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- David Lowenthal Macbeth: Shakespeare Mystery Play
- 359 Lionel Gossman Antimodernism in Nineteenth-Century Basle:
Franz Overbeck's Antitheology and J.J.
Bachofen's Antiphilology
- 391 Leslie G. Rubin Love and Politics in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*
- 415 Greg Russell Eric Voegelin on the Truth of In-Between Life:
A Meditation on Existential Unrest
- 427 Timothy H. Paterson Bacon's Myth of Orpheus: Power as a Goal of
Science in *Of the Wisdom of the Ancients*
- 445 Hugh Gillis Gaston Fessard and the Nature of Authority
- 465 Sanford Kessler Tocqueville on Sexual Morality
- Book Reviews*
- 481 Will Morrisey *The Crisis of Liberal Democracy: A Straussian
Perspective* edited by Kenneth L. Deutsch and
Walter Soffer
- 487 Michael P. Zuckert *Alexis de Tocqueville: Selected Letters on
Politics and Society* edited by Roger Boesche and
*Alexis de Tocqueville and the New Science of
Politics* by John C. Koritansky



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Gaston Fessard and the Nature of Authority

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You know that, among the Gentiles, those who claim to bear rule lord it over them, and those who are great among them make the most of the power they have. With you it must be otherwise; whoever has a mind to be great among you, must be your servant, and whoever has a mind to be first among you, must be your slave. So it is that the Son of Man did not come to have service done him; he came to serve others . . . Mark X: 42–45

Insofar as modern political thought is dedicated to the realization of human freedom and equality, it is marked by open hostility towards the notion of authority. In the name of freedom, a powerful vein of thought that derives from Rousseau and Kant decries authority as the infringement of autonomy and the subordination of the rational will to alien, heteronomous powers. In the name of equality, Karl Marx denounces all political authority as the masked expression of class antagonism and exploitation. In the *Communist Manifesto*, he contrasts public power with political power, “the organized power of one class oppressing another” (Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, in the *Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert Tucker: New York: Viking, 1968, p. 97).

The measure of the success of the modern assault on authority can be seen in Hannah Arendt’s assertion that the prevailing concepts of authority are based on misunderstanding and intellectual confusion. Arendt maintains that we can differentiate between tyrannies and even the most draconian of authoritarian governments because the latter are based on laws and not on the will and inclinations of an individual. The defining feature of authority is not its use of coercion but its dependence on a transcendent source:

The source of authority in authoritarian government is always a force external and superior to its own power; it is always this source, this external force which transcends the political realm, from which the authorities derive their ‘authority’, that is, their legitimacy and against which their power can be checked. (Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future; Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, New York: Viking, 1968, p. 97.)

For Arendt authority is a type of command that is based on neither physical force nor rational persuasion, but rather an assent that recognizes the superior-

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ity of the claim of authority. While force and authority are both means of making people obey, “authority precludes the use of external means of coercion; where force is used authority has failed” (*ibid.*, p. 97).

The most powerful intellectual forces emanating from the Enlightenment have, according to Arendt, deprived all forms of authority of their transcendent foundation. This loss of authority is irrevocable and is the final stage of the dissolution of the bonds of religion and tradition. Authority, along with religion and tradition, provided the ground for a world now lost forever, and we are required to find a new ground, something that can provide a consensus that allows people to live together. We have, literally, forgotten what authority is.

Any attempt to revive the concept of authority must move on three fronts: (1) Against those who attack authority in the name of autonomy, it must demonstrate that true autonomy is only possible through the interiorization of authority, (2) Any defense of authority must call into question Marx’s opposition between ‘political’ power and ‘public’ power and show that relations of coordination are dependent, at least in part, on relations of subordination; that is, some relation must be established between authority and the common good, and (3) Against those who maintain that authority has been historically superseded or has withered away, it must be asserted that authority is not a once dominant specific historical form but rather it is an integral element in the ontological structure of social life. To retrieve authority we must understand its role in generating and perfecting the social bond.

Traditional Catholic teaching, basing itself on the thirteenth chapter of St. Paul’s *Epistle to the Romans*, has always upheld the necessity and indeed the divine origin of authority. For St. Thomas Aquinas the individual is not self-sufficient and requires the aid and cooperation of others to provide for the bare necessities of life, to say nothing of the requirements for civilized life. Because society requires a diversity of functions and there is a corresponding diversity of talents among men, there is a need for a force to direct and coordinate these diverse functions and talents to a common end. This force is authority. Political organization enables civilized human beings to conduct their lives within society. Insofar as it is God’s will that man’s social nature requires subordination and hierarchy, it can be said that authority comes ultimately from God. Indeed, authority, because it produces order within society (as the etymology of the word subordination suggests) participates in God’s power. Here Aquinas combines the Aristotelian concept of man’s political nature with the Pauline notion that authority has its primordial source in God.

This twofold theme of authority’s naturalness and its sacred character is echoed by modern Thomists. According to Jacques Maritain, “a totality without hierarchy—a whole without subordination of the parts to a whole” is impossible. “The necessity of authority in the political community, as the necessity of the State itself, is inscribed in the very nature of things” (*Scholasticism and Politics*, trans. and ed. M.J. Adler, London: Geoffrey Bles, 1954, p. 78). Furthermore, the sacred character of authority, the notion that it has a transcen-

dent source, characterizes any nonmaterialist conception of the world which sees the foundation of man's social, political and ethical life in nature and the world's intelligibility (ibid., pp. 82–83).¹

The French Jesuit philosopher and theologian, Gaston Fessard (1897–1978), little known outside of a small circle of French Catholics, upheld the traditional Catholic teachings on authority: “the necessity of political power until the end of time and the supernatural origin of power” (“Politique et structuralisme,” *Recherches et débats*, décembre, 1965, p. 120). Fessard, who belonged to the same generation of French Jesuits that produced such brilliant scholars as Henri de Lubac and Jean Daniélou, was a seminal figure in the French Hegelian revival, and was a penetrating critic of Marxism. Alexandre Kojève, whose famous 1930s Sorbonne lectures on the *Phenomenology of Spirit* Fessard attended, once remarked that if he so wished, Fessard could have been France's leading Marxist theorist (“Communisme et christianisme”, *Critique*, 3–4, 1946, p. 308). A North American reviewer noted that Fessard's “impressive literary production could well become one of the landmarks of contemporary French Catholicism” (E.L. Fortin, *Review of Metaphysics*, 35, 1981, p. 128). During World War II, Fessard was active in the Resistance, clandestinely publishing a critique of the Vichy regime's collaborationist policies, *France, prends garde de perdre ton âme* (1941). His major works include *Pax Nostra* (1936), an examination of international relations, *Autorité et Bien commun* (1945), the three volume *Dialectique des Exercices Spirituel de saint Ignace* (the third volume appearing posthumously in 1984), *De l'Actualité Historique* (1960), outlining his philosophy and theology of history and *Chrétiens marxistes et théologie de la libération* (1978), a critical analysis of the foundations of liberation theology. His work constitutes a profound and engaging meditation on language, history, and society, and it deserves to be better known in the English-speaking world.

Despite his fidelity to Catholic tradition, Fessard, unlike most modern Catholic thinkers (at least prior to Vatican II) did not develop a theory of authority based on Thomist assumptions. Rather, in opposing contemporary thought, Fessard's imitation of Aquinas took a different form altogether. Fessard notes that in attempting to refute Avicenna, Averroes, and their Latin disciples, Aquinas did not reply on a recourse to the Platonism of St. Augustine and the church fathers:

Rather he was compelled to study Aristotle, because the Philosopher was the immediate source from which his adversaries had drawn their best arguments. And it was in never losing sight of the teachings of Scripture and Tradition that he succeeded in baptizing Aristotle and in constructing a new synthesis for sacred doctrine which is still living today (*De l'Actualité historique*, vol. II, Paris: Desclée, 1960, p. 293).

For Fessard, Catholic theology was called to an analogous undertaking in combatting such contemporary errors as Marxism and existentialism. Specifically, it must confront “the immediate source from which its adversaries

had drawn their best arguments”, namely Hegel. The essay “*Dialogue théologique avec Hegel*” could serve as an apt description of Fessard’s life work. According to Fessard, “if Aristotle was ‘the Philosopher’ for the Middle Ages, and in particular for an Aquinas, Hegel has the right to the same title for our time” (“*Dialogue théologique avec Hegel*”, *Stuttgarter Hegel Tage, 1970*, ed. H.G. Gadamer, Bonn: Bouvier, 1974, p. 248). Contemporary Catholic theology must do for Hegel what Aquinas did for Aristotle: appropriate his truths to the Catholic tradition and correct his errors in the light of the deposit of faith. As was the case in Aquinas’s interpretation of Aristotle, scripture and tradition provide “the means of overcoming the errors of Hegelian philosophy”, thus leading to the hope that the German philosopher can be brought “not to baptism—[since] he has already received it—but to recantation” (*De l’Actualité historique*, II, p. 293).

Throughout this dialogue with Hegel, Fessard sought “to rehabilitate the representations of the Absolute Religion, against the ‘domination of the Concept’, at least to the extent that it has the tendency to unilaterally transform itself into a tyranny” (“*Dialogue théologique avec Hegel*”, p. 231). Fessard resolutely rejects the notion that Christian dogmas have been definitively surpassed, yet preserved, by being translated into the categories of Hegelianism. Nor does he accept Hegel’s immanentism, the belief that the divisions within and between human beings can be overcome in time and history. The final reconciliation between master and slave, to say nothing of finite and infinite consciousness, can only be fully realized beyond history, though it can be partially anticipated within time. In its purely temporal state, human consciousness is bound to remain ‘unhappy’, to seek its definitive satisfaction in a ‘beyond’, and thus to be never fully at home in the world.

For Fessard, the theological engagement with Hegel meant above all a reflection on the nature of human historicity, on man’s historical being. The challenge Hegel presented was the need to develop an “essentially historical ontology”, which would be in continuity with classical (which for Fessard meant primarily Thomist) metaphysics (*De l’Actualité historique*, pp. 24, 114). Fessard’s oeuvre can be understood as an immense effort to analyze the historical, “both in its own essence and in its relation to other dimensions of being, more familiar to the theologian or philosopher, such as the natural, the rational, the supernatural, etc” (*ibid.*, p. 10). For Aquinas, following Aristotle, there are only two regions of being: nature and reason (cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics*, IV, lec. 4, 573–74). For Fessard, the historical constitutes a third realm of being (*De l’Actualité historique*, I, p. 19). The development of a historical ontology does not lead to the oblivion of nature; nor are nature and history simply opposed. On the contrary, in certain circumstances, nature exercises a jurisdiction over history insofar as history and freedom can and must have meaning (*ibid.*, p. 25). Unfortunately, Fessard never treated the relation between history and nature in an extended, systematic fash-

ion. The exact nature of the continuity between Thomist metaphysics and Hegelian historicity remains obscure and difficult questions of their ultimate compatibility remain unanswered.

The philosophy of history, Fessard maintains, does not mean the delineation of the successive stages of mankind's development, in the manner of Comte and Marx (*ibid.*, p. 114). Rather it is "an analysis of the structures of human historical being," which for Fessard, as a theologian, means in its profoundest sense, "the dialectic by which the supernatural life is engendered," or in Kierkegaardian terms, the process of becoming a Christian through the eternalization of history and the historicization of Eternity (*ibid.*, p. 112). In all his writings, including those on politics, Fessard remains deeply theological, indeed Christological. As one of his most perceptive critics notes, at the heart of Fessard's thought is a vision of the "communication of idioms," which dynamically conceives the hypostatic union (the union of divine and human natures in the one person of Christ) as the union of opposites (E. Ortiques, "Réflexions sur la théologie de Gaston Fessard", *Revue de métaphysique et morale*, 66, 1961, p. 317). Communication of idioms is a theological term originally coined by St. Cyril of Alexandria to explain the relations between the divine and human natures in the Incarnation. Fessard seized upon the Hegelian dialectic with its interplay of the finite and the infinite, the universal and the particular, as a means of exploring and developing a philosophy and theology of history centered on the communication of idioms.

The principle of the communication of idioms underlies the dynamics of authority and makes it structurally analogous to the Incarnation. Just as Christ acts as the mediator between God and man so that in the Incarnation, God's descent to man is simultaneously man's ascent to God, authority acts as the mediator between the good and the common, making the good common and the common good.

Like Aquinas, Fessard conceives the social order and authority ontotheologically, to borrow a Heideggerian term. In contrast to the Thomist position, Fessard emphasizes the historical process whereby the content of natural law in and through authority becomes actualized or achieves concrete embodiment in the laws, institutions, customs, and mores of a particular society. This historical process will, in turn, be related to a metaphysical superstructure of *egressus* and *regressus*, of emanation from and return to God, which has its roots in Christian Neoplatonism.

Fessard's writings merit attention, if for no other reason than that it is intrinsically worthwhile to scrutinize any attempt by theology to constructively engage a philosopher of the stature and depth of Hegel and this, all the more so when, as with Fessard, the theologian is aware of the risks as well as the gains that such a venture poses for revealed religion. Since Hegel is the source of most philosophical speculation on the nature of history, the confrontation with Hegel raises the question of the nature of historicity and its relationship to tra-

ditional Catholic thought, including its teaching on authority. Can Catholic thought take historicity seriously without jettisoning the *philosophia perennis*? Can the notion of the natural law as a standard by which to judge the concrete forms of authority still be maintained? Can human historicity be thought through in such a manner that it does not lead to the oblivion of eternity? That Fessard's writings raise such questions demonstrates their seriousness.

II

An aspect of the meaning of authority is shown in its etymology. The Latin root of authority, *augeo*, means to grow, to augment, to increase; thus growth or development is the original underlying meaning of the word. Since growth is defined by its origin and end, the derivatives of *augeo* have a double significance: on the one hand, to produce or give birth, on the other, to perfect or accomplish. Etymologically, authority has the sense of a dynamism which produces, develops, and perfects the bond uniting human beings. On this basis, Fessard gives a preliminary definition of authority as "the generative power of the social bond, tending on its own to grow until its fulfillment" (*Autorité et bien commun*, 2nd ed., Paris: Aubier-Montagne, p. 13).

According to Fessard, there are three principal senses of authority. The first and most common meaning refers to legal or *de jure* power (*pouvoir juridique*), the power which belongs to a head or delegate of a legally constituted body or society. The second, refers to actual or *de facto* power (*pouvoir de fait*), the power to impose decisions upon or influence others apart from any legal status. The prime example of *de facto* authority is Max Weber's charismatic, natural born leader. The third is the value (*valeur*), which compels recognition solely by virtue of its value, for example, the authority of the expert which is based not on his personal characteristics or his legal status but rather on the truth of what he has to say. Fact, law, value—these are the three primary forms of authority and encompass the entire sphere of hierarchical relations between humans (*ibid.*, pp. 11–12). Their dialectical interplay determines the development and structure of authority: its origin, growth and end.

Authority has its origin in the forces which give birth to the social bond. These forces exist prior to any legal or rational formulation. Indeed, all *de jure* authority has its origin in *de facto* power, though its origins are often obscured. Prior to obedience to laws is obedience to a dominating individual (*ibid.*, p. 14). It is this obedience that provides the basis for the creation of the social bond. According to Fessard, this obedience has its source in two elemental emotions—the desire for well-being and the fear of violent death.

The desire for well-being is engendered in the elementary structures of family relationships, specifically the parent's power over the child, and by the abil-

ity of the charismatic natural-born leader. Here Fessard follows Weber who identified the prerational, prelegal legitimations of domination as patriarchal and charismatic authority ("The Social Psychology of World Religions" in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, tr. and ed. H.H. Gerth and C.W. Mills, New York: Oxford U. Press, p. 245). Patriarchal authority, according to Weber, is the foundation of all authority that claims tradition as its sanction. As such, it is the foundation of the customary, the routine, of what is permanent and ongoing in everyday life. Opposed to it is the unsettling power of the charismatic leader able to dominate men by the sheer force of his personality. The charismatic leader is the leaven of society, "conquering an inert or hostile social world, moving it and moulding it in its own image" (*Autorité et bien commun*, p. 15), thus creating a new consensus, a new self-understanding within a community, in other words, a new basis for the social bond. The vision of the charismatic leader becomes in time routinized, to use Weber's phrase, integrated into the community's everyday life, eventually forming part of its stock of tradition.

Both patriarchal and charismatic authority aim at the provision of the material and spiritual goods that contribute to human well-being. In Weber's words, patriarchal authority is an extension of the family as the basic socio-economic unit and "is rooted in the provisioning of recurrent and normal needs of the workday world", while charismatic authority is the foundation "of the provisioning of all demands that go beyond everyday routine" (*From Max Weber*, p. 245). Both are expressions of human sympathy and tend to create a community of goods which constitute a basis for measuring the common good.

Although patriarchal and charismatic authority are prerational, they pursue rational ends. As Fessard realizes, the other source of obedience, the fear of violent death, introduces an irrational element into the foundation of society. The idea that the fear of violent death lies at the basis of civil society is, of course, not new in the history of political thought. Hobbes made it the cornerstone of his political philosophy and the motivation for the social contract. Fessard follows the Hobbesian teaching as it was developed by Hegel. His account of the form of authority that has its origin in the fear of violent death is based on the famous master-slave dialectic in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. By introducing the master-slave relationship, Fessard adds a third type of domination, in addition to Weber's charismatic and patriarchal types. Unlike the latter two, the master-slave dialectic has no real legitimation initially. It rests solely on coercion. Nevertheless, it is a necessary element in the transformation of *de facto* power into *de jure* authority.

The master-slave dialectic is composed of two moments. The first is the struggle to the death between two adversaries which results in the unreciprocal recognition of one combatant as a master by another who becomes his slave. The master is able to establish his domination because he overcomes his attachment to his natural existence and is willing to risk his life in combat whereas

the slave remains attached to life and is therefore overcome by the fear of violent death and submits. "The recognition which ends that struggle creates the first social bond which unites the two individuals while differentiating them into two unequal social classes" (*De l'Actualité historique*, I, p. 142). This recognition is for Fessard the origin of history and politics since the master is the most primitive form of the sovereign (*Autorité et bien commun*, pp. 16–17). If, as Weber contends, "the state is a community that . . . claims the monopoly of force within society," (*From Max Weber*, p. 78) this monopoly is initially established through the master's triumph over the slave. As in Hegel, this struggle remains a constituent element in all the transformations and refinements of political sovereignty. The master-slave dialectic "is found analogically at the base of all social relations" (*De l'Actualité historique*, I, p. 143). It "represents not only the first social bond and origin of all political society, but also an essential moment in the genesis of human reality, i.e., a transition which repeats itself in each instant and at every level of social relations, from the least relations between two individuals to world affairs" (*ibid.*, p. 149).

The master-servant relationship is the first instance of the coexistence of *de facto* and *de jure* power. Because no law can exist without the power to enforce it, *de jure* authority presupposes the existence of the Master's *de facto* power. No authority, however evolved or spiritual, can renounce this support. Even the church, a purely spiritual body, must resort to the threat of excommunication to overcome the threat of heresy or schism (*Autorité et bien commun*, p. 21). No matter how much a particular government rests on consent, it must be able to defend itself from internal and external threats, from wars and revolutions. No modern state can exist without an army or a police force. Because irrationality and violence remain permanent aspects of human life and thus constant threats to the social bond, there is need for a countervailing force.

The second moment in the master-slave dialectic is labor where the slave, under the master's command, transforms given nature through his productive activity for the master's consumption. If the first moment of the dialectic, the struggle to the death, is the origin of *politics*, the second moment, labor, marks the beginning of *economics* (*De l'Actualité historique* I, p. 153, *Autorité et bien commun*, p. 82). The structure of the dialectic gives a relative priority to politics over economics (*De l'Actualité historique* I, pp. 146–47). This means that truly human labor only occurs in a stratified, class society or, in Marxist terms, that the administration of things is dependent on the government of men. Through the master's *imperium*, and the accompanying anguish produced by the fear of violent death, the slave is removed from the immediacy of immersion in instinct and desire. He enters into a new 'intentional' relationship with the natural world, as the result of an internal transformation which is the precondition for the transformation of nature. This new intentional relationship could not be preserved if the slave immediately appropriated the object; con-

sciousness would not achieve true independence from nature. Consequently “without fear of obedience there is no humanizing and universalizing labor” (ibid., p. 148). In Hegel’s words, “If consciousness fashions the thing without that initial absolute fear, it is only an empty self-centered attitude; for its form or negativity is not negativity *per se*, and therefore its formative activity cannot give itself a consciousness of itself as essential being” (*The Phenomenology of Spirit*, tr. A.V. Miller, Oxford: Oxford U. Press, p. 119).

As Hegel himself notes, the master-slave relationship is only the necessary, not the sufficient condition for the genesis and development of political society: “although the state may originate in violence, it does not rest on it” (*Hegel’s Philosophy of Mind*, tr. W. Wallace and A.V. Miller, Oxford: Oxford U. Press, pp. 173–74). The master-slave dialectic must be combined with some other sociohistorical process in order to create the state whose end is to satisfy human desires and aspirations.

While the master-slave dialectic is indispensable for explaining the genesis of authority, it is incapable, by itself, of showing how political domination can be directed toward the common good. If the struggle to the death were the sole basis for anthropogenesis then the natural condition of human relations would be war and there would be no other foundation for peace than the imposed will of the master and the slave’s fear of violent death. How can a common good be established when the slave’s labor is directed solely to the satisfaction of the master’s selfish desires? Hegel himself never adequately explained how the master-slave relationship evolved into the state whose essence is to be the realized expression of ethical substance. According to Hegel, the fight for recognition belongs to the primitive stage of human social development: “it is absent in civil society and the State because here the recognition for which the combatants fought already exists” (ibid., p. 172). The question remains, however, as to how the *de facto* unequal and unreciprocal recognition of the master-slave relationship is transformed into the *de jure* equal and reciprocal recognition of citizens within a state. Is there not some other human relationship, no less fundamental than the master-slave relationship, that provides the basis for an alternate principle of recognition?

The young Hegel pointed to such a possibility in what is now known as the “Fragment on Love”, where he discussed the relationship between man and woman in dialectical terms. There Hegel contrasts love with the understanding which undialectically leaves opposed terms still opposed. “In love”, on the other hand, “the separate does still remain, but as something united and no longer as something separate” (*Early Theological Writings*, tr. T.M. Knox, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971, p. 305). This union finds its concrete embodiment in the child. “Thus the process is: unity, separated opposites, reunion. After their union the lovers separate again, but in the child their union has become unseparated” (ibid., p. 380). According to Kojève, Hegel originally believed he had discovered in love the specifically human content

of human existence and what distinguished it from natural or animal existence. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Kojève claims Hegel abandoned this position. The desire for love between man and woman is replaced by the desire for recognition between two combatants as the source of human distinction. Indeed, the mutual recognition between lovers is only possible because the animal man has previously become human through the anthropogenetic master-slave dialectic. "In accepting the point of view of the *Phenomenology*, one would have to say that Man can *love* (which no animal can do) only because he has created himself through the Risk incurred in a Fight for Recognition" (A. Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, ed. A. Bloom, tr. J.H. Nicholson, Ithaca: Cornell U. Press, p. 244, note).

Fessard reverses this perspective by making the relationship of love between man and woman, prior, logically and temporally to the master-slave dialectic. Hence it is both complementary and superior to master-slave dialectic ("Politique et structuralisme", p. 136). "Marriage", Fessard writes, "is the archetype of the reciprocal recognition that the *Phenomenology* had, just before analyzing the Master-Slave dialectic, defined as an 'I which is a We and a We which is an I' signalling it as the initial emergence of the 'notion of Spirit into the spiritual daylight of presence'" ("Les relations familiales dans la *Philosophie du Droit de Hegel*, Hegel-Jarbuch, 1967, p. 40). Like the master-slave dialectic, the man-woman dialectic can be found analogically at the base of human relations; it is not, as Kojève insisted, purely private. "All unification between human wills, not only individual but also collective, finds its perfect archetype in that conjunction of man and woman" (*De l'Actualité historique*, I, p. 165). The man-woman dialectic provides the means for transforming the master-slave dialectic by providing it with an end, a goal that is directed to the common good.

How is the mutual recognition found in the man-woman relationship extended to society as a whole? The man-woman relationship gives rise to the family where domination or rule is exercised for the common good. Paternity provides the origin and model of the conversion of 'political power' into 'public power', and thus the means for transforming the master's domination into service. The end of the parent's rule over the child is to transform the child into an adult, a being who is recognized as an equal. Similarly, the master's power "can commence becoming true authority only by emancipating (*affranchissant*) the Slave, by recognizing in him, at least in principle, an identity in nature and a legal equality with the Master" (*Autorité et bien commun*, p. 45). By interacting with paternity, the master's power becomes educative and the slave's labor is directed towards the common good of both master and slave. "Under the influence of paternity, the Master becomes Lord, Prince or King, then finally the State, while correspondingly the Slave becomes Serf, Subject, and finally Citizen" (*Esquisse pour une analyse chrétienne de la société*", *Communio*, V, 2, mars-avril, 1980, p. 26). Thus far from being, as Kojève maintains, an "existential impasse" who does not change, the master is no less the motor of his

tory and progress than the slave (*Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, p. 19).

The master is required, at the outset, because there must be an imposed, exterior discipline in order to have peace. In time, through the educative function of paternity this imposed order is interiorized, the necessary condition of all emancipation. Nevertheless, at times of rebellion and civil war, the master-slave dialectic re-emerges in order to re-establish the imposed exterior peace.

Between the two dialectics, man-woman and master-slave, there “exists a communication of their properties—of their ‘idioms’ in the technical sense of that expression of theological origin” (Fessard, *La Dialectique des Exercices Spirituels de saint Ignace*, vol. III, Paris: Lethielleux, p. 357). The interaction of paternity and the master-slave dialectic requires that the master renounce his will-to-power and transform himself into a servant, thus in effect reversing the master-slave dialectic (*Autorité et bien commun*, p. 101). The underlying principle is Christological. The model for the dialectic conversion is the Incarnation as described by St. Paul: “His state was divine, yet he did not cling to his equality with God, but emptied Himself to assume the condition of a slave, and become as men are; he was humbler yet, even to accepting death, death on a cross” (Phillipians II:6–9). Kenosis, in imitation of Christ’s renunciation of his divine state and taking on human form, and the communication of idioms as the principle of dialectical conversion are what allow the master’s power to be placed at the service of the common good.

III

De facto power, Fessard maintains, has a tendency to lose its personal character and transform itself into stable forms, into customs, mores, laws, and institutions. Thus it takes on a more rational character, becoming *de jure* authority. For example, the vision of the charismatic leader will, if it corresponds to the needs and aspirations of a social milieu, become reflected in a society’s ongoing social life, eventually taking on an institutional existence that no longer depends on the personal influence of the initiator. Thus it moves from a particular to a more universal form. Similarly the master’s force is transformed into the punitive power of the law.

If the origin of *de jure* authority is *de facto* power, its end is revealed by examining the third of Fessard’s three basic forms of authority: the authority of value, that is, that which imposes itself on the strength of its own truth. If *de facto* power is what gives birth to the social bond and *de jure* authority the means by which the bond develops and grows, then the recognition of truth would be the end of this process. Does this mean that for Fessard the authority of the ‘*savant*’ (for example, the scientist, the scholar, or expert) represents the culmination of all authority? The answer is both yes and no. It would seem to

be the perfection of authority because “truth obtains the consent of wills without violating personalities and produces a universal agreement of spirits, thus realizing the perfection of the social bond” (ibid., p. 23). This consent is only possible, however, among equals, among those who are capable of understanding the expert. “It is only for the scientist and those that practise his science that demonstrations and discoveries acquire an absolute value and compel recognition by virtue of their own merits” (ibid., p. 23). Because assent is based solely on demonstration, the expert’s truth becomes recognized only to the extent the expert’s authority disappears. The expert’s authority is only an authority for nonexperts and in proportion to their lack of knowledge. For the nonexperts “knowledge does not impose itself by virtue of its own value; on the contrary, from their perspective, it plays the same role as does force vis-à-vis the weakest; it imposes itself externally” (ibid., p. 23). In other words, for the nonexpert, knowledge exists as a *de facto* power.

The notion of truth as the end of authority gives rise to the following paradox: either the expert’s truth becomes a common property among equals, in which case the expert’s authority disappears, or the expert’s truth becomes a *de facto* power for the nonexpert, in which case we return to our point of departure, the origin of authority in *de facto* power. The argument appears trapped in a circle but for Fessard the circle is not vicious. On the contrary its circular nature reveals the essence and aim of authority:

Is not the end of authority to disappear in realizing itself? So that its growth begun at the moment when *de facto* power comes up against *de jure* authority and is transformed into the latter, would aim at essentially developing the social bond to the point where all superiority is rendered useless and consequently does away with itself [*se supprime elle-même*], thus realizing the perfect accord between the opposed terms whose conflict gave birth to it (ibid., pp. 24–25).

Authority then is legitimate to the extent that it “sets out as its end its own end” (ibid., p. 25). The final goal of authority is its termination through consummation, modeled on the authority of the expert who does away with his personal authority by making his truth available to others. Paradoxically, the end of authority is “to will its own end” (ibid., p. 26).

Does this mean that for Fessard the leader of a state would fulfill his role by abdicating? Clearly not, since such an act would only lead to the dissolution of the social bond. The literal interpretation of the perfection of authority as its disappearance can only be applied to limited cases, such as the teacher-student relationship where the teacher aims at raising the student to the teacher’s own level. In the case of the state it must be interpreted “dialectically”, through an analysis that shows that authority “only has meaning, value, and, consequently, legitimacy, to the extent that it tends, not to abolish itself materially, but rather to realize itself, to regain unity with its essence” (ibid., pp. 27–28).

Authority realizes its essence, says Fessard, by acting as the mediator of the

common good. Authority and the common good stand in an intimate reciprocal rapport. Authority is what engenders and sustains the common good, while the common good is what constitutes and measures the legitimacy of authority. In producing the common good authority has two interrelated ends: to promote the social bond uniting individuals and to be the means by which transcendent principles become actualized in social life. The first corresponds to the horizontal axis which unites individuals in a community centered on the common good, the second to the vertical axis which unites the community with the transcendent source of the common good. The interaction of these two axes constitutes the dynamics of authority. Insofar as the transcendent is a universal and the community a particular, authority becomes the means by which the universal is manifested concretely within the particular and the particular elevated to the universal. Authority realizes its end by creating a concrete universal.

Fessard uses as an illustration of the dynamics of authority, an example taken from everyday life—the relationship between a doctor and a patient. The doctor resembles the teacher insofar as he is an expert whose authority is based on knowledge. His relationship with a patient differs from that of teacher and student, however, in that the end of his authority is not to turn the patient into a doctor. From the patient's perspective the doctor possesses a *de facto* power; his knowledge exists as a form of power. This *de facto* power is transformed into *de jure* authority when the patient agrees to follow the doctor's orders. The doctor's knowledge appears to the patient not as a truth, but as a good, something that answers a specific need. The doctor acts as a mediator between the patient and the truth. Through the doctor, the patient has access to the truth not in its abstract formal sense, as pure science or knowledge, but as something that corresponds to a felt need (Compare Plato, *Statesman*, 293b-d).

For Fessard, the doctor-patient relationship illuminates the disinterested nature of authority. It is by virtue of disinterestedness that authority dialectically realizes its essence as the wish for its own end. The doctor's disinterestedness is rooted in the very nature of truth as universality. Through the doctor's mediation truth "descends" into the actual, concrete world, accommodating itself to the level of the patient's requirements. Fessard terms this descent "the gratuitousness of authority" (*ibid.*, p. 30), a term that is central to his understanding of authority since it explains why the exercise of authority always assumes a sacred character. The disinterested communication of knowledge to which the patient would not otherwise have access, is analogous to God's grace by virtue of it being a gratuitous and free act.

Authority exists as two inverse movements between the poles of individual and universal. On the one hand, there is the ascendent movement from individual to universal in the transformation of *de facto* power into *de jure* authority. On the other hand, there is the descendent movement from the universal to the particular exemplified in the application of the doctor's universal science to the particular requirements of the patient. Fessard sees the two movements as

two stages in the genesis and realization of authority. The descent of the universal to the particular is simultaneously the elevation of the particular to the universal in and through the growth of authority that leads to its fulfillment and end (in the double sense of that word). The model for this two fold process is, of course, the Incarnation.

How does authority in this process realize its essence as the wish for its own end? According to Fessard, it does so by generating a new relationship between the universal and the particular, a relationship which at the same time strengthens and transforms the social bond. The process involves a double mediation: on the horizontal axis it is a mediation between master and subject (teacher and student, doctor and patient, prince and people); on the vertical axis it is the mediation between the true and the good.

On the horizontal axis the relationship between master and subject is centered on realizing their particular needs. This is seen in the example of the patient-doctor relationship. The patient's health which is the bond between doctor and patient is not merely an abstract universal:

It becomes first a good *communicated* from doctor to patient, then a good *communicating* to the latter the satisfaction of his desire for well-being. This satisfaction does not leave the doctor indifferent. At the very least, he finds in it confirmation of his diagnosis and therapy. So that his healing becomes in turn, a good *communicated* from the patient to the doctor and a good *communicating* to him a satisfaction analogous to that of the patient (ibid., p. 35).

Because it satisfies their particular desires, the patient's health creates a bond between doctor and patient centered on the realization of a common good. Through the relationship, the universal becomes concrete in making itself common. Since the common good results from their reciprocal action and is an act of free will on both their parts, doctor and patient see it as a good *communicating itself* to both of them.

On the vertical axis, the common good results not only from the relationship between doctor and patient, but also from the universal which in and through this relationship communicates itself to them. The self-communication of the universal in and through the particular occurs by means of the mediation of the true and the good.

Reflection on the relationship between doctor and patient will reveal "that their interaction has been throughout the course of its development, commanded and sustained by the interaction of the good and the true" (ibid., p. 40). For Fessard, this means that the metaphysical source of the common good is "a Good which is beyond them, incorporates them and communicated itself to them" (p. 41). The vertical axis points beyond the temporal horizon to "another dimension" (p. 39) to what is "the cause and transcendent exemplar" (p. 38) of all values active in the social world. Fessard uses the language of traditional metaphysics in calling this source the Good, thus differentiating it from

any particular goods. The Good is both transcendent and immanent, both beyond the world and active in it. Although it transcends the world it is not static; it remains a dynamic presence within the social world, the ground of all true authority. Insofar as the Good pertains to human social life, Fessard speaks of it as the common Good (*le Bien commun*). All particular common goods are authentic only to the extent that they participate in the common Good.

Authority realizes its essence and end by becoming a moment in the inner life of the common Good. Fessard describes this inner life as an activity:

where the unity of being diffuses itself and returns to itself in a movement without end, the good expressing this unity in a multiplicity because it is *diffusum sui*, and the true gathering all multiplicity in that unity because it is *index sui* (*ibid.*, p. 41).

Authority grounds the bond uniting individuals in this inner life. The gratuitousness of the universal means that the individual authority's gift (his skill, his knowledge, his 'charismatic' leadership) becomes the vehicle through which the Good incarnates itself as the vital force animating communal life.

We can summarize Fessard's teaching on authority as follows: Authority is presented with a "double option" whereby it realizes its essence as the mediator of the common good (*ibid.*, p. 47). Insofar as it rests on *de facto* power it is necessary that authority open itself to the universality of law. Otherwise it is in danger of becoming a tyranny based on selfishness and exploitation. Insofar as it is *de jure* authority it must ground all law in a transcendent Good, the ultimate source of all particular common goods. The leader's role is not only to act as a mediator between man and man but also to act as the mediator between the community and the transcendent Good. Because authority is grounded in the transcendent there is always an element of the sacred in its exercise. Because authority has its ultimate source in value it realizes itself by willing its own end: it affirms not itself but the value it transmits. Authority exists not as an end in itself but as a means through which the universal becomes the informing principle of a society. Thus the willing of its own end is not only the end of authority; it is also its beginning, its initial inspiration. In this process the master-slave dialectic is reversed as the master renounces his will-to-power and transforms himself into a servant.

IV

Fessard's account of authority raises several questions which can be conveniently grouped under two general subject headings. The first concerns the relation between history and metaphysics; the second with the value of a metaphysical account of authority for a society that has rejected transcendence.

Fessard claims that in attempting to delineate a historicist ontology it is not his intention to replace or repudiate Thomist metaphysics. In fact, he regards

the historicist ontology as a complement to classical Catholic thought. Nevertheless problems exist when we try to correlate the two. For instance, Fessard's account of labor and economics is dependent upon Hegel's master-slave dialectic which sees human work as the negation of given-being or nature. Indeed, such negating activity is primarily what constitutes man as a historical being. How does such a concept of work relate to the Aristotelian and Thomist concept of work as completing rather than negating nature? Can the two concepts be brought together, or are they antithetical? We are brought back to the primary question: What is the relationship between history and nature?

The danger of purely historicist account of authority is that history alone provides the models and norms for any particular form of authority. Hegel made this clear in his preface to *The Philosophy of Right*. Hegel states that philosophy is always bound to a specific time and culture: "philosophy too is its own time apprehended in thoughts" (*Philosophy of Right*, tr. T.M. Knox, Oxford: Oxford U. Press, 1962, p. 11). Applied to political philosophy, this means that the philosopher must confine himself to understanding the inherent rationality of *existing* institutions. "As a work of philosophy, it must be poles apart from any attempt to construct a state as it ought to be" (*ibid.*, p. 11). In stressing the actuality of the idea, Hegel tends to obliterate the distinction between the ideal (in the sense of the full realization of reason) and the actual, just as his immanentism tends to obliterate the distinction between time and eternity. Fessard maintains the tension between time and eternity, while outlining their interaction. However, the tension between time and eternity must be complemented by a tension between the ideal and the actual.

Fessard avoids the extremes of historicism by his emphasis on the transcendent character of the common Good. This implies a distinction between the common Good and any particular common goods. The common Good as both exemplar and source of particular common goods is more not less real than they are. Because the common Good possesses more reality it can serve as the guide and standard for existing historical societies.

The Hegelian insistence on the inherent rationality of existing institutions must be counterbalanced by an emphasis on the degree to which the common Good transcends any existing common goods. Fessard presents the germ of this idea, but it must be elaborated. His presentation of the common Good's activity within the historical world must be complemented by an outline of an overarching order which can serve as the standard by which to judge specific historical forms of authority. In other words, the historical account of authority needs to be completed by an account of the good or just regime, a utopia in the strict sense of the word, that is, a political order outside of history.

Can an account of authority which derives from theology and metaphysics find a hearing today? Fessard's appeal to the transcendent clearly goes beyond the bounds of contemporary social science. Hannah Arendt has shown that there is a correlation between the contemporary hostility or indifference towards transcendence and the oblivion of authority. As she points out, it is not

accidental that the loss of religion, tradition and authority was also accompanied by the demise of traditional metaphysics. (See Arendt's essay, "Tradition and the Modern Age, in *Between Past and Future*.) For both Arendt and Fessard, the very concept of authority implies some form of sacred or transcendent foundation. If, as Arendt maintains, the collapse of religion, tradition, and authority creates the mass society which makes totalitarianism possible, then contemporary political thought is faced with two alternatives: either authority is restored (though not necessarily in its original form) and with it some form of transcendent justification, or we attempt to find a substitute for authority, something that can provide a basis for the social bond and is not based on coercion and violence.

Arendt herself provides some suggestions for a possible substitute for authority, by turning to the political life of Athens for new norms and models for determining how human beings can live and act together. In Athens, political life was conducted on a noncoercive basis without appeal to the authority of the past or the transcendent. (Arendt may be overlooking the part religion played in Athenian life.) Athens provided a different paradigm for social cohesion, one that was based on power rather than authority. Arendt defines power in a sense that is, perhaps, unique with her. Power is not understood in Weber's terms as "the possibility of imposing one's will on the behavior of other persons" (*On Law in Economy and Society*, ed. M. Rheinstein, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1954, p. 323). Rather "power corresponds to the human ability not just to act, but to act in concert" (Arendt, *On Revolution*, New York: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich, 1970, p. 44); that is, it is the uncoerced ability to act collectively on the basis of consensus. Like authority, power is opposed to violence or force; "where the one rules absolutely, the other is absent" (*ibid.*, p. 56).

As a substitute for authority, Arendt seems to make power an end-in-itself. On Fessardian grounds, this attempt to replace authority with power raises two objections. The first is that it is highly unlikely that any consensus could be formed without the mediation of some form of authority, either traditional or charismatic. The second is that if power is a consensus aimed at collective action, it begs the question what the content of this consensus is and what are the values it affirms. If "power" is taken as an end in itself, the goal of the consensus is to form a consensus. Like Rousseau's general will, Arendt's notion of power can be accused of formalism and indeterminateness. Can such an indeterminate form become the basis for the social bond?

Fessard rightly contends that the basis for consensus must be the actualization of the common good and that any true common good must be a concrete universal. This means that social cohesion, if it is to be enduring, cannot be generated on the horizontal level alone, as in Arendt's concept of power or in social contract theory. There must also be interaction on the vertical axis. Society needs recourse to a universal to integrate it on the horizontal level.

Man cannot dispense with a transcendental mediation for society without re-

course to some other form of universal. Much of modern political thought can be seen as attempts to find an immanent universal to replace the transcendent as the basis for authority and the foundation of the social bond. Numerous writers have pointed out the affinities between modern ideologies and religion. Fessard's contribution to this position is to show that authority, when it acts as the mediator of the universal, takes on the aura of the sacred. It is not surprising that such immanent universals as Comte's humanity and Marx's classless society become simulacra of the sacred (in Raymond Aron's famous phrase "secular religions") and that politically they take the form of what Berdyaev called "inverted theocracies." For Fessard, totalitarianism is characterized by "the exclusion of all transcendence", and the sacralization of such pseudo-values as race or class (*De l'Actualité historique*, I; p. 63). In this process, the hieratic function is taken over by "clercs de l'ordre humain" whose claim to authority is that they can direct humanity to its final end on the basis of their ideology (p. 64). As a result, there is a "fusion and confusion of the political and the sacred, more complete than that whose dissolution they had previously glorified" (p. 65).

Such inverted theocracies, Fessard would contend, are incapable of realizing the common good because they lack a true ontological foundation. If the common good is generated by the interaction of the true and the good, the good which is the end of authority can only be real if it is true; that is, if it both reflects and participates in the ultimate source of values. The political task is to discern if the universal invoked by an authority is genuine, if it is true, because it is an ontologically based value. Foremost in this endeavor, is the necessity of determining the true final end of humanity and the secondary ends which exist to make this final end possible.

Religion is the principal locus of the vertical interaction between a particular community and universal value. When society denies religion it effectively denies the possibility of such an interaction. This means that authority if it is to realize its essence must ultimately be spiritual. Within society there exists a fruitful tension between the spiritual and the temporal. When spiritual authority claims to lead humanity to its final end, it acts as a limitation on all human, temporal authorities (*Autorité et bien commun*, p. 111). In its proper exercise, spiritual authority does not, on some theocratic model, seek to usurp the legitimate powers of the State; nor does it intend to impose detailed policies and programs for the State to follow. Rather its task is twofold: negatively, it demonstrates to the conscience of society how certain secondary ends are destructive of its transcendent final end and therefore should be avoided; positively it presents a model of the interaction of time and eternity, a goal or ideal for society to follow (*De l'Actualité historique*, I, pp. 66–67). In its proper exercise, spiritual authority fulfills the essence of true authority. Its goal is to make itself useless, to enable the directed conscience—whether individual or collective—to direct itself and thus provide human freedom with a meaning and an

end (*ibid.*, p. 70). But because human infirmity is an eternal aspect of historical and contingent man, the need for spiritual authority will never disappear.

NOTE

1. Cf. also *Man and State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), pp. 126–39. Another notable twentieth century Thomist who wrote on authority is Yves Simon. See his works, *The Nature and Function of Authority* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1940), *The Philosophy of Democratic Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), and *A General Theory of Authority* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1962).