Wolfgang Leidhold

Rationality - What Else?

1. The question

In political life, is there an alternative to action based on rational consensus? This is one of the key questions raised by the juxtaposition of 'World-views or reason?' informing the symposium that was the original context of the present contribution. What is being asked about is the extent to which the *political identity of the West* can be said to be based on consensus as a key feature of rationality.

My reflection on that question starts with a second question: 'Rationality - what else?' The question can be understood in two ways. It may be merely a rhetorical question, or it may be not. If it is a rhetorical question, of course, then it implies that there is *no* alternative to rationality. If there exists no alternative, then everything might be fine; and so our reflection on the topic, at least with regard to its ineluctability, may quickly come to an end. With the very likely exception of Nietzsche, all philosophers would happily agree, including myself. There is no alternative to action based on rational consensus.

But our experience does not support this answer. Political life does not look like it is actually based on any kind of rational *consensus*. Instead, the main feature of political life is *disagreement*. Disagreement is, in fact, a constant element of political life from antiquity to the present day. We cannot ignore it. If rationality means consensus, then political life has never been rational. Therefore, we are compelled to pose a serious question implying that there *is* an alternative to rationality. And now - again with the very likely exception of Nietzsche - all philosophers would most likely be somewhat less than happy.

Yet there may be a way out of this dilemma, for there are two ways of understanding the question, depending on the relation between rationality and disagreement: rationality may either include disagreement in political life, or it may not.

If rationality excludes disagreement, then we would be in serious trouble. The problem was addressed by Karl Raimund Popper in his work on *The Open Society and its Enemies*.[1] Popper argues that Plato's version of rationality does indeed exclude disagreement, and thus it leads to a closed society based on a forced

---

1 Popper, K.: The Open Society at its Enemies, vol: i: The Spell of Plato, London 1957 (various editions and reprints).

consensus. In Popper's view, Plato promotes a totalitarian answer to political life. Once more, Nietzsche would be happy, since now it would be Plato instead of himself who would be blamed for providing the theoretical inspiration of fascism, Leninism and Maoism.

If rationality allows disagreement, how can it be founded on consensus at the same time? How can rationality incorporate two principles that appear to mutually exclude each other? My thesis is the true rationality of political life consists in combining the two principles in one framework. This statement, however, seems to be a contradiction in itself, inasmuch as we would attribute to rationality two principles to which we cannot adhere at one and the same time. Either we are looking for consensus, or we allow for disagreement, but we can never have both at once. Still, I wish to defend the position that political rationality without dissent is impossible. First, we have to discuss the idea of rationality. After that we can attempt to explain what rationality has to do with political life.

The term 'rationality' is derived from the Latin *ratio*, which in turn comes from the Latin verb *reor*, meaning 'to calculate'. *Ratio* encompasses a wide range of meanings. First it means 'calculation', often in the sense of some business, then business as such. Since business requires focused attention on a certain matter, *ratio* implies 'consideration' and 'interest'. Because considering or being interested in something implies a particularly focused way of thinking about it, the noun came to mean 'reasoning' or 'reason' and the way of thinking in general. Since one of the main tasks of reasoning consists of giving (good) reasons for something, *ratio* can be used in the sense of 'cause' or 'argument'. Finally, it can designate the result of a process of reasoning, especially a scientific system, theory or method.

What the Latin *ratio* focuses on is not quite clear. It seems to be centered around something like 'book-keeping' or even the scientific ways of thought. The Latin *ratio* is used for the Greek *logos;* and we may achieve better results if we look at the Greek term. It is derived from the verb *legein,* meaning 'to read', 'collect', 'talk', 'speak', 'command'. *Logos* therefore encompasses the following meanings: 1. speech, saying, sentence; 2. story, tale, discourse etc.; 3. writing, treatise; 4. subject matter, question, incident, history; 5. calculation, account, responsibility; 6. reasoning, thought; 7. reason, cause, argument; 8. consideration; 9. meaning, value, importance; 10. reason, reasoning power. Rationality, then, means the *logical* way of thinking (and talking), which means to say: how to be considerate about the *order* of things. Yet its relation to political life remains unclear. How can one be considerate about the order of things in political life? The way to answer this question consists in inquiring into the historic counterpart and forerunner of rationality, that is, myth. For that *logos* is opposed to *mythos* represents an ancient commonplace.

2. The cosmological order of human life

In order to clarify the nature of rationality in political life we will first turn to the seedbed from which it emerged. The ancient counterpart of political rationality is cosmological myth. Hence, I wish first to turn to an analysis of political ideas in the context of ancient mythology. Mythical texts like those found in Mesopotamia usually portray the development of political order and the way it works in the context of genetic stories. We find a recurring pattern of theogony, cosmogony and anthropogeny along with the genesis of political order recorded for most of the old cosmological civilizations. Usually there are not many details offered in these texts. Instead, we meet with certain formulas again and again, as in the Sumerian king-list which begins with the words: „When the kingship was lowered from heaven, kingship was in Eridu(g)."[2]

We are given more details in the Babylonian *Enuma Elish,* a text that combines two topics: the story of creation and the story of how the Babylonian city-god Marduk became the supreme god of the Akkadian pantheon. From Apsu (the underworld ocean) and Tiamat (the primeval chaos) - two figures that more resemble forces than personal gods - derives a first generation of gods (Lahmu, Lahamu, Anshar, Kishar, Antum, Arurur and others). A second generation (probably the children of this first generation) turns out to be restless and reckless. One god of the second generation, Ea, kills Apsu. Although Tiamat seeks revenge, the old gods appear to be too weak for the task. Only Marduk, from the third generation of gods, a son of Ea and Damkina, is not impressed by the rebels and strong enough to overcome them. Ready to face the enemy, he desires complete power over all the gods and the cosmos as his reward in case of victory. So he asks:

> Lord of the gods, destiny of the great gods,
> If I am indeed to be your avenger,
> To vanquish Tiamat and to keep you alive,
> Convene the assembly and proclaim my lot supreme.
> When you are joyfully seated together in the Court of Assembly,
> May I through the utterance of my mouth determine the destinies, instead of you.
> Whatever I create shall remain unaltered,
> The command of my lips shall not return (void), it shall not be changed.[3]

2 Quoted from Jacobsen, T: The Sumerian King List, (Assyriological Studies No. 11) Chicago 1939, 10-75, here: 10
3 Heidel, A.: The Babylonian Genesis, The Story of the Creation, 2nd ed. Chicago 1951, 29, Tablet II, 122-129. A more recent collection of relevant texts can be found in Bottéro, J./Kramer, N. (eds.): Lorsque les dieux faisaient l'homme. Mythologie mésopotamienne. Paris 1989.

When he accomplishes his task and receives his prize, the old gods declare:

> From this day onward thy command shall not be changed.
> To exalt and to abase - this shall be your power!
> Dependable shall be the utterance of thy mouth.
> Thy command shall not prove vain.
> None among the gods shall infringe upon thy prerogative.
> Maintenance is the requirement of the sanctuaries of the gods;
> And so at (each) place of their shrines shall be appointed a place for thee.
> Marduk, thou art our avenger;
> To thee we have given kingship over the totality of the whole universe,
> So that when thou sittest in the assembly, thy word shall be exalted.
> May thy weapons not miss, may they smite thy foes.
> O lord, preserve the life of him who puts his trust in thee;
> But as for the god who has espoused evil, pour out his life![4]

Characteristic for the type of kingship established in this passage is the despotic command structure. The word of the king is a sacred, final and immutable statement. This applies to all cosmological empires (even as the earlier city-states of Mesopotamia knew the institute of a council and of debate[5]).

In Hellas, to turn to another example, only a few remnants, or rather echoes, of the cosmological era of society can be detected. In broad terms, the genealogy of the Greek Gods is a struggle for power that starts with the chthonic goddesses, follows with the titanic gods, and culminates in the Olympic generation. Some of the echoes can be heard in the *Odyssey,* where early Minoan practice is mentioned: „There is a great town there, Cnossus, where Minos reigned, who every nine years had a conference with Jove himself."[6]

Other remnants of older myths can be found in Plato, for example, in the beginning of the *Nomoi.* There the Athenian asks his Cretan partner Clinias, to whom the Cretans ascribe the authorship of their legal arrangements: „To a god or to some man?" (624a-b). Clinias answers that they call Zeus their lawgiver, while in Lacedaemon they refer to Apollo. Thereupon the Athenian quotes the

above lines from the Odyssey, and the Cretan supports this story: „So our people say" (trans. Bury).

Mythical stories share some typical structures. These include: (1) The anonymity of the tale, for as no-one participated in the events at the beginnings of time, there can be no human author. (2) The story thus represents an eternal truth, derived from a source beyond profane history. (3) The tale has a dramatic structure, the actors being the gods and heroes. The internal relations among these actors are primarily ordered along genealogical lines; they form one large family tree whose history is related as a, a myth about the origin of the gods - a *theogony.* Usually a violent fight breaks out among the gods that determines a hierarchy for the families and/or their individual members - a *theomachy.* (4) The entire process is structured as a metamorphosis; the gods are generated from a primordial substance, in the Greek case „chaos", according to Hesiod. More gods are generated from the corpses of slaughtered gods or as children of the survivors. Next, (5) the so-called *cosmogony* and (6) *anthropogeny* produce the entire world, or *cosmos* (the orderliness of things), along with mankind. The only exception from this pattern of metamorphosis is the implementation of (7) the political order, which generally is established by *command.*

In the context of myth, the structure of political order involves three aspects: the establishment of a supreme command (kingship) among the gods; the transfer of this structure to the human world; and finally, the exercise of this kingship by the king over his subjects. Mythological politics is, then, established in terms of a command structure, a one-way movement from the top down, from heaven to earth, from the king to his subjects. The king, often endowed with sacral functions, represents the cosmological order. He is not a representative of the people. People are not *politai,* not citizens, but only *hypekooi,* subjects, that is, they are not free. In cosmological societies, neither the idea nor the reality of a political life as such exists. Cities and empires are the *cosmos* written in small letters; they form a microcosm.

3. The rationality of political life in the *polis*

The world of cosmological societies is ordered by command and thereby ordered as a representation of cosmic order. Let us now look into the contrast between *mythos* and *logos.* What are the key ingredients of 'logical', that is, 'rational' societies? Greek thought records a gradual movement away from the world of cosmological myth that began with Hesiod around 700 BC. Within a time-span of roughly three centuries, by the time of Plato, this movement was already complete.

4 Heidel, The Babylonian Genesis, 36-37. Tablet IV, 7-33.
5 Cf. Jacobsen, T.: Early Political Development in Mesopotamia., in: Moran, W. L. (ed.): Toward the Image of Tammuz and Other Essays on Mesopotamian History and Culture, (Harvard Semitic Series 21) Cambridge, MA 1970, 132-156 (= *Journal of Near Eastern Studies,* July 1943, 159-172); id.: Primitive Democracy in Ancient Mesopotamia., ibid., 157-170; id.: The Treasures of Darkness. History of Mesopotamian Religion, 2nd ed. New Haven/London 1978. - Kramer, S. N.: History Begins At Sumer. Twenty Seven 'Firsts' in Man's Recorded History, Garden City, NY 1959; id.: The Sumerians, Their History, Culture, and Character, Chicago 1971.
6 Homer: Odyssey XIX, 178-179, quoted from: The Odyssey of Homer, trans. by S. Butler, ed. by L E. Loomis, Toronto/New York/London 1944.

While myth is as such anonymous, Hesiod comes on the scene as an author, his authority being based on the guidance of the muses who command the *orthos logos* (correctly ordered speech) and proclaim *aletheia,* or truth. The contrast is striking. While the acceptance of a mythological story ordinarily follows from its sacredness, the authenticity of Hesiod's story is based on its claim to truth.[7] Indeed, his task in writing the *Theogony* was to order the genealogy of the gods by combining various incoherent local sources into a logically consistent family tree. There is a final difference between *mythos* and *logos* that we can discern from a study of Hesiod. Not a single myth ever openly confesses that in an earlier version errors were committed and a revision of the (oral or written) text has become necessary. If errors are corrected at all, this is always done tacitly. In Hesiod's writing, however, we have the first-ever recorded confession of a revision of history. In the *Erga,* he changes his interpretation of the meaning of conflict (era), saying that there are two varieties: a good, or productive, one and a destructive one.[8] The search for truth goes hand-in-hand with the need for revision. The logical world seems to be a revisionist world. If one commits an error and detects it, there is disagreement. Disagreement, therefore, *is* an integral part of a logical order as opposed to a mythological order in which disagreement is ruled out by command. Hence, while the key-concepts of the mythological world are sacredness and command, Hesiod's world is ordered by truth, error and revision.

The next step is undertaken by Solon. In his writings we meet with the first attempt to identify, under the paradigm of a search for truth, the order of things. Without using the terms that afterwards became standard in philosophy, he describes the relationship of cause and effect in nature (as lightning and thunder) and in human affairs, in which, analogously the decline of justice as a mental disposition leads to the economic decline of the city as a social situation. The search for truth for Solon is a general human task; he calls it the search for the invisible measure, for the *aphanes metron.* Knowledge and reason provide the basis for the good order of human affairs. The cosmic order now is conceived as a transparent threefold relationship between these components: (1) the sphere of the gods, especially *dike* as the power of the order of justice; (2) the invisible measure ordering all things and the knowledge of the author; and (3) the good order of human affairs, the contrast being posed in terms of *eunomia* versus *dysnomia.*[9]

In the next century, early philosophers such as Thales, Anaximander, Pythagoras, Heraclitus, Parmenides, Empedokles and Zeno accomplished the development and systematization of these and related fundamental philosophical concepts. Regarding the order of things, the terms *logos* and *arché* become common usage, meaning the order of the cosmos as well as its origins or principles; *logos* denotes at the same time the (human) capacity of grasping this order and expressing it correctly. The standard terms describing a well-ordered personal and political world are: the *agathon* (the good), *areté* (the realized best form, usually translated 'virtue' - a moralizing misunderstanding), and *eudaimonia* ('happiness' or 'bliss'), which literally means that one's life is guided by a good *daimón.* The search for order is directed towards the *alétheia,* which in this context is not an epistemological but instead an ontological concept. Un-hidden, *a-léthés,* is something that is no longer concealed by *léthé,* the demonic force of forgetfulness, located in the underworld. As the poet Simonides in one of his verses declares: „One thing alone distresses him in Akheron: not that he left the sun behind and found there the halls of Lethe."[10] The opposite force to *léthé* is *mnémosyné,* the Titan goddess of memory who invented words and language. As a daughter of Ouranos (Heaven), she is a goddess of time, representing memory, the ability to preserve the stories of history. Of her Pindar - a contemporary of Heraklit - sings: „But I pray to Mnamosyna (Memory), the fair-robed child of Ouranos (Heaven), and to her daughters, to grant me ready resource; for the minds of men are blind, whosoever, without the maids of Helikon, seeketh the steep path of them that walked it by their wisdom."[11] For Pindar, the Muses are the forces that enlighten the blind minds of men, they give *alétheia.* Somewhat later, in the age of Pericles, Anaxagoras introduces reason *(nous)* as the ordering power of the cosmos. Since men participate in *nous* they are able to recognize the order *(logos)* of the cosmos. For Anaxagoras, God is nothing other than *nous.* It is no longer a Muse that guides men in their search for truth, but a power by which mankind participates in the ordering source of cosmos, the god *nous.*

The renunciation of the mythological framework is now almost complete. What is still missing is the *popularization* of the new ideas. This was achieved by the Sophists. In spite of all Socratic and Platonic critique, we are indebted to the Sophists for their having transferred rationality from the small circles of the elite to the masses in the market place. Within the Sophist movement, we can distinguish two groups: one, represented by Herodotus and Thucydides, practices the

---

7 Hesiod: Theogony and Works and Days, trans. with an intro. and notes by M. Litchfield West, Oxford/New York 1988, here: Theogony, 27 ff.. Works and Days, 10.
8 Hesiod, Erga, 11 ff.
9 See Fragm. 16, in: Elegy and Iambus, ed. by J. M. Edmonds. Cambridge (Mass.) 1931,Vol. I, 133; cf. Fragm. 3, 4, 5, 10, 11, 16, and 24.

10 Greek Lyrik, Vol. III, Stesichorus, Ibycus, Simonides ..., with an English transl. by D. A. Campbell, Cambridge, MA 2001; cf. Fragm. 67.
11 The Odes of Pindar, including the Principal Fragments, trans. by J. Sandys, Cambridge, MA 1956; cf. VII. Paean.

analysis of experience, the other, including Protagoras and Gorgias, teaches the art of analysis as such and in doing so lays the foundations for rhetoric and logic as subjects that can be taught at school and practiced according to fixed rules. Having done that, their greatest achievement consists in mediating the corresponding analytical competence to the general public (at least in principle) and thereby providing the masses with the necessary basis for potential participation in political life. The deficiency of the Sophists, by contrast, can be found in their limited, that is, relativistic rationality - a weakness that the Socratic critique detected.

The basic change in the move away from a mythological framework can be characterised as a change from the representation of the cosmic *mythos* to a participation according to a true *logos*. The kings, once representing the cosmological order, no longer exist or are reduced to sacral functions. The Greek cities are no longer a microcosm - the *cosmos* written in small letters - as they finally become man written in large letters.[12] The city and her ruler exist on behalf of her citizens. This represents a complete inversion of the mythological order The structure of a truly *political* life is organized as a hierarchy of mutual representation and participation, as unilateral command has been replaced by liberty.

The order of the city-states rests on a shared set of principles, not on a single command structure exercised via personal power. Most importantly, there is a primary consensus of citizens and their representatives in the exercise of political rights according to the rule of law: the *nomoi,* and for the common good. Put simply, this means that both the people and their representatives must profit from political action. Citizens participate in the life of the *polis;* the center of power is meant to represent the people. This arrangement gives particular expression to the idea of good government, an idea embodied in the classical list of good and bad political forms of order: monarchy, aristocracy, polity and sometimes even democracy being the good forms, tyranny, oligarchy, anarchy and sometimes democracy as well being the bad forms.

Secondly, the center of power is bound by a *taxis,* one which denotes the political order in a narrow sense, that is, the constitution, the *nomos* of the city. It orders by way of rules the regular relationships among the elements of the political order, namely the people of the city. This order of the city's *nomos* is based on a certain common *logos* symbolized primarily by *dike,* the principle (and goddess) of justice, especially by the orientation toward the *koinon sympheron,* the common good and the adherence to the golden rule. The golden rule is a measure for the rationality of all rules. (Although he was not fully aware of it, Kant was indebted to these Greek notions.) The rationality of rules in turn is based on an

12 Cf. above all Plato, Republic II, 10.

insight (by reason conceived as *nous)* into the cosmic order, now called the *physei dikaion,* the law of 'nature'. After all, the order is founded on the invisible measure of the *logos,* the intelligible cosmic order. But this foundation now is articulated by the political common-sense of the people, not by an anonymous mythology as in the past. Taken together, these elements constitute, in the environment of the Greek city-state, the supreme *logos* of political order: popular articulation, general participation, responsible representation, the supremacy of the law as the order of all the political elements, the rationality of its rules and the aim of the common good.

4. Three dimensions of rationality

Within this political society there arose, however, a dispute of a fundamental nature: Is the supreme *logos* of political order itself based on rationality or not? One answer was given by the Sophists. To them, the concept of justice and other criteria were themselves conventional and arbitrary, for the Sophists regarded them as based on (private or popular) opinion. Another, different answer was that of Plato and Aristotle, for whom the concept of justice and other such criteria are 'rational', that is, they are based on an immutable and objective principle, a *logos* independent of opinion. This, then, is the key Platonic question: What is the reason or *arché* of the *nomo* if we do not (or cannot) rely upon heavenly command as narrated in the myth? Its pendant is: If we nonetheless continue refer to myth, what can it tell us?

Even among these two opposing positions there existed common ground, however, which we can easily detect in the Socratic dialogues. It appears in nothing less than the fact that the two parties can still argue with each other. This means that they share, at least in principle, common rules and procedures on how to dispute about the truth. This is the basic and common rationality of the logical society. Whereas in mythological discourse we have an eternal but impersonal truth about the nature of the cosmic drama, in logical discourse we find persons that attempt to portray the truth to their audience, a truth for which they present themselves as accountable. They give an account, that is, they give the reasons for the story that they are telling. The new concept of the order of human life, shared by Sophists and Platonists alike, is based on three dimensions of rationality. The first one I would like to call *metaphysical rationality,* the second *theoretical rationality,* the third *political rationality.*

Of these three dimensions, metaphysical rationality is the most fundamental. It is a consensus about the rationality of things - that the realm of being is a whole structured by a regular relationship of the parts. This relationship of part

and whole renders the entire realm of being a participatory and orderly whole, of which man himself is a part and capable of participation. The order of all things taken together is the *cosmos,* a neatly ordered whole. The ontological principle of order is the basic idea behind the terms *logos* and *ratio.* This is an ancient idea present in almost all Indo-European languages.[13]

This metaphysical consensus leads to the question: How do we participate in the order of things? This question is answered by a consensus about theoretical rationality, that is, the order of thought. Since man himself is part of the *cosmos* he participates in it by his very nature. Although he participates with his body (like all other animals) and his mind (*psyche, logos, nous)* the knowledge accessible through participation is not simply given but must be acquired. The order of things, called *logos,* can be and has to be discovered by us since it is not known per se. Myth can hint at or even point to this order, but can offer no proof. Instead, the insight into the order of things must be demonstrated by giving reasons and formulating arguments; it cannot rely on command or personal authority. If the order of thought represents the order of things adequately it is called *alétheia.*

Since this truth is not simply given, we have to find out who is able to give the best reasons for the truth that he has found. Since we no longer submit to any authoritative statement about truth, we have to have the means to dispute arguments for truth. That is why the search for truth must be carried out according to rules (what we call 'logic'). Ony to the extent that the logical order of thought reflects the order of things is the logical order of thought necessary element in truth-claims. He who claims truth has to give sufficient reason for his claim. Yet precisely because all claims are open to critique and may be revised, we say: *dissent* is a vital ingredient in the search for truth. This means that theoretical rationality is based on rules and procedures for dissent.

The theoretical rationality of dissent poses a practical problem: What shall we do if we do not fully agree about truth but nevertheless have to act? The problem can be solved only by a consensus about *political rationality.* The typical situation of political life is like this: We have a problem that is important to all of us;

---

13 We have in old Avestan: *rta* ('fitting, right'), *rtám* ('well-arranged holy order') and *ratu* ('the judge'); *asa* ('right and truthful'). In Vedic Sanskrit the idea is articulated as *aram* ('fitting, sufficient'), *rta* ('cosmic order, truth') and *rtúh* ('time, order, rule'). In Greek the same is present in: *harmonia* ('harmony') and in *harmos* ('joint, arrangement'), *artron* ('member, joint'); *areté* ('best form, "virtue"'), *aristos* ('best'), and *arithmos* ('number'). In Latin we find besides *ratio: ars* ('art', originally: 'the ability to fit things together'), *ritus* ('rite, the traditional way of religion, usage'). Modern languages reflect these older meanings in many cases, as in the English 'order' and the German *Recht, richtig, Ordnung* etc. See Pokorny. J.: Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch. 5th ed. Tübingen/Basel 2005, 55 ff.

but at the same time we disagree about its solution. Many such problems have to be solved immediately and cannot be postponed. What can we do under these circumstances? Since dissent and not consensus prevails in political life, we can only divide the problem into two parts. First of all, we need consensus about how to cope with dissent. This is why political life is based on a common *taxis,* the *nomos* of society, albeit the order is a monarchical, an aristocratic, a democratic or a mixed one. Political life must be ordered by common (human) laws, not by men ruling arbitrarily. Therein, the rule of law is superior to the rule of men. The choice of these rules is a rational choice: weighing ends and means. It can only be based on a shared understanding of the ends of the society, being its *logos,* its final set of goals (such as peace, liberty and justice). We therefore have to establish rules for action that are effective even in situations of dissent. Being effective simply means making it possible for us to decide a case in due time. This is the rationality of political order. The matter is fairly simple; for what we need is consensus on how to act, even if we disagree. The preferred solution is fairly simple, too: decision according to a majority vote.

The machine of rationality, however, never rests. Hence, we may find that our framework of rules is insufficient to achieve our common ends. Then we may change the constitution. Or we may find that our decisions were wrong, and then we may change our laws. Therefore, in a rational society all (human) laws are subject to critique and subsequent revision. The right to say 'That was wrong' is an integral part of political life. Dissent is a vital ingredient of political life. The machine of rationality rests, according to the Sophist *and* the Platonic position alike, on an agreement about the basic ends of society. Otherwise, we cannot judge the fitness of its general rules and its actions. In practical rationality, the theoretical dissent of Sophists and Platonists does not matter. The rational political society does not claim to act according to universal truth. All decisions are open to debate and argument, all decisions can be revised. Put somewhat differently, all political men are revisionists. This understanding is shared by the rational common man as well as Sophists, Platonists and Aristotelians. In practical rationality, whether there exists something like universal truth or merely opinion remains open to debate. But even among the Sophist and Platonic positions, we find a common ground. For if there are no common ends, there also can be no peaceful public life, no matter whether ends are conventional or rational (or mythical). The rest remains a matter of dissent. Political existence is not an existence endowed with the total knowledge of final truth. On the contrary, it is the existence of veracity or truthfulness, that is, a common search for the common good according to basic rules of rationality. After all, rational man must be well aware of the possibility that he may be wrong all the time. This is the price we have to pay for leaving the cosmological society.