With today's antipolitics we are becoming dimly aware once again of the possibility that there might be human life without politics and the public world. We live in many groups or 'communities', ethnic, gender, religious, cultural, class, professional and so forth. Most of them we do not feel to be 'political'. For working purposes I will define 'politics' inexactly as the contested and changing common life of a community, connected with a modern state, that is exclusive of other such communities ('sovereign') and may be in conflict with them. By the public world I mean the array of words, symbols and habits that gives people a sense of membership in a community connected with the state.

These words are not only the names of countries and identities ('American', 'English') but abstract terms such as 'country', patrie, Heimat, otechestvo. The most powerful symbols of politics are those survivors of the age of enlightened despotism, the flag and the military uniform. In most human activities we feel no awareness of politics. In voting, campaigning and demonstrating against some public practice we feel politics. When our country wages war we suddenly have a powerful sense of belonging to a political community. Broadcasting and watching 'news' is a modern habit that gives a strong sense of politics, though it can also provoke a disgust with politics. The public world understood in this way is felt as separate from a 'private' world of individual and group tastes, connections and strivings. Politics, as we now feel it, presupposes the modern distinction between state and society.

Politics thus defined does not exist everywhere. Thirty miles north of the Sa'na airport the authority of the government of the Yemen Arab Republic ends and the control of the Arhab...
tribe begins. Among these tribesmen there exist authority and conflict, but not political authority and political conflict as I would define it. Their life is structured by the ‘segmentary’ form of social organization described by anthropologists. Society consists of groups descended from a common ancestor within larger groups descended from an earlier ancestor, in the manner of matryoshka dolls.

The tribal system, typical of segmentary structures everywhere, is a system of balanced opposition between tribes and tribal sections from the largest to the smallest divisions [nuclear families], and there cannot therefore be any single authority in a tribe. Authority is distributed at every point of the tribal structure and political leadership is limited to situations in which a tribe or a segment of its acts corporately. With a tribe this only happens in war or in dealings with an outside authority which for its own purposes recognizes the tribe as an administrative unit. There cannot, obviously, be any absolute authority vested in a single shaikh of a tribe when the fundamental principle of tribal structure is opposition between its segments, and in such segmentary systems there is no state and no government as we understand these institutions; and criminal law is absent and civil law exists only in a very rudimentary form. The shaikh’s social position is unformalized and ... he must in no sense be regarded as a ruler or administrator.\(^1\)

An old Arab proverb expresses this system more simply: ‘Myself against my brother; my brother and I against my cousin; my cousin, my brother and I against the outsider.’

It is not clear that the ‘political’ reality is very different in more modern areas such as those controlled by narcotics chieftains in the highlands of Columbia, or by warlords in Bosnia or the Caucasus.

What we call politics came into being at a certain point in history, as its Greek etymology suggests, and it is always conceivable that it might disappear again at another point in history. The medieval knight, when he waged war against another knight, for plunder or honor, entirely within the law, did not think he was engaged in ‘politics’, nor did the pope when he excommunicated a holy Roman emperor for appointing bishops by himself. During the Middle Ages the