Quarterly Review of the John Paul II Institute
POWER: ISSUE ONE

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Issues in Family, Culture & Science

POWER

Authority and Power

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"The eclipse of the idea of authority is an essential characteristic of today's world; in fact, it is the most immediately observable characteristic" (Del Noce). Yet freedom has not become more luminous in the absence of authority. On the contrary, it has been eclipsed together with authority by ever-more absolute forms of arbitrary power: totalitarianisms which aim precisely at authority. Authority is in the service of freedom; for it is the power to make things grow in accord with the *given* order to which the authority is first subject. It is best represented by a father who bears witness to that order, received from above, as he hands himself over to the mother and together with her brings a child into being.

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BOOK REVIEW

The Scientific Law of Power

THOMAS HOLMAN

Bertrand de Jouvenel, *On Power: The Natural History of Its Growth* (Liberty Fund, Inc.; Liberty Press ed. edition, 1993).

Every once in a while, there comes along an exception to G.W.F. Hegel's dictum "The owl of Minerva begins its flight only with the onset of dusk." While the observation that theory is able to express the essence of an age only after it has entered its decline generally holds true, there is such a thing as genuine philosophical foresight. A case in point is French political theorist Bertrand de Jouvenel's classic book, *On Power*. First published in 1942, it can be read today as a helpful guide to some key aspects of contemporary politics. In particular, as we continue to cope with a steady succession of political irregularities in both the domestic and international spheres, it pays to reexamine the nature of power in the modern state. But studying power is not only helpful for understanding what has happened in the "advanced" democracies of the past several years. It may also help us to understand (and perhaps avoid) certain dangers latent in the structure of liberal democratic governments.

Jouvenel's thesis is simple: the coercive force of the modern state has grown steadily since the Middle Ages. Contrary to the popular myth that we have emerged from the "Dark Ages" into a democratic age of ever-expanding autonomous freedom, Jouvenel argues that we are (as we have always been) dealing with what he calls "the Minotaur." This is best described as an impersonal force at work in history, always acting through persons, but somehow transcending them. Also called simply "Power," the Minotaur is more like a scientific law than a god or transcendent power, something to which we are beholden, yet which would not exist without us. For Jouvenel, the Minotaur is the root cause of the evils of the twentieth century that he witnessed in their darkest fury even as he wrote. Indeed, for Jouvenel, Hitler himself is only a "bad tenant" of this Power apparatus, ever increasing over the last millennium.

He begins the book with an examination of what he calls "the miracle of civil obedience": what is it that drives people to obey civil authorities despite such widespread discontent? Force alone cannot explain why most everyone, broadly speaking, does what they are supposed to do

day in and day out. Ultimately, for Jouvenel, the one unified explanatory principle of Power must be the divine will, but the various theoretical approaches have had great influence in Power's growth, especially since the eighteenth century. Theories of sovereignty and the organic state, for example, have played important roles in shaping how we understand politics historically speaking. However, these are ultimately unsatisfying for Jouvenel: they cannot, on their own, explain the miracle of obedience.

In spinning out his own theory of Power, Jouvenel employs an idiosyncratic reading of history combined with an almost geometrically lapidary prose style. For him, political "science" is an articulation of more general truths reasoned from certain axioms with a healthy dose of historical examples. Power, for Jouvenel, is defined as "*l'ensemble des éléments gouvernementaux*," the totality of governmental elements. Another of the axioms from which Jouvenel reasons is that the essence of Power is its capacity to command obedience. The extent to which Power can do this and the number of areas of life over which it exerts influence are important dimensions or axes along which Power can be measured. This allows him to treat his subject almost mathematically.

> *For Jouvenel, the one day every four years on which the citizens vote is a sad pittance indeed for the sacrifice of liberty to Power.*

Yet this is most definitely not the whole picture. Indeed, Jouvenel's reading of the past is as important as his quasi-mathematical method. The book includes a succession of fascinating anecdotes that Jouvenel employs to support his thesis. This deft combination of axiomatic theory and historical anecdote allows him to bring social, economic, political, and (crucially) spiritual analyses to bear on the problem of Power's growth. In this way he avoids the errors of contemporary historiography that would rigidly separate these spheres into distinct analyses.

We now are prepared to examine Jouvenel's theory of Power proper. He begins with an examination of the "magic" of Power that took root in the earliest human societies. According to Jouvenel, in its primitive form, Power resembled a "black mass" more than a deliberative council. Out of these misty beginnings, marked by fear of powers outside of man's control, emerged the warrior culture in which individual clan leaders arose who dared to transgress the taboos of early tribal life. From the beginning, these chieftains aimed at forming alliances, but these were usually insecure and ephemeral. However, sooner or later, one chieftain was able to rise to prominence and form a lasting alliance around his person. Yet this more lasting alliance was never quite able to ignore the possibility of a threat from a group of adversarial chieftains. This primordial rivalry between the chieftains and the king heralds one of the defining features of Power through the rest of history. The interests of the chieftains constitute the *res publica*, the complex of interests of the "people," broadly speaking, while the king becomes "the man who is above all and rules all," Power in its earliest form. Under such a Power, the people become subjects "possessed in common" rather than persons "associated in common."

Yet it is not a simple story of kings always dominating alliances of barons. If this were the case, we would not have the Magna Charta. There is a back-and-forth movement, wherein sometimes the barons are ascendant, while at other times the king predominates. This

"dialectic of command" constitutes the history of Power: the interests of the chieftains, barons, or aristocracy assert their interests against the prerogative of the king and vice-versa. Power moves between "parasitism" and "symbiosis" as the aristocracy and the monarchy jostle to assert their rights. From this dialectic emerges true liberty: for Jouvenel, "liberty" means nothing if not the assertion of ancient rights and privileges owed to a person based on his or her position within the whole. It depends on law only in the most fundamental sense, in its ancient and perhaps unwritten form.

However, over time, the monarchy slowly starts winning out by becoming "egotistical," that is, it joins itself to the causes of society as a whole, championing the downtrodden masses and thereby undercutting the aristocracy. By promising to address societal issues that concern "the people," the king expands Power while undercutting the aristocracy. As Jouvenel never fails to remind his readers, this is precisely what happened in the French Revolution: what began as a noble proclamation of universal equality for all quickly devolved into a radical dismantling of the aristocratic practices of the *ancien régime*, resulting in a horrific breakdown of order.

Out of all this, however, Power emerged unscathed, indeed, greatly expanded: within 10 years, the French had imposed conscription on the public, a feat that would have had that most absolute of monarchs, Louis XIV, practically salivating with delight. In other words, precisely the moment when the cause of freedom is supposed to have taken its greatest leap forward is when Power reached new heights of dominance. Jouvenel sees a similar pattern in the British Interregnum as much as in the presidency of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. No sooner did Charles I lose his head than Britain became effectively a military dictatorship (this drastically expanded Power eventually passed to Parliament alone), while the New Deal drastically accelerated Power's growth in America.

As we gallop through history with Jouvenel, he shows how Power has been able to extend its reach into vastly greater areas of life: after legal equality is won, economic equality is demanded; after economic equality is won, social equality is demanded; in this struggle virtually no aspect of life is left untouched. This leads to what Jouvenel calls "totalitarian democracy" where the supposed sovereignty of the people results in a Power unlike any heretofore dreamt of in history. Here we broach another insight from Jouvenel's analysis: Power that can right any type of injustice can inflict a host of similar injustices in its turn. As the organs of Power crusade against all and sundry forms of injustice, the liberty (in Jouvenel's sense) of the various other interests falls by the wayside. In their place rises a meaningless form of egalitarianism, in which all are equally powerless before Leviathan. For Jouvenel, the one day every four years on which the citizens vote is a sad pittance indeed for the sacrifice of liberty to Power.

What is to be done? Jouvenel is not optimistic. One gets the sense that he is deeply worried that Hitler and Stalin are only a foretaste of yet more awful things to come. However, he does examine a few possible remedies: the rule of law, institutional checks and balances, and "folkways." But by far the most compelling and perhaps the most heartening for Americans reading this book today comes in Jouvenel's analysis of the late Roman republic. Rather than any large-scale property redistribution, the great populist reformer Tiberius Gracchus (assassinated by a group of Senators in 133 B.C.) aimed at creating a large class of middling landholders. That is, he tried to create a new and interested middle class, which for Jouvenel hits at the "hidden secret" of liberty. In other words, it is in the clash of genuinely held interests within society at large that true liberty can be preserved. A large middle class engaged in protecting its interests against encroachments from other quarters of society is essential. The lower classes, trade unions, the bureaucracy, the executive, the aristocracy can all take part in this dialogue, but the important thing is that something like a give-and-take

negotiation between these elements takes place, that none of them ever controls Power unquestioned. The contrast with "interest group democracy," or a "politics of difference," will be obvious to his readers. Jouvenel means that large and internally diverse segments of society must consciously, constantly, and (to a greater or lesser extent) effectively work at defending their interests throughout all levels of government and civil society. Yet they still retain a sense of the whole, despite the back and forth nature (not to say adversarial) nature of the negotiation. The dialogue between large, engaged segments of society is what matters. It is our best hope to check Power and preserve liberty.

Perhaps the greatest weakness of Jouvenel's analysis is that he notices but doesn't emphasize how, in whatever stunted and unsatisfying manner, American politics is marked by just such a back and forth between broad-based "interests." Of course, this is always under threat, and it is often well-nigh impossible to tell whether this or that group really represents a broad segment of society as Jouvenel demands, but we do have our moments where such a dialogue or negotiation is taking place. Perhaps a few examples might show that, in an admittedly qualified way, America is different.

For example, consider how differently we engaged with the Covid epidemic here in the United States than in many European countries. Despite a smattering of attempts by the government to snuff out certain scientifically plausible viewpoints, to exclude those who refused the vaccine, or to silence parents worried about the pernicious effects of school closings on their children's well-being, there was meaningful resistance to such policies, a resistance found in other eras of American politics, like Vietnam.

We might forgive Jouvenel for writing before such events as the pandemic or, if you like, the revolt against the Vietnam-era draft. But he largely bypasses important ways in which America might be different than Europe. He rightly points out the unique role our Court system plays in our constitutional order but fails to analyze how it contradicts his theory of the inexorable growth of Power. Further, he does not analyze the ways in which the unique constitutional and cultural resources ("folkways") of the United States might be brought to bear in the struggle against Power.

Perhaps Jouvenel would retort that these are insignificant green shoots poking out of what, taken as a whole, is more like a desolate wasteland. He might remind us to ponder what resources Power will levy against those who might happen to disagree with the dominant orthodoxy on, say, climate change. But, at least for now, Americans of all political stripes ought to be thankful for our protections against an overweening state: the unique institutional role of the Senate, the filibuster, judicial review, and the legal limitations on Executive Orders, to name just a few. To be sure, all these institutions are under fire by legions of politicians from both parties, but there is little doubt that they have curbed at least a few of the worst excesses of Power in this country.

But this slight shortcoming doesn't come close to overshadowing the immense value of Jouvenel's book. Despite having been written over 70 years ago, it remains thought-provoking. But more than that, it provides a step back from the noise of day-to-day politics, reminding all of us that in our post-totalitarian age, whether or not my favored policy wins out is never the most important factor. What matters is that there is a true conversation of interests happening, where no group's grasp of Power is ever secure enough to dominate the whole. Only out of some such "dialogue" can any semblance of true liberty remain.

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BOOK REVIEW

What Is Totalitarianism?

MARY TAYLOR

F. Flagg Taylor IV (ed.), *The Great Lie: Classic and Recent Appraisals of Ideology and Totalitarianism* ((ISI Books, 2011)).

> *The totalitarian state attempts to turn all its subjects into accomplices in its great lie.*
> —Václav Benda

Everyone is familiar with small lies—the white lies told to save someone's feelings, the justifications used for morally ambiguous choices—and with larger lies, as when we find out that an institution's actions have been ruthlessly deceptive. The Great Lie is something else entirely: an all-encompassing ideology that begins as political but extends far beyond politics, penetrating into all aspects of experience. It attempts to reconstruct the very nature of the human person, and to undermine reason. Hence, it is a falsification of reality itself, well captured in Mussolini's famous dictum, "All within the state, nothing outside the state, nothing against the state"[1] —a diabolical inversion of I Corinthians 15:28, where God is all in all.

The totalitarianism that arose in the 20th century is not a modern and corrupt form of tyranny, but something new in history, as the essays in *The Great Lie* make clear. Hannah Arendt insists that it is beyond even the "unprecedented," exploding all possible alternatives. Tyrants rule by fear, and that fear is concentrated in an external threat coming from a specific direction; the Big Lie engenders *internalized* self-coercion and self-repression motivated by a miasma of dread that cannot be dispelled by reason. This is by design: those in power act in unpredictable ways, a feature of terrorism that instills a pathological anxiety in its subjects, resulting in servile obedience. The State lies, and the people living under its maleficence must themselves lie in concert in order to protect their life and livelihood. Solzhenitsyn notes that "the permanent lie becomes the only safe form of existence."

It is impossible to do justice in a short review to this monumental volume of essays on the Great Lie. It comprises thirty-six articles written from 1941 to 2001, many by well-known authors (Havel, Solzhenitsyn, Arendt, Miłosz, Manent, Voegelin, Strauss, Besançon) and others whose names might be unfamiliar to the English-speaking world. It is divided into six sections: *Concepts* (how totalitarianism differs from tyranny); *Nature* (the essential logic and features that arise, even in very different circumstances); *Origins* (the philosophic conditions that allowed for the rise of such a modern novelty); *Seduction* (how these regimes captured so many people); *Dissent* (its possibilities, how it is manifested, and what this tells us about the nature, novelty, and limits of totalitarianism); and *Lessons* (the totalitarian experience and what it means for the future).

> *Although we may not have a malevolent police-state apparatus with a multitude of informers, we have incomparable methods of digital surveillance and control that would make the KGB envious.*

Many topics will be familiar, but there are several claims in the book that for some readers might seem unlikely. One would be Taylor's contention, referencing among others Voegelin, Aron, and Arendt, that Soviet Communism and Nazism were not in fact representative of the extremes of left and right but were essentially two species of one genus. On a more current topic, Chantal Delsol notes that Western societies, like totalitarian ones, "also attempt, and for the very same reasons, methodically to reconstruct cultural reality." The rejection of the rosy view of liberal democracy as a bulwark against totalitarianism seems counterintuitive, for surely it is the very antithesis of the all-encompassing State, with its public/private distinction, system of checks and balances, and more. Indeed, Solzhenitsyn was excoriated after his 1978 Harvard Commencement Address for implying that the differences between the totalitarian East and the liberal democracies of the west were "less terrifying than the similarity of the disease" afflicting both.

The notion that an incipient totalitarianism has been present in the liberal West has not been readily acknowledged. Totalitarianism takes on various configurations: as certain plants send out rhizomes and can appear differently in different places due to disparities in soil composition and climate, so totalitarianism sends its poisonous shoots into very diverse sets of circumstances, mutating its distinctive DNA to adapt to the conditions. Content is mistaken for form: totalitarianism does not necessarily require repressive physical violence like nighttime raids, bullets in the back of the head, and gulags. Although we may not have a malevolent police-state apparatus with a multitude of civilian and familial informers, we have incomparable methods of digital surveillance and control that would make the KGB envious. Worse, we have a populace who too often needs no external constraint but rather has been conditioned to embrace the desiderata of the State apparatus as if they were personal choices. These points make the book of more than historical interest. Events straight out of Orwell's *1984* make the news daily, from arrests for praying silently inside one's head, to re-education classes for expressing a belief that has been held for millennia, to the corruption of language into Orwellian "newspeak" and the inversion of the truth, where violence becomes "protected speech" and reasonable speech is equated with violence. The totalitarian desire to control the very conscience, as in the climax of *1984*, is pervasive, making the book chillingly astute about the present and prescient about the future.

The penultimate paragraph of book reviews is often the locus of criticism. I find nothing to criticize, but given the above, one suggestion I might make is that future editions include something by more writers, such as Augusto del Noce as well as D.C. Schindler. Schindler's article "America and the Inversion of Tyranny," in *New Polity* (Winter 2024) is particularly timely as it illuminates our present situation: totalitarianism without tyranny in the classic sense —and inspires us: "Our resistance has to begin with a recollection of politics in its original purpose: the formation of order, open above and below, that arises from a recovery of the relationship to reality, in all of its created goodness, truth, and beauty at the foundation of human community."

Reading *The Great Lie* elicits startling moments of recognition and, due to the immensity and weight of truth told at a price, the awareness that the writers are bearing witness. To quote Delsol again, "The authentic subject is neither a fanatic nor a nihilist, but a witness." That should be true of the readers as well. Solzhenitsyn exhorts us to open our eyes to that which demands "the total surrender of our souls, continuous and active participation in the general, conscious lie…. Do not lie. Do not take part in the lie. Do not support the lie."[2]

[1] B. Mussolini, *Discorsi del 1925* (Milan: 1926), 192. "Tutto nello Stato, niente al di fuori dello Stato, nulla contro lo Stato."

[2] "Participation and the Lie" in *I Must Speak Out: The Best of the Voluntaryist* 1982–1999, ed. Carl Watner (San Francisco: Fox & Wilke, 1999).

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FEATURE ARTICLE

Of Power, Truth, and Language

ANCA M. NEMOIANU

Power seems to be a trendy word these days—maybe ever since Michel Foucault's contributions on this theme—but as a linguist, I am not surprisingly interested in how it relates to language. Who wields power over language? In order to attempt to answer that question, I will start with three language "stories" that speak to the relationship between power and language.

The first story is about a six-year-old boy talking about the revolution that toppled Romania's Big Brother some 30 years ago, when he was in first grade. When asked at that time how the unexpected change affected him, he said with premature irony: "One day we were calling our teacher 'Comrade,' and the next day we were supposed to call her 'Mrs.'" The Ministry of Truth, responsible up to that point for censorship over words and concepts, was dismantled, and children were allowed to use the language they used at home and among themselves. In other words, it took a bloody coup for language to return to truth and normalcy.

The second story records the vicissitudes of the epicene English pronoun. About thirty years ago, the gender-indefinite pronoun "he" started being perceived as offensively sexist. The suggested and slowly enforced alternative was "he or she," "he/she" (a strange slashed pronominal form), and various other orthographic variants. Editors created the change and started implementing it, at times mechanically, with hilarious results. For example, the male author of an academic work, referring to himself in the introduction, naturally, as "he," saw the edited manuscript changed to "he/she!" In general, this pronominal solution, mandated in editorial rooms and classrooms, was felt to be awkward, therefore speakers chose another pronoun, the sex-neutral "they," to take its place. As the class of pronouns, unlike that of nouns or verbs, cannot be enriched with made-up or borrowed words, the speakers chose an already existing pronoun, the third person plural and gave it an additional function. And the powers that tried to enforce their own pronouns admitted defeat and adopted the speakers' pronominal choice, in speech and writing. Thus, the circle was closed, as the use of "they" was not new, but can be found in English as far back as the Middle Ages.

The third story is one of Eudora Welty's accounts from her autobiographical work *One Writer's*

Beginnings:

> The school toilets were in the boys' and girls' respective basements. After Miss Duling had rung to dismiss school, a friend and I were making our plans for Saturday from adjoining cubicles [in the girls' school toilets]. "Could you come spend the day with me?" I called out, and she called back "I might could."
>
> "Who-said—MIGHT-COULD?" It sounded like "Fe Fi Fo Fum!"
>
> We were both petrified, for we knew whose deep measured words those were that came from just outside our doors….
>
> "You might as well tell me," continued Mrs. McWillie. "I am going to plant myself right here and wait till you come out. Then I'll see who it was I heard saying 'MIGHT-COULD'"… Saying "might-could" was bad, but saying it in the basement made bad grammar a sin. I knew Presbyterians believed that you could go to Hell.

In spite of this early traumatic encounter in the school bathroom, I am sure Eudora Welty continued to use the double modal at home and with friends from the American South, and she, a keen listener to the rhythms of her characters' speech, put it in the mouths of many a fictional character, but she may not have always used it in conversations with non-Southern-dialect speakers from among her readers.

Changes in language can be brought about by powerful agents: totalitarian leaders, publishers, and teachers. And yet, their changes, coming from above, last only temporarily, for as long as the enforcers stay in power: eventually, the language, through its speakers, rejects them or keeps what they think works best in communication. The changes coming from the speakers eventually make their way into written discourse and are recorded in dictionaries and grammars and style handbooks.

Over long stretches of time languages change in sound, structure, and meaning. They change very slowly, after periods of fluctuation and inconsistency. The agents of change are the speakers themselves, although often they are unaware of language change and, oftentimes, some even deplore it. The history of the English language is a dramatic example of such change: for hundreds of years, since the first attested documents in English dating from approximately the 8th century, to current times, English has changed its very typology, from a language structured more like Latin (with noun and verb endings and a loose word order) to what it is today (most of the endings gone, and the subject+verb+object word order firmly entrenched). This change is so dramatic that a contemporary speaker of English has to learn Old English, the language of the epic poem *Beowulf*, as a foreign language, and needs some help to understand the Medieval English of Chaucer, and even Shakespeare, much closer to today's English. How did this happen? Many non-linguistic changes happened over fifteen centuries: increased population and mobility, rising literacy, the Norman Invasion, the printing press, among others. Kings succeeded each other, French almost replaced English, but the English speakers kept speaking English, with little concern about how language changed over generations, and unaware that they were holding the keys to their language in their own hands. With increased literacy and broader availability of books, late in the history of spoken language, self-appointed defenders of language began to raise their voices against chaos and

vulgarity in language and to ask for the need for "purification" and "standardization." This was a continental movement that soon reached the British Isles.

> *Efforts to mold language by ever-changing ideologies does nothing less than obfuscate communication, moving it away from the truth. They can hardly be enforced for long periods of time, for the language, through its speakers, is bound to reject them sooner or later.*

Thus, at the very end of the 16th century, Italy created the oldest European Academy, the Florentine Accademia della Crusca, a group of philological scholars, poets, and lawyers set out to sift bran (*crusca*) from wheat and give birth to "*il piu bel fior*," free from corrupt words and grammatical structures. Starting out on a jocular note, la Crusca soon took its own power to purify language seriously.

One hundred and fifty years later, under the protection of Cardinal Richelieu, the French created their own academy, L'Académie française, the awe-inspiring institution responsible for regulating French grammar and spelling, "to render the language capable of treating the arts and sciences." The Academy has survived to this day: it has always had only 40 seats, each held for life. The academicians are men and (only very recently) women of letters (Marguerite Yoursenar was the first woman elected in 1980!). They are called "immortals," because their work is meant to assure the immortality of the language. The first complete edition of their dictionary, *Le Dictionnaire de l'Académie française dédié au Roi*, was published in 1694. Its most recent task has been to clean French of the many words borrowed from English, oblivious to the fact that over a thousand years ago English was literally invaded by thousands of Norman French words, which were gradually and imperceptibly incorporated into the host language the way speakers of a language know how to do it, without the need of an academy.

Echoes of the French Academy soon reached over the Channel. In 1711, Jonathan Swift, of *Gulliver Travels*' fame, wrote a letter to Robert, Earl of Oxford and Mortimer, known as "A Proposal for Correcting, Improving, and Ascertaining the English Tongue," in which he was asking for the earl's patronage of a manual with rules for correcting "abuses" and "absurdities" in the language, and the many offences against "every Part of Grammar." For Swift deplored the imperfection of language and its continuous change. He was taking upon himself the task of fixing the English Language forever, of wielding power over English. His lengthy, historically detailed plea did not reach a favorable ear with the earl, although many of Swift's literary contemporaries harbored the same desires, notable among them Daniel Defoe, well known for his *Robinson Crusoe*. England's 18th century was the time when such calls for power over language with the intent of turning English into a perfect language on the model of Latin and logic were heard most loudly. The century witnessed a proliferation of English grammars whose purpose was to "ascertain" the language. They were published in many editions and used in schools across the country, teaching children to express themselves with propriety. Maybe the most influential of these was Bishop Robert Lowth's *Short Introduction to English Grammar*, the target of ridicule by modern linguists. Lowth found fault with grammatical points in the language of Shakespeare, Milton and even Jonathan Swift! He is attributed with many rules for the elimination of "false syntax," here side by side with

contemporary examples of use: the double negative (“I can’t get no satisfaction”), the split infinitive (“to boldly go where nobody has gone before”), the gender-neutral “he” (“Everybody should mind their own business”), the superlative of two items (“the best of the two options”)—all of them gradually banished from the English language, at least in speech, with all but the most pedantic speakers.

The only immortal produced by eighteenth-century England was the legendary Samuel Johnson, described by his friend, the delightful novelist Fanny Burney, as the “acknowledged head of Literature in his kingdom.” The quirky, original, versatile, omnivorous, highly knowledgeable Dr. Johnson published, in 1755, under the sponsorship of the 4th Earl of Chesterfield, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, with 43,000 entries, illustrated for the first time in dictionary making by literary quotations. No one in the English language had more influence over language than Dr. Johnson. And his dictionary reigned supreme for about 150 years, when the Oxford English Dictionary took up its mantle.

Dictionaries and grammars are important for standardizing language, particularly in writing. Given the changes in English during its tumultuous history, primarily in sound, Dr. Johnson’s dictionary was crucial in establishing uniform spelling. Teachers and style handbooks are the enforcers of these standards, at least in written discourse.

Over the pond, similar linguistic moments followed at great speed. In 1765, in perfect symmetry, Rev. Dr. Samuel Johnson, the first president of what became Columbia University, published *An English Grammar; the First Easy Rudiments of Grammar Applied to the English Tongue*; and in 1828, *An American Dictionary of the English Language* was published, known to this day as Webster’s Dictionary. Webster’s Dictionary was even more open to the “people’s language” than Dr. Johnson’s, for its creator considered that it was better to be “vulgarly right than correctly wrong,” that is to say that his dictionary should mirror the language people spoke. When all is said and done, in the Anglosphere no Academy was ever established.

Just as the 18th century was a prescriptivist century in matters of language, the 20th century was descriptive of spoken language and of the creativity of speakers evident in the many language varieties, from dialects and poetry to slang and jargon. Holding back judgment, modern linguistics acknowledges what has been evident over centuries of language change: that only speakers have control over language. On the assumption that speakers want direct, unambiguous, truthful communication, they are “allowed” to borrow words from other languages or create new words as needed; to change form and structure, many times by similarity with other forms, at other times “incorrectly,” even “inelegantly.”

All along, since the 18th century, there have been in the English language taboo words, avoided by speakers for various reasons, and replaced by euphemisms: religious interjections (gee, golly, geez, for Pete’s sake, holy cow, etc.); profanity-free intensifiers (shoot, fricking, etc.); nouns that acquire a pejorative connotation over time (for example, the many names associated with the words “maid": charwoman, cleaning woman, custodian). Religious euphemisms have been part of the English language so long that many contemporary speakers don’t even know that they are originally religious in nature; they are perceived as interjections, not any different from other interjections, like “oops” or “wow.” In contemporary colloquial discourse, reinforced in movies and popular music, profanities are no longer euphemized. The last category of euphemisms, however, has lately been enriched considerably, as greater segments of the population are more easily offended and believe that by changing words they will be less so. Thus, “garbage men” become “sanitation engineers,” in keeping with current efforts to erase “sexist language” by eliminating the sound cluster “man”

from all words which contain it, even when it does not refer to maleness (“manual,” “manuscript,” etc.). The replacement of words by euphemisms leads to what the linguist Steven Pinker called “the euphemistic treadmill”: euphemisms soon acquire new pejorative meanings and have to be replaced by other euphemisms, and so on. Reality and speaker attitude do not disappear. The whole process is underlined by an ancient belief in “word magic,” that is, the ability of words to magically bring about human attitudes and judgments instead of simply pointing to reality.

The purpose of what the philosopher Paul Grice called cooperative conversation, indeed, of language itself, is to be clear and unambiguous, economical and lucid, and above all truthful. Changes imposed from above, efforts to “purify the language” or make it more logical or a more beautiful language or mold it to a particular ideology by academies and prescriptive grammarians and ever-changing ideologies, do nothing less than obfuscate communication, moving it away from the truth. That is why they can hardly be enforced for long periods of time, for the language, through its speakers, is bound to reject them sooner or later. If the underlying assumption of communication and purpose of language is not truthfulness—witness the proliferation of words denoting lying of all kinds and degrees in today’s discourse!—we would not know what lying is! Humor and satire will die. And communication based in truthfulness and trust will break down.

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FEATURE ARTICLE

Power and Authority—Gleanings from Hannah Arendt

STEPHAN KAMPOWSKI

A Suspicion of Power

"Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely," wrote Lord Acton in a letter to Bishop Mandell Creighton in 1887. We have learned from Montesquieu and others that power needs checks and balances and that it is best to have a division of power among institutions. When we think of power in the family, or when we think of the family itself as a power structure, our first inclination is to think of something negative, something that needs to be controlled. This is why Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, in their 1848 *Communist Manifesto*, called for the abolition of the family—which they identified as the bourgeois family—an institution that they saw as serving only to perpetuate the power of the ruling class. According to them, children must be saved from exploitation by their parents. Education must be socialized and thus taken out of the hands of the ruling class. For better or worse, we can also observe a connection between family and power in American history, considering the great influence of families on politics, from the country's Roosevelts to its Rockefellers, Kennedys and Bushes.

But what is power? Is it always negative? How does power differ from authority, a concept that seems to be closely related to it and also highly relevant in the same semantic context: politics, family, education. And, finally, despite the above-mentioned suspicion of power—and possibly also of authority—is there a positive, true, and authentic sense in which these ideas play a role in family life and education?

Turning to Hannah Arendt

To address these questions, I will now turn to the thought of Hannah Arendt, one of the preeminent political theorists of the twentieth century. Born and raised in Germany in the early 1900s, she studied philosophy with Martin Heidegger and Karl Jaspers. As a Jew, she experienced persecution during World War II, but managed to escape to the United States in 1941. Here she was recognized for her work on totalitarianism and became truly well-known for her coverage of the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem in 1961, in the context of which she coined the now famous—though initially highly controversial—phrase "the banality of evil." Scholars

of her thought generally consider her 1958 book *The Human Condition* to be her most important work, in which she analyzes life under the conditions of modernity, laments what she calls the modern "world alienation," and introduces her important notion of "natality": the fact that we are newcomers by birth is the root of our capacity to act and to begin something new.

However, the work that she herself considered her best is another, namely, the collection of essays entitled *Between Past and Future*, which originally contained six and later eight "exercises in political thought." In what follows, two of the essays published in this volume, "What Is Authority?" and "The Crisis in Education," will be my main inspiration, though I will also refer to other writings.

Functions and Distinctions

When Hannah Arendt set out to confront a particular philosophical problem, she rarely gave formal definitions. What she substituted for definitions were distinctions based on a perceptive observation of reality and a profound interpretation of our experience. Hence, if we are to approach the question of power and authority, she believes that we must distinguish these concepts well from each other and from other ideas with which they are easily confused. Indeed, she is very careful to differentiate between power, strength, authority, violence, and expertise.

> *Authority … never has its source in the person who wields it. There must be a larger reality, a "hierarchy" shared by those in authority and those under authority.*

One difficulty in distinguishing among these stems from a certain prejudice that she found among the thinkers of her time, and which is still largely with us today, namely, the idea that if two things perform the same function, then they are indeed the same thing. Arendt addressed this issue as early as 1954, when she wrote a letter to the then-editor of *Confluence* magazine, a certain Henry Kissinger, to object to Jules Monnerot's proposal of "secular religions." Monnerot had argued that ideologies—regardless of their content, and even if, like communist ideology, they explicitly deny the existence of God—play the same role as religions and are therefore religions. The fallacy of this idea is illustrated by Arendt's somewhat jocular counterexample: she confesses to having occasionally used the heel of her shoe to drive a nail into a wall. Does this make her shoes a hammer, just because they sometimes perform the same function? Can one speak of her walking around with hammers on her feet? Hardly.

By analogy, just because some people use power, strength, authority, violence, and expertise to exert a certain influence over others—giving a "command" in the broadest sense and being met with "obedience" in the broadest sense—it does not follow that all these terms refer to one and the same reality. In fact, as Arendt will argue, they are profoundly different. Let us try to follow her thought here, beginning with the realities that are easier to grasp and then moving on to the more elusive ones.

The Strength of the Individual

Strength belongs to the individual as an individual. The strong man can move things because of his muscles or his intelligence. He may be able to build a house by himself or defeat ten enemies single-handedly. We may think of lone wolves who successfully fight whole armies, as often portrayed in movies by Arnold Schwarzenegger or Chuck Norris. But Arendt points out that the isolated individual is by definition powerless. And it may be that Schwarzenegger's tenure as "Governator" of California was arguably less successful than his tenure as "Terminator" in the film series of the same name simply because Schwarzenegger the politician may have drawn too much inspiration from the characters he portrayed as Schwarzenegger the actor, relying on personal strength rather than "power" in Arendt's sense, which we will discuss shortly. Strength is in the body, in the endurance, in the intelligence of the individual. Through his strength the individual can, to a certain extent, make others act as he wishes. The limits are clear: the moment a sufficient number of opponents unite against him, the strong man will be subdued, regardless of his strength or cunning.

From the Barrel of a Gun

Violence, on the other hand, is in the means. Even those who are weak in themselves, in body or intellect, can hold a gun convincingly enough to command the obedience of a Texas Ranger who could kill them with a flick of his hand. Violence in particular is very often, and for Arendt very wrongly, confused with power. But to Arendt's mind, there is no power in the violence of the barrel of a gun. It can compel obedience. It can also destroy power, but it cannot generate power. The greater the means of violence, from the knife to the thermonuclear bomb, the greater the threat posed by those who possess them. But for Arendt, the moment one must resort to threats to get others to do as one says, one has already lost authority and admitted powerlessness. The person becomes isolated. Indeed, even the greatest tyrant, armed with the most destructive means he can muster, cannot get by completely without power. He must at least be able to rely on his bodyguards. There must be enough subjects willing to carry out his orders to ensure that the means of violence remain under his control. Otherwise, they will simply change hands.

The Ruinous Advice of Experts

Expertise, too, can command obedience, but it is neither power nor authority. Recent events surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic have given new life to the bon mot, variously attributed to Charles de Gaulle or Georges Pompidou, about the three ways that lead a man to ruin: gambling being the fastest; women, the most pleasurable; and the advice of experts, the surest. The expert appeals to scientific knowledge, and yet, as philosophers of science such as Thomas Kuhn, Karl Popper, or Paul Feyerabend teach us, empirical knowledge is always hypothetical; it speaks of probabilities, not of certainties. Anyone who claims absolute certainty in areas of empirical knowledge speaks unscientifically and has disqualified himself as a scientist and expert.

But even the expert who is aware of the limitations inherent in the enterprise of empirical science, the expert who gives advice on the basis of probabilities rather than certainties, can only give advice from the perspective of his discipline. One thing is the science of infectious diseases, another is the science of economics, yet another is the science of sociology. An expert in infectious diseases may be able to predict, with more or less probability, the effects of certain policies on the spread of a disease. He may not have the same ability to predict the impact of those policies on society as a whole. Even if the probable mortality rate is taken as the sole criterion for the recommended procedures, his advice will be based on only partial

knowledge, since people die not only from infectious diseases, but also from poverty-related conditions, from isolation, from a broken heart, or from civil unrest. Public authority must consider the whole community entrusted to its care from every angle. A one-sided adherence to the advice of experts will easily lead to unbalanced policies.

Public officials also differ from experts in another, perhaps even more important, way. The former must take responsibility for their decisions; the latter can hide behind their knowledge. Scientists can always say: "All we did was to present the data available to us at the time and make recommendations based on it." After all, it was not their job to foresee the outbreak of violence in the city, or the increase in mortality due to growing poverty. They do not have to take responsibility for their advice. They can act like an artificial intelligence, simply processing the available data. But algorithms cannot be held accountable. They are irresponsible. Representatives of public authority, on the other hand, are responsible. No experts or algorithms can take that burden off their shoulders.

The Power of the Promise

So, what is power for Hannah Arendt? Power is a reality that emerges when people come together to act for a single purpose. Power is a capacity to move, to make a difference, to influence what Arendt calls "the common world," a capacity that is never the property of a single individual. It arises spontaneously wherever people come together for a coordinated activity and work together toward a single goal. In her book *The Human Condition*, she speaks of the power generated by mutual promises. Consider a soccer game between two teams. On one team, each player has agreed to play a specific role so that the team's activity is coordinated—by mutual promises, if you will. On the other team, each player plays the role he feels like playing at any given moment. There is not even a designated goalkeeper. There are no agreements, no mutual promises. It is not difficult to predict which team will win.

In her 1973 address to the Society of Christian Ethics, Arendt derives the very notion of law from the power of the promise. The Latin word for law is *lex*, which she argues originally signified something that binds two parties together. Thus, in the original Roman sense, law refers to the terms of a mutual alliance; it is the basis of a society, a mode of communal life in which people, bound together, have become allies. Power can thus be institutionalized in law and in the public institutions in which laws are made or in which laws are applied, observed, or interpreted. These institutions are alive and vigorous as long as people continue to act together, interested in participating in the "public thing," the *res publica*. The moment people withdraw and lose interest in the common world with its parliaments, courts, and similar realities, these institutions themselves are destined to wither, decay, and become hollow facades.

Transmitting the Foundation: Authority and the Common World

We have saved the discussion of the most difficult concept for last. What is authority? As with violence or the force wielded by strength, authority has something to do with commanding and obeying. People who have authority tell a person under their authority to do something, and the person does it. We can think of the parent-child relationship, the teacher-student relationship, and the officer-soldier relationship. When a parent or teacher has authority, the child or student obeys at his mere word. It is the same with all other authority figures and those they command. If a parent or teacher has to use threats to command obedience, he has already lost all authority. Authority is not a form of violence, since the inferior obeys the superior freely. Nor is authority the same as power, which, as we have seen, arises among those who work together and coordinate their actions toward a single goal, enabling them to

exert a decisive influence on society. Among themselves, however, they are more or less equal, while authority refers to the relationship between the superior and the inferior.

For Arendt, the word, like the experience to which it refers, has its origins in Roman antiquity. It is closely linked to the event of the founding of the city of Rome. As Arendt explains, the Latin word *auctoritas* is derived from the verb *augere*, which means to increase or augment. Those who have authority are those who represent the beginning, who augment it, and who refer us back to it. In fact, for Arendt, authority is always part of a "trinity" composed of religion, which binds us to the past (according to a not-uncontested etymology, "religion" derives from *re-ligare*, i.e., "to re-bind"), authority, which is the notion under discussion here, and tradition, which is the way in which the past is handed down. The one who commands with authority and those who obey are both united by a bond of shared convictions and a shared concern for the world they live in, a world structured by a sacred order, a hierarchy. Both the one who commands and the one who obeys share this hierarchy and recognize their respective places in it. The command is seen as legitimate in light of their shared concern for the common world. For the ancient Romans, this common world was the city, the empire, the *res publica*, constituted by an event: the founding of the city of Rome. This founding event was passed on to each new generation and remained the point of reference for all authority.

For Arendt, after the decline of the Roman Empire, it was the Catholic Church that somehow inherited the Roman legacy and remained the only institution still representing authentic authority. For Christians, the foundation of the Church, in a way analogous to the foundation of the city of Rome, was also constituted by an event: the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This foundational event is also handed down from generation to generation, and those in authority in the Church are invested with authority to the extent that they bear witness to this event, represent it, and communicate it.

Responsibility for the "Public Thing"

In the case of both the Roman Empire and the Catholic Church, authority is based on something that is at once greater than the individual and common to those in authority and those under it. Authority is based on a public thing, a *res publica*, a common concern, whether it is the foundation of the city or the foundation of the Church. What distinguishes those in authority for Arendt is their willingness to take responsibility for this common world and its common good. Without the willingness to take responsibility for the common world, there is no authority. This is especially true in the field of education. Here, the willingness to take responsibility for the world is expressed in the willingness of educators to introduce newcomers to the world, whether or not the educators are happy with the world as it is, whether or not they would have wished it to develop differently than it has. It is still our world, the world—the city, the society—that we inhabit. It is the world to which we belong. My words have weight because they do not simply express what I happen to think or prefer. I am transmitting to you something that is greater than I, that does not depend on me, that I did not invent. What I am doing and saying has a source and a point of reference that goes beyond me.

It thus becomes clear that to have authority in education and in any other field, one must live one's life under the horizon of something greater than one's own life, and one must be willing to take responsibility for it. In a sense, the person in authority is always under authority, under the authority of the foundational event that constituted the common world, whether it be the founding of the city, the promulgation of the constitution, or, in the case of the Church, the death and resurrection of Christ. Only one who is under authority can have authority, as the Roman centurion whose encounter with Jesus is related to us in the Gospel of Matthew clearly knew:

> The centurion answered, “Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only speak the word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes, and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes, and to my slave, ‘Do this,’ and the slave does it.” (Mt. 8:8–9)

Power and Authority in the Family

Is there power in the family? Is the family itself perhaps a power structure in society? Ideally, yes, under the condition that the family is united. It is united by the power of the promise of marriage, which binds together the husband and the wife, and which also binds together the two families of origin. In fact, the very promise of marriage is such as to turn strangers—husband and wife and their respective families of origin—into kin. With the birth of the couple’s sons and daughters, new kinship relationships are created, making the husband and wife the father and mother of their common children, constituting their respective parents as grandparents, and their respective siblings as aunts and uncles. There are now brothers and sisters and cousins of various degrees. Even the in-laws are joined in a new way that goes beyond the couple’s promise—which may be broken—to become united in the couple’s children, in whom the blood of both original kinship groups is now forever mixed.

The bonds of consanguinity and mutual promise, in turn, can provide a solid foundation for members of the family to act together toward common goals, allowing for the creation of power through which they can, for good or ill, exert decisive influence on society, as the Kennedys or Rockefellers still do on a large scale in the United States today, but as any kinship group beyond the nuclear family can do anywhere at any time, though often on a smaller scale.

But there is no automatism. As our Lord himself puts it, “If a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand” (Mk 3:25). A house, that is, a family, can be divided. Brother can turn against brother. In fact, the first murder in human history, as recorded in the Book of Genesis, was a fratricide. At the same time, as Aristotle knew, the bonds of kinship can be the basis of a certain kind of friendship that can be particularly lasting. From this friendship, which always implies activity, i.e., acting for a common goal, power in Arendt’s sense will by definition arise. Aristotle, too, thought that public authority should take a special interest in fostering friendships among its citizens in order to promote the cohesion and stability of the city and, if we wish, its power.

Authority in the family will play its role primarily in the education of children. Having generated their children, parents have both the right and the duty to educate their children as their primary educators. But this right and duty, rooted in the natural relationship of parenthood, must be deliberately embraced. This is where parents can succeed or fail, and the extent of their effective authority over their sons and daughters will depend in large part on their willingness to take responsibility for their children and for their common world. Authority in Arendt’s thought—and with her in the classical Roman sense—never has its source in the person who wields it. There must be a larger reality, a “hierarchy” shared by those in authority and those under authority. Such a reality is indeed first and foremost the family, understood as a kinship group extended in space and time, with its traditions and its history, and with a heritage of which all members see themselves as “trustees” in Carle C. Zimmerman’s sense. But such a reality is also constituted on a larger scale by the city, the nation and indeed “the common world” to use Arendt’s parlance. If parents, as the primary, though not the only educators of their children, can understand and credibly present

themselves as part of a larger whole and as representatives and mediators of that larger whole, then they will indeed have authority. The law they lay down for their children does not come from their arbitrary whims. They are not its authors. There is a family tradition. There is a tradition of the larger community, the city and the nation to which they themselves adhere and to which they themselves are subject. There is a way the world, our common world, works. Let us introduce you to it.

Conclusion: A Love of the Common World

We explored the complex relationship between power and authority, drawing on the thought of Hannah Arendt. We began by examining the common suspicion of power, often seen as corrupting, and contrasted it with Arendt's nuanced distinctions between power, strength, authority, violence, and expertise. Arendt argues that power is not an attribute of an individual, but a capacity that arises among people when they unite as equals for a common purpose. Authority, in turn, is a relationship between superior and subordinate, rooted in a shared commitment to a foundational event and a tradition that communicates this event to the present. For Arendt, authority as a concept and lived reality has its origins in Roman antiquity and can still be found today as a defining principle in the Roman Catholic Church. We then discussed the role of power and authority in the context of the family. For better or for worse, families, understood as kinship groups extended in space and time and united by consanguinity and mutual promise, can indeed be power structures with significant influence on society. Authority in the family, in turn, is brought into play when it comes to raising one's children. For Arendt, the true authority of parents derives from their commitment to take responsibility for a reality larger than themselves and their willingness to introduce their children to it. To have authority over one's children, or in any other context for that matter, requires a love for something greater than oneself: the love of the family, the city—a common good quite in general—or, speaking with Arendt, "the common world."

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FEATURE ARTICLE

In Praise of Authority

CARLO LANCELLOTTI

One hesitates to write about "authority" because in today's culture the concept carries such a stigma that the danger of being misunderstood and getting mired down in ideological diatribes is very high. Yet, the very fact that it is hard to talk about authority confirms that this is the *punctum dolens* of modern Western culture. This was also the opinion of Augusto Del Noce (1910–1989) who in 1975 dedicated to the theme of authority a long essay of the same title,[1] in which he argues that "the eclipse of the idea of authority is one of the essential characteristics of today's world; in fact, it is the most immediately observable characteristic."[2] He goes on to observe that this crisis manifests itself across so many different domains (the family, education, the church) that it cannot be studied in merely sociological terms. It is a *philosophical* crisis, which reflects a deeper crisis in our collective understanding of the human condition.

1. The Concept of Authority

To support his claim Del Noce points out that over the last few centuries the common perception of the meaning of the word authority has undergone a reversal. Etymologically, authority shares the same root as "author" and implies the idea of being "authored" or "augmented" (the Latin verb *augere* means "to make grow"). Authority means the power to generate and increase life, as parents do. Accordingly, the paradigm of authority is the figure of the father, which however in modernity has generally taken a negative, oppressive connotation. A common cliché in popular culture is that we do not grow by following a father-figure or a teacher, but rather by freeing ourselves from external influences, and by unleashing our potential as autonomous individuals who contain in ourselves all necessary resources for our self-realization. As Del Noce says

> the etymology of authority includes the idea that *humanitas* is fulfilled in man when a principle of non-empirical nature frees him from a state of subjection and leads him to his proper end, as a rational and moral being. Man's freedom, as power of *attention* and not of *creation*, consists in his capacity to subordinate himself to this higher principle of liberation and

> be freed from the pressures from below. Conversely, today the common mentality by and large associates the idea of authority with that of "repression," and identifies it with what stops "growth," what opposes it, reversing what the etymology implies.[3]

It must be noted that the "growth" mentioned by Del Noce in this passage cannot be merely biological, or more generally "mechanical," since in that case no external support would be necessary after childhood. What is at stake is growth in humanity, as rational and moral beings. Thus, the idea of authority is inextricably tied to the notion that human life is different from purely animal life, because it involves questions of "meaning," moral and religious questions. Consequently, the need for authority is tied to the religious dimension and to the idea of "tradition," since tradition means precisely the "handing down" of insights about humanity, about the good and the just and the beautiful. In this sense, "the question of authority is, in fact, the relationship between man and the invisible, the primacy of the invisible."[4]

"Affirming authority is the same as affirming the primacy of the invisible"
—Augusto Del Noce

Furthermore, the concept of authority is linked with a specific concept of *freedom* as the capacity to precisely embrace those higher goods, and to pursue specifically human ends which transcend mere animal nature. Conversely, the modern rejection of authority is tied to what Del Noce calls an "instinctual" concept of freedom, whereby people cannot discriminate between different ends, but can only be "free" (or not) to pursue the dictates of their instincts. This is the "libertarian" and "permissive" idea of freedom: "today's permissivism replaces 'freedom to' with 'freedom from.' It is a form of liberation in which every ascetic element, even in the most secular sense, is abolished. It is 'libertarianism' replacing the liberal spirit … Liberation coincides with the *affirmation of instinctual freedom.*"[5] Under such libertarian-permissive regimes no rational discussion about values is possible, and thus authority can only be "repressive."

2. Authority vs. Power

This brings us to what Del Noce regards as the ultimate manifestation of the eclipse of the idea of authority: the impossibility to distinguish "authority" from "power." Indeed, without a genuine experience of authority, what is left is either self-determination or coercion. As a result, people will tend to "unmask" all forms of authority as concealed exercises of power which use ideological deception, propaganda or psychological manipulation rather than brute physical force.

> The philosophical consequences of the confusion between authority and power are immense. Indeed, only from the standpoint of their radical distinction can we speak of metaphysics as distinct from ideology. Conversely, if the idea of authority is absorbed into the one of power, it

> follows that general conceptions of reality are absorbed into ideology, understood as a practical act designed to legitimate, from the standpoint of being, some specific form of power … Accordingly, criticism takes the form of explaining religions and metaphysics (necessarily understood in the plural) in terms of historical factors. Therefore, the belief that the concept of authority is reducible to the concept of power coincides with the "Marxian option," which is openly or silently accepted by a large part of contemporary culture.[6]

For Del Noce establishing the distinction (and, in fact, the opposition) between authority and power is, in a sense, the key philosophical question of our time, because the denial of this distinction stems from certain crucial metaphysical assumptions that need to be reversed. In order to highlight the fundamental experience that underpins the concept of authority and makes it entirely different from that of power, he refers to Hannah Arendt:

> According to Arendt, the obedience and the dependence (or even the discipline) required by authority are qualitatively different both from the idea of "persuasion" and from the idea of "forced coercion." Persuasion is subjective, egalitarian, and reached through a process of argumentation (what nowadays is called "dialogue"). But after we have distinguished the concept of [authority from that of] persuasion, we must trace it back to the concept of *evidence*, recognizing that this *concept* is the great discovery of Greek metaphysics. The submission of the mind to evidence is more radical than submission obtained through force or persuasion; but at the same time it has a liberating nature (from the pressure of lower or exterior forces).[7]

Thus, for Arendt (and Del Noce) authority is first of all an attribute of truth. Truth has the ability to impose itself on the intellect as "liberating evidence." It demands a submission, but this submission fulfills intelligence instead of alienating it. A visual metaphor is apt: truth is like light which "imposes" itself on the open eye and affords it the vision it seeks according to its very nature. Then, this authority of truth transfers, so to speak, to those who communicate (truthfully) their experience of evidence to others. This communication, too, is liberating because the intelligence of the receiver is illuminated by the truth and can verify its evidence for itself. While power acts on the exterior, the action of authority is interior, and "sharing the same values prevents the hierarchical relationship that characterizes authority from being identified with the one between master and slave." Thus, "the hierarchy inevitably associated with authority has an intrinsically interior character (because man discovers the order of being in the order of conscience): the freedom of what is specifically human, the rational component, requires the subordination of instinctual freedom."

3. The Metaphysical Significance of the Idea of Authority

We should observe that the analysis of the link between authority and evidence relies on certain metaphysical "discoveries" which Del Noce, following his teacher Carlo Mazzantini, attributes to classical Greek philosophy, and in particular to Plato. The fundamental assumptions are that there is truth, that it illuminates the intelligence without doing it violence, that it can be received freely, that it is the same for different people and so can be communicated and held in common. Therefore, the concept of authority depends on another fundamental concept that Del Noce identifies with the Platonic tradition, that of *participation*.

People know, and can communicate their knowledge, because they participate in a common universal rationality, the *Logos*. In turn, participation in the *Logos* allows the discovery of permanent, non-arbitrary standards of conduct, which are the foundation of the *nomos*, the law, and which make possible social life.

The modern crisis of authority reflects the crisis of this classical (Platonic) metaphysics, which Del Noce also calls the "philosophy of the primacy of being": "the idea of authority, together with those of tradition and sacredness, is inseparable from the philosophy of the primacy of being. To summarize in a formula, we could say that in the philosophy of the primacy of being, authority is the foundation of power, whereas in the philosophy of the primacy of becoming power absorbs authority within itself."[8] Del Noce adds that modern philosophy "keeps going back and forth" between "theological rationalism and voluntarism and arbitrarism (fideism, religious existentialism, empiricism)" whereas "the idea of authority implies (a) that truth has a super-human character, so that dependence on it coincides with liberation from domination by other men; (b) that man not obey some arbitrary power; (c) on the other hand, that such dependence not be transferred into God Himself; in other words, that his 'wisdom' not be understood as a norm to which his will is subordinated."[9]

4. Authority and Freedom

We are now ready to circle back to the connection between authority and freedom, which for Del Noce is crucial because it illuminates the *political* consequences of the modern eclipse of the idea of authority.

> Having thus recognized that Plato's *nomos*, together with the particular form of obedience that it demands, is the metaphysical foundation of the idea of authority, if we then consider the historical circumstances that led to its affirmation (Socrates being convicted, and the hostility against philosophy on the part of the *polis*), we can discern from the genesis of its formulation that this idea is inseparable from the idea of freedom. The affirmation of the super-human is what frees man from dependence on other men.[10]

There is a necessary connection between the loss of the idea of authority and the loss of freedom, also at the political level. In particular, Del Noce identifies *totalitarianism* as the typical political expression of a world view in which the idea of authority has been lost and subsumed into the idea of power. In his view, "totalitarianism means the absolutization of power (i.e. the total absorption of authority within power, leading to that practical disappearance of the idea of authority which is the distinctive characteristic of the present crisis) and the inversion of the process of liberation into the most slavish dependence that history has ever known."[11]

This "inversion" marks the tragic failure of the whole modern project that started with the European Enlightenment of the 18th century, to the extent that it sought to achieve liberation by denying authority. Still today, it is a commonplace in our culture to think that authority is the enemy of freedom. However,

> the progressive-Enlightened mentality faces insurmountable difficulties as soon as it tries to explain the phenomenon of totalitarianism (which has not disappeared at all; it is its nature to take new and previously

> unpredictable forms), in which the negation of authority and the negation of freedom go hand in hand. These difficulties, I believe, are due to the fact that totalitarianism represents the greatest expansion of power in conjunction with the greatest rejection of authority: we can recognize in it the outcome of the revolution as contradictory to the program of universal liberation. But we have seen that affirming authority is the same as affirming the primacy of the invisible; the negation of the invisible, which characterizes the Enlightened-progressive mindset in its final stage, must erase the distinction between authority and power.[12]

5. Conclusion

Almost half a century later, the process described by Del Noce has essentially run its course. Far from bringing liberation, the Western process of denial of authority has produced the triumph of power, because without authority nothing can "prevent the decline of social relationship into relationships of force."[13] New strains of totalitarianism are pervasive in our political culture and, surprisingly to some people, what used to be the most "liberal" and anti-authoritarian political forces are now the ones most bent on social control and the least concerned with freedom of speech, association, religion etc. Paradoxical as it may sound, today we face a sort of "anti-authoritarian totalitarianism," which is keen on using absolute state power in order to stamp out all residual forms of authority (think, for example, of the drive to take away parental rights in the context of "affirmative" gender therapy).

Apart from its predictive power, does Del Noce's analysis offer any indications for the future? At the very least, it teaches us that there are no "metaphysical shortcuts." One cannot simply fight power with power, like many people on the "right" side of the political spectrum today still hope to do. By doing that, one merely accelerates the progress of social disintegration associated with the eclipse of authority. Of course, whenever it is possible, we should take appropriate political measures to resist its practical manifestations. But, in the long run, a restoration of freedom *and* authority (since the two are inseparable) can only be a meta-political process. It will involve a personal and collective return to the common "Platonic" rationality described by Del Noce, which is closely linked with religiosity. It will involve a re-establishment of what Del Noce calls the "primacy of the invisible," of those realities that are not objects of empirical measurement and yet are more necessary to humans than the air we breathe: truth, justice, beauty. It will involve recognizing again (the Platonic "anamnesis") certain "evidences" which we all share in common and which we have forgotten. These common evidences, what Luigi Giussani called "elementary experience,"[14] are the only possible foundation not just of human rights and of a democratic political system (in the broad sense of recognizing the equal dignity of each member of society and valuing the contributions of all) but of social life itself. Their rediscovery can only be, strictly speaking, the work of grace but, as Del Noce also says, the action of grace requires "that the hearts of men be attentive."

[1] Augusto Del Noce, "Autorità" in *Rivoluzione Risorgimento Tradizione* (Milan: Giuffré, 1993), 513–78. This essay had been originally published (in shorter form) as an entry in *Enciclopedia del Novecento* (Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1975), 1: 416–26, which has recently been reprinted in book form (Rome: Treccani, 2024). A complete English translation titled "Authority vs. Power" is found in Augusto Del Noce, *The Crisis of Modernity*, trans. C. Lancellotti (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press), 189–246 (TCM from now on). An abridged version appeared in *Communio* 42 (2015), 265–300.

[2] TCM, 189.

[3] TCM, 189–190.

[4] TCM, 193.

[5] TCM, 205

[6] TCM, 194

[7] TCM, 195. Del Noce is repeating Hannah Arendt's observations in *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Viking Press, 1961) 93, 107–8.

[8] TCM, 197.

[9] TCM, 195. Point c) concerns theological voluntarism, where divine power has become a *potentia absoluta*.

[10] TCM, 196.

[11] Augusto Del Noce, *the Suicide of the Revolution*, my translation.

[12] TCM, 205.

[13] Augusto Del Noce, *The Problem of Atheism* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1921), 428.

[14] Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2023), 7ff.

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FEATURE ARTICLE

Authority, Power, and the Economy

EDWARD HADAS

For much of the last century, it has been common knowledge among thinking men that the great beast known as the Modern Economy was both out of control and in total control. Out of control: unconstrained by governments, social norms, traditions, soldiers, priests, or anyone or anything else. In total control: not only of much of people's lives, but also of political and social power structures, ethical and aesthetic judgments, developments in science and technology, religious and philosophical beliefs, and even emotional and psychological tendencies. This conventional wisdom is not wrong. The modern economy is strangely powerful. However, it is only powerful by default, that is, because modern authorities are too weak to do what they should.

My description relies on the difference between power and authority. Power is the crude and ultimately violent potential to act as desired, while authority is the ordered, broadly accepted, and transcendentally grounded responsibility and capability to guide people and institutions to promote the good of all. The difference between these two concepts is often not noticed. For example, "authoritarian" governments are the way they are largely because they rely on power and not on authority. Philosophers such as Hannah Arendt and D. C. Schindler have explored the implications of this distinction in the generally power-rich and authority-poor modern world.

The conventional understanding of economic power is basically Marxist, in the sense of assuming that economic forces and conflicts are at the center of everything, everywhere and always. According to this "masters of suspicion" narrative, despite what appearances and reasoning might suggest, all aspects of how we live and move and have our being are actually always, at the deepest level, shaped by the power of the economically rich. Pure Marxists are confident that the pattern has been and always will be the same until the arrival of the Communist utopia. It is in the nature of human society, they say, that the few rich necessarily use their economic power to exploit, oppress, and expropriate the many poor.

For Marx and some of his followers, the economic oppression is always precarious. The rich always recognize, although often not consciously, that if the poor were united and aware, they could easily take power. To prevent such unity and awareness, the rich hide, soften, and

beautify the inherent violence of the current power relationship by developing misleading myths of authority. They say something like, “We are not violent oppressors who rule by fear. We are chosen by the gods to guide the people.” Marxists consider these myths to be a sort of upholstery, like the stuffing and covers of a sofa. They amount to a comforting and distracting superstructure. However, just as the sofa’s real structure is its wooden frame, the real structure in any society is the violence of economic oppression.

The belief in and reality of economic pre-eminence is both unnatural and exclusively modern.

From this perspective, there is no mystery in the power of the modern economy. There are only questions about who exercises economic power. In Marx’s day, capitalists were in control. Today’s economic elite is harder to identify. There are still old-fashioned business-building, uber-rich capitalists, but they are part of an amorphous and almost borderless network of institutional investors, investment bankers, and senior executives, who are supported by a collection of experts and hangers-on: consultants, academics, governmental bureaucrats, fawning journalists, and so forth. Compared to Marx’s crude capitalists, the current elite is more sophisticated and less cruel. They are technocrats who preside over a highly successful economic system, one which offers unprecedented affluence to almost everyone. However, the affluence has been purchased at a high price. Elites and commoners are all immersed in and psychologically and spiritually immiserated by the economy’s oppressive structures.

This quasi-Marxist analysis captures something important about modern power-structures, but it is built on the deeply and dangerously erroneous core Marxist assumption: *the economy is always at the center of the human condition*. In reality, the economy does not naturally—this is in accord with human nature—dominate all other social structures. Nor do economic concerns naturally dominate the lives of individuals, certainly not once people have enough food, shelter, and energy to survive. The belief in and reality of economic pre-eminence is both unnatural and exclusively modern. Always and everywhere in the premodern world, economic success was considered less central to human flourishing than worship, than military and other sorts of glory, than living in accord in harmony with the cosmic order. In all of the leading premodern philosophical, religious, and spiritual revelations and traditions, an excessive dedication to the search for greater economic prosperity was judged to be an ethical error and a distraction from the goals that are more suitable to the rational, religious, and loving creatures that humans are. Considering this unanimity, it looks like the thinking man’s Marxist analysis just skips over the most important question about the modern social order: Why did prosperity, and eventually ever-increasing prosperity, become the predominant modern standard of cultural success?

My answer to this question starts with the observation that the rise of the economy is not the only modern social-cultural novelty. Rather, it is inextricably intermingled with such unprecedented innovations as massive secularization; large, complex, and intrusive governments; an ideological commitment to social equality; mass education; mass entertainment; various sorts of individualism; more advanced science; and predominantly urban living. *What needs to be explained, then, is what is it about modernity itself that it places the economy at of the center of human concern?*

After all, there is no good reason to think that economic factors have always guided or dominated the modern world. On the contrary, the great economic changes came centuries after many other profound innovations. By the time large-scale industry was a big thing, in the mid-19th century, modern science, law, and religion had been developing for two or three centuries. Marxists can claim that the controlling economic forces were simply working below the surface for all that time, but such claims only make sense to true believers. A more plausible explanation must include some of the other new things—the non-economic ideas, beliefs, and practices that increased the social interest in economic pursuits, that allowed economic gains, that allowed those gains to become so much more important for societies and individuals, and that hollowed out the non-economic premodern institutions which had guided the much more tractable premodern economies.

A full explanation requires a book, but here is a sketch, in four claims.

First: The economy is ill suited for being the power at the center of society. Whatever the economic good is—presumably some combination of creature comforts, good work, and ample choices for everyone of both consumption and labor—that good is far too modest to be justly preeminent. The problem is that human nature is oriented to greater things than what the economy can offer: immortal things, wondrously beautiful things, things worth dying for. The economy's goods are far too modest to inspire the best people to keep doing their best to achieve them.

As already mentioned, the modest rank of economic goods was rightly understood throughout premodernity. Even when the gods or the Lord were expected to reward the righteous with prosperity, the primary communal goal was always the righteousness, not the rewards. When new technologies were developed in premodernity, they were almost never originally aimed at producing more or better goods for everyday life. Rather, their purpose was to win battles, to make more beautiful things, or to increase knowledge. In reality, the cultural centrality of economic goals was quite new when Marx postulated it as a timeless truth.

Of course, the temptation to pursue riches is part of what Christians know as the fallen human condition. The universality of this vice is demonstrated by the presence in every culture of both ethical exhortations to avoid it and of extensive legal and cultural rules to regulate, mitigate, and often to limit affluence. The ubiquitous premodern complaints about economic greed should not be taken as evidence that something good was being repressed. Even Marx, at least in his utopian mode, accepted that economic considerations should—and would under Communism—lose the central cultural position that he thought they had held up to the present.

Second: The modern pre-eminence of the economy is justified by power, not by authority. In other words, the economy rules through coercion, not through respect.

The lack of respect for economic greatness is easy to understand. While the modern economy is certainly impressive, it is not sublime, divine, or a clearly unmixed blessing. Rather, the endless political talk of the importance of economic growth and the standard economic vocabulary of jobs, employment, careers, production, and brands reek of the temporary, contingent, and superficial. The quasi-anonymous bureaucracies which actually supervise these economic systems inspire nothing like reverence, dedication, or even durable respect.

As for economic authority, the best evidence for the absence of it may well be the almost hysterical efforts to identify something greater than power and pleasure as the controlling principles in the economy. Economists' dedication to entirely fictitious models that show the "market" economy's *higher purpose*, the extensive resources dedicated to building up images

of corporate solidity and virtue through advertising and marketing, the vastly exaggerated cults of charismatic corporate leaders, and the breathless search for the next new thing have many goals, but at the deepest level they all aim to create a simulacrum of authority. The ever-changing and resolutely worldly economy is simply incapable of creating or embodying anything worthy of near-transcendent respect. Confidence in divine providence gave authority to premodern generals, kings and popes. Its rival in the rhetoric of modern economics, the fully human process of the market's supposed "invisible hand," gives no lasting authority.

While the lack of genuine economic authority is as easy to see as the closely related lack of economic greatness, the presence of economic power is more hidden, because it is increasingly exercised without physical violence. Worker riots, strike-breaking toughs, and debtors' prisons have pretty much disappeared in prosperous countries. There are no men with bayonets standing behind the terms and conditions set by Microsoft and Amazon. However, indirect economic violence is ubiquitous in the modern economy. At the most material level, anyone living in the modern economy is compelled to participate in the "technocratic paradigm." All of us necessarily search for technical solutions to many of the problems and challenges of life. We must install the latest software to deal with the world, book flights to visit friends and family, and call up a technician when the house is too cold or too hot. Birth, illness, and death, learning, worship, and loving—all are necessarily mediated by the mindset of worldly costs and worldly benefits. At the more social level, men force men, including themselves, to abandon some of their humanity to fit better into systems of production that are bureaucratic and atomized. Men bombard men, including themselves, with dishonest and psychologically disorienting tools of persuasion. Men find solutions that often cause more problems than they resolve. The indirect violence in all this force is found in its inescapability. The only way to avoid the power of the economy is by a sort of self-imprisonment in communities that are intentionally non-modern in their economic organizations. Even those efforts are, like the resistance to totalitarian power, generally more symbolic than effective.

Third: The modern world as a whole is increasingly deprived of any real authority. As Arendt points out, modern thinkers, from Hobbes onward, have rarely even recognized the difference between rule that is accepted because it is endorsed by, or springs from, some transcendental reality and rule that relies on the ability credibly to threaten to destroy the lives or—as in the modern economy—the livelihoods—of any dissenters deemed to be dangerous.

While the intellectual denial of the existence of authority has dominated non-Catholic intellectual discourse for centuries (spurring Catholics to ever more fervid defences of the authority of current popes and various traditions), actual authorities endured for a long time. It took many generations for the new ideas to overcome belief in and loyalty to divinely rooted monarchies and aristocracies, anointed priests, god-fearing legislators, tribal leaders, judges, and even fathers of families. The sense that there was something godly about all sorts of rule persisted until well into the secular age.

Most notably, in political matters, the thinkers in the Enlightenment tradition rejected crude power in favor of a quasi-transcendental and psychologically and ontologically inferior substitute for real—that is divinely sourced—authority. In particular, Rousseau, followed and elaborated by both American revolutionaries and Hegel, attributed a certain transcendental weight to the often hidden but supposedly unified "general will" of the governed: *vox populi, vox dei*. Other authorities lasted longer. The practical discrediting of paternal, intellectual, and artistic authority was not widespread until well into the 19th century, and the denial that even the Bible could provide religious authority had to wait until the historical-critical school came to undermine the Protestant substitute for apostolic authority. In the economy, the rising bourgeoisie did not at first look only to the power of their money. Rather, they searched for

some sort of divinely-sourced authority in their success and their opulence.

Marx was wrong to think that everything was always economic; but he was prescient to see all modern secular claims to authority as thin veils that were designed to hide the shame of relying only on crude power. He did not live to see all the veils torn off. But by now, it is power all the way down. Outside of the Catholic Church, authority is a distant memory in every part of life. There are just the powers of the age: the potential and actual violence of political regimes, the technocratic control of welfare states and educational systems, the life-shaping and death-shaping power of the medical machine, the contested powers of different "identity" groups, and the soft and persuasive power of the economy. The powers are sometimes in conflict, but mostly they work together, reinforcing the culture of worldly aspirations, spurious and lonely individualism, and groupthink.

Myths of economic authority are still rolled out. Just as politicians still murmur about democratic choices, academic economists promote a quasi-mystical trust that individual economic decisions in the modern economy are more controlling than controlled. But both state and market are much better understood as guided by modernity's *authority-free technocratic powers*. Those rational, pragmatic and bureaucratic powers long ago swept away the lingering vestiges of true authority, seen for example in Catholic Archbishop Edward Manning's successful mediation of the 1889 London dock strike, or even in the wide support given to the governmental programs of post-Second World War welfare states. There are now only economic powers, squabbling over the details of how to direct the search for ever more economic power. The result of the authority vacuum is the dispiriting and dispirited inevitability of bad economic decisions, creating such modern economic monstrosities as hugely expensive and bleakly impersonal health care and universally available pornography.

Fourth: The economy is going to remain in and out of control. In other words, it is all but impossible for any true authority to replace or even substantially to curb economic power. The impediment is modernity's ever more thorough dissolution of all sorts of authority. This process has advanced so far that there are almost no non-State authorities left which could even imagine building up the skills and respect needed to influence economic governance. Even if the members of the dominant technocratic elite wanted to overpower the economic forces that promote unlimited consumption and unneeded innovations, they lack the intellectual-spiritual capacity and the necessary institutional anchoring. Quite the contrary, they are so deeply entwined with economic power (in large part through the modern medium of high finance) they can barely imagine what authority would feel like.

In theory, my bleak prediction is undoubtedly an exaggeration. Human freedom is ineradicable and divine providence is omnipotent, so the creation of some genuine authority that can guide the modern economy is always a possibility. Besides, since modernity is ever developing, it certainly could develop away from the directions it has followed with hardly any detours or reversal for the last five centuries. However, induction suggests such a change will not occur. Since the Protestant Reformation first challenged the authority of the Catholic Church, modern "rationalism" and the modern search for "freedom" have first seriously wounded and then effectively obliterated a long series of premodern authorities. Their initial modern replacements were always weaker than their predecessors and even they have all but disappeared in the rubble of ever more secularized modernity. No one has yet even imagined a plausible source or expression of authority appropriate to the industrial, urban, self-perpetuating, technology-driven, and bureaucratic modern economy.

In my judgment, there is only one non-miraculous path that could lead to the development or discovery of a modern economic authority: the way of cataclysm. If a great war, some

unstoppable environmental event, a plague, or merely rapid depopulation were to destroy much of human life, the next generation's elite might hold modernity responsible for its misery. In such dire circumstances, perhaps a faithful remnant—the few who have not bent the knee to the modern Baals of economic comforts and growth, or who have firmly repented of their idolatry—would be granted the authority that comes from God, the unchanging divinity who outlives all civilizations.

The scale of disaster needed for such a conversion should not be underestimated. The two great wars of the 20th century were not enough, although they generated a temporary religious revival. While waiting, with dreadful anticipation, for an even greater modern disaster, we can only live in the far-from-divine hope that the non-authoritative economic elite do not use their technological-bureaucratic power too irresponsibly.

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FEATURE ARTICLE

The Law of Our Fathers: On the Familial Origins of Legal Authority

D. C. SCHINDLER

Contrary to the image projected by popular movements in ecology, our first and most immediate encounter with nature occurs in the family. Indeed, the word "nature" itself derives from "nascor," "to be born." It is in a family, to a mother and father, that one is (normally) born, and each of the progenitors of this family was himself or herself born into a family. The family is therefore one's "natural" place, being the place wherein one encounters, and comes to inhabit, nature in a *specifically natural way*.

To say this is not at all to deny the existence of culture, and the particularities of history and human creativity—the "artifice"—that come with it. Quite the contrary, the claim is meant to imply that culture is a natural part of human nature. The wise twentieth-century zoologist Adolf Portmann pointed out that, unlike any other animal, the rational animal that is man leaves the physical womb of the mother long before his development as an organism is complete (one might compare colts, for example, which may stagger for a few minutes after emerging from the womb, but are thereafter already capable of walking like an adult horse).[1] The human child must finish its being born, its "naturing," in the "spiritual womb" (*uterus spiritualis*) of the family, which is an inherently social and personal space, permeated by culture and history. In man, culture therefore does not wait until natural birth is over to then be layered on top as the next level but enters into nature from within.

Culture is moreover present not only in the raising of children, but already in the union of man and woman at the child's origin. This means that isolating a realm of pure nature, as something untouched by culture, is *artificial*. Marriage, that supremely natural reality in human existence, the place wherein human nature itself is born, has always been a culminating (*Hochzeit*) expression of culture, a "high" event of music, liturgy, architecture, worship, food, and festival. To be sure, one might object that the observations I have just made apply uniquely to man, and not to nature in general, but in fact one could show, in another context, that there is inevitably a connection between how we think of human nature, and how we think of nature *simpliciter*.[2] However that may be, the fact remains that, if we define nature in simple opposition to human culture, we will tend to approach human culture itself

as something radically artificial—and for that reason at the same time we will tend to reduce the natural world to pure matter, bracketing out the presence of form and, speaking more broadly, the symbolic significance of things. In a word, to fail to see that the family represents our first encounter with the natural world is to have a very un-natural sense of nature, which one inevitably carries with oneself, so to speak, even (perhaps especially) if one flees to the woods to escape all things artificial.

If the family is the first place in which we encounter nature, it is also the first place we encounter *authority*. Indeed, as has been traditionally recognized, the family is the most natural expression of authority, the expression of authority at the level of nature. The word itself has an organic sense: by bearing witness to a higher, intelligible order, "authorship," the figure of authority enables that order *to grow*, to *flourish* at a lower level (*augere*). Let me emphasize that authority has an essentially "martyrological" dimension: it does not exist without pointing to an order that exceeds it and for which it holds a special responsibility.

The exercise of authority is then the communication of this order, received "from above," in a fruitful way, to others below one. Here we see why authority has traditionally been associated specifically with fatherhood: the father, in fulfilling his role given by nature and so bearing witness to the order of nature, pours himself out so as to become fruitful in another, specifically, the woman, who is, to use Aristotle's description, fruitful in herself. According to the model of "mere power," in abstraction from authority, this act would be an imposition of order, a coercion, or a forcing through of some intention from the outside in a monolithic sort of way. So conceived, the act presents itself essentially as one that can be replaced in principle by technological means. But authority, as essentially "martyrological" and so as bearing witness (testament—*testes*) to an order that is not self-produced, operates by most basically acknowledging the order of the other that is (naturally) given, liberating that given order to be itself authoritative in turn, in its own particular way, and so to be itself distinctly generative. In and through the man's authority, the woman becomes authority. This is an event of analogy.

> *Family is the* symbol *of authority, … which is to say that it is its embodiment, the concrete place wherein authority is first made effectively present, quite literally* in the flesh.

The act of procreation, which we might say is a paradigmatic *symbol* of authority, might be compared to language, another symbol. The word authoritatively spoken, the name given by the author to the reality he beholds, is in itself a mere nothing, a simple *flatus vocis*, compared to the reality it names; but, in naming, the word elevates that reality to a wholly new, spiritual and intelligible, order of existence that it was not capable of on its own. The procreation of the child is something similar, indeed to an astonishing degree: the sperm of the man is next to nothing in relation to the egg offered by the woman, and yet its effective presence transforms the egg as a whole, allowing the egg to recapitulate itself now as something altogether new, self-generative, no longer a mere part of the woman (or, for that matter, of the man). It has been made "to grow" (*augere*). The act by which the child comes to be, by which the child

originally “natures,” is a primal enactment of authority.

It is important to see both that this primal enactment is structural and physical, which is to say, an actual reality, a matter simply of *being*, rather than in the first place an act of the will, a matter of *doing*, in the sense of a moral achievement. The *doing* of authority, then, and the subsequent activity of the parents in their deliberate efforts properly to fulfill their authoritative roles and raise the child into adulthood, is not a mere “add-on” to a nature already complete. Instead, their authoritative acts of the will are a fruitful participation in the natural order, and indeed they *are* fruitful—i.e., genuinely authoritative—*because* they are a participation in the given movement of nature. As we just saw, nurture (i.e., culture or *nomos*) does not *simply* come after nature, but even as something new and introduced from without, enters into nature from the inside. It is precisely family life that reveals this truth to us. Nurture elevates nature from within, which means that the parents’ forming of their children’s existence, the regulation of behavior, the education, from the simplest of tasks (learning to tie shoes) to more demanding achievements (the mastery of a musical instrument), to the noblest of acts (the gift of self in the resolute determination of a state of life), are recapitulations at ever higher levels of the “naturing” and so of the original authority of the parents. In authority, nature rises, from within, to a higher level (*eu zēn*), and it does so because, in nature, authority descends into the foundations of life (*zēn*) so as to take its origin.

This double movement, from above and from below, is the essential movement of analogy. The natural articulation of authority in the family shows us that—again, precisely unlike “sheer” power—authority has an ontological root. I have argued elsewhere that authority may be said to arrive along the path of beauty, because beauty, akin to authority, moves us already from within to a higher order of existence. Similarly, the parents speak with authority to their children in the first place because they are, as it were, already present in and to the children by nature. The order that parental authority effectively represents can be understood as emerging in some respect from within the organism, and therefore from within the soul, of the child, because it is communicated to the child from his natural, i.e., his ontological, origin. The common blood is a physical expression, a *symbol*, of the spiritual truth of authority.

This last point deserves emphasis, since it helps us to avoid what would be an easy misinterpretation of the family’s role in cultivating authority. One might think that the family plays this role simply in a psychological or developmental sort of way: one first learns to obey, one acquires the habit of docility, by being subject to commands at an early stage in one’s life, when one had little recourse to any other “authority,” which left one in principle quite vulnerable. If the process occurs successfully, and the vulnerability is not exploited, one learns to follow rules, and so one can participate more actively, more co-operatively, more productively, as a “good citizen,” and perhaps most significantly, as an employee of a larger corporation, where one’s capacity to be what is called “a team player,” has its most direct social significance. This reductively *functionalist* interpretation of authority, however, ultimately undermines the role of the family, at least in this respect.

As Robert Spaemann has argued, to interpret a thing in a functionalist way by that very fact is to render it replaceable.[3] The family, in this inadequate interpretation, just *happens* to be the “first school of sociality,” and so “the first school of authority,” so to speak; but, precisely because it is something merely naturally given, and not a function of rationalized technique, it is liable to fail and cannot be counted on to perform its social function without oversight. There is no reason, in principle, why the certified experts in medicine and psychiatry, social servants, and professional educators, would not be able to teach children the social skills of cooperation and rule following, thus understood, more reliably and effectively than any given set of parents. From a functionalist perspective, it makes most sense to trump parental

authority by the expert means administered ultimately by the state, and thus by that very token to transform authority into artificial power: to technologize social and political existence.

There is, to be sure, a lot that may be said about the damage this sort of civil replacement of family function does to the fundamental relationships between parents and children and siblings, and indeed all the way unto the child's relation to himself and his own bodily nature. But there is another dimension to the problem that I think tends to get less attention. It is that the state cannot thus intrude on the life of the family *without transforming the state's own nature*. If the ruling power does not recognize the relative authority of the family, it does not understand that authority as such has its *roots* in nature and what is naturally *given*, which is to say that it forfeits its own authoritative status. It can only be an instrument of power. It no longer has authority in the proper sense because it no longer bears witness to a given order.

In this respect, it is interesting to consider the (rather diabolical) insight of John Locke, who might be interpreted as having sought to rethink political order from the ground up precisely in the absence of authority in the deep sense we have been describing it.[4] We are generally familiar with his *Second Treatise on Government*, which offers a social contract theory of political rule in what is arguably its paradigmatic early modern form. The book essentially begins by recasting parental rule over children in the household in functionalist terms (revealingly, right after a discussion of property[5]), as a proto-contractual relation.[6] But even more significant, from our perspective here, is the fact that this reconception of human relations in the *Second Treatise* is preceded by the *First Treatise*, which has been almost entirely ignored by scholarship.[7] The purpose of this path-breaking and ground-laying first book is to provide as radically and completely as possible a deconstruction of the principle of "patriarchy," the notion that governance has some natural root, some naturally *given* origin—which, it is worth pointing out, Locke recognizes is inseparably a theological notion.[8] I am not so concerned here to defend Robert Filmer, the man specifically under attack in Locke's book, who might be said to have had a rather positivistic sense of patriarchy, and whose argument clearly evinces a complete absence of any sense of analogy.[9] Instead, I mean to highlight the principle to which Locke's *First Treatise* gives a decisive expression: In order to eliminate authority from human existence, all the way up through the political order to the sphere of religion,[10] Locke had to discredit, and so neutralize, the specifically *naturally given* claims of the family.

What I mean to propose, in the light of this point, is that family is not simply "the first school of authority," functionalistically understood, but *is* in fact where one comes to understand the nature of authority because it most basically represents the authority of nature. It is the *symbol* of authority, in the sense we have been using the term, which is to say that it is its embodiment, the concrete place wherein authority is first made effectively present, quite literally *in the flesh*.

Once we grasp this, we see how potentially misleading it can be, without proper qualifications, to speak of the sphere of the family as "pre-political." One speaks this way of course out of a right and proper desire to protect the integrity of the family and to honor its sphere of sovereignty, as it were, outside of the state's mechanisms of control. There may be situations wherein such a manner of speaking can be necessary, and so justified as a matter of prudence. But if the language is meant at the level of principle, the implication of this move are quite devastating. To designate the family as a "pre-political" reality is first of all to confirm the division between the state and civil society, a division, as I have argued elsewhere, that eliminates all authority in principle at a stroke. Secondly, to posit the "private" sphere of the family as coming before the political is, by implication, to prioritize the *parts* of human

community over that community taken as a proper whole. Aristotle (and Aquinas[11]), by contrast, says: "the polis is by nature [τ φύσει] clearly prior to the family [οκία] and to the individual, since the whole is of necessity prior to the part."[12] Note that this priority is given, according to Aristotle, specifically *by nature*. It is the nature of a whole to precede the parts, insofar as the whole is that by which the parts can be understood as such. To call the family "pre-political" is to betray the logic of the whole and so introduce a principle of fragmentation into the foundation of one's conception of human community. This principle has two consequences for the family that are ironic—not to say "tragic"—insofar as the aim is to protect the family's integrity: on the one hand, by making the parts prior to the whole in principle it tends by its very logic to reduce the family to a collection of individuals, and, on the other hand, by projecting that fragmentation into the state, it turns the state into a kind of machine that as a mere functional conglomerate of bureaucratically divided departments cannot in any genuine and substantial way recognize the integrity of any natural wholes, including that of the family. The very effort to protect the family therefore works toward its undermining.

The third point is an elaboration of this last. Given an interpretation of marriage and family as the symbol of authority in its natural modality, and so as representing the authority of nature, to place the sphere of the family specifically *outside* the political is to determine the political itself as *un*-natural. In other words, unless the phrase "pre-political" is significantly qualified, the use of the phrase to describe the family by implication empties the political of its natural content, concedes its purely artificial character, and denies its essential rootedness in the order of nature. In this case, conservative thinkers who continue to appeal to "natural law" in the modern context out of a desire to keep politics somehow tethered to transcendent truth, cannot but find the phrase increasingly weightless and unable to gain any political traction. It is hardly an accident that those who *both* champion natural law in politics *and* insist that marriage and family are "pre-political" realities, have been criticized precisely for dissociating natural law from nature.[13] "Natural law," after all, exists only insofar as the logos of law is able to descend into nature and the physis of nature is able to rise up into logos. We cannot affirm "natural law" unless we have a properly analogical sense of authority. It is precisely this that is precluded by the positing of the natural reality of the family as something that occupies a "pre-political" sphere, a sphere that lies enclosed in itself (without authoritative meaning for the community as such) outside of and thus merely juxtaposed to the similarly closed sphere of the political, which can only relate to the family extrinsically—and by insisting on "natural rights" as something like an external check on (wholly artificial) political power.[14]

For the state to recognize the distinct authority of the family, and specifically of the parents in relation to their children, by contrast, is to include the given order of nature within the political sphere that defines the state, and so to allow the family, in its natural reality, to be properly *meaning*-full. This very act of acknowledgment transforms mere power into authority, because it constitutes the principle of political rule as open in an essential way to an order that exceeds it. To use the language proposed earlier, it gives a "martyrological" dimension to political power. This dimension, this openness to an order that exceeds it, lends political authority a depth and dignity it would otherwise lack—and the lack of such depth and dignity is, I would suggest, one of the basic reasons why the rule of law finds itself in such a state of crisis today. There are few people who respect the political—in its forms, rituals and procedures, in its decisions and policies, in its aims and institutions, and above all no doubt in its statesmen. Respect cannot be coerced or fabricated; it can only be *given*. And it will be given in truth only to an institution that is itself founded on what is given, an institution that represents a higher order and manifestly binds itself to what is true, good, and beautiful.

To call the family "pre-political" threatens to deprive the family of authority, and thus by implication to deprive *nature* of authority. But if nature has no authority, then political authority has no natural substance, which is to say it ceases to be authoritative at all and becomes a mere mechanism of power ultimately at the service of private interest, whether conceived individually or collectively. Such a mechanism cannot offer of itself any reason to pay it any heed, any reason to cooperate or to participate in its devices in a manner that would engage one's humanity or personhood. Cynicism becomes the rule in this case, not because of any moral failing, but because the empty and impotent husk of the pseudo-political cannot possibly call forth from us anything else. In this context, Michael Hanby's arguments about our having entered into something like a "post-political" era become quite compelling. Without authority, there can in fact be no "polis," no political order, no ruler who would order common life, but instead only some mode of capitulation to the inexorable movement of the "biotechnical" imperative, on the one hand, or of supra-political economic entities, on the other. We are thus led to a conclusion that might, given so much of the typical discourse on the matter, seem initially counter-intuitive: the state needs to recognize and foster the integrity of the family if it wishes to maintain its own authority. Put positively, by safeguarding the family, it honors and protects, in its natural symbol, the very principle of authority on which its own reality depends.

[1] Adolf Portmann, *A Zoologist Looks at Humankind* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 19–49. I am grateful to my colleague Margaret McCarthy for drawing my attention to this text.

[2] Robert Spaemann makes profound observations along these lines in "Nature," in *A Robert Spaemann Reader: Philosophical Essays on Nature, God, and the Human Person* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 22–36.

[3] Robert Spaemann, "The Undying Rumor: The God Question and the Modern Delusion," *Spaemann Reader*, 187.

[4] Though it does not foreground the theme of authority per se, this is in essence the argument we make in *Freedom from Reality*, 65–127.

[5] This is no accident, though it is not the place to explore the point in detail here: authority is arguably founded in a basic sense on property (one might consider the dual meaning of the Latin word *dominium*, both power and property, or the Greek expression for authority, ex-ousia, which, at least in one interpretation of the etymology, appears to be derived from *ousia*, "substance" in the sense of "property"). There is an inseparable connection between the way one interprets property and the way one interprets political authority, ultimately because property represents the actual reality of goodness that it is the principal task of the authority to distribute.

[6] See sections V and VI of Locke's *Second Treatise*, in *Two Treatises* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 285–330.

[7] There are very few, but interesting, exceptions: Herbert H. Rowen, "A Second Thought on Locke's First Treatise," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 17.1 (January 1956): 130–32; Charles D. Tarlton, "A Rope of Sand: Interpreting Locke's First Treatise of Government," *The Historical Journal* 21.1 (March 1978): 43–73; and Robert Faulker, "Preface to Liberalism: Locke's *First Treatise* and the Bible," *Review of Politics* 67.3 (Summer 2005): 451–72. These texts all argue that the "deconstruction" of tradition is an essential precondition for clearing the ground that

makes liberalism possible. Faulkner points out that this requires the undermining of the Biblical God.

[8] Locke engages Filmer's rooting of Fatherly Authority in God's creation of Adam: chapter 2, *Two Treatises*, 144–51, and so forth.

[9] His book was entitled, *Patriarcha: A Defense of the Natural Power of Kings Against the Unnatural Power of the People*, and was written probably between 1635 and 1642, but published only in 1680 (see Oakley, *Omnipotence, Covenant, and Order*, 99). It is considered one of the most influential early formulations of the principle of the "divine right of kings," a particularly modern sense of (univocal) power, isolated from the theological (ecclesial) context that would make it analogically authoritative.

[10] As his *Letter on Toleration* expresses clearly, all religions are to be tolerated—except those that depend on a principle of authority (as is well known, though he mentions Islam specifically in this context, what he really has in mind is Roman Catholicism: see Patrick Romanell's introduction [New York: MacMillan, 1950], 10.).

[11] See Aquinas's *Commentary on the Politics*, I.1.22 (pp. 17–18 in the Hackett edition).

[12] Aristotle, *Politics*, I.1.1253a19–20.

[13] Henry Veatch is best known for this: "A Critique of the New Natural Law Theory," *New Scholasticism* 62.3 (1988): 353–65.

[14] For a more extensive argument on this point, see *Politics of the Real* (Steubenville, OH: New Polity Press, 2021), 109–37.

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Humanum

Issues in Family, Culture & Science

WITNESS

Brainwashed by a Regime of "Truth"

GINTAUTAS VAITOSKA

I would like to be able to write an essay about my heroic resistance to the Communist regime in Soviet Lithuania. I cannot, however. I was brainwashed by the regime. Born in 1960 in Communist-ruled Lithuania, I belong to the generation that knew close to nothing about the violent beginnings of that rule in our country. I was disoriented, as would be a man who unknowingly built his house on blood-soaked land.

The first twenty years of my life elucidate the power of the regime on the young mind. Somewhat unexpectedly, it seems that a majority of the young population nowadays is deluded by a similar lie. Between the Soviet regime then and "liberated" society now, there exist related lines of thought.

This is my story: my parents—and those of the majority of my friends—were very cautious in revealing to us the true history of our country: that the Soviet Union occupied Lithuania in 1940, that from 1944 to 1954 thousands of our best men perished when fighting the Russian army, and that hundreds of thousands of Lithuanians were forcibly brought to Siberia to die of hunger. We also did not know that in the little town where we lived around half of the inhabitants were Jewish before the war, and that most of them were killed in 1941 by the Nazis.

We were robbed not only of memory but also of faith. My 11-year-old sister and her friend washed the floor for the elderly housemaid of the local bishop residing on the other side of the little street from our 12-unit apartment building. The girls were trying to be "good pioneers," as good works were meritorious in the Youth Communist League, but helping a Catholic was another story. Our mother was scared: if the school administration found out, both the girls and their parents would face consequences.

I was so accustomed to the vacuity of words under the [Soviet] regime that when I encountered real speech in the United States, it took me by

surprise. The fact that people actually meant what they said or wrote was a novelty.

On the other hand, my parents resisted the pressure to join the Communist Party. Thus, some sentiment against the regime was relayed to me and my sister, but not the duty to fight against it. I would say that we belonged to the majority in Lithuania at that time. After armed resistance was repressed in the 1950s, only a very small minority of the population remained in the underground opposition to the regime (e.g., publishing the *Chronicles of the Lithuanian Catholic Church*), while about 8 percent of Lithuanian citizens were Communist Party members.

What form of youthful idealism—an indispensable feature of youth—was lived by me and my contemporaries? To be a Christian was forbidden and, on the whole, strange; to praise the regime was also not so popular. Like young people in other parts of the world, we were aspiring to grow in athletic prowess and to travel, dreaming of idealistic love and ascending to prestigious professions. But an important part of our strivings was consumed by the "ideals" of the sexual revolution.

We were aware of the "free West" existing on the other side of the Iron Curtain. The Voice of America and Free Europe were known to us, if only from the Soviet-produced hindrance noise coming from radio sets when our parents half-clandestinely tried to catch the forbidden frequencies. However, the mode of freedom that impressed the young was broadcasted by "Radio Luxembourg," to which we listened with youthful piety. It transmitted pop music and proclaimed hippie ideals. We all dreamt of wearing long hair, which was forbidden by the Communist "morality" in our schools; well-known brands of jeans, imported from the West, had tremendous cachet. And "Radio Luxembourg" was easier to catch than The Voice of America. Free love and rock n' roll, even if portrayed by the Soviets as decadent features of bourgeois society, posed less threat to the regime than the Catholic resistance.

Consequently, the Church was described as an outdated congregation of old ladies and reactionary priests. The mass media—the press, radio, and television—proclaimed that the independent Lithuania of pre-war times was a country where the exploitation of simple people reigned both in towns and in the villages. Having no access to other interpretations, we believed that, at least partially. In my town, there lived a prominent Lithuanian resistance figure, Fr. Jonas Kauneckas, now Bishop Emeritus in the Panevėžys Diocese. We heard rumors then, remote as they were, that a "strange" priest lived on Pioneers Street (a prophetic coincidence?), one who criticized the Soviet regime and for that, was frequently interrogated by the "militia." Neither to me nor to my friends was this information important. We were, rather, interested in the freedom of the West. Sexual connotations were part of this freedom—a logical extension of the hippie mentality expressed in its pop music.

We were victims of our parents' inability to give arguments for a moral life because they could not root it in the Judeo-Christian tradition. The officially reigning "Moral Code of the Builder of Communism" was fake and impotent. Parents knew what the Red Terror was and could not for one moment believe in the sincerity of the regime's call for "moral purity," "modesty," and "brotherly relations" between people ("Man is to man a friend, comrade, and brother"). Newspapers and television praised dutifulness, love of truth, and solidarity, while most people thought to themselves that the most prominent newspaper in the Soviet Union should be called "Lie" instead of "Truth" ("Tiesa" in Lithuanian, "Pravda" in Russian).

The very terms describing moral values were corrupted. Even we, the young, who knew little about the true history of the Soviet regime, sensed that the words "duty," "brotherhood," and the like were empty of content. In my room, I hung the poster of Leonid Brezhnev, and then added to it the titles of photos from Communist newspapers about the milkmaids who were elected to the Supreme Council of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and of the tractor drivers in kolkhoz who were proclaimed the "heroes of socialist work." For myself and my friends, this was funny. I was so accustomed to the vacuity of words under the [Soviet] regime that when I encountered real speech in the United States, it took me by surprise. The fact that people actually meant what they said or wrote was a novelty. I had several such experiences: for example, I got a traffic fine for parking my car near the fire hydrant because I did not think the note not to park the car near it meant what it said. There was a revealing saying in the former Soviet Union: one thinks one thing, speaks another, and does still another.

Our parents could have had the chance to help us see that moral terms are not just empty shells if they had told us what really happened in Russia in 1917, and in Lithuania and other Baltic states in the 1940's and after the Second World War: namely, that the central moral fiber of our society—the Catholic faith—was annihilated with bloody violence. Then moral education could have been effective. In that situation, the post-war generations could have been saved from the mesmerizing voices of the pop sirens of Radio Luxembourg. Then, our idealistic compassion for the "insulted and humiliated" would have distinguished between genuine injuries to human dignity and the ideological inversion of Christian moral principles.

This misplaced compassion seems to be one of the leading forces in young fighters for the sexual ("post-sexual" by now?) revolution both in the East and in the West. In both cases, it is rooted in the rejection of a Christian, that is, an adequate anthropology. The central dimension of it is expressed well by Mark Regnerus: sex in our day has become "naturally" infertile. As famous contemporary minds say, man gave in to this long-standing temptation by the massive use of the contraceptive pill. Both Soviet and "capitalist" ideologies led many young people astray in this crucially important area of life. The identical attitude toward sexual freedom of the capitalist West and communist East is logical: Herbert Marcuse, who argued for the normality of "polymorphous perversity," and Willhelm Reich, who coined the term "sexual revolution," were both Marxists.

It is not easy to distinguish between the freedom of spirit and that of the instincts. Delacroix's *La liberté…* looks noble, and the "Rock March" of 1987–1989 in Lithuania claimed both, freedom for the country and freedom for the passions. The latter trend, given our habituation to the Dionysian rhythms of rock music (as Allan Bloom would say), was subconscious and matter of fact. Additionally, until the 1990s, only a few of us knew enough English—so the natural movement of modesty in our souls was undermined even more easily by our ignorance of the sexualized lyrics of rock.

The Marcusean ideal of "non-repressive" civilization is an enticing one. A powerful narrative has been formed in the post-war West about the oppressive nature of Christianity. Since young people need an enemy to fight against and an ideal to strive for, these ideological minds—as Erik Erikson called them—were misled. According to Agusto del Noce, in the post-war era, the political left moved its target from economic to sexual "exploitation." The young passion for justice was redirected: the oppressed became those who were forbidden free love. One's duty is to fight for it. How do we show it is a prison? Mere intuition that something is not quite true—as it was in the case of my generation with the regime's proclaimed "truths"—does not suffice. This is my conclusion about a young soul: it needs to be told.

And what happened to me, that young man who grew up deceived by the regime? I was an 18-

year-old student at the Medical School in Kaunas, Lithuania. One peaceful summer evening I went out for a walk just to clear my head from studying for exams. The sunset was beautiful. I, who was educated in a materialist ideology, thought to myself: if this beauty is merely a result of an accidental conglomeration of atoms, it is meaningless. Void. I rebelled against this depressive position. It took me some years to arrive at a point when I was able to say with our famous poet: “And why this midnight is so beautiful, O God, my God—how many stars in heaven!”

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Humanum

Issues in Family, Culture & Science

RE-SOURCE: CLASSIC TEXT

The Defenseless Power of Love

POPE BENEDICT XVI

The following excerpt comes from a homily given by Pope Benedict XVI at the Vigil Mass on August 20, 2005, preceding World Youth Day in Cologne. Setting the stage for the Pope's reflection on the Magi who travel in search of the star in the East was the pilgrimage of a flame which was brought from Bethlehem to Germany during Advent the year before.

God's Ways, Not Our Ways

Even if those who had stayed at home may have considered [the Magi] Utopian dreamers, they were actually people with their feet on the ground, and they knew that in order to change the world it is necessary to have power. Hence they were hardly likely to seek the promised child anywhere but in the King's palace. Yet now they were bowing down before the child of poor people, and they soon came to realize that Herod, the King they had consulted, intended to use his power to lay a trap for him, forcing the family to flee into exile.

The new King, to whom they now paid homage, was quite unlike what they were expecting. In this way they had to learn that God is not as we usually imagine him to be. This was where their inner journey began. It started at the very moment when they knelt down before this child and recognized him as the promised King. But they still had to assimilate these joyful gestures internally.

They had to change their ideas about power, about God and about man, and in so doing, they also had to change themselves. Now they were able to see that God's power is not like that of the powerful of this world. God's ways are not as we imagine them or as we might wish to them to be.

Absolutizing what is not absolute but relative is called totalitarianism.

God does not enter into competition with earthly powers in this world. He does not marshal

his divisions alongside other divisions. God did not send twelve legions of angels to assist Jesus in the Garden of Olives (cf. Mt 26:53). He contrasts the noisy and ostentatious power of this world with the defenseless power of love, which succumbs to death on the Cross, and dies ever anew throughout history; yet it is this same love which constitutes the new divine intervention that opposes injustice and ushers in the Kingdom of God.

God is different—this is what they now come to realize. And it means that they themselves must now become different, they must learn God's ways.

They had come to place themselves at the service of this King, to model their own kingship on his. That was the meaning of their act of homage, their adoration. Included in this were their gifts—gold, frankincense and myrrh—gifts offered to a King held to be divine. Adoration has a content and it involves giving. Through this act of adoration, these men from the East wished to recognize the child as their King and to place their own power and potential at his disposal, and in this they were certainly on the right path.

By serving and following him, they wanted, together with him, to serve the cause of good and the cause of justice in the world. In this they were right.

Now, though, they have to learn that this cannot be achieved simply through issuing commands from a throne on high. Now they have to learn to give themselves—no lesser gift would be sufficient for this King. Now they have to learn that their lives must be conformed to this divine way of exercising power, to God's own way of being.

They must become men of truth, of justice, of goodness, of forgiveness, of mercy. They will no longer ask: how can this serve me? Instead they will have to ask: How can I serve God's presence in the world? They must learn to lose their life and in this way to find it. Having left Jerusalem behind, they must not deviate from the path marked out by the true King, as they follow Jesus.

....

Saints: True Reformers

The saints, as we said, are the true reformers. Now I want to express this in an even more radical way: only from the saints, only from God does true revolution come, the definitive way to change the world.

In the last century we experienced revolutions with a common programme—expecting nothing more from God, they assumed total responsibility for the cause of the world in order to change it. And this, as we saw, meant that a human and partial point of view was always taken as an absolute guiding principle. Absolutizing what is not absolute but relative is called totalitarianism. It does not liberate man, but takes away his dignity and enslaves him.

It is not ideologies that save the world, but only a return to the living God, our Creator, the guarantor of our freedom, the guarantor of what is really good and true. True revolution consists in simply turning to God who is the measure of what is right and who at the same time is everlasting love. And what could ever save us apart from love?

Dear friends! Allow me to add just two brief thoughts.

There are many who speak of God; some even preach hatred and perpetrate violence in God's name. So it is important to discover the true face of God. The Magi from the East found it, when they knelt down before the child of Bethlehem. "Anyone who has seen me has seen the

Father," said Jesus to Philip (Jn 14:9). In Jesus Christ, who allowed his heart to be pierced for us, the true face of God is seen. We will follow him together with the great multitude of those who went before us. Then we will be traveling along the right path.

This means that we are not constructing a private God, a private Jesus, but that we believe and worship the Jesus who is manifested to us by the Sacred Scriptures and who reveals himself to be alive in the great procession of the faithful called the Church, always alongside us and always before us.

There is much that could be criticized in the Church. We know this and the Lord himself told us so: it is a net with good fish and bad fish, a field with wheat and darnel.

Pope Benedict XVI served as pope from 2005 to 2013.

October 10, 2024