
The Case Against Political Theory

Author(s): Harry V. Jaffa

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THE CASE AGAINST POLITICAL THEORY*

HARRY V. JAFFA
Ohio State University

THE SUBJECT PRESENTED FOR OUR CONSIDERATION is: What is political theory? I do not, however, propose to attempt a direct answer to that question. Instead I would ask: Is political theory either necessary or desirable for the study of politics? Or, to put it briefly: Is political theory good? You may quite properly wonder how I can expect to say whether something is good before I have said what I think that it is. For the moment I defend the respectability if not the logic of this procedure by reminding you that Socrates, in Plato's *Republic*, unhesitatingly undertakes to convince Glaucon and Adeimantus that justice is intrinsically good almost immediately after he has said that he knows nothing about it. Politics, I shall argue, is a practical discipline, and therefore to speak of political theory—a theory of practice—is itself an anomaly. The theoretical point of view, as I understand it—considered ideally, and not in its limited attainment even in sciences to which it is unquestionably proper—is the point of view of the observer who is neither affected by what he observes nor who affects the objects under his observation. However difficult it may be to achieve such detachment in other sciences—as in physics, where the energy of the light which makes observation possible affects the objects even as they are being observed—it nonetheless remains a guiding intention.

In politics, I maintain, such detachment is not only impossible, but undesirable. An active concern with political objects, a care for them which naturally expresses itself in both love and hate, is the very condition of their “visibility” to the eye of the mind. Political objects, by and large, exist only in the realm of human opinion. The political system which constitutes the United States exists mainly in the minds of the people of the United States. Because there is such a state of mind, we observe certain behavior which

*Paper presented to a panel on “The Nature of Political Theory” at the meeting of the American Political Science Association in Washington, D. C., on September 12, 1959. Professor John H. Hallowell was Chairman of the panel and Professor David Easton represented the case “for” political theory.

expresses itself in statutes, judicial decisions, voting, military service, legislative assemblies, *etc.* Yet no description of political behavior, however, comprehensive, would convey an understanding of this political system if the animating principle or principles behind it were not grasped. A thorough understanding of what is expressed by the Preamble of the Constitution would enable any astute reader to deduce at least a rough approximation of the frame of government that follows it: *e.g.*, separation and limitation of governmental powers, frequent elections, *etc.* But could someone who knew nothing of how the Founding Fathers regarded property, or civil and religious liberty, comprehend how the frame of such a government might be expected to operate?

Liberty and property are things that, I maintain, no one can possibly understand by mere observation, apart from having experienced in some way or other the passions which have engendered, and have been engendered by, those mighty symbols, just as one cannot understand what life is without feeling in his own soul its preciousness and its precariousness. Only as a man has compared in the experience of his own existence the things that make it valuable to him, on the one hand, and the things that make it a burden to him, on the other, can he even begin to grasp what it is. The fundamentals of man's moral and political existence are disclosed to him only as he is stimulated by pleasure and pain, and as he is moved to love and to hate. Strictly speaking, political theory is impossible, because the detachment implicit in the idea of theory would shut us off from access to political phenomena; yet the illusion that theory is the goal or summit of political science can produce, and is producing, the most deleterious consequences for our profession.

I

My colleague, David Easton, has written that all mature scientific knowledge is theoretical. Leaving aside the question of whether political knowledge is scientific, I would deny that mature knowledge of politics is theoretical. Theoretical knowledge, as I understand the term, is general: that is, it describes the invariant relationships that subsist among a number of different particular objects. The greater the number of objects of which a given generalization is true, the more "mature" our knowledge of those objects is. The

Newtonian laws of motion are, I understand, still an accurate prototype of pure theoretical understanding: they describe invariant relationships among all actual, or possible, bodies in the universe.

But let us consider the relationship of generality of this kind to political knowledge. A political question *par excellence*, I should think, would be one which had to do with the relationship of the United States and the Soviet Union. For example, in the light of the generally understood goals of American policy, should the United States seek a *détente* through summitry now or should it first increase its conventional military forces so as better to neutralize Soviet force on the continent of Europe? To answer this, we would need a whole series of valid propositions concerning both the United States and the Soviet Union as political systems. Both are systems to which the term "super-state" clearly applies today. Super-states are species of the genus "state" even as "state" is a sub-genus of "political community," a term which embraces "city-states," "empire-states" and others. But what is true of all super-states" will be true of *both* the Soviet Union and the United States, and will be only of conditional value in deciding what policy one of these ought to pursue with respect to the other. The more general our political knowledge, the more abstract, the more remote it is from political reality. After all, *the* "super-state" has no real existence, any more than *the* "state," or *the* "polis." The Soviet Union and the United States, like England, France and Germany—or like Athens, Sparta and Jerusalem once upon a time—alone are political realities. And political knowledge, as it seems to me, must culminate in the comprehension of what is proper to each particular political system, rather than in the perception of what is common to all.

Politics, in a radical sense, more than any other discipline, is oriented toward the empirical. I am not here arguing that we should not have such things as definitions of "the state." Students of politics must classify their data, and general terms come naturally into use. It will be a matter of the first importance when, for instance, China becomes (if it does become) a power of the rank of the United States or the Soviet Union. And we must be clear as to what constitutes a power of that rank in order to make that observation. But the end in view is *not* that we know what constitutes a super-state (the generalization), but that we be able to tell when and whether China is one (the particular judgment).

II

In *The Political System*.¹ Easton deals with two main objections to the possibility of genuine theory in political science. (pp. 24ff.) The first of these is the self-fulfilling or self-denying prophecy. This states, in brief, that any theory of social or political behavior is itself a political datum, and as such capable of being a cause of change in the field it purports to describe. Since the change it causes will not have been taken into account when the theory was formulated, it will falsify the theory. Whether the theory induces behavior intended to contradict the theory (the self-denying prophecy) or to fulfill the theory (the self-fulfilling prophecy) is secondary: in either case the theory has become part of the field it was intended to characterize and the theory as formulated is no longer valid. Easton's main reply to this objection, as I understand, is this: a theory may assert a relationship among specified variables while assuming other factors to remain constant. It may then by definition exclude itself from the field it characterizes. This reply, I think, is reasonable and correct when we have in mind the lesser hypotheses that must be developed and tested on the way to the construction of the grand Newtonian-style hypothesis, the "true" theory which is the ultimate end and goal of a "true" science. But such a generalization, about *all* political communities, obviously cannot contain the limitation that no member of any political community learn of it—a proviso that could not be fulfilled if the theorist was himself a member of such a community—as he would have to be, in some way or other.

As a further reply to the self-fulfilling or self-denying prophecy, Easton claims that there are some hypotheses whose validity does not depend upon the knowledge or ignorance of those to whom they apply. I do not find the example he gives to be at all convincing. "Certain consequences of the division of labor," he writes, (p. 29) "cannot be avoided, however widely they are advertised. The fact of ensuing industrialism is a result that no amount of human knowledge can alter, as long as a division of labor prevails." It is to be observed that Easton ascribes causal necessity to the relation of the division of labor and industrialism. And yet it is a fact, I believe, that industrialism has accompanied the division of labor only in modern times: in the ancient world the division of labor was widely known and implemented, and yet industrialism—meaning thereby

¹(New York, 1953).

the process of manufacture accompanied, as Easton says, by technological change—never occurred. Industrialism in the present-day sense is a consequence of the application of modern science to the problems of production, something that incidentally involves the division of labor.

Yet Easton elaborates upon his law thus (p. 29): "Once knowledge of the effects of urban concentration and industrialism has been dispersed . . . it does little to change the relationship between industrialism and urban concentration." If this statement means that knowledge can never significantly change the relationship between industrialism and urban concentration, it seems certainly wrong. At least that is the assumption of town planners. Easton himself is certainly aware of this when he continues by saying that "The generalization still prevails that *undirected* industrialization [italics added] leads to vast congregation of human beings in small areas." His original formulation of his hypothesis did not speak of *undirected* industrialization. Indeed, he originally spoke of the consequences of industrialization as being inescapable "given the condition that society early [*i.e.*, early in the industrial revolution] decided to intervene only peripherally in the whole process of industrialization." In other words, when manufacturers find it convenient to have their workers piled up in slums next door to the factories, and when these same manufacturers are largely in control of the government, slums will *then* almost certainly pile up. That is not undirected industrialization, but industrialization directed toward concentration. On the other hand, if a British labor government decides upon industrial dispersion in new towns, then urban concentration—at least on the 19th-century pattern—will not occur. I see nothing in the nature of a law, or even of a generalization here, unless it be that major social changes tend to occur in accordance with the fixed dispositions of those who control governmental power. In no event do I see any predetermined consequences flowing from the division of labor (other than those implied tautologically in the definition of the expression) or industrialization which are not to be accounted for by the presence or absence of *other* factors, that is, factors such as the dominance of 19th-century liberalism or twentieth-century socialism, factors which are *not* contained in Easton's original hypotheses.

It seems to me that generalizations like that the division of labor

causes industrialism, or that industrialism causes intense urban concentration, are prime examples of what Easton himself would call a "culture-bound" social science. Given the "values" of 19th-century British liberalism, it was in fact altogether probable (although by no means necessary) that industrialism would have the consequences Easton mentions. But it is equally true that, given different "values" dominant in the governing system, different effects are probable. For example, the rate at which capital is channeled away from consumer goods and into heavy industry in the Soviet Union is quite different from what it has been or is in the Western capitalist countries. It is almost inconceivable (although, again, one can hardly say impossible) that capital formation on the Soviet pattern would ever happen under democratic auspices. The "values" in virtue of which men choose what we in the West call democracy also induce us to select less drastic methods for attaining social goals. On the other hand, Soviet Communists, opting for the advantages that first-class political power confers, must perforce accept a political system that denies any weight to the political opinion that does not genuinely accept the burden imposed by such a goal. Those who prefer pleasure, comfort, or political freedom *now*, to power *later*, must be disfranchised. Since the vote of the shiftless and of the dedicated count the same in Western-style democracy, Western-style democracy is incompatible with at least some conspicuous "values" of Soviet Communism. I think it would be a painful laboring of the obvious to try to demonstrate further that "values" are an integral part of all social causation, and that the effects of any such "cause" as industrialization are utterly unpredictable apart from the "values" impelling those who are the agents in the process of industrialization. No generalizations as to the effects of industrialization which do not, tacitly or overtly, include a specification of the "values" guiding the process have any validity whatever. Unless then, true and comprehensive generalizations as to human "values" can be made, no enduring generalizations concerning social causality seem possible.

Easton does recognize that most theories, so-called, are valid "if at all, within the limits of a particular cultural situation" (p. 34). But he is optimistic that, as we define each cultural situation with ever-increasing care and precision we will gradually distinguish the culturally conditioned from the culturally unconditioned and arrive

at "truly universal propositions." But this expectation—and I cannot see that it is more than that—seems to me to be unjustified. The idea of a "culture" is the idea of a community of tastes and preferences—religious, artistic, gastronomical, sexual, athletic—a community of "values." And values are, on Easton's own definition, essentially idiosyncratic. They are, he says, ultimately reducible "to emotional responses conditioned by the individual's total life-experience" (p. 221). He does not say so, but I understand him to mean that they are intrinsically nothing more than the aforesaid responses. That is to say, on this view of values there is nothing in which the emotional responses of all men are grounded which provides a non-emotional standpoint from which to view values. I would be the last to deny that values are emotional responses; but it seems to me that if political science were to be a science like physics—or if it were to be capable of dealing with the problem of universal judgments concerning human actions in any other way—it must assume a uniform underlying principle of causality within the universe of human values no less than among the other political facts for which it seeks the causes. There must be a human nature that is in some sense the uniform cause underlying all human valuing no less than gravity is a uniform cause underlying the motion of all bodies in the Newtonian system. Values must be seen as the emotional responses of men achieving or failing to achieve what all men are impelled or drawn toward in virtue of their common humanity. If values are not intelligible in this way—and I do not now assert that they are—then the idea of an inter-cultural or trans-cultural science of society is necessarily vain.

To summarize: if such a phenomenon as industrialism may be the cause of diverse effects—as it clearly may—and if those effects are unpredictable apart from the values of those engaged in the process, then we must in each case know what the values involved are in order to make a judgment as to the probable consequences. But this would only tell us about the consequences of industrialism within a given culture and would be true of that culture, only so long as its values did not change, a condition in fact never strictly met. It would be a culture-bound judgment with no real element of that generality which is the hallmark of the science Easton seeks. But still more, it would be the record of the mind of an observer within a culture, and with particular values. It would be doubly

culture-bound in that we would have no guarantee that an observer from another culture could comprehend the terms of the judgment. And it is difficult to see how the idea of social causation can remain other than culture-bound if values are nothing but emotions, since emotions are reducible to individual "life-experiences" within uniquely different cultures, and as such are incommensurable and incomparable.

III

In *The Political System*, Easton divides political theory into causal theory and value theory. I believe, however, that it follows from what has been said that there can be no causal theory apart from value theory, nor for that matter value theory apart from causal theory. On this latter proposition there does not seem to be any difference between Easton and myself. In some extremely fine passages on "The Meaning of Moral Clarity" (pp. 228ff.) he argues that no statement of values is meaningful apart from a demonstration of its consequences; that is, without showing the effects of which the values are essential and intrinsic causes. From this point of view the great classics—for example, Plato's *Republic* and Hobbes's *Leviathan*—serve the purpose of portraying such consequences imaginatively (and yet with logical rigor), and they show us how certain moral commitments can operate as causes in the political and moral world. By doing so they enable us to understand what we would commit ourselves to wish for if we were to adopt the preferences of their authors. This is the essential role of value theory, from Easton's standpoint. Yet however necessary such understanding is, it is insufficient for either true causal or true value theory. Unless we can understand the connections between *different* value systems we do not really understand the connections between their different effects. And if political theory were to culminate in true generality or universality, then it would be these very connections—the connections which transcend cultures—which we would have to grasp. But I deny that, if trans-cultural knowledge is possible—and I do not now deny its possibility—it can be knowledge of the kind obtained by the methods of the positive sciences, by the methods of induction, hypothesis, experimentation and generalization. Although the methods I would suggest have something in common with the

foregoing, they rely primarily upon introspection and dialectic. What we can know about other cultures depends primarily, I maintain, upon what we can learn about ourselves.

Easton has argued, and argued very soundly, that a value-free social science is a delusion. Values have a determining influence upon everything human beings do, and political scientists are human beings. Research interests are determined by values; criteria of relevance are so determined; the ways in which we select our data are so determined. Most important of all, our ability to perceive social reality—and what we are capable of believing *is* social reality—is determined by our values. The finest passages of Easton's book are animated by this insight. Men with one set of values are acutely sensitized to one set of relationships; men with certain other values are incapable of perceiving these same relationships. In truth no one, and that most assuredly includes the scientific investigator, perceives social reality except through the media of certain values, opinions which determine what he can see and how he can see it. Perception of social reality is itself social perception, "cultural apperception" the social psychologists call it. Without having some way to judge the qualities of the lenses we use to look out upon the social or political universe, we have no way of knowing which of the unlimited number of possible universes is *the* universe. How do we know, for example, that our ideal of an inter-cultural or trans-cultural social science is anything but a "value" of our culture, and that the elements in other cultures that seem to be common to all are more than an illusion inspired by our desire to find them?

Easton would probably say that there is one island of certainty in the ocean of equally defensible but contradictory perspectives. That island is located by the navigational instruments of modern scientific method. The proof of the pudding is in the eating; and no unscientific culture has achieved control over the natural environment as ours has. The truth of scientific method is attested by the fact of *power*. We cannot help believing in the superiority of the conception of reality conveyed by modern physics, not because atoms or curved space are believable, but because these quite unbelievable hypotheses have given us an undeniable ability to work our wills upon physical nature. For these reasons, it is held, the methods which have given us power must be the true methods to perceive reality, political and social no less than physical.

Yet this ground for faith in the possibility of *political* science is fallacious. As noted at the outset, the physicist stands outside the system he observes. "What is physics?" is not itself a physical question: that is, it is not a question about the physicist, except in the incidental sense that his body is composed of matter and energy. But "What is political theory?" *is* a political question. The reasons why the physicist asks his question are irrelevant to the understanding of his answers to it. The reasons why the political scientist asks a similar question are fundamental to understanding his answers. The question of the political scientist is asked by a man who is himself a part of a political community, a man charged with moral commitments, with "values." Like the Socrates of Plato's *Crito* he is the offspring of a particular social complex, he is a child of laws. Unlike Socrates he may regard himself as an abandoned, neglected or mistreated child but he is a child all the same. As such he is no more a free agent in deciding how to act with regard to those laws—that social complex—by which his soul was formed, than he is free in his actions with regard to the progenitors of his body. Thanks to the dispensation of modern psychoanalysis, few social scientists today would, I think, claim any great area of freedom *there*. The case for political theory rests decisively upon the possibility of a trans-cultural theory of human values, and this in turn rests upon the idea of a universal human nature, the common basis of all values. We must, however, again ask ourselves: is not such an idea itself a purely cultural phenomenon? And further: is not every possible answer to the question "What is human nature?" a circular argument? For is not the idea of a universal answer implicit in the terms of the question, foreclosing the possibility that the truth does not lie in a universal, but in a particular, and that the "universal man" is the form in which "particular man" appears in our culture?

In his recently translated essay, "What Is Philosophy?,"² Heidegger observes that the form of the universal questions beginning "What is . . ." is Greek in origin. We may of course ask, "What is that object there?"; to which the answer may be "a tree." But when we ask, "What is a tree?" we are seeking something different from the particular object, the tree that we see with our eyes. We are seeking a universal, that to which we perforce ascribe the cause

²Translated by William Kluback and Jean T. Wilde (New York, 1958).

of such intelligibility as we find in the particular object we call a tree. The quest for the "whatness" of things, their quiddity, essence, idea, form, *universal* quality, is a specific inheritance in Western civilization from the philosophy of which Socrates is believed to be the founder. So far as I am aware—and I believe this is Heidegger's opinion as well—questions in this form have never been asked in any other civilization; that is, they never were asked anywhere before they were raised in Greece in the fifth century B.C., and they have never been asked elsewhere except as these elements of Greek culture have been diffused. The idea of a universal human nature is part of our Greek inheritance. Implicit in the question, "What is man?," is the notion that man's "whatness" is intrinsically unconnected with any particular culture. Yet the question itself was first asked at a particular time and place in a particular culture, and there is no positive evidence, no *behavioral* evidence, from which the proposition implicit in the idea of the question could be validated. On the contrary, the apparent absence of the idea of universality implicit in the Greek question, from the ideas of all non-Greek (or non-Greek-infused) cultures, would make such a universality impossible to infer from positive, experimental, evidence. That is one reason why I have maintained that the methods of the positive sciences could never establish the possibility of theory in a science of man.

The seriousness of this difficulty may be further seen if we examine briefly the character of the Aristotelian question, "What is the *polis*?" As part of his way of answering, Aristotle compares human gregariousness to that of ants and bees, whose social existence is prescribed by nature, *i.e.*, by causes external to the consciousness of ant and bees, and is not subject to alteration by the voluntary actions of the members of the beehive or anthill. Fire burns the same way both here and in Persia, but the things called just, the things in virtue of which man's social existence is ordered, are everywhere different. Since the ordering of the *polis* is in this way free, it calls into activity man's rational faculties, which are required for deliberating upon the order to be prescribed. For this reason Aristotle sees man as the rational and political animal. Man's political nature requires the employment of his reasoning faculties, and reasoning supplies him with the means for ordering his political existence. Yet I think that this *kind* of answer—and

however much it may differ in details from the actual answers of present-day theorists I think they would all give the same *kind* of answer—is open to grave objection. Aristotle, for example, like most Western thinkers since, denies *a priori* that the sufficient principles for ordering man's social existence can be found in tradition. "All the survivals of the customs of antiquity are utterly foolish," he says in the *Politics*. What men really seek, and what they should seek, "is not the paternal but the good." However, is not the distinction between the ancestral and the good—a distinction which implicitly denies the teaching of the Old Testament, a distinction fundamental to classical and modern political theory—presupposed in the question beginning "What is . . .?" When we ask, "What is the *polis*?" do we not presuppose that the essence of the *polis* is not to be found in the particular characteristics of any particular political community? Do we not tacitly assume that there is a rational judgment, unconditioned by the unique circumstances of a particular culture, by which man can judge the true political reality, and thereby order his political existence? Is not the character of Aristotle's answer already prescribed by the character of his question, and must not every other answer to that question be similarly circumscribed?

Although Western culture has never been so volatile, so untraditional as it has been since the installation of the permanent revolution of modern technology, yet its spiritual existence has never been consciously "tradition-directed" since the spread of Greek philosophy, and particularly since the fusion of elements of Greek and Hebrew conceptions of the universal in Christianity. However, do not many non-Western tradition-directed cultures, ancient and modern, primitive and complex, have certain greater resemblances to the antihill and the beehive than to Western culture? Should this not make us wonder whether the difference between the human and the non-human is as fundamental as certain differences between the human and the human? Indeed, must we not dare to doubt whether the category of the "human" is a permanent fundamental in any valid sense? Aristotle spoke of all the things called just being changeable. But by what right did he employ the single category, "just," for the varieties of forms of gregariousness that he thereby subsumed under the "human"? Is there not in this a tacit

begging of the underlying question, the question as to the appropriateness of his questions?

All political theory is either Greek, an inheritance from the Greek, or a transformation of the Greek. The questions of political theory have been traditional, authoritative for *us*, because we are parts of that Western culture for which Greece was so decisive. How then do we know that every culture is not a kind of solipsism, from which there is no escape? Is the aspiration to trans-cultural understanding merely the characteristic of *our* culture? We return again to the self-same point. Yet the raising of the Socratic questions was not a cultural inheritance of Socrates, nor of the mind represented to us by that name. And we cannot dismiss *a priori* the possibility that that mind somehow hit upon a possibility that no other mind—at least that we know of—had ever hit upon. That the true informing principle of the human soul, and of a human society shaped to give effect to the truly informed human soul, was discovered at a particular moment by a particular individual, who broke free from all that he (and possibly every other man) had been up until that moment, is not only a possibility considered, but one that is even described by Plato in the *Republic*. Nothing but the most earnest and critical reflection upon the nature of the experience in which the Socratic question was born can decide whether political theory, ancient or modern, is essentially a culture-bound, or trans-cultural phenomenon. We would be false to the spirit of the Socratic question if we were to take its validity for granted. We would, I am tempted to add, be false to our own tradition.

IV

Let me re-state our difficulty once more. The question (or any of the variants of the question), "What is human nature?," by its very form identifies the universal in man with the rational faculty, and identifies the rational faculty with that which somehow perceives the universal. Yet the assumption upon which this question rests—in virtue of which all theory ancient or modern is legitimated—is not itself abstracted from experience in the way in which the answers to it may be. On the contrary, it seems to have been a unique experience, occurring in a particular culture, and one which has become general only by diffusion; that is, not by a repetition of the

original experience but by its recollection. When we think how radically our understanding of human nature has been conditioned by our tradition and by the authoritative character of this question as an element of our tradition, the very idea of political theory must appear paradoxical, if not self-contradictory. A unique experience presents itself as inherently universal, and becomes believable as such by becoming authoritative. This difficulty is the more acute for us, it seems to me, because there is another major element within the Western tradition—namely, the Bible—in which the identification of the universal with the particular is openly maintained, and maintained in a manner that is not exposed to the objections we have raised to the Socratic questions. Let me explain.

Man, the Bible tells us, is made in the image of God. It follows from this that we cannot know what man is unless we know something of God. God is the fundamental reality, man the derivative. The idea of a trans-cultural political science, in Easton's sense, would be an absurdity from the Biblical standpoint. Not the examination of all possible relations of man with man, but the examination of the actual relations of man with God, alone could reveal the primary underlying causes of all human moral and political existence. The record of man's encounter with God is not to be found in anthropological studies of existing societies, but in the record appointed by God himself in sacred scriptures. The notion of a meaningful separation of the sciences of man and the science of God—of revealed theology—would be impossible.

Let us consider again the question, "What is the *polis*?" It is important to realize that such a question could not be asked by an orthodox member of the community led by Moses through the wilderness of Sinai. The act of raising such a question would appear to him as indicative only of profound ignorance or wicked impiety: the purpose of Israel is to witness the truth of the one living God; the purpose of all other communities is ultimately to receive, from Israel, the truth of which Israel is the witness. The form of the community which is Israel, is the form impressed by the divine law, the law received immediately from God by Moses, and propounded by him to the descendants of the patriarchs. One could not accept this account of the Mosaic community and still wonder, "What is the *polis*?" For Aristotle's question implies that the distinguishing quality of the *polis* can never be identified with the characteristics

of any particular community as such, just as human nature can never be inferred from the observation of any individual man, no matter how virtuous. To ask Aristotle's question in all seriousness means then, of necessity, to doubt the affirmations in virtue of which the community of Israel understood itself. The affirmations destroy the intelligibility of the question; the question denies the affirmations.

As I understand it, the essential tenet of Judaism is that man cannot be a law unto himself, that unassisted human reason is not a sufficient principle for the ordering of man's moral and political existence. Because human wisdom is radically insufficient, the recognition of man's radical dependence upon a being other than himself is *the* ultimate in human wisdom. In the Garden of Eden the serpent told Eve that if she disobeyed God, she should become as "gods," knowing good and evil; and he said that in the day of her disobedience she would not die, as God had predicted. And the serpent, being a good theoretical scientist, was in literal sense correct. But the ability to predict—the test of a sound theory—was a false test. The serpent, an unbeliever, could not know that, in knowing good and evil, man would not become like God. For man cannot become like the Creator of the possibility of good and evil Himself (Isaiah 48:4-8) merely by knowing good and evil. If God could be identified with the knowledge of good and evil, then God as mere Knower could be distinguished from the object of his knowledge. Moreover, since the truly knowable as distinct from the opinable cannot change, God as knower of good and evil would be bound by his knowledge: He would not be omnipotent. He might perhaps be like the Platonic demiurge who intermediates between the eternal ideas and eternal matter; but he would not be the God of Israel, who is absolutely supreme in the universe, beside whom there is none other.

The primary fallacy of natural theology, whether from the point of view of an Aristotle, an Aquinas or an Isaac Newton, is the affirmation of eternal, unchanging essence—that is, of an objective order that can be the subject of true theory—as lying at the heart of human reality. But if the essence of God could be *known* to be forever unchanging, then God would be subject to the intelligible necessity of his nature. And if man, in his rationality, participated directly in God's nature, then man could in principle have a reliable

guide in the work of his own reason. There would be no radical need of man for God, for human and divine reason would be fundamentally the same—as the serpent supposed. But the Bible, by insisting that the dependence of man upon God is radical, denies in effect that the divine nature—the heart of the mystery of human life—is knowable. Man's salvation is not, in principle, accessible to him by reason. The principle of the universe, *the universal par excellence*, as it becomes accessible to man, and therewith his guiding knowledge, is the activity of the living Lord of the Universe. His actions are not vouchsafed to such as that offspring of wonder and of pride—Socrates. For Socrates, even in the consciousness of his ignorance, discerned the grounds of his superiority to every other man who lived. But Abraham, in his impotence (rather than ignorance), discerned the grounds of reverent submissiveness to a power higher than himself. Socrates' pride discerned within himself the grounds whereby an autonomous or sufficient human life might be lived. Abraham's humility made him a worthy vessel for the disclosure by the Almighty of the means by which helpless humanity might, like sheep, receive the all-encompassing protection of an eternal shepherd.

Knowledge of God is then itself dependent upon the will of God. It is not for man to prescribe the ways in which God can be known, but for him to take up the ways God discloses in a pious and humble spirit. God, we might say—although we would have to recognize the metaphor—could not have revealed himself through unassisted reason without implying a necessity in his nature which would constitute a denial of that nature. God as “free,” as unbound by necessity, must reveal himself by an act or acts of will. Such acts must be individual acts, acts which in their impact upon human life must become known first to individual men and women. Revelation must be by miracles, by particular acts of power whereby God makes certain particular men conscious of his presence, and to that consciousness discloses the way to salvation. Contrary to Aristotle, the tradition embodying these particular experiences may not only be the oldest tradition—unknown, however, to Aristotle—but may be so far free of absurdity as to constitute the only possibility that man can escape absurdity.

I have taken the pains to express—how inadequately I am painfully aware—the problematic character of the idea of political

theory. To take for granted the legitimacy of the theoretical enterprise would, I hope it is granted, be false to the skepticism in which theory itself was born. I have tried to show how difficult—if not impossible—it is that theory give a consistent account of the propositions implicit in raising the theoretical questions. I have also suggested that the idea of faith, as given in the books of Moses, is free from the besetting dilemma of theory: that the “universal” should be, in the first instance, a “particular,” flows consistently from the notion of an omnipotent God beyond all necessity. Certainly a political theory arising in Western civilization, if it is not to be merely self-contained and culture-bound, must confront the critical challenge implicit in both its Biblical and Socratic roots. The problems raised by the positive sciences assuredly cannot be solved by those sciences. They are not easy problems, but they are derivative and superficial. They can be attacked only by returning to depths from which they have sprung.