in common: They are both given mean-
ing, shaped, communicated, and firmed up *via words,* and indeed through
the *same words.* The word is "democracy" (or liberalism or socialism) regard-
less of whether we intend the ideal or the reality. In like manner, freedom,
equality, justice, and so on, are, respectively, identical terms (words) for both
ideals and facts. Granted that facts are, in truth, reports about facts, and
granted, therefore, that to counterpoise ideals and facts in a symmetrical fash-
ion is a grand simplification, in the end the simplification is vindicated. In
a fundamental respect that symmetry holds.

The quintessential point is that the difficult and precarious linkage be-
tween the outer world and the world inside our heads stands and falls on
one element: its words and wording. Even the most bare empiricist cannot
escape the unescapable, namely, that his data are found and cast within his
concepts, and thereby via the *wording of his concepts.* Putting it the other
way around, concepts (as termed or worded) are "data containers" just as much
as they are anything else. In the field the researcher employs words (categories,
classes, checklists) that *(a)* select the facts to be searched; *(b)* prejudge their
interpretation; and *(c)* communicate what has been found. The gist is, then,
that if there is a sure way of distorting, and indeed destroying, the process
that somehow brings the outer world into our minds, this sure way is to dis-
establish the vocabulary, to play or cheat with words. The sine qua non con-
dition that permits the assumption that an outer world somehow enters our
heads is that throughout this tricky ambulation *the vehicle remains constant;*
this vehicle being the word element and, more precisely, a firmed-up corres-
pondence between a given wording and a given concept.

Yet, during the last decades the game in town has been—not always un-
wittingly—a "word game" that has very effectively destroyed any intersub-
jective, stabilized correspondence between wordings and concepts. This is
what has happened, we have just seen, to the correspondence between the
words utopia and myth, on the one hand, and their meaning-function, on
the other. A similar kind of disfigurement happened to "violence" when it
became fashionable to speak of "structural violence" (i.e., a violence without
violence).[47] And throughout this book we shall see that the words consen-
sus, conflict, power, authority, freedom, coercion, and indeed all the central
terms of the vocabulary of politics, have been subjected to the same treat-

ment. If so, and to the extent that this is so, *much of our evidence becomes*
invalid; in the aggregate, and over time, it denotes or measures under a same
word different things (since it measures highly volatile concepts). Of course,
research may, per se, produce valid findings (provided that its word vehicle
is kept constant by the researcher). Even so, when all the research findings
are added up, the aggregate conversion of "facts" into "apprehended facts"
will reflect the messiness of the language basis. That is to say that the greater
the interindividual volatility of meanings, the lesser the validity of the pile
(of evidence) thus resulting. Under these conditions it becomes very difficult,
in the case at hand, to assess which evidence has what bearing on the theory
of democracy.

The foregoing clarifies—I hope—when it is, and how it is, that so-called
evidence becomes *(a) valid evidence,* in the broad sense that it speaks to the
problem that it addresses; and *(b) trustworthy evidence,* in the sense that it
can credibly be assumed to convert (as best as human ways can do it) an "out-
side" reality "inside" our minds. Let us now revert to the assertion that so-
called facts actually are reports of experience and evidence about facts, in
order to clarify in what sense *experience* is, or is not, evidence.

If evidence is qualified as "scientific evidence," or hard evidence, then
it is self-evident that it differs from experience. However, this narrow mean-
ing of the term evidence is of little avail to us. This is not only because the
social science evidence still happens to be largely insufficient but also, we have
just seen, because the disruption of language undermines its cumulability and,
therefore, its cumulative validity.[48] Should we conclude from this that it is
not evidence (scientific evidence) but experience, notably historical experience,
that stands out as the primary source of our factual knowledge? Tocqueville
is ever prophetic, although unassisted by social science. Saint-Simon performed
astonishingly well as a prophet of the industrial society, despite the thinness
and softness of his evidence. All the classics that outlined the project of our
liberal democracies—from Locke to the authors of the *Federalist Papers*—
well understood the world "as it is," since their project did succeed in the real
world; yet their knowledge was almost entirely historical: reports about his-
torical experiences.

These considerations notwithstanding, I still believe that the theory of
democracy is entitled to make reference to "evidence"; among other reasons
because I see no compelling reason for reducing and restricting the notion
of evidence to its scientific variety. When used without qualifier, in my usage
"evidence" points to whatever can attest credibly to a state of the real world,
thereby including the evidence that comes from both historical experience
and personal experience.

Once evidence is defined, we may revert to the question: What renders ideals constructive instead of self-defeating? The test, I said, is how ideals relate to evidence. Ideals that simply reject evidence or that simply negate evidence—as now defined—cannot be, in the long run, constructive. That is to say that when ideals are intended to be constructive, they must *interact with,* and *account for,* the pertinent evidence. As spelled out by my feedback rule, this does not imply that ideals ever do, or should, surrender to evidence; it implies, instead, that ideals *succeed* in their constructive intent when evidence is put to use. Conversely, impermeability and deafness to whatever evidence is a sure sign that an ideal is not being managed constructively, that its real-world implementation will fail.

There is still one point that deserves mentioning. Remember that evidence is, in full, *reports* about evidence. If this is explicated, it means that a report about experience and events actually consists of using words (whether or not supplemented by numerical values), of bringing them together in some coherent and meaningful fashion, of drawing inferences, and also of arguing that the evidence being reported on is not only credible but as credible, or more credible, than previous or contrary evidence. So, to report is already to provide a string of arguments, an argumentation. Nonetheless, I have asserted earlier that evidence cannot replace argument, just as argument cannot displace evidence. Why is that so? The reason is simple, yet important. While a reporting actually unfolds itself as an argument, its inherent limit is to be confined to the ambit of the "until now." Thus, in a very fundamental sense, not only the impossible, but also *the possibles* escape the purview of evidence. Evidence attests to past, not to future possibles. It should be well understood, therefore, that while I shall relate, most of the time, ideals to evidence, any investigation of "possibles" (and of their correlative impossibles) requires theoretical argument.

A brief recapitulation is in order, not least because we have moved a long way from the beginning. The beginning was that the extant division into realists and democrats is wrongly and ominously drawn, for it divides those who—on fundamentals—belong to the same family and unites those who should indeed be divided. When the chips are down, the divide is *violence:* whether we praise peacelike or warlike politics, whether we respect the individual and his freedom or whether we disclaim his sacredness, his freedom, and indeed his right to be alive. In truth, the real enemies of liberal democracy are located at the extremes of each camp; they are hyperrealists who negate all ideals, or hyperidealists who negate all facts. Thus, if democracy is attacked from without by mistaken realists, it is also (and at the moment more menacingly) undermined from within by mistaken idealists. The general point is that the

excessive disrepute of present-day democracies among their beneficiaries is surely related to our having raised the stakes too high. The ingratitude typical of the man of our time and his disillusionment with democracy are also, and in no small part, the reaction to promised goals that cannot possibly be reached. And to the extent that this is so, the danger threatening a democracy that officially has no enemies left, is, above everything else, perfectionism. Ultimately it is the deluded perfectionist who either resorts to violence and to the maxim that ends justify all means, or who faults ideals that are faultless, thus turning to counter-ideals. It is, instead, my argument that ideals are not made to be "literally" converted into facts but to challenge facts; and that if this is not understood, ideals ultimately become self-denying. If the sights are incessantly raised, then the real world takes its revenge. Nor is there any unassailable reason for assuming that a "good" is optimized the more it is maximized.

There is a final item—if only an aside—worthy of mention. In my discussion of perfectionism I have never brought in the notion of demagogy. Even though perfectionists easily become—if they enter politics—demagogues, the two are very different animals. At bottom, the perfectionist is an intellectual animal, brought up in some kind of intellectual hothouse, whereas the demagogue is a born politico, a "natural" political animal. The fact remains—it will be retorted—that democracies are exposed to, and suffer from, demagogic escalations far more than from anything else.

Democracy is to politics what a market system is to economics. To pursue the analogy, just as we know no better method of protecting the consumer than forbidding monopolistic concentration of economic power, we do not know a better means for upholding freedom than letting parties (in the plural) compete among themselves. The difference, however, is that competition among economic producers is submitted to the control of consumers who do indeed consume, and are therefore in a position to appraise goods that are offered to them in some tangible form. Competition among political parties, on the contrary, easily escapes the control of the political consumer, for political goods are not tangible and cannot easily be evaluated. The analogy breaks down on a second count as well: that economic competition is legally controllable and controlled, whereas political competition is not. Economic cheats, so to speak, are brought to court and also to prison; political cheats (demagogues) are not. The difference is, then, that unfair, inflationary, and indeed purely demagogic competition hardly has, in politics, effective correctives. In short, economic demagogy does not pay, or pays far less, than political demagogy.[49] This, incidentally, is probably the reason that keeps "demagogy" a specifically political term.

There is nothing in the above that I could deny. As the Greeks already found out, the demagogue is as old as politics. The demagogue is the person who tries to fool all the people all the time. Since he is not likely to ever disappear the problem can only be confronted, it seems to me, by having publics that are hard to fool—at least all the time. If demagogy is to be counteracted, the most effective way of doing so is to create, around the political cheater, a credibility vacuum. And since it is the perfectionist who gives credibility to the demagogue, to curb perfectionism is also, if only by indirect implication, to curb the demagogue. A final reason for criticizing democratic perfectionism is, then, not to assist demagogy with our intellectual mistakes. While ideals cannot be *fully* satisfied, they can be satisfied *satis* (i.e., optimized). But this is the view, and the task, of the non-perfectionist.

Notes

1. See chapter 6, section 6.

2. On the origin of this phrase, see Francis Lieber, *On Civil Liberty and Self-Government* (Philadelphia: 1880), p. 405, and chap. 35, passim.

3. The one towering author whose rejection is unconditional is Nietzsche. His *Genealogie der Moral* (1887), which is the counterpart (together with the *Anti-Christ*) of Nietzsche's theory of the Superman and the *Herrenklasse*, represents the most powerful negation of all the values in which Christianity, liberalism, and democracy rest.

4. In the Preamble of the Declaration of Independence of the United States (4 July 1776). Instead, the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizens of 1789 reads: "Men are born and remain free and equal *in rights*" (my italics). What makes Jefferson's text characteristic is that it stands unqualified. See, for what he intended, H.A. Myers, *Are Men Equal?* (New York: Putnam's, 1945), pp. 34-35, 63-64, 136-37.

5. Equality is discussed in full in chapter 12, herein.

6. In the *Theses on Feuerbach* (1848).

7. Reference is especially made to the "critical philosophy" of the Frankfurt school, well reviewed in L. Kolakowski's monumental *Main Currents of Marxism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), vol. 3, chaps. 10-11. While the school was formed around Horkheimer in the 1920s, its revolutionary mass impact (relatively speaking, of course) occurred some forty years later. Its direct derivation from the Marxian revolutionary philosopher basically stems from the fact that all the authors concerned (including Marcuse) still belong to the dissolution of Hegelian philosophy, albeit variously rejuvenated by sociological or other cross-breedings.

8. More concludes his *Utopia* (1518) precisely in these terms: "I may rather wish for, than hope after."

9. See especially *Ideology and Utopia* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1936), pp. 173ff. Note that the coupling of utopia with ideology also muddles the latter concept.

10. Mannheim admits that "among ideas which transcend the situation there are, certainly, some which in principle can never be realized" (ibid., p. 177). We should, if so, distinguish between realizable and unrealizable utopias—a weird way of restoring what is being negated.

11. *The Soul of Man under Socialism* (Saugatuck: 5x8 Press, 1950), p. 18.

12. Cited by Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia,* p. 183.

13. Ibid.

14. H. Marcuse, "The End of Utopia," *Five Lectures* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), p. 63. He concedes that utopia points to an impossible "when a project for social change contradicts real laws of nature." However, since there are no known "real laws of nature" in the realm of politics (unless we restore a natural-law philosophy), Marcuse's concession is of little, if any, meaning. In substance Marcuse reduces utopia to "immaturity of the social situation."

15. J.O. Hertzeler, *The History of Utopian Thought* (New York: 1923), p. 279.

16. Since my point is strictly conceptual, no reference is made to the contents and variety of utopias (thereby including "distopias," i.e., counter-utopias). A very interesting substantive analysis is R. Ruyer, *L' Utopie et les Utopies* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1950). See also Frank E. Manuel, ed., *Utopias and Utopian Thought* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1966). The editor of the symposium significantly admits: "There was an early consensus that we had better not embark upon any attempt to achieve a common definition of the term utopia" (p. xiv).

17. R.M. MacIver, *The Web of Government* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), pp. 5 and 4. MacIver's techniques subsume exact knowledge but are otherwise narrowly defined.

18. Ibid., p. 51. Interestingly, when MacIver praises democracy (chap. 8), he never uses "myth." The myth on which he especially dwells is authority.

19. *Power and Society,* pp. 117, 116. It is fair to note that Lasswell and Kaplan justify their tour de force with the argument that "we characterize symbols in terms of their functioning, not directly by their properties."

20. The parallelism is so close that Lasswell and Kaplan actually combine their redefinition of myth with the redefinitions of Mannheim, as follows: "The *ideology* is the political myth functioning to preserve the social structure: the *utopia* to supplant it" (*Power and Society,* p. 123).

21. It should be clear that "extension" is used in the ordinary meaning of the word (a smallness or bigness), not in its technical acceptation in logic, i.e., as the denotation (as opposed to the intension or connotation) of a concept.

22. This point is pursued under the focus of "participatory democracy," chapter 5, section 6.

23. The objection that under conditions of natural harmony the self no longer is a "self" (i.e., that individuals would no longer differ among themselves) does not bear on the point. If the self disappears, the problem disappears; in that case, even the notion of government (a political concept) is abused and becomes meaningless.

24. For the Marxian concept of democracy, see chapter 15, sections 1 and 2.

25. *Des Réactions Politiques* (1797), chap. 8. Compare with Kant: "It is obvious that no matter how complete the theory may be, a middle term is required between theory and practice. . . . For a concept . . . which contains a general rule, must be supplemented by an act of judgement whereby the practitioner distinguishes instances when the rule applies from those where it does not." (E. Kant, "On the Common Saying: This May Be True in Theory but It Does Not Apply in Practice," in *Political Writings*

[New York: Cambridge University Press, 1970], p. 61.) Kant was recommending prudence; Constant was saying much more.

26. Ibid.

27. The issue is taken up in chapter 9, section 5.

28. To be sure, ideals can also cover up and camouflage reality, but not at the genetic moment that I envisage.

29. Both quotations can be found in *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953).

30. D.F. Thompson, *The Democratic Citizen: Social Science and Democratic Theory in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 45, 46. Italics added.

31. John Herz, *Political Realism and Political Idealism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), p. 42.

32. See chapter 2, section 3.

33. See again Herz, *Political Realism and Political Idealism,* p. 168 and pp. 168-89.

34. Realists believe in the force of "force" but do not extol "violence." As Sergio Cotta pointedly observes, "the truly characteristic fact of our time is the *exaltation* of violence. Up until the nineteenth century one finds no trace of any substance of such exaltation. Violence was recognized as being inevitable . . . but was not praised. . . . If at times men were taught to employ it, this was because violence was believed to be, under given circumstances, a necessary evil, certainly not a good. . . . What has at times been exalted in the past was force . . . not violence" (*Perchè la Violenza?* [L'Aquila: Japadre, 1978], pp. 21-22).

35. For a historical and conceptual analysis, see especially P. Calvert, *Revolution* (London: Macmillan, 1970); and C. Kotowski, "Revolution," in G. Sartori, ed., *Social Science Concepts: A Systematic Analysis* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1984). The literature is extensive. See T.R. Gurr, *Why Men Rebel?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970); and H. Eckstein, "On the Causes of Internal War," in E.A. Nordlinger, ed., *Politics and Society* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970). See also, in general, C.J. Friedrich, ed., *Revolution* (New York: Atherton Press, 1966); C. Tilly, "Revolutions and Collective Violence," in F.I. Greenstein and N.W. Polsby, eds., *Handbook of Political Science* (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1975), vol. 3; and A.S. Cohan, *Theories of Revolution: An Introduction* (New York: Wiley, 1975). For broader sociological considerations, see Chalmers Johnson, *Revolutionary Change* (Boston: Little Brown, 1966); and especially S.N. Eisenstadt, *Revolution and the Transformation of Societies* (New York: Free Press, 1978).

36. Marxists conceive revolution as an extended process and thus consider fundamental socioeconomic change a defining characteristic. If so, it can be argued that (*a*) the first "true revolution" is the Leninist one; and (*b*) revolutionary violence is a necessary condition of fundamental change. Both implications are too restrictive (and excessively self-serving). An intelligent exposition of the Marxist approach is Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

37. This element is highlighted especially by J. Monnerot, *Sociologie de la Révolution: Mythologies Politiques du XX Siecle* (Paris: Fayard, 1969). See also L. Pellicani, *I Rivoluzionari di Professione: Teoria e Prassi dello Gnosticismo Moderno* (Firenze: Vallecchi, 1975). A broad, often insightful coverage of related themes is S. Bialer and S. Sluzar, eds., *Radicalism in the Contemporary Age* (Boulder: Westview, 1977), 3 vols.

38. *Anti-Dühring* (Moscow edition: 1959), p. 391.

39. Sorel's best-known work is *Reflections on Violence* (1905; Glencoe: Free Press, 1950). However, his writings are extensive and unquestionably attest to philosophic credentials.

40. This, we have seen (chapter 3, section 2), is how politics is conceived by Carl Schmitt.

41. Interestingly (as we are reminded by Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* [London: Faber & Faber, 1963]), Cromwell's revolution was not called "revolution," for the notion still maintained in the 1650s its traditional astronomical meaning of circular movement and, thus, of constant orderly recurrence. In this acceptation the "revolution" was the restoration of the Stuart monarchy in 1660. The first revolution to be designated as such by its protagonists was the Glorious Revolution of 1688—an essentially peaceful event. Our understanding of "revolution" (movement without return, rupture) is, thus, the one established in 1789.

42. Note that I am not addressing the question of Alec Nove, *Was Stalin Really Necessary? Some Problems of Soviet Political Economy* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1964). My conjecture is a preliminary one, namely, that Russia would have done far better than has been the case had its 1917 revolution simply been an unblocking revolution. For a comparative assessment of what the tsarist regime had accomplished in its last decades see Norman Stone, *Europe Transformed: 1878-1919* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984), pp. 197-254.

43. For a major, detailed coverage and investigation see J. Linz and A. Stepan, eds., *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978). Linz's Part 1, "Crisis, Breakdown and Reequilibration" (pp. 1-124), is a truly outstanding analysis. In general, see L. Morlino, *Come Cambiano i Regimi Politici* (Milano: Angeli, 1980).

44. Thompson, *The Democratic Citizen,* p. 47, distinguishes between "reconstructive" and "constructive" ideals and qualifies the former as "justifiable with little or no evidence from behavioral social science as it now exists." I find the distinction, as stated, unconvincing.

45. Since ideals are expressed via ideas, at the source they need not be distinguished.

46. Its importance is well explained, almost to a point of overstatement, by M. Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

47. See J. Galtung, *Essays in Peace Research* (Copenhagen: Ejlers, 1975), 1:5, "Structural and Direct Violence." To be sure, "structural violence" can only mean that structures are "constraints." But if constraints are called violence, either violence is nothing much or everything is violence. In either case the concept is disfigured.

48. Within the context of the theory of democracy, the most notable exception to this broad generalization is the evidence on public opinion. See chapter 5, sections 1-4.

49. For party competition and the economic analogy see G. Sartori, *Parties and Party Systems: A Framework for Analysis* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976), esp. chaps. 6.1 and 7.1. More generally, and for other disanalogies between economics and politics, see the perceptive analysis of W.C. Mitchell, "Efficiency, Responsibility, and Democratic Politics," in J.R. Pennock and J.W. Chapman, eds., *Liberal Democracy* (New York: New York University Press, 1983), chap. 14.