

# Essays on Power



# Essays on Power

## *Empire, the Sin upon My Head*

By

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Essays on Power: Empire, the Sin upon My Head

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**For my parents**

Why do some human beings desire with such urgency to do such things: regardless of the consequences, voluntarily, conscripted by no one but themselves? ... I have tried to tell how, and when, and where? But why? That is a mystery.

—Apsley Cherry-Garrard,  
*The Worst Journey in the World*

Often think of the rapidity with which things pass by and disappear, both the things which are and the things which are produced. For substance is like a river in a continual flow, and the activities of things are in constant change, and the causes work in infinite varieties; and there is hardly anything which stands still... And consider this which is near to thee, this boundless abyss of the past and of the future in which all things disappear. How then is he not a fool who is puffed up with such things or plagued about them and makes himself miserable? for they vex him only for a time, and a short time.

—Marcus Aurelius Antoninus,  
*Meditations*, V 23

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## PREFACE

Kings' solitude, kings' inconsolable torment, kings' human misery: we are accustomed to read about this in the Shakespearean plays. And, as posteriors to the era of royal politics, we should be grateful for their existence, for so little else in the literature, expected to give close attention to the subject of political power as history, sociology or political science, takes much real notice of it. With the exception of a few scattered biographies, the life of sovereigns outside of the cases of blatant royal exhibitionism—Henry VIII, Louis XIV, etc.—is rarely studied with a conceptual framework that can capture the reality of the human experience of power and what we might call the imperial know-how. The same, to a large degree, applies to the lives of political leaders—upstarts and otherwise—who came to replace them.

The secrets of their inner thought process, the equilibrium of motives—moral, political, metaphysical—are often subdued by the attention to the facts and consequences of this process. General history seems more at home with broadly conceived abstractions, which can be easily followed and understood. Looking into the abyss of the internal human drama of a historical figure always feels like falling into the pits of one's own personal collisions about life's meaning and purpose. Few historians have the stomach for this kind of exercise, and those who do can always have the safety net of the facts of a life already lived, a fate already decided. Their main characters and they themselves in their private lives do not. So whenever a deep, bottomless question comes to the fore in the study of a historical figure or period, one can easily save the day by an act of displacement or scientific insinuation. A brief change of subjects—the country in the place of the ruler and the man (France, Spain, Europe in the n-th century, Church, Enlightenment, Absolutism, etc.)—comes to replace the universal drama at the centre, explaining human frailty and confusion with large-scale processes and concepts.

Perhaps it is appropriate that this should be the case. It is not historians' task to solve metaphysical issues and delve into the cognitive processes of individual stress psychology. Yet, the truly great ones—I make references to some of them as G. H. Elliot on Spain, Christopher Clark on the outbreak of the First World War and others—do just that, to our universal gratitude.

This book is an attempt to help the process from the side of philosophy as the science that, at least in theory, should take care of the borderline cases of human mind, where philosophers function as the experts of the first and final questions, the augurs of the deepest internal sufferings and joys of the soul.

In doing this, I am as unprepared as we all are. The qualifications of philosophy, however, are unique at least in the insistence on the importance of the questions and the people who in their particular circumstances of time and space, came to ask them. My task, and the task of this book in particular, is to recognize these questions and expose them to the full light of our own consciousness.

If philosophy has an advantage over other sciences in humanities, it should be in the ability to operate with shifting focus lenses and render irrelevant the coats of historical and conceptual considerations that have concealed their essence. Philosophy offers the possibility of initiating a dialogue with the soul and the heart of the human beings of the past, and, in the flow of that dialogue, place everything in its rightful place and perspective. It strips the mind of its time, the desire of its images, the pain of its circumstances, so that one can hear the inner voice of a human being, placed on earth and trying, desperately, to make sense of it all—life, passions, duties, power.

Hearing the voices of the past, recalling their rantings and their prayers, remembering their words and giving them a rightful place in our thoughts and our own reality—so full of their presence, their buildings and their possessions in all the great cities of Europe—this is what this book will try to achieve. It presents the lives of the people of power as universal stories and types of consciousness. Unique as only individual life can be, they speak of our stories and of our lives, just as Shakespearian kings and princes utter words we have all uttered to ourselves, not knowing they were once someone else's and born by far off circumstances.

Universality: one does not need to be trained in the secrets of the dialectics of Plato's *Parmenides* or Hegel's *Science of Logic* to know that it resides in the most subjective, most transient forms. There is no contradiction, no distance, no separation. The absolute reality of ideas, divine intelligence or speculative reason, has never ceased to be present in this life and in the foundations of its transitory meaning and truth. They are all here. Words, questions and passions of the heart and of the mind exemplify their participation and presence, turning our questions into a real connection of evocation and materialization.

At this point the voices mix, and there remains only one dialogue—one human voice talking to the world or worlds above and below. The voice of

one crying in the desert or singing in the garden. For they, and we, have all done both, and will continue to do so, worrying at the speed of their succession and the incessant change of scenery.

For, to quote words that can only be repeated, not explained: “We are such stuff as our dreams are made on, and our little life is rounded with a sleep.” So let’s do that: dream the dreams of life. Theirs, ours, who knows whose and who else’s?



# **PART ONE**

## **CONCEPTS**





# 1. DREAM

## **Freedom**

At the root of it all is a dream: the dream of freedom—physical, political, metaphysical—to act and to achieve your goals unimpeded, to have your thoughts and will realised in the world, flowing without hindrance as in water; mind and body, thought and reality, united in one free thought, free will, free world.

This is the dream of wholeness restored through human action and of politics as the magic field of that action. It is not about wealth, supremacy or domination but about freedom as absolute release of the soul within the world, inhabiting it with the realisations of our thoughts and desires. And this, in a sense, is what the world is: a place of embodied will, accomplished desire, realised thought—the thoughts, the desires and the will of those who came before us and were in this place of creation earlier. It is their thoughts we need to reshape and reorder.

The dreams of a creature: to create, to be a creator. As human beings we already have an innate power to create in love with someone else. We can create and we need to create: a life, a being like ourselves, but here our power is split in the middle, our will representing only half of the whole, true being that is needed. Being yourself means being at a quest for the other who can complete your promise. Hence, the dream is split too and has to be shared with others.

Other powers of creation lie within spheres of a different order but of the same origin: the need to become complete through your own will and effort. It is a completion not as occurrence or grace but as a result of action that can bring meaning to your life and make it feel as a series of steps toward fulfilment. The required condition is belief: belief that the task is possible, and that your action will bring about the reality of your vision as the material for your experience of satisfaction and truth.

The need to create is continuation of the sense of power—expanding power—which for us, as creatures, begins deep down with the process of gaining mastery over our bodies, not more, when we grow up. Life itself is a journey of power, starting helpless and weak, nurtured into existence out of a single point: the desire within the body of an already existing being, longing for a union with another. Life grows within, until it can be issued forth and separated. Then it begins to take control over itself, acquiring a

voice of its own, ability to stand, to walk, to protect itself; until it becomes a full point of reference on the matrix of being, endowed with all the marvellous powers of life, flowing out from its centre, its seed—the heart. It is all power: power over one's mind, body, behaviour; power to possess, to learn and create, power to dominate, power to transcend. Step by step it expands, tied to consciousness and the essence of desire.

## Change

The first experience of power is like the first experience of love, with the excitement of the unknown, the pull towards something—blind, excruciating, to the point of forgetting yourself—which will result in something else. In what?

The lure of politics, the hunger for something that is in it, the lust, is just like any other but now for power: a certain experience that will do something for you and of you, something that you want to possess, something you need in order to be yourself, as if so far you have not been at all, and will only now, only then—in possession of power—become what you really are.

There is a blinding quality in the striving for that state, that being of a desire stronger than its name, which shows only later what it truly is: an entry to a reality first encountered and, only then, experienced and understood. It comes with the hypnotic spell of movement and of change—that magic word of politics—that suggests moving through the world, rising through the circumstances of life and delivering you into a different place. It promises a sense of relief from the pressure of being yourself and brings the hope that social change will become a metaphysical one, that being someone else will mean being in a different way, feeling, living differently.

The struggle for a place in politics is a struggle for access to this field of magic action that can transform human life. It sees politics as an alchemic enterprise, which can turn you into a stronger, higher being and reveal your true self.

It is not greatly important what particular vision is put at the end. The essential element is always the absence of tension, uncertainty and fear. It is, in a way, absence of reality, a paradise of thought without the senses, for reality implies receptivity, time, and only slowly, tentatively, emerging thought of what is really happening with you. The goal is to invert the relation and not to allow things to happen to you, but instead, make them happen in a dictated, predictable way, following your own actions and desires: a reality, causality, without surprises.

It is all there: on the curving way of history, in the lure of the unknown around the corner. Happiness is within our grasp, a few weeks—"ifs", "thens"—ahead, just off the field of vision and of comprehension, in the future as the promised land, the promised time, of politics.

## Permanence

Permanence, clarity, guidance: the dream of politics is the dream of internal, existential harmony, a kind of re-settling of the world and establishing a metaphysically acceptable order. Subconsciously political figures always promise that and are keen to project a kind of a smiling, confident human centre around which society could readjust and reorder. Politics appears as the public answer to private, much more intimate, anxieties.

There is fallacy in that since politics offers psychological response to a metaphysical torment. Religion used to have that function, but in the absence of religious faith, what remains is politics, adopted with a veneer of dignity and heroism. It is the human response to the shared challenge of reality, of life. Adopting the posture of heroic action, it elbows out religion as a tired habit of the mind and instead proposes an escape from insecurity and confusion through large scale action. It shows a way out: out of the failures and worries of small-scale ordinary life into the new truths of big politics. A lot of the people in power are driven by that, as if the build-up of a public persona could heal the wounds of the private one and dome over the inadequacies of the hidden, intimate world.

This is the great illusion of power: its promise of transformation, transfiguration, of the human condition. The intensity of the drive for power is the intensity of the urge to escape from the inner self, away from the inner sanctum. The tidal waves of ambition are instigated by the impulses of separation and the need to take one's secure distance from the troubles at the inner core. The pain lies there and so do fear, insecurity and vulnerability, which one feels when exposed to the brutal, honest light of reality and the full gaze of the ego. Being alone is being at pain and at a loss with oneself and the world around. The desire to be somewhere else, someone else, is born out of these inner visions of emptiness and loss.

The philosophical concept of negativity does little justice to the complexity—or simplicity—of what lies there, but it does point to a polarity of both the inner and the outer ends of the human being. External behaviour is a direct expression of the content within. It is not a matter of complicated psychology or simplified correspondence; the relation is direct, and the manifestation is essentially at one with the inner source that grounds it.

The difficulty to control this polarity is related to the fact that we are conscious of it but can never fully master its determination at either end. The processes on the inner side are so deep, so elemental, that they precede all kinds of reflection and thought. We are conscious of them only in a secondary, almost compulsive, manner. The self is as it is, and if it is empty and needy, we come to think of everything in the terms of emptiness and hunger in a direct causal relation, which we cannot turn around.

The idea that a controlled thought can reverse the relation is a reflective one. At the beginning lies reality, the fact of a presence, a being; the strategies for a different, “positive” thinking come as a consequence and occur at a different ontological level. The two modes of consciousness operate on separate plains and cannot be interchanged.

So politics with its visions of power—our power, our possession—presupposes a metaphysical difference within. Deep down we are fully conscious of our projection outside in the physical, bodily world and in the presence of others. We have full view of our metaphysical ambiguity—of our chain of exposure and inner polarity, always remaining vulnerable in our physical, visible presence. This is what drives our careful steps and constant measurements of the world outside: the people, the objects and the relations between them. They are all seen as resources for filling up the self. Hence, we desire only things that contain the promise of transformation. Coming to their possession, envisaged in the wandering eyes of the ego, promises to connect their force to the inner self and, in turn, fortify the manifestation itself. It is a circular movement of opposites, a metaphysical transfer of promises and expectations that always points inwards.

This is what makes politics a particularly tough calling, and historically, in times of danger, the toughest of them all. It is a quest for the outer parts of the ego, a search for the manifestations beyond, which when gathered and possessed, can make up for the loss within: a loss we start with the moment we gain consciousness of ourselves. This loss is permanent, carried around like a wound, breeding the hope that some miraculous change, some meeting or deed, will heal it.

## Order

Things can never be ordered and will never be ordered. The perfect state is a metaphysical impossibility. The very nature of the world—our world, our selves—is one of transformation, mutation and growth; it is never static and can never be exposed in a purely rational way. To a rational mind its flow is invisible, its form—beyond the understanding that we can

gather from the concepts of the things that surround us. They show our world as a world of effects, not causes. The causes are somewhere else and so are the formative principles of the present. Hence, any portion of life we can be aware of is a portion of movement that we observe from the fringes. We can record its speed and describe its phases but not its inner forces and logic.

The logic of this world, its *logos*, is not inscribed in the result. To present this otherwise is lunacy, and politics is full of examples of that. Ideologies, religions, sects and short-lived movements have littered the records of history, but made no impression on life itself beyond the pain and desolation they caused, until their adherents learned the lesson and finally started to doubt their notions.

To equate the real with the visible is a dangerous fallacy. And even more dangerous is to equate it with the logical constructions of a refined scientific order. Proven—to whom? To ourselves, the beings on the fringe, uncertain of their own now, anxious and incomplete, wistful and full of longings.

Politics is the supreme act of gardening of our own nature, the attempt to re-order our collective human presence. To do this with rational notions is to treat the descriptions of botany as normative principles and apply them on their primary source—the life of plants, earth, light, water—exterminating anything that does not fit.

Such ordering of the human garden requires supreme arrogance and searing inner pain. The gardener, being no different from the species whose life he rushes to regulate, uses his temporary freedom over them to entrench himself among them and create grounds for his claim of supremacy. Fed by the same turf and water as them, yet feeling regulated and inwardly trimmed, he transposes that feeling on the things that surround him: those beyond and beneath him. Hence, the term tyranny as the unnatural violence of life upon life itself. It is a disproportionate relation of (former) equals, which no matter how claimed and presented, feeds on the life-sources of others, and cannot exist otherwise. In the end, the tyrant lasts his natural cycle, and can only hope, not very fervently, that it will be the same for his immediate offspring.

## Desire

At the centre of it all is the uncertain vessel: man. Holder of desires and thoughts, which he can enact in his own way, the desires being the lasting thing, and he, the unstable self-conscious mind, an uncertain I that attaches itself to them. Like a programmable unit with limited capacity, the self can

hold on only to a few ideas of itself, capable of a few circuits of reality: from the acceptance of a desire, to its realisation and back to the self as an experience of the body and the mind. A few stronger desires or prolonged cycles of realisation can break it.

The preoccupation with the circuits and with the self is absolutely the wrong focus. It falls not on the things that pass but on the self alone, as if it could be independent of its circumstances and desires, and on fear, the constant fright for oneself and of oneself—as if it is the most fragile and most vulnerable of things. The ego, constantly offended by its own thoughts of comparison, can come to the brink of collapse by the mere presence of others or the miscarriage of its concepts.

It is in the midst of this fragility that desires take hold: desires of permanence, supremacy and being, longing for reality as the one thing the ego, in its sleep, lacks most. Despite the fullness of the sleep and the lull of sensations, the ego is always sober and conscious of its imaginary presence. So it clings to desires, or rather, lets the desires cling to it and then—uncertainty, gingerly—enacts them. They pass through it, and so the ego brands them its own, happy of their bulk and their force, finally able to look to the others with confidence and face the immense spaces of nature, full, staffed and stable, and with a new sense of drive and direction, perhaps not its own but enough to give it content and power.

The desires then play themselves out like chemical reactions in the life of the self, spending its energies in the process. One of the codes of reality is activated by the charge of human life and the human energies of mind and heart: the desires sitting and waiting, the man trotting around and playing unwittingly with them in his mind, until one or two get fixed and take hold of him, getting their chance of playing the dance of life, which for the charger, the vessel, is also the dance of death, chosen with desire.

How then can a normal human being, strained and confused, full of memories, longings and thoughts running in all directions do politics? We—so impulsive, so blind? How can such being, this being, have power? What is it that it will do with it? And how can it settle for a particular kind of relation of interdependence with others?

## **Blindness**

Publicity, self-image, presence: the bloated need for control over other minds, beings, bodies is at the heart of the business of politics. Its roots, like everything else, are deep down in the soul and the relentless mechanics of consciousness. To understand that, one needs to take a long distance away from politics to address an obscure issue concerning one of

the primary characteristics of the mind: its fixture on the visible and on the act of vision. The relationship is so close that it seems as if the mind is only half of a process, which ends in vision. The classic theory of knowledge usually separates the two, but ordinary human consciousness does not. There is no single verb for the nature of this activity, yet this singular act of thinking-seeing (thought-sight) and the presence of visibility (*Anschauung* or intuition in Kant) in the mind cannot be ignored. In effect, it implies the mind's fixture on images and therefore on concrete sides, slides, of reality. The mind is active in them, and this connection becomes important when we discuss practical consciousness.

For the mind this primary presence of vision is an axiom. The human being sees itself, or rather, is fixated upon the view of itself: of its body, its existence. Even in acts of greatest proximity with others we are still focused exclusively on ourselves. The ego defines our primary field of thinking, and an invisible border is permanently set to separate us—the inner being—from the rest. The addition of others is secondary. The primary vision does not extend to them, so we see them in a perspective of distance, from a primal point of seclusion.

We are so used to this, so accustomed to this segregation of visions, that we have a tendency to mark out the moments when this border has been suddenly lifted and our mind has travelled to other beings and new inner visions. The mind has accepted them and reached out to them in the way it reaches out to itself. We treasure these moments because they are so difficult to find. Most of our longings are directed to moments like this and the splitting of a suddenly produced whole reinstating the lines of separation—segregation—of oneself is experienced as privation, associated with unbearable pain: "I am alone again, blind, encapsulated by myself."

This little overture on vision matters because of the clarity with which it defines our most habitual form of presence: this fixture on ourselves, these one-man channels, complete with news, films, ads, etc., which broadcast in our heads to ourselves and on ourselves alone. Whatever we do, our mind takes on the mode of publicity; we are our own stage managers, anchors and public. We record and comment on the life we have while we are having it, adding suggestions, corrections, applause, and the intensity of the internal dialogue makes for the total absorption with the self and the on-going spectacle of its doings. There is little place for anything else, and other human beings can make only brief guest appearances in the genre plays or sitcoms of our lives, featuring as lovers, rivals, enemies.

This is the mind—the social mind—that is taken to politics, which

because of its exclusively public character resembles a broadcast show par excellence. There everything is grander, and if our egos shine bright in our own home grown productions, the egos of the people in power shine brighter still, with large real life following. They make waves, they matter.

One can see this in almost every piece of political news with the sense of double perspective of two parallel shows going on, the political figures talking to (at least) two audiences at the same time: one inward and one outward, where the others are reduced to the abstract presence of a visual background—better looking than mere slogans, more intimate and appealing than a wall of dark suits. This background humanity is best fitted for the more important audience within: the eyes of the ego-mind, where the vision of oneself, standing on platforms and uttering sentence after sentence to the world *urbi et orbi* is eagerly absorbed and magnified by reflection of public attention.

It is this vision, this stance, provided by the presence of others that is most treasured in politics. It could only be arranged in the space of the outer, non-primal vision. It has to be a public production, needing others to do this for us so that we can witness it internally. Nothing one can do alone can substitute for the power of public recognition, the bestowal of public attention and praise. Our primal vision is elemental; it remembers us as we are, as we always were. It is in a sense blind, like a blind spot, that can be filled only form outside, when something in the external vision is dramatically changed. We cannot make the change by ourselves; we need the others to do it.

This is what makes politics—most of it—so intensely shallow, so deeply theatrical. One gesticulates to the mirror inside, and there is no better mirror for the self than the real presence of others. You need them, thickly set behind you so that nothing can stand out in front but you. Everything you say and do is reflected back and returned with incredible sharpness, colour and saturation.

This is the privilege of publicity, the blessing of power. Even when you know it as shallow, it feels as a success: the success of having yourself so clearly defined, so vividly set. “This is me,” you think, and the presence of others immediately validates this assertion. It is not how it is for the mass of private figures, the powerless, the deprived: deprived of clarity and attention, full of hesitations and doubts, the doubts of the mind translating into doubts of vision and of existence. And it is this inability to clarify oneself to oneself, to come to a clearer focus of “who I am” that makes one a follower: a background shadow of other brighter images of the ones with charisma, the ones with energy, the ones with power.



## Finality

Finality, wholeness, fulfilment: sometimes the longing for finality appears as something else and is presented as the search for meaning and truth, but that is superficial. We do not really need a response or an explanation. Nothing of that nature will do, and if it did we would have probably heard it already, for in reality we are bombarded with the truth: with its signs and presence, its meaning, its clues. It is all around, spread so broadly, so persistently that it is only at a time of sudden revelation that we come to realise how close it has been, and yet how distant it has remained.

To put this into words is to hide behind style, but we could try to use the words to direct us to the experience. Perhaps what the human being really longs for is some sort of closure, an end. We live with an inbred sense of the elusiveness and evolution of everything around, including ourselves. We seem to flow and to divest ourselves of everything that we are at any moment in time. We relentlessly outgrow everything we touch and do, unable to sustain a feeling or thought for any breath of time. The will is like the ruder of a boat: it can direct the flow and somewhat help to keep a course. Yet, it is an instrument of direction with a limited range. We cannot really force our will upon the current taking us onwards; we can only employ its force with some measure of success.

It is a strange feeling: this effortless disentanglement from everything, this instant annihilation of reality that becomes memory the moment we turn around, never to come back, never to be regained; this inability to have hold of ourselves, to stop growing and changing in the incessant flow of consciousness.

We stylise this movement as freedom, praising thought as an instrument of agility, order and creativity. Yet it is only partially so, for it is an agility within a current of memories, retentions and perceptions. They show a reality postponed, and it is there, amidst the belated flow of perception, that we move, directing our will and desires. The flow goes on, and it is the innate distance between reality (the moment) and perception (the momentary) that allows the freedom of operation—not in relation to the real but to its image, its reception, its memory.

On a simpler note, as a biological unit we know deep down that we change and grow and age. The life of the body, the organism that we are, contains an inner movement of transformation, which we know of. We cannot stop or change it. We can lapse into forgetfulness about it, then, reminded by its more visible traces as the syncope of aging starts showing, we rush to hide or postpone it.

The flow of life, the flow of consciousness: place this within political

context and you can begin to see the causes of the deep anxiety about change, transformation, reality and time. The conservative and the progressive, the reactionary and the revolutionary are mad with anxiety about time and reality, which though claimed as absolute, is seen as fragile and constantly dissolved. The revolutionary has no time for his escape and his remake of a world he finds repugnant. The pain is to be turned into past and thrown into the flow of time and consciousness. Finishing it all off is the task; the pain and the circumstances that have been seen to cause it should go. Replace the people, remove the institutions and the bits of reality that generated it: this alone will annihilate the memory and the traces of its presence. It will guarantee that the pain will be exterminated and will never return. The hold on power is then a hold on experience.

On the other side is the sense of fragility of the goodness of life, of its sweetness and truth: so tender, so easily forced to destruction. Move a thing about the people around you or your position in the whole, and you will lose the goodness that you have experienced in it. Force a change, and you will replace sweetness with pain, happiness with horror, as if breaking the nature of it all and hurting its metaphysical body. Therefore, the protection of the status quo is a protection from dissolution, emptiness and death. Everything that surrounds one's life is seen as instrumentarium for preservation of human warmth and affection; not perfect but needed like the shell or a creature—soft and tender on the inside, hard and crude on the outside. Do not tamper with the outer forms of society, politics, culture, for this will hurt the life within and its complex symbiosis with everything else.

The conservative sticks to the forms he finds around him for he knows not what life can be without them. The revolutionary cannot wait to break them all, for he knows not how to live with them and can only hope for newer, better ones. Both tamper with creation, the one—stalling it, the other—rushing its evolution. Yet both, in their own particular way, are made to face the deeper truth behind it.

## 2. POSSESSION

### Immediacy

There are two options: to be born with power (power as fate, as an inheritance, a *Lebenswelt* in the Husserlian sense) or to gain it by coming from outside and holding it for a certain period of time (power as achievement, a prize of conquest). From a metaphysical point of view this makes no difference. Whatever the pedigree, the individual human being of high birth is just as unprepared for the shocks of power as any other. The circumstances change, the stream of events of every conceivable sort can throw in confusion anyone. To have more is to be more exposed and more openly vulnerable to attacks on things that do not concern others; they mean nothing to them and everything to you, for it is all your responsibility.

Democratic societies share responsibility by diffusing the pressure and consequently power in dynamically constituted bodies: parliament, political parties, judiciary, etc. Failure of responsibility is engraved in them and it is expected and managed by the circulation of people at regular intervals: long enough to divert attention and to generate hope for change on the right side of the political cycle. No pessimism, no gloom; just when one begins to understand and to rethink there comes the time for elections and hence for renewal of hope, just with the arrival of spring in the natural cycle.

In older time pressures were more direct with no possibility to divest of one's power and transfer it to somebody else. The body and the will of the monarch literally kept together a union which otherwise would disintegrate in assortments of dissociated units. Power was impossible to give since there was no one who could take it safely from its possessor. This brought immense pressure to keep the male inheritance intact and to reproduce and to live long enough to give the crown to an able-bodied heir.

Heir—blood line—responsibility: this relation gave a deeper sense of the reality of power and of fate, responding in unfathomable ways to your intentions and actions. To act in politics is to wait for a response inevitably given. It has been conceptualised as cunning or luck, but it is rather a metaphysical luck: to be allowed to continue and let be.

The diluting of personalities in power is diluting of the experience—never fully absorbed, never fully acknowledged—because the actors are gone before they could reap the deserts of their actions. When in power, the new-comers immediately inherit a situation, which they could change only slightly in the realistic life-span of a few years. The result is an intense awareness of the immediacy of politics: immediacy of its actions, preoccupations and results. The switch to open immorality in Machiavelli seems as a professional trait, almost a matter of expediency. There is no time, and hence, the questions of morality or immorality are questions not of substance but of technique and know-how. One does what works. What matters is efficiency: immediate and direct.

To worship the immediate in practical terms is to worship it in the metaphysical and to care about it passionately, for one rules only in the moment, only now. There is no past and no future—in both of them you are without power and thus without meaning, without life. Once there, in power, what matters is here and now. Prolonging it is your purpose, and everything is subjected to it. *Carpe diem* and the world as it is felt, seen, known now under your eyes. Hence the intensity of the consumption of power: the heightened sense of immediacy is also a heightened sense of pleasure of the kind closest to the senses, farthest from the mind.

Political pleasures are tangible, tactile, like a touch. The tender touch of power: the pleasures of its presence and of your presence in it, the possibilities that it opens for you in the eyes of the others, the freedom to penetrate the goodness and gathered sweetness of their life: their beauty, their joy, their love. It is the freedom to attract their emotions and consume their attention in large doses. Not the scant, meagre attention of the ordinary humans, but their full, staring amazement and their willingness to be open for you, ready to laugh, to please, to become yours. This is more than a Don Juan complex; it is the grandeur complex with the same deficiency of a lingering, sticky continuation, and an aftertaste—afterlife—one cannot control. This is the aftermath of consumption, the later day, the real.

## Empire

There are certain views, certain challenges and choices that only empires come to face. The others, accustomed to the view from bellow and assigned to a position of weakness, rarely come to know the truth that empires are free. They have no one else to look up to, no one to imitate or follow. For them, it is all the Gulliver and Lilliput story, and in this story it is the choices of Gulliver that matter most.

This is the imperial privilege: politics as the sphere of realised desires, the world of your wishes, the manifestation of your thoughts. Seen from outside it is reality, objective history, fact. Seen from the inside it is desire, strategy, cunning, longing, uncertainty, fear and, above all, choice: individual subjective choice on the tip of the mind of doing or not doing, following and not following, believing or not believing.

Yet, proportions in politics can change in a year or even a week. The size of the allotments of greatness is decided by the actors themselves. Their power depends on the quality of their character, their thoughts, their faith. Hence, there always remains the question about the choices that had to be made, which trouble political figures for as long as they live: "Where did I do wrong? What if I acted differently and taken the other path?"

This is where lies the great difference between politics and theory. The theorist can try other options and follow them intellectually, studying consequences and outcomes; the politician cannot. He can choose only one, closing off the others forever. Power is about now, now, now: a million decisions, which you have to take in the moment. There is only one "now" and only one reality that can follow the decision. It is almost as if, for once, we humans are given demiurge's instruments and powers to decide what it is that has to be created. Action is followed immediately by creation. "Here it is: power. This is your word now and this is the world that it creates. Witness it and say whether it is good."

In this act of creation there are no reference points. Politics is a movement in the open sea of reality, where it is the course you take that determines the materialisation of land or its absence. Reality is a matter of choice. It is up to you. Once there, at the helm, the reference points are all behind, and you are constantly at a moveable crossroads, all paths starting at the moment of your decision here and now. What you can rely on are the principles you brought to politics. It is not something you can learn or prepare for in advance; not if you are at the top. There are no schools for demiurges, no courses for emperors, since the art that has to be taught is the art of coping with the shifting contours of reality and its interplay with you: your thoughts, your desires, your actions. Reality cannot be taught. It cannot be shared or introduced; it can only be encountered. *Gnóthi seautón*: know thyself! It is you who is the kernel of your world, the seed of your creation, and of the fate that will unwind from the centre of your being.

This is where politics meets religion and the two become literary one, like adjacent halls in the same building. It does not matter whether this religion is the public faith of the society you belong to, a secret of a community with hidden rituals and commitments, or your own private set

of beliefs that connect you to the source beyond. No empire has ever been built without that, no state worthy of that name.

The Romans were obsessive about the ritualistic side of the practice of power. Politics—and especially war—was a sacred endeavour, a kind of ritual service, where it was the quality of the spirit and the observance of the rites that ensured that events will go your way and keep the favour of the gods. The favour of the gods: it was not something gained by a single prayer; it started with destiny and could be already divined from the circumstances of your decision and the first step you made on the road to war. This path was followed with great attentiveness as the ritual of war approached its culmination in the final encounter. Everything up to that moment—the birds that flew above, the wind in the trees, the geometry of the campus you build—was seen as a procession in the open temple of war. You honoured its gods by following its rituals and gained victory through the strict observance of its principles.

All empires are built around religion and its practice, claimed as superior to others. This is how the created, the empire, could be aligned to the reality beyond and nested on its principles, so that it can last as long as they do.

## Experience

Every imperial experience as every life is unique. There are no recipes or clues, except the ones gained in hindsight and exemplified by the failure of the original plans. Hence, there is precious little one can rely on, except for the counsel of men experienced in the ways of the world, who can advise on a course of action on the basis of hard-won intuition. They will judge the situation on the basis of a knowledge that cannot be reduced to a set of rules or a theory, which can be used at a later date.

Theories are based on abstractions, politics—on concrete actions, and to detach one's judgment from the political senses of the body politic is to deprive reason of its instincts. In politics people are invaluable and in the condensed time of historical cataclysms and dangers—irreplaceable. Those who disappear from the decision-making bodies of the state take their wisdom with them, leaving nothing behind that can serve as a substitute. It is this strange quality of politics—the intransferable nature of political skill and the impossibility to preserve it in a lasting, impersonal form—that makes political history so important and so disturbing.

One more platitude of the same order: none of the truly great political figures in history had left political theories of serious note. The practitioners and the theorists of politics were, to a large degree, two very