Liberalism and Its History*

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Translated from the German by Mary and Keith Algozin

The task of sketching the history of liberalism, though modest, is for methodological reasons difficult. For we stand before the question of whether there is even such a thing as liberalism as a clearly definable subject and whether this subject, should it not be clearly definable, can have a history. We touch here upon a general methodological problem. Toynbee, for example, opens his great work with the question whether England has a history; he concludes that the English nation as a society is so closely related to the society of Western civilization that one cannot write an English history without going into the entire history of Western civilization. It is in this sense that there arise the questions of how liberalism is to be delimited and whether it has a history. And they arise more acutely because the case of liberalism is much more complicated than that of England. For even if some phases of English history, for example the Reformation, can be dealt with only in relation to the general European history of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, still there are long periods of isolated, specifically English history. In the case of liberalism, a narrowing of the subject to national societies — German, French, English or American — is hardly justifiable. For all the regional phases of liberalism are only parts of a common Western movement; and furthermore, this movement can only with difficulty be isolated from other movements which run parallel with it in time.

I

The methodological questions must be raised, because in the course of the past 30 years the image of what liberalism is has changed completely. If you look at an older standard work such as Guido de Ruggiero's work of the 1920's, you will find that at that

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time, at the close of the liberal era, liberalism still appeared to be an easily definable phenomenon. But if you look at the more recent literature, you will find that the prototype of Ruggiero's work has just about disappeared—today the questions of liberalism are posed in broader contexts. Let me characterize briefly three of the more recent works to see in which direction the investigation moves today.

Consider first the work of Franz Schnabel, the Munich historian, *Deutsche Geschichte im 19. Jahrhundert*, which appeared in 1934. The second volume contains a thorough, penetrating treatment of liberalism. Here, while there is a chapter devoted to the type-concept of liberalism, the historical presentation can describe the phenomenon of liberalism only in the context of its struggle with other movements of the nineteenth century—reaction, restoration, conservatism, socialism, etc. It becomes evident that liberalism is no independent phenomenon; its essence can be adequately described only in terms of its confrontation with other phenomena.

Two decades later, in 1955, Joseph Leclerc's work appeared on the *Histoire de la Tolerance au Siècle de la Reforme*. In this excellent monograph on the history of tolerance in the age of the Reformation there is a noteworthy investigation of the genesis of liberal attitudes from religious conflicts. From the conflict between the churches, and from the conflict of both churches with the state, there grew a new attitude of tolerance between the churches and of both churches toward the state. Leclerc traces the beginnings of the liberal attitude to a situation in which the older treatment of liberalism does not usually seek them, namely, the desire for tolerance which grew out of the experience of the religious wars—the insight that the truth of Christendom cannot be saved by the churches exterminating each other for the sake of dogma, the insight that the churches must somehow live together in one society.

Finally, in his new work on *Die Dritte Kraft*, Friedrich Heer draws an important line of spiritual history from the enlightenment of Erasmus' time at the beginning of the sixteenth century to the present. Using this "third power" approach, Heer presents the history of a movement which repeatedly sought to stabilize a liberal order between revolution and reaction, between the left and the right wings of the surrounding political movements of Europe. There emerges the picture of the secular political movement of which liberalism is a phase.

These brief indications show to what extent there has been
articulated today the framework of problems into which liberalism must be fitted. The context which surrounds and gives meaning to liberalism goes far beyond what one commonly understands by the classical liberalism represented by John Stuart Mill.

II

The picture of liberalism changes because liberalism itself changes in the process of history. And it changes because it is not a body of timelessly valid scientific propositions about political reality, but rather a series of political opinions and attitudes which have their optimal truth in the situation which motivates them, and are then overtaken by history and required to do justice to new situations. Liberalism is a political movement in the context of the surrounding Western revolutionary movement; its meaning alters with the phases of the surrounding movement. Its field of optimal clarity is the nineteenth century, which is preceded and followed by fields of decreasing clarity in which it becomes increasingly difficult to establish its identity. We can best gain access to this constantly changing field of meaning if we seize the expression "liberal" at its point of historical and political origin.

Even if, as we have seen, the beginnings of liberalism can be traced back to the early sixteenth century, the word "liberal" is nevertheless a relatively late creation. It appears for the first time in the second decade of the nineteenth century when a party of the Spanish Cortes of 1812 called itself the Liberales. This was a liberal constitutional party which formed a front against attempts at restoration. From this beginning the expression "liberal" entered the general European vocabulary, and soon there occurred throughout Europe the formation of liberal groups, parties, and movements.

The first use of the expression indicates the problems of liberalism. The new attitude is so tightly bound up with the attitudes it opposes that the entire complex of attitudes becomes a unity of meaning which overshadows each of its elements. In the decade from 1810 to 1820 there arise, parallel with the idea of liberalism, the ideas of conservatism and of restoration. With Chateaubriand's Le Conservateur we have conservatism, and with Haller's Restauration der Staatswissenschaft of 1816 we have the idea of restoration. Within a decade those three symbols arise which henceforth designate movements and parties, run parallel, are interrelated, and are held together in a unity of meaning by the fact that they are three
modes of reaction to the phenomenon of revolution. The meaning of the three modes of reaction is defined in relation to the revolution, so that only in its context can the four labels—revolution, restoration, conservatism and liberalism—be understood.

But even having gained this insight, we still cannot state the meaning of the four symbols precisely, as in a conceptual definition. For in the historical process the elements of the movements move evenly relative to each other and change their meaning. Let me indicate some changes of meaning.

In the first place, today "liberal" has become almost equivalent to "conservative," and, indeed, this is because the movement of liberalism has been overtaken by new, more radical waves of revolution, in opposition to which it plays the role of conservatism; just as formerly, in the decade from 1810 to 1820, conservatism was conservative in opposition to revolution and to liberalism. Raymond Aron, for example, answered the question about his political attitude by saying he was liberal, that is, conservative. The same could be said of the economist, von Hayek: he is liberal, that is, conservative with respect to socialism, communism, or any other variant of the phase of revolution which has overtaken liberalism. The prototype of the "old-style liberal" is today considered conservative.

Another change of meaning has occurred in America. In the American political vocabulary "liberal" generally means, not the European liberalism of the nineteenth century, which today is considered conservative, but, on the contrary, a politically progressive attitude. Roughly speaking, one can say that in America the Republican Party is called conservative, the Democratic Party, liberal-progressive. But what is conservative in the Republican Party is its liberalism in the older European sense—that is, its opposition to socialism, to excessive state intervention, etc.; while the Democratic Party is liberal insofar as its program tends toward the welfare state, state capitalism, and a decided emphasis upon the interests of the labor unions. The shift of meaning toward the left goes so far that "liberal" is often used as a synonym for "pink" or "fellow traveler." This change of meaning became possible in America because European liberalism of the old style scarcely existed there in a distinct form as a political movement; and it did not develop because America lacked the opponent which liberalism confronted in Europe. In the first half of the nineteenth century, during European liberalism's heroic time of struggle, America did not
have to battle the movements of restoration, a surviving monarchical principle, or a politically active church allied with the state. It becomes clear that liberalism can take on various functions and shades of meaning according to the social context.

A very remarkable new change of meaning has occurred in liberalism since the Second World War. If you look at the political fronts of the postwar period—in West Germany, France and Italy—you will note a political force which before the war did not exist to this massive extent: the principal parties are closely connected with the Catholic and Protestant churches. Through mutual assimilation liberalism and this new force came into broad agreement. The liberals who were overtaken by the revolution became conservative; and the conservative Christian organizations liberalized themselves considerably. There became possible a common front against the common danger. But again, the social context has its effect, and the direction of the development is not unambiguous. When parties of Catholic or Protestant affiliation become the bearers of liberalism, then rigidly secularist liberals may become still more secularist and more anticlerical—may, as in France, move even more sharply toward the left, since the liberal position is now occupied by conservatives, may even tend toward the communist party, although they are by no means communists. Especially in France and Italy, communism took over the anticlerical function of the older liberalism, because the old liberals shifted toward the right and became conservative, occasionally with distinctly Christian overtones.

But even this does not exhaust the complications. I noted before that all the symbols—liberalism, conservatism, restoration—can be understood only as modes of reaction against the revolution. In France itself, again in the decade from 1810 to 1820, liberalism appropriated the symbol of revolution and made it its own. Let us consider this shift of meaning. In 1815 the liberal Charles Comte (not to be confused with Auguste Comte) founded the *Globe*. In this periodical Comte developed the program of a liberalism whose task it would be to carry on the révolution permanente. What is this permanent revolution? Comte believed that there were terrible social wrongs under the ancien régime, and that the revolution occurred because necessary reforms were not implemented at the proper time. If not enough is done to satisfy the demands of social justice the result is revolution. If in the future we wish to avoid a repetition of the horrible events, then what the revolution achieved
by unhappy means must be achieved at the proper time through the less unpleasant means of reform. The revolution must become permanent in the sense that a permanent, flexible politics of reform buys off revolutionary terror. Even though it changed its name, Charles Comte's idea lived on in liberal politics, and, by way of the reform liberalism of the nineteenth century, it became what today in America is called "peaceful change." The idea of peaceful change, a policy of timely adaptation to the social situation which, in the age of the industrial revolution, changes very quickly, has become today a constant in all shades of liberalism. From this point of view liberalism becomes a method for carrying on the revolution with other, less destructive, means.

This liberalism, plausible and tempting as it sounds, is weak because it greatly underestimates the motives and forces underlying the revolution. In fact, liberalism did not buy off the terrors of revolution at all but rather was forced to play the conservative role in the age of totalitarian regimes. Indeed, Charles Comte saw correctly that in liberalism there is something of revolution, but that revolution goes very much farther than liberalism wants. This becomes evident in the course of the révolution permanente in the twentieth century. Trotsky took up the idea during the revolutionary phase which recently overtook liberalism. He was an acute analyst of the revolutionary movement; he knew that what is called revolution (whether today's communist revolution or yesterday's French revolution, the entire significance of which is understood only today) is a movement—and that a movement lives in that it moves. The radical revolutionary must make the revolution into a permanent condition; there can be no compromise or stabilization of the achievements at a definite point. For as soon as a plateau of stabilization is permitted, the revolution is over. To keep a revolution alive one must carry it on further; it thrives on unrest, it needs a permanent opponent; it must meet obstacles to be overcome by its assault, etc. If there are no more obstacles, no more imperialists or deviationists, the revolution dies for lack of things to attack. Revolution can end only if it has reached its goal. And this is precisely the insight expressed by Trotsky in his idea of the révolution permanente: revolution in the modern sense has no intention of producing a stable condition; revolution is the mental and spiritual condition of an act which has no rational goal. The revolution can be permanent because its formal goal, which in communism is a society
whose members have become supermen, cannot be realized. Revolution becomes permanent when the revolutionary posits a goal which \textit{ex definitione} cannot be reached because it requires the transformation of human nature. The unchangeable nature of man constantly places obstacles in the path to the paradisaiical goal. If the goal of the revolution is defined by a gnostic philosophy of history, then revolutionary action has no rational goal. Trotsky understood this situation although he expressed it differently.

I have dealt with this shift of the meaning of \textit{r\'evolution permanente}, not to present a historical curiosity, but because the problem of permanent revolution is involved in liberalism. For Charles Comte’s idea that the goal of the revolution could be achieved through a constant process of reform without the unpleasant side effects belongs in the gnostic-utopian class. It is intimately related to the eighteenth-century progressivist idea, as held by Kant and Condorcet, that a final state of rational humanity can be achieved in a process of infinite approximation. But this cannot be achieved, for man is not only rational but much else besides. Therefore it is no accident that the communist revolutionary took up again the liberal’s \textit{r\'evolution permanente}. For in liberalism also there is the irrational element of an eschatological final state, of a society which will produce through its rational methods, without violent disturbances, a condition of everlasting peace. Liberalism too is a part of the revolutionary movement which lives to the extent that it moves. From Charles Comte to Trotsky there runs a line of growing insight that the reform movement, to which liberalism also belongs, is a unique state of affairs insofar as its final goal cannot be actualized.

The interweaving of liberalism, revolution, and restoration will become clearer with a brief reflection on Charles Comte’s more illustrious namesake, Auguste Comte. In the third volume of his great work on \textit{La Jeunesse d’Auguste Comte}, Henri Gouhier has provided a noteworthy study of “Revolution and Restoration.” In this study Gouhier raises the question whether Comte was a liberal, or an executor of the French revolution, or a phenomenon of the restoration. And he shows very subtly that this question can be answered positively in each case. For the French revolutionary movement went to an extreme, stopped, and then became retrogressive; the extreme under consideration here is that which overtook liberalism in the more recent revolutionary phase. What is at
issue here can best be seen in two figures, Robespierre and Hébert. During the revolution Robespierre was the representative of deism; he wanted to establish a cult of the Etre suprême, the supreme being. Hébert believed deism was too great a concession to Christianity and clericalism; he wanted a culte de la raison. For Robespierre that was too atheistic. Of the two men, Robespierre was the conservative revolutionary, while Hébert was the radical revolutionary who wanted to discard completely the spiritual content of Christianity, even in the pale form of deism. And now let us examine Comte's position in the context of this tension between conservatism and radicalism. In relation to Robespierre, Comte was revolutionary; he did not want to return to deism and the cult of the Etre suprême. He became the founder of a new religion, the religion de l'humanité. Thus he was the successor of Hébert; he wanted to deify reason, and to organize the new humanity in the spirit of deified reason; he was the executor of the revolution, a radical revolutionary against all the restorationist and liberal movements of his time. On the other hand, however, Comte could also be seen as conservative, for he did not at all want to renew the terror. Indeed he wanted to overcome not only the ancien régime but also the revolutionary populism of the commune of Paris, whose representative Hébert had been. He sought a new way to unite the spiritual content of the revolution with a conservative organization. He wanted a temporal power of industrialists united with a spiritual power of intellectuals under the pontificate of Comte. This is the afterimage of a medieval society, with the managers in the place of the feudal princes, and the positivist intellectuals in the place of the clergy. In view of later events, one could say that this is the model of an industrial fascism under the leadership of a gnostic sect. Seen from this point of view, Comte was a conservative. And finally, there is the Comte in whom the liberals of his time took satisfaction. In the first, so-called intellectual, phase of his work he attacked metaphysics and religion from his scientistic position. Liberals like that. That was the phase in which Comte gained the friendship of John Stuart Mill and Littré, and became internationally influential. John Stuart Mill in particular fused into his liberalism much that he borrowed from Comte. But liberal friends were frightened and angered by the second, so-called religious, phase of Comte's work, in which he wanted to produce a world organization of positivist intellectuals and found the authoritarian organization as a new church. There
occurred a break between Comte and the liberals. For our purposes now it is important to establish that there never were the two phases in the life and work of Comte. Gouhier has demonstrated that the ideas of the so-called second phase were contained, at least in outline, in the early writings of the 1820's. Comte proceeded according to plan and gradually developed the total concept of his early period; the liberal, the conservative, and the revolutionary Comte are an integral personality. For the liberal historians of the second half of the nineteenth century, however, this phenomenon was so frightening and incomprehensible that they invented the two phases, and went so far as to ascribe the second phase to a mental illness. The division into two Comtes continues even into the twentieth century: the first Comte, the founder of sociology, still inspires the neo-positivist social sciences; the second, the religious Comte, has been replaced by Marxism. What frightened the liberals into their defensive constructions was the radical revolutionary element in Comte, which made all too painfully evident the gnostic content of liberalism also.

The behavior of the liberals toward Comte occasions a fundamental reflection. Comte was pleasing to the liberals so long as he attacked theology and metaphysics and opened the perspective of a sociology analogous to physics. He knew, however, that an imitation of the methods of natural science in the social sciences is no substitute for spiritual order and its theological-metaphysical symbolism. He was aware that he had to posit an alternative spiritual order to replace the spiritual order he attacked as untrue. There lay beyond the thinking he had in common with the liberals his understanding of the spiritual dimension which also, and above all, must find its fulfillment. Comte was, in fact, a genuine revolutionary of the spirit; he knew it was not enough to attack spiritual authority; and because of this consciousness of the problem, he was a more important thinker than any liberal has ever been. With this differentiation between Comte and a mere liberal we hit upon the reason why liberalism must unavoidably be overtaken by the spiritually much more powerful revolution. One can’t get away from the revolution. Whoever participates in it for a time with the intention of retiring peacefully with a pension which calls itself liberalism will discover sooner or later that the revolutionary convulsion to destroy socially harmful, obsolete institutions is not a good investment for a pensioner.
III

We have spoken of the revolution of the spirit of which liberalism is a phase, and we have seen that more recent authors trace the beginnings of the movement back into the sixteenth century. Classical liberalism of the nineteenth century has its place in this encompassing movement. Naturally, it is not possible to give here a synopsis of the history of the movement; the subject is so vast that an investigation of details would reveal nothing more than the futility of the attempt. An outline of the model must suffice.

The revolutionary movement runs its course in great waves. In each of these waves there can be distinguished, first, the actual outbreak of revolution; second, the countermovement and organization of the resistance; and finally, a period of quiescence and adjustment, of stabilization at a new level, until the next outbreak. We can now distinguish three such waves since the sixteenth century. The first begins with the Reformation, which begets the Counter-Reformation. The second wave begins with the French Revolution, which calls forth the countermovements of reaction and restoration. The third wave clearly begins with the communist revolution. The corresponding countermovement is not so clearly defined, however, since the third wave has reverberated far beyond its Western center and become worldwide in its effect. The resistance assumes forms as different as the massive rightist reaction, within the West, of Fascism and National Socialism (which have their own revolutionary character), the resistance movement of the free world against communism (which can, however, join in alliance with communism against the revolutionary character of Fascism and National Socialism), and the opposition of a neutral "Third World" (which cannot be clearly outlined, since it is overshadowed by the movement of liberation from Western colonialism).

To each of these waves of movement and countermovement there corresponds a phenomenon of stabilization. With the exhaustion brought on by the religious wars there emerges a unique ideology of stabilization, the so-called natural law. It is an attempt to base a new order of Western humanity upon insights gained independently of revelation and the dogmas of the churches. Grotius formulated the intention most clearly perhaps when he said he wished to base the principles of natural law upon axioms as infallible as those of mathematics. By its very nature the attempt to
construct the truths about human and social order *more mathematico* had to fail—the century of natural law was inundated by the next wave of revolution. After the revolution and the organization of the resistance in the wars of coalition, and after the period of reaction, there again follows a period of stabilization. The age of liberalism can perhaps best be characterized as this period of stabilization which corresponds to the age of natural law after the first revolutionary wave. Nothing can be said yet about the stabilization after the third revolutionary wave—the warlike confrontations between revolution and resistance are still in process, and the complications have become worldwide. But within the Western world the outlines of a stabilization can be seen in the combination of a liberal concept of economics with a politics of the welfare state. This stabilization has the further characteristic that the spiritual degeneration fostered by ideologies, though in no way overcome, has been remarkably alleviated by a tendency to draw upon the sources of Christianity and of *ratio*.

IV

We have regarded liberalism as a phase of the revolutionary movement; now we should define its content. We may use as our guide the classification of the four aspects of liberalism in Franz Schnabel's *Deutsche Geschichte*: the political, economic, religious and scientific aspects of liberalism. This classification is oriented primarily toward the German form of liberalism; to some extent other points need to be emphasized if it is to be applied to other Western nations.

The *political* aspect of liberalism is defined by the liberal opposition to certain abuses, which are to be eliminated. Liberalism is above all against the old-style police state; that is, against the encroachment of the executive upon the judicial and legislative domains; in constitutional politics liberals demand the separation of powers. Secondly, they oppose the old social order, that is, the privileged position of clergy and nobility. At this point can be seen the weakness of a political attitude which is tied to the situation; we will have more to say about this later. In time, when the rising working class becomes politically capable of directing it, the attack on privilege turns against the liberal bourgeoisie itself. In the course of the revolutionary movement the attack cannot end until the
society has become egalitarian. And finally, liberalism turns against
the tie between church (no matter which one) and state; the move-
ment becomes anticlerical.

Economically, liberalism means the repeal of the old legal re-
strictions which set limits to free economic activity. There should
be no principle and no motive of economic activity other than en-
litened self-interest. It is assumed that actions undertaken in
rational, anticipatory self-interest will lead to harmonious order in
society.

A third front is the religious. This must be distinguished from
the anticlerical attitude whose goal is the separation of church and
state. Beyond this constitutional demand, liberalism rejects revela-
tion and dogma as sources of truth; it discards spiritual substance
and becomes secularistic and ideological.

Liberalism's scientific position cannot always be separated from
its religious position. Its essence is the assumption of the autonomy
of immanent human reason as the source of knowledge. Liberals
speak of free research in the sense of liberation from “authorities,”
that is, not only from revelation and dogmatism, but also from
classical philosophy, the rejection of which becomes a point of
honor, because of its medieval association with scholasticism.

V

In all of these four aspects liberalism has run into difficulties.
The programmatic battle could always be waged with success up to
a certain point, only to fall into a new difficulty, more serious than
the one overcome. We must now look more closely at the phenom-
elon of liberalism being overtaken and mired down.

The weakness of political liberalism is its belief in the redemptive
value of a constitutional model constructed in opposition to absolute
monarchy and the police state. The pillars of the construction are
the demands for basic human rights, the separation of powers and
universal suffrage. The three requirements are not systematic
axioms; rather, their conjunction is historically contingent. The
basic human rights are the sediment, become statute law, of the
old jus divinum et naturale, which obligated the rulers of the Middle
Ages and the Renaissance, even if their fulfillment of the obliga-
tion left much to be desired. Using the image of sunken cultural
treasure, one could say that they are a list of what has been salvaged
of the ruler's duties, whose religious and metaphysical foundation is no longer permitted in a time when spiritual substance is lost. The demand for the division of power, which is often taken as a principal item of the liberal constitutional program, has an ambiguous status. In Europe north of the Alps it becomes the center of attention after the end of the seventeenth century. Montesquieu praised as a model English constitutional practice in the decades after the Glorious Revolution; and the ideas of the mixed constitution and of the balance of powers, partially influenced by the concept of equilibrium in the new mechanics, contribute their theoretical dignity. Nevertheless, English constitutional practice very soon developed away from the division of powers toward the sovereignty of parliament. When in 1789 the principle of the division of powers was incorporated into the American constitution, it was no longer present in the English constitution. Actual English constitutional practice was made known to a wider public only after the middle of the nineteenth century by the work of Baghot. Therefore, one can hardly speak of the division of powers as a fundamental demand within liberalism; it is rather a fashionable model, whose destiny and claim for support are conditioned by the current situation of information or ignorance. Finally, universal suffrage was originally in no way a political goal of the liberals; it was a populist element, and the older liberals sought to uphold in opposition to it the suffrage principle of property and education. Only under massive political pressure from below did it develop gradually into a liberal demand.

A constitutional model that is so manifestly historically contingent must lead unavoidably to difficulties, and cause severe damage when it is dogmatized into a world view and its elements are raised to articles of faith. The catastrophe of its exportation to non-Western societies plays itself out for all to see, but we need not look that far. Within the West itself, Europe has been led to the brink of destruction by the international propaganda against, and destruction of, political structures which do not correspond to the model of the liberal national state, and by the insanity of introducing the model without transition into societies which had not produced it. Especially the misunderstanding of basic human rights as including the privilege to ideologically destroy the existing order has had deadly consequences in societies without a mature political tradition, such as the German. Today the eschatological fire of the model is, if not extinguished, considerably dampened. We know
today that societies do not become free through liberal constitutions, but that free societies produce liberal constitutions and can function in their framework—a relation to which John Stuart Mill pointed emphatically.

Closely connected with the failure of the constitutional model is the collapse of the economic model. In its English conception the economic model was originally bound to the situation of a relatively low concentration of population and a predominantly agrarian economy. The model of the natural condition, out of which Locke developed his constitutional construction, was the American pioneer society, in which every head of household is a landowner and husbands his piece of land with his family, making a living, and producing a surplus. In the Second Treatise of Civil Government, Locke formulates the model drastically: "In the beginning all the world was America." This archetype survives vigorously in the Jeffersonian resistance to industrial society. The original harmonious balance of citizens of equal economic potential was destroyed by the development of industrial society. A new power structure came into being with which the original agrarian liberalism had not reckoned. When society differentiated into capitalist and worker, the model of the society of free, equal citizens was overtaken by a reality which pressed toward the crisis of class struggle. There arose the social-ethical problematic, which after long political struggles led to the massive introduction of socialist elements into the liberal economic structure.

The overtaking by history of the antireligious attitude of liberalism is so well known that a brief indication will be sufficient. The liberal attack was directed against dogmatism and the authority of revelation. If only these influences on thinking and public life could be removed, then the free human being would order society rationally with his autonomous reason. However, if in practice Christianity is successfully driven out of men, they become not rational liberals but ideologues. The undesirable spiritual order is replaced not by liberalism but rather by one or the other of the emotionally as intensive ideologies. The liberals did not foresee this, because their conception of immanent reason had already so badly deformed the image of man that the problematic of the spirit and its transcendence had disappeared from the field of vision. Politically, the ideologizing of man, which was powerfully co-caused but not intended by liberalism, has the result that the liberal constitutional
model can no longer function. If the majority of voters are communists and national socialists, they can form the majority bloc which makes the functioning of the constitution impossible, as we have seen in the Weimar Republic.

The scientific problematic of liberalism is very closely related to the religious. Technically, to be sure, the questions about this area are much more complicated. We must be satisfied here with a few hints. As far as I can judge, the concept of autonomous, immanent reason causes no damage in mathematics and in the mathematicized natural sciences. But in the sciences of man and society it destroys the subject matter, for man is the imago Dei and participates with his essence in transcendent being. If one defines immanent reason as the essence of man, ontology as the fundamental science is destroyed, and a rational social science adequate to the subject is no longer possible. The result is the decay of the social sciences which characterizes the late liberal period and which is now being overtaken by the restoration of ratio and of ontology. An example of the decadence which is being overtaken today is the method of value relation and the value relativism which, as ideology, has had as much worldwide success as Marxism, positivism or psychoanalysis. The essence of value theory is the transformation of the objective hierarchy of goods, with its summum bonum of transcendent completion, into human value posits. The subject of the social sciences is held to be constituted by relation to current values, while the validity of these values can be established only by posit. As long as the method is used in a tradition-laden milieu, the danger is not so obvious, since the "values" remain relatively close to the traditional objective hierarchy of goods. But if the method is applied in a society undermined and infested with ideology, the result is as many definitions of the subject as there are ideological value posits. Science collapses into an apology for various ideologies. The extreme consequence was brought to my attention on the occasion of an address in Heidelberg, when, during the discussion, I was opposed by a young man from the Alfred Weber School who insisted that in order to remain objective the social scientist must conduct his science in the spirit of the time, for there are no criteria for choosing and ordering the subject of inquiry other than the values recognized at the time. When he places himself outside the spirit of the time and introduces ontological criteria, then that is subjectivism. Thus, only if one subjectively and arbitrarily joins some ideology of the
time is one objective; if one attempts to find objective grounds for judgments concerning social order, one is subjective. Examples of similar opinions could be given from the realm of neo-positivist social science. In the face of this radical destruction of social science we stand today before the problem of its reconstruction through the restoration of a critical ontology.

VI

 Permit me to summarize the result of these observations. As a phase of the revolutionary movement, liberalism has left behind a sediment in contemporary Western society. Part of this sediment is the trend toward the separation of church and state, which originated in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, prior to the liberal period in the narrower sense. While it did not always necessitate the formal separation of church and state, as it did in America, the trauma of the religious wars called forth the resolution that under no circumstances were organizational or dogmatic conflicts between churches ever again to be permitted to achieve such high political rank in public affairs that the society would be split into parties of civil war.

 Implicit in this resolution is an attitude of tolerance insofar as the outbreak of hostilities can be avoided only if a religiously pluralistic society is accepted. There has been implemented a positive policy of religious freedom and freedom of conscience for everyone, limited only by the mores of the society and the penal law. A sect of Adamites, for instance, who are informed by their conscience that the naked truth of God is best represented when one goes walking naked on the street, will scarcely be tolerated. The case is not fictitious—it gave Roger Williams great concern in his religiously liberal Rhode Island. Polygamy, too, is scarcely to be permitted—the Mormons had to give up polygamy when Utah was to be accepted into the United States. Within the indicated limits religious tolerance was allowed to hold sway; and, where it is still in doubt, it is allowed to establish itself.

 Another part of the sediment left by liberalism is a certain resistance—activated slowly yet decisively in concrete cases—to those social phenomena which were the specific objects of liberalism's attack during its time of struggle, especially tendencies toward a dictatorial constitution, and attempts to implement socially an organized spiritual authority.
Finally, we may mention two more phenomena, which cannot be called part of the sediment left by liberalism since they point, on the contrary, to the transformation of liberalism under the pressure of historical events; however, they are today so deeply embedded in liberalism that they belong to the form it has taken in contemporary society. The first is the absorption of social-ethical demands into classical liberalism. This has produced that amalgam that we know under various names—New Deal, welfare state, *Soziale Marktwirtschaft*, etc. The second phenomenon is liberalism's becoming filled with Christian substance. We must be careful not to maintain that the manner of recapturing the Christian substance is always the most fortunate and promises lasting success. Yet the phenomenon is so vigorous that in the period after the Second World War the parties close to the churches could become supporters of liberal politics in three of the principal continental nations—Germany, France, and Italy.

In the light of these considerations we can say that, on the one hand, liberalism decidedly has a voice in the political situation of our time; on the other hand, however, today the ideas of autonomous, immanent reason and of the autonomous subject of economics are scarcely alive and fruitful; thus, the classical liberalism of the secularist and bourgeois-capitalist stamp may be pronounced dead.