

Interpretation

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Mark Twain's *Joan of Arc*: An American Woman?

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LOVE'S LABOR

"Possibly the book may not sell, but that is nothing—it was written for love."¹ Thus spoke Mark Twain of what he described as his best and most thoroughly researched novel.² And perhaps he was right, not only about the book's worth but also its popularity.³ For the text to which he referred was

¹ Mark Twain to H. H. Rogers, April 29, 1895, in *Mark Twain's Letters*, ed. A. B. Paine (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1917), 2:624.

² "I like the *Joan of Arc* best of all my books; & it is the best; I know it perfectly well. And besides, it furnished me seven times the pleasure afforded me by any of the others; 12 years of preparation & 2 years of writing. The others needed no preparation, & got none" (quoted in James M. Cox, *The Fate of Humor* [Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002], 250).

³ The novel's tone and content are evidently so different from those of Twain's previous novels that many scholars dismiss the text as the sloppy sentimentality of an aging man whose reverence for Joan undermines his typically acerbic wit and sharp insight. David Foster helpfully documents the wide range of Twain scholars who dismiss the work in this way in "On the Theme of Mark Twain's *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc*," *Mark Twain Annual*, no. 13 (2015): 43–62, esp. 44–46.

not *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, *Huckleberry Finn*, or *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*—expressly American classics even now read in high schools throughout the United States—but rather a book about a small French peasant girl, Joan of Arc.

Joan of Arc? Impressive though she may be, a seventeen-year-old girl, almost single-handedly responsible for the revival of the spirit of the French soldiers and people on the brink of despair and capitulation during the Hundred Years' War between England and France, is hardly Twain's typical hero. Other abnormalities about the text might immediately strike the thoughtful reader, not least the title of the work. What could Twain mean by calling his self-proclaimed masterpiece, "written for love," *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc*? How could a preeminent American novelist presume such intimacy with, much less dare to recreate, another era, another nation, the child of medieval times, and a medieval church? What could he intend his audience, primed by the reading of works such as *Huckleberry Finn*, stories of ruddy American boys, to gain from this work about a small French girl?

To begin our inquiry, we might turn to the question immediately raised by the title of this perplexing work. *Who* is "personally recollecting" the life, speeches, and deeds of Joan of Arc, and why? Is it Twain? Not exactly. It is rather Sieur Louis de Conte, Joan's personal secretary and childhood companion, who goes to great lengths to establish his credibility as an eyewitness to her life. He not only attended Joan of Arc from their childhood in Domremy until her bitter end at the stake, but he also attended her rehabilitation hearings after her death.⁴ But in answering the question of narration, de Conte's role raises another problem, for Twain fictionally aggrandizes de Conte's historical role in Joan's life. Furthermore, the novel contains the added qualification that it is "translated" out of "Ancient French" into "modern English" by a fictitious translator, Jean François Alden, who often takes anachronistic liberties (regularly calling Joan "the commander in chief," for example) in his translations.⁵ Our translator reminds Twain's audience of his role when he leaves footnotes, throughout the book, that alert us to certain discrepancies between de Conte's predictions and historical events that occurred after his death.

⁴ Mark Twain, *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1989), 27.

⁵ Indeed, Twain initially published the work in installments in *Harper's Magazine*. As Andrew Tadie observes, "the reading public did not realize that the work was written by Mark Twain," for the novel was "ostensibly a recent translation by Jean François Alden of the memoir of Sieur Louis de Conte, the one person who knew Joan and was with her during the three important stages of her life: as visionary village peasant, as a military genius, and as the defendant at her trial" (introduction to *Personal Recollections*, 9).

Twain is, then, twice removed from the telling of this tale. And yet this is a tale told by a teller (de Conte translates “tale”) who shares Twain’s christened initials, S. L. C. (Samuel Langhorne Clemens). Moreover, de Conte addresses his work to his “great-great grand nieces and nephews” in the year 1492 in order that his descendants (or at least his heirs) might hear, learn from, and cherish Joan’s story. Indeed, it would not be too much to say that this introductory letter makes it apparent that this is a novel written precisely for those who would inhabit the new world of America discovered in 1492.

We have moved, then, from one obvious answer to the question of who is personally recollecting Joan of Arc to the next. This is a book written by an author (Twain) for his modern (and largely American) audience in such a way as to make a lesson from the past (translated out of archaic French into *modern* English) available to these readers. Something old must be discovered anew. Perhaps America, the world conceived in 1492, must be sought anew. But by what means? By means of recollecting a peculiar figure, a woman, a *French* woman, Joan of Arc.

What is it that Twain desires us to recollect about Joan? In an essay written a few years after the novel was published, Twain claims that the artist’s task is to “paint the spirit” of one whose “childlike faith,” “loyal heart,” “lovable character,” and courage won not only the hearts of a cowering French nation but its freedom. It is precisely the character of this “forgiving, generous, unselfish, magnanimous,” mere slip of a seventeen-year-old “girl soldier” which we must learn to recollect.⁶ But what could a modern American audience learn from this “child” and from an age innocent of the advancements of modern politics and modern science? Will not the stories and strife of the Hundred Years’ War—stories from an old world marked by overt concern for God, for king, and for country—strike modern readers as hopelessly quaint?

It might be useful, then, to consider a character study of Twain’s immediate American audience undertaken by one Alexis de Tocqueville not long before Twain composed *Personal Recollections*. In *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville warns of the dangerous effects that might be produced by a liberal democratic regime in which the love of equality would eventually outstrip devotion to (and ability to preserve) freedom, a particular form of the moral devotions (“mores” or “habits of the heart,” as Tocqueville calls them) that above all else culminates in a love of the noble and beautiful. Americans, Tocqueville warns, “will habitually prefer the useful to the beautiful,” and

⁶ Mark Twain, “Saint Joan of Arc,” in *Personal Recollections*, 452.

for that reason might lose their capacity for the great virtue, devotion, and sacrifice necessary for the preservation of the regime.⁷

It is for the kind of audience against which Tocqueville warned—one concerned with utility rather than beauty—that Twain paints the soul of Joan of Arc, whose spirited faith, nobility, courage, and love of her own roused to victory a French nation on the brink of despair and utter capitulation. Perhaps Twain, like Tocqueville, supposed the hope for the success of the American experiment lay not simply in its practicality, abundance, or commercial success but rather in the ability of its citizens to maintain certain virtues necessary to the preservation of freedom. Yet for Tocqueville, and, as this essay will argue, Twain, the task of preserving and transmitting moral virtue in a democracy resides above all else with its women.⁸

Joan of Arc is, then, for Twain not just the past liberator of France; she is America's greatest hope. For in displaying her beauty and nobility—traits Americans are likely to overlook in pursuing what is useful—Twain warns America not to forget her noblest possibility, as though claiming, with Tocqueville, that America's success is due to “the superiority of its women,” who are the makers of mores.⁹ This is especially evident when Twain's narrator recalls an ancient prophecy of Merlin that “in a far future time France would be lost by a woman and restored by a woman.” The narrator de Conte can hardly keep from applying this saying to Joan, observing that “France was now, for the first time, lost—and by a woman, Isabel of Bavaria, her base Queen; doubtless this fair and pure young girl was commissioned of Heaven to complete this prophecy.”¹⁰ Isabel of Bavaria, the Dauphin's mother, was thought to have encouraged the Treaty of Troyes that effectively disinherited her son and transferred the rule of France to the issue of the English king Henry V, the infant Henry VI. If France had been lost by a woman unfaithful to the nation (and possibly to her husband), how much more might it be redeemed through a woman with the purity and fidelity of Joan of Arc?¹¹

⁷ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 439.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 279, 563, 576.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 576.

¹⁰ Twain, *Personal Recollections*, 89.

¹¹ There is even some suggestion that Charles is through Isabel's infidelity an illegitimate son and not true heir to the crown. This doubt, felt deeply by Charles, is the primary source of the Dauphin's cowardice, which Joan ameliorates by speaking to him of this doubt, which he has shared with no one. See *ibid.*, 124–25. Moreover, the particular phrasing of Merlin's prophecy recollects the Christian image of a world lost through the sin of Eve and redeemed through the fidelity of Mary the mother of Jesus. The

Twain's hope for America at the dawn of the twentieth century was for one who would restore (or, rather, recollect) in the hearts of her people a notion of what is noble, and thereby restore the courage (or, as the Greeks say, the *andreia*, or "manliness") required to defend and preserve freedom. For if Joan could, as de Conte tells us, make a man of the cowering French king, with his "little soul like a raisin,"¹² could she not inspire a nation whose very strength, its commercial success, might become a weakness, enervating the moral courage necessary to the preservation of liberty?¹³ If Twain's estimation of his work is accurate, his readers might see in the text that he loved so dearly the spirit of Joan as a model of and for an American woman.

Asserting that Joan of Arc, a French shepherdess, political martyr, and saint of the Catholic Church, embodies the virtues essential to the preservation of the United States of America may sound a bit far-fetched. We might begin more cautiously by investigating what, exactly, Twain took to be most remarkable about the character and virtue of Joan. The bulk of the work is divided into three parts—"In Domremy," "In Court and in Camp," and "Trial and Martyrdom"—each of which traces Joan's early education and youth, her rise from shepherdess to supreme commander of the French armies, and her betrayal, trial, and burning at the stake, respectively. In what follows, we trace Twain's treatment of Joan's virtue and her unique capacity to draw forth what is most noble from her men, particularly from Charles, the cowardly king of France, and from her childhood friend nicknamed "the Paladin." Probing Twain's understanding of Joan's virtue, the fundamental features of which are her utter willingness to sacrifice her own good for the good of her nation and her ability to embolden her men, sheds light on the author's teaching in the novel and offers implications for his hope for the possibility of maintaining the American regime.

story of Joan might then be understood as a reenactment of a primordial story of fall and redemption and the way in which women might catalyze ruin or magnify what is good.

¹² *Ibid.*, 134.

¹³ George Washington warns of this danger in a letter to James Warren, in which he wonders "whether foreign Commerce is of real advantage to any Country; that is, whether the luxury, effeminacy, and corruptions which are introduced along with it; are counterbalanced by the convenience and wealth which it brings with it" (Mount Vernon, October 7, 1785). Similarly, in an essay published in the *Maryland Gazette* in 1788, an anonymous Anti-Federalist warns of the danger of an "overgrown, luxurious and effeminate capital," which will soften the nation and invite foreign intrigue (*The Complete Anti-Federalist*, ed. Herbert Storing [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981], 5:31).

JOAN'S VIRTUE: "THE BEAUTIFUL," "THE BASHFUL,"
"THE PATRIOT," AND "THE BRAVE"

Often the observations of one's friends concerning one's character are deeply revealing. And as we all know, character begins to develop from childhood.¹⁴ Hence, by allowing de Conte to recollect so much of Joan's early childhood and interaction with her peers, Twain grants his audience some insight into the source of the consistent modesty, nobility, love of her own, and courage that Joan learned from her humble beginnings as a shepherdess from the hamlet of Domremy. De Conte showcases these essential virtues of Joan of Arc perhaps most vividly when he recollects the wealth of nicknames bestowed on her by her childhood playmates:

All children have nicknames, and we had ours. We got one apiece early, and they stuck to us; but Joan was richer in this matter, for as time went on she earned a second, and then a third, and so on, and we gave them to her. First and last she had as many as half a dozen. Several of these she never lost. Peasant girls are bashful naturally; but she surpassed the rule so far, and colored so easily, and was so easily embarrassed in the presence of strangers, that we nicknamed her the Bashful. We were all patriots, but she was called *the* Patriot, because our warmest feeling for our country was cold beside hers. Also she was called the Beautiful; and this was not merely because of the extraordinary beauty of her face and form, but because of the loveliness of her character. These names she kept, and one other—the Brave.¹⁵

Each of Joan's nicknames—the Bashful, *the* Patriot, the Beautiful, and the Brave—allows us to glimpse what Twain saw in the soul of one capable of rousing France and her cowering king from its slumber after their defeat at Agincourt by Henry V. The France of Joan's childhood is one that "had fallen low—so low!" ravaged as it was by "famine, pestilence, [and] slaughter," even to the point that the bodies of the dead were left in heaps in the streets of Paris without Christian burial, to be set upon by wolves. De Conte describes a France beset by the traitorous Burgundian party (Frenchmen in favor of English rule), housing a discouraged people and a ragged army under the reign of a cowardly king subject to treacherous advisors.

¹⁴ As Aristotle explains when discussing the relationship between character, moral virtue, and habit in Book II of his *Nicomachean Ethics*, "It makes no small difference...whether one is habituated in this or that way straight from childhood, but a very great difference—or rather the whole difference" (1103b23–25).

¹⁵ Twain, *Personal Recollections*, 53.

It is into this bleak political landscape that Joan of Arc is born. Yet Joan's extraordinary political and moral virtue is all the more striking in that it develops amid rather ordinary peasant conditions. With one exception, Joan's early childhood is marked only by the distant rumor of war, and Domremy, "like any other humble little hamlet of that remote time and region," was a simple and picturesque world apart from the political ravages of the Hundred Years' War. When de Conte first speaks of the village of Domremy in which he and Joan grew up, he observes that "every human creature in the village was an Armagnac—a patriot—and if we children hotly hated nothing else in the world, we did certainly hate the English and Burgundian name and polity in that way."¹⁶ Joan is *the* Patriot among patriots.

The village of Domremy is a world with a limited moral horizon marked "by the narrownesses and prejudices got at second hand" from elders and tradition, both religious and political. The very children whose nicknames for Joan reveal her remarkable character and qualities are described as being, while "not bright, of course," "all good children," "good-hearted and companionable, obedient to their parents and the priest." "Their religion was inherited, their politics the same." As they grew up these children "became properly stocked with narrownesses and prejudices without examination also—which goes without saying."¹⁷

While the peasants of Domremy remain unquestioningly loyal to the French king, "impotent as he was,"¹⁸ Joan's love of her homeland, reflected in her well-earned title "*the* Patriot," is exceptional in that it is joined to a precocious political prudence evident in her rhetorical capacities. Joan, that is, never simply bows either to her parents or to her priest, as the other children do.¹⁹ An early episode both reveals these remarkable qualities in Joan

¹⁶ Ibid., 31.

¹⁷ Ibid., 33. Indeed, de Conte's narration reveals that for all his skepticism (a theme explored by David Foster), he too might be stocked with some of the same prejudices as the other children of Domremy, albeit with a certain amount of self-reflection. For example, de Conte tells us that many villagers supposed that a dragon of "a brilliant blue color, with gold mottlings" lived in the woods outside Domremy, though "no one had ever seen it." De Conte, in contrast, acknowledges that this was not an opinion he shared, for "I think there is no sense in forming an opinion when there is no evidence to form it on." Hence, regarding the color of the dragon, de Conte tells us confidently, "I always held the belief that its color was gold and without blue, for that has always been the color of dragons." The dragon was eventually exorcised, which is why de Conte never saw it for himself (34). See also Foster, "On the Theme," 51–53.

¹⁸ Twain, *Personal Recollections*, 31.

¹⁹ The following episode showcases Joan's refusal to simply bow to the priest. For an episode illustrating Joan's reasoned and well-mannered refusal to simply bow to her parents' authority, see chapter 3 of part 1, in which Joan gives her porridge to a ragged road-straggler, despite the ongoing debate about

and reflects Twain's portrayal of Joan as a heroine uniquely suited to the American regime. There stood in Domremy, de Conte recalls, "a most majestic beech-tree with wide-reaching arms," which the children of Domremy would flock to every summer and sing and dance around for hours together with the fairies of Domremy, "oh, every summer for more than five hundred years." The children often "made wreaths of flowers and hung them upon the tree and about the spring to please the fairies that lived there."²⁰ Yet one fateful day when Joan was ill and unable to defend them, these fairies, so beloved by the children, were banished from the tree by the village priest, for they had been warned nearly one hundred years prior that should they be seen by any of the peasants they would be exiled forever. Hence, though the children themselves had never seen the fairies they loved so dearly, when a peasant woman happened upon the fairies in private revelries, she reported her sighting to the priest, who subsequently banished them for their crime.²¹

Confined to bed with a fever during this occurrence, Joan awoke to find her beloved fairies exiled from the village, whereupon she "burst into a great storm of anger, for so little a creature," and rushed to the priest, Père Fronte, to plead their cause.²² Joan's willingness to oppose the good father illustrates her natural pity alongside her admirable concern for justice. Unlike her companions, whose simple patriotism manifests itself as a simple "obedien[ce] to their parents and the priest," Joan stands up to Père Fronte when he has committed an injustice. Her cross-examination of the priest demonstrates more than her principled love of her own, however. It both showcases a capacity for rhetoric that would serve her throughout her short life and also allows Twain to put into her mouth, rather anachronistically, an odd embrace of a certain kind of piously suffused but unmistakably liberal democratic language.

"Who owns France?"

"God and the King."

"Not Satan?"

"Satan, my child? This is the footstool of the Most High—Satan owns no handful of its soil."

the propriety of feeding the rascal's laziness, which her father is initially firmly against. "When she was asked why she had not waited until a decision was arrived at, she said the man's stomach was very hungry, and it would not have been wise to wait, since she could not tell what the decision would be. Now that was a good and thoughtful idea for a child" (*ibid.*, 51).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 35.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 39–40.

²² *Ibid.*, 40.

“Then who gave those poor creatures their home? God. Who protected them in all those centuries? God. Who allowed them to dance and play there all those centuries and found no fault with it? God. Who disapproved of God’s approval and put a threat upon them? A man. Who caught them again in harmless sports that God allowed and a man forbade, and carried out that threat, and drove the poor things away from the home the good God gave them in His mercy and His pity, and sent down His rain and dew and sunshine upon it five hundred years in token of His peace? It was *their* home—theirs, by the grace of God and His good heart, and no man had a right to rob them of it. And they were the gentlest, truest friends that children ever had, and did them sweet and loving service all these five long centuries, and never any hurt or harm.... And what had the children done that they should suffer this cruel stroke? The poor fairies *could* have been dangerous company for the children? Yes, but never had been; and could is no argument. Kinsmen of the Fiend [as the fairies were called]? What of it? Kinsmen of the Fiend have *rights*, and these had; and children have rights, and these had; and if I had been here I would have spoken—I would have begged for the children and the fiends, and stayed your hand and saved them all.”²³

The priest left this encounter ashamed of himself and amazed at Joan, fully persuaded by her argument, to the point that he admits, “Ah me, poor children, poor fiends, they *have* rights, and she said true—I never thought of that. God forgive me, I am to blame.”²⁴

We might be surprised to find Joan defending justice and convincing the priest of his wrongs in the (modern) language of individual rights. Has something been added in Alden’s translation? After all, what would a young peasant girl in France in the early 1400s know about the doctrine of individual natural rights, advanced by seventeenth-century liberal thinkers such as Thomas Hobbes and John Locke? As Alden is fictional, we must infer instead that it is Twain who infuses Joan’s passionate character and rhetorical gifts with an understanding of human beings, and even fairies, as creatures bearing unalienable, God-given rights. Her appeal is that the priest and the follies of men have arbitrarily deprived both the children and the fairies, though they be “Friends of the Fiend,” of certain unalienable rights to due process. Doing this is so contrary to justice that, having delivered her rebuke, the young Joan flies from the priest’s presence in angry tears. The priest has deprived the children of dear friends, but above all else, he has deprived the

²³ Ibid., 44–45.

²⁴ Ibid., 45.

fairies of the home bestowed upon them by God. The fairies, though friends of the fiend, ought to be pitied, not banished. The anachronistic presence of the language of individual rights in Joan's speech signals Twain's attempt to combine Joan's virtue and love for God's creatures (even fiendish ones) with an understanding of justice that would serve to remove matters of temporal justice from priestly control, and hence would likely prevent the kind of unjust judgment exercised in this episode by Père Fronte.

Yet even while Joan's understanding of justice is phrased in "modern English," her moral disposition as a whole stands as a rebuke to the self-interested individualism that so often accompanies the language of individual rights. Joan manifests, in contrast, an impressive courage, marked by her unflinching willingness to sacrifice herself for others and for what is noble and just. Another episode de Conte relays from Joan's childhood, one that prompted some to bestow upon her the honorific "the Brave," highlights this courage. De Conte recalls a particular occasion in which he and the other children learn the "black news" that the queen of France (Isabel of Bavaria, the woman through whom France was lost, according to de Conte), the wife of the mad but reigning Charles VI, has, along with the treacherous Duke of Burgundy, orchestrated the humiliating Treaty of Troyes. The treaty effectively disinherited her son, the future King Charles VII, and entrusted the succession of the French nation to the infant son of Henry V, king of England.²⁵

Upon hearing this news, the children grow despondent and, in order to distract themselves from their grief, engage in speculative dreams of the battles and heroic deeds they *would* have performed for the cause of France had they been just a few years older.²⁶ Even some of the little girls of the village (excepting Joan) begin to imagine how valiantly they would have fought had they been men. This speculation on the part of the girls leads one of Joan's peers and the most impressive boaster of the bunch, Edmond Aubrey,²⁷ nicknamed "the Paladin" "because of the armies he was always going to eat up some day," to speak dismissively of the girls, "Pooh!" For everyone knows that, much like the Paladin, "girls can brag, but that's all they are good for. Let a thousand of them come face to face with a handful of soldiers once, if you

²⁵ Ibid., 54.

²⁶ Ibid., 56.

²⁷ It was Edmond's mother who tattled on the fairies to the village priest. See *ibid.*, 39. Edmond's proclivity for exaggeration does not reflect kindly on his upbringing, and so his identity as that "foolish" and "thoughtless" woman's son emphasizes the fundamental injustice of the fairy tree incident and speaks to the importance of due process for fairies and friends of the fiend everywhere.

want to see what running is like. Here's little Joan—next *she'll* be threatening to go for a solider!”²⁸ But the Paladin's teasing hardly stops there:

The idea [of Joan as a soldier] was so funny, and got such a good laugh, that the Paladin gave it another trial, and said: “Why, you can just see her!—see her plunge into battle like any old veteran. Yes, indeed; and not a poor shabby common solider like us, but an officer—an officer, mind you, with armor on, and the bars of a steel helmet to blush behind and hide her embarrassment when she finds an army in front of her that she hasn't been introduced to.”...Well, he kept it up...till he made their sides ache with laughing, which was quite natural, for certainly it was a very funny idea—at that time—I mean, the idea of that gentle little creature, that wouldn't hurt a fly, and couldn't bear the sight of blood, and was so girlish and shrinking in all ways, rushing into battle with a gang of soldiers at her back. Poor thing, she sat there confused and ashamed to be so laughed at.²⁹

Yet a sudden turn of events reveals not only the prophetic irony of these idle speculations but also their failure to take into account the strength of Joan's moral fiber. For even in the midst of their laughter, the children suddenly awake to the horrible realization that the “madman” of Domremy called “crazy Benoist” (a name meaning “blessed” in French) has escaped from his cell in the local prison and is rapidly approaching them, axe in hand, from behind the Fairy Tree where they have been holding counsel. “The thought that shot through us all was, crazy Benoist has gotten loose from his cage, and we are as good as dead!” de Conte recalls. At this point, “we all broke and fled, this way and that, the girls screaming and crying. No, not all; all but Joan.” Unlike the other children, Joan remains. De Conte turns around only to see the sickening sight of “Joan standing, and the maniac gliding stealthily toward her with his axe lifted.”³⁰

This vision made the narrator so sick that he could not see, for a time, but, when he regains his sight, he sees Joan “walking by the man's side toward the village, holding him by his hand. The axe was in her other hand.”³¹ What? Could “girlish” and “shrinking” Joan not only be safe but also be gently leading the madman to his cell, when any reasonable person would have either fled or frozen in fear at the sight of him? And this from the same child whose

²⁸ Ibid., 56.

²⁹ Ibid., 56–57.

³⁰ Ibid., 57.

³¹ Ibid.

association with valiant action in the face of death brought forth such peals of laughter from her peers? How could this be?

Joan is remarkable in that she is as patriotic, loyal, and pious as she is thoughtful and clever. Yet her unmatched wit is apparently surpassed by her indefatigable courage and compassion. When de Conte presses her for an explanation for her brave deed, she rather modestly accounts for her actions thus: "You make a great thing of it, but you mistake; it was not a great matter. It was not as if I had been a stranger to the man. I know him, and have known him long; and he knows me, and likes me." How has this acquaintance come to pass? Joan, we learn, has been feeding the madman through the bars of his cage in the village for some time. Moreover, the previous December, when two of the madman's fingers were chopped off "to remind him to stop seizing and wounding people passing by," Joan dressed his hand every day until it healed.³² She was not afraid, then, because she knew the madman through her abundant generosity. But might a madman forget the debt of gratitude he owed to the small child, another companion inquires? Well, yes, Joan must admit that he did threaten to kill her with his axe. Why, then, did she resist running away with the other children? Joan's reply is telling: "Because it was necessary to get him to his cage; else he would kill some one. Then he would come to the like harm himself."³³

Joan's humble remark, as de Conte observes, reveals just how "entirely forgetful of herself and her own danger" she is.³⁴ Yet all the more remarkable is that no one hearing her explanation thinks Joan's speech, revealing as it is of her generosity, bravery, and self-sacrifice, worthy of comment, challenge, or criticism. Rather, it was "taken by all as a matter of course and true." This silent acceptance of Joan's speech "shows how clearly her character was defined, and how well it was known and established" from so young an age.³⁵

³² Ibid., 58–59. In the Gospel of Matthew, Christ foretells the judgment of the nations, saying, "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit upon his glorious throne, and all the nations will be assembled before him. And he will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. . . . Then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me'" (Matt. 25:31–36 [New American Bible]). Joan, too, demonstrates her righteousness by feeding the hungry madman, welcoming him when he is lost, clothing his naked wounds, and visiting him in prison.

³³ Twain, *Personal Recollections*, 59.

³⁴ Similarly, David Foster takes Joan's self-forgetfulness to be the most astounding characteristic Twain sees in Joan. See Foster, "On the Theme," 56–58.

³⁵ Twain, *Personal Recollections*, 59.

Joan's remarkable bravery and willingness to sacrifice her own good for that of others—her nobility—distinguish her concern for individual rights from the individualism of liberal thinkers. Unlike modern liberalism, which proceeds from an understanding of human nature as inescapably self-interested, Joan's concern for individual rights is inseparable from her concern for the noble, or from her understanding that human beings are capable of sacrificing their self-interest for a higher good.

Joan's courage and nobility are again displayed in a later occurrence when, fully grown and leading troops behind enemy lines on her way to see the Dauphin, she encounters an English captain whose duty is to arrest "the witch" of Domremy in order to quash any remaining French hopes of reconquest. This later episode is as comical as it is anxiety inducing, for in the dead of night Joan's small group of Frenchmen are, like Joan herself for much of her life, not recognized for who they are. The English captain assumes that Joan and her troops are his own English scouts, and accordingly questions her as to the whereabouts and looks of Joan of Arc. Is she still behind us, the English captain asks? "She is still behind," Joan replies truthfully. Have you seen her, what she looks like, and where she is camped? "Yes, I have been in her camp," Joan again answers truthfully, "she is not more than seventeen." And so the dialogue continues, the English captain asking questions and Joan, even as she speaks the truth, misleading.³⁶ Eventually, the captain completes his line of questioning and commands his imagined scout to burn the bridge that would put a gulf between Joan and her English pursuers.

Once they are away from any threat of English pursuit, Joan's officers jokingly admire "how ingeniously she had deceived that man and yet had not told him anything that was not the truth."³⁷ Joan, however, is troubled by this and replies, "I thought he was deceiving himself. I forbore to tell him lies, for that would have been wrong; but if my truths deceived him, perhaps that made them lies, and I am to blame. I would God I knew if I have done wrong." While her men attempt to assure her that she has done no wrong, her brother, Jean, reminds her that she did something similar in telling her parents the truth (that she would go to her Uncle Laxart's house and would tend to his ill wife there) without telling them the whole truth (that she intended to go on to Vaucouleurs and eventually to lead the French to victory over the English).³⁸

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 103–4.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 106.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 107.

Joan is troubled by this and faces a struggle of conscience that displays the reflection and self-knowledge that accompanies her moral character. From her generals she is assured that she has done no wrong, for, they reason, “in the perils and necessities of war deceptions that help one’s own cause and hurt the enemy’s were always permissible.” In other words, necessity exculpates. Necessity turns what would in normal conditions be an evil into a good, or at least an excusable, action. This Machiavellian morality is unsatisfactory to Joan, however, who decidedly refuses to yield to it, as bowing to this understanding of morality (that necessity exculpates) so lowers the possibility of nobility (self-sacrifice) as to destroy it. Her response reveals both her self-understanding and her nobility:

“I see, now,” said Joan sorrowfully, “I told no lie, yet I deceived. I had tried all other ways first, but I could not get away, and I *had* to get away. My mission required it. I did wrong, I think, and am to blame.” She was silent a moment, turning the matter over in her mind, then she added, with quiet decision, “But the thing itself was right, and I would do it again.”³⁹

What could Joan mean? She admits that she has or might have done wrong, and yet she affirms that she would do it all over again, for “the thing itself was right.” Joan refuses to claim that her actions were “necessary” evils, but rather assumes moral responsibility for wrongs she freely committed. To help his reader understand the significance of Joan’s statement, one that demonstrates the way in which her reason and self-knowledge are as crucial to her character as her other admirable virtues, Twain allows de Conte to reflect upon its significance:

It seemed an over-nice distinction, but nobody said anything. If we had known her as well as she knew herself, and as her later history revealed her to us, we should have perceived that she had a clear meaning there, and that her position was not identical with ours, as we were supposing, but occupied a higher plane. She would sacrifice herself—and her *best* self; that is, her truthfulness—to save her cause; but only that: she would not buy her *life* at that cost; whereas our war-ethics permitted the purchase of our lives, or any mere military advantage, small or great, by deception. *Her saying seemed a commonplace at that time, the essence of its meaning escaping us; but one sees, now, that it contained a principle which lifted it above that and made it great and fine.*⁴⁰

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid. Emphasis ours.

As in the episode with the madman, this reflection reveals the tremendous moral weight of Joan's action. Much like Twain's renowned character Huckleberry Finn, who famously decides to help Jim escape from slavery even at the cost of his eternal salvation ("All right, then, I'll go to hell"), Joan is willing to sacrifice even her prized virtue, her truthfulness, for the good of France, her divine mission.⁴¹ Both of Twain's heroes exhibit a willingness to sacrifice their ultimate good—eternal salvation—for the good of another, be it a friend (as in the case of Huck) or a beloved nation (as in the case of Joan). Joan would do this not just for the sake of her cause, but for the sake of morality itself. Here she attains an almost unimaginable height of nobility in that she would willingly sacrifice her life and her "best self"—and so, by implication, her salvation—by assuming responsibility for the evil action of lying, rather than desecrate morality (and the possibility of noble action) by the alchemic claim that necessity turns evil into good and thus neutralizes good.

It is perhaps this mix of self-knowledge, nobility, an understanding of human rights, and a separating of religious piety from a direct relationship to secular authority that helps us to begin to understand Twain's admiration for the person of Joan and the way in which she might serve as a model for the American regime. Her very nobility stands as a rebuke to a regime that could allow its use of the language of individual rights to lower its goals to the pursuit of merely individualistic safety and comfort. Her courage, self-sacrifice, and self-understanding disclose that, while her use of the language of rights serves to curb the illegitimate use of church power in the political realm, it will not serve to banish the noble, to which the church might properly direct souls, from the political realm.

JOAN AND THE ART OF MANLINESS

While Joan's virtue is wondrous itself, one of the themes Twain allows his readers to reflect upon is not simply her modesty, nobility, love of her own, and courage, but also the way in which her virtue is bound to her womanliness, and the unique bearing her femininity has upon her men in the political sphere.⁴² The preeminent example of this is the way in which de

⁴¹ Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (New York: Norton, 1962), 168.

⁴² That Joan's womanliness is a theme in throughout the novel is further supported by Twain's essay on Joan of Arc in which he emphasizes her femininity thus: "And always she was a girl; and dear and worshipful, as is meet for that estate. When she fell wounded the first time, she was frightened, and cried when she saw her blood gushing from her breast; but she was Joan of Arc! and when presently she found that her generals were sounding the retreat, she staggered to her feet and led the assault again and took the place by storm" ("Saint Joan of Arc," 451–52).

Conte describes Joan's interactions with the Dauphin (who, thanks to Joan, is eventually crowned king of France) himself.

The king is frequently described as "indolent" and surrounded by malicious and crafty advisors who successfully counsel inaction and render his rule impotent. When Joan, after innumerable delays contrived by these dubious counselors, finally meets the Dauphin, it is under false pretenses. In order to test the child's divine mission, the counselors have convinced Charles to dress one of his men-at-arms as king and the king himself as a pauper. If Joan should fail to recognize this trap, she will become the laughing stock of the "tinsel show" court, "with its small King and his butterfly dukelets," in such a way as to undermine her mission. Much to the shock of the court and to her own advisors, Joan sees through the trap and immediately identifies the true Dauphin and begs to speak with him privately.⁴³ De Conte describes the effect of that conversation as follows:

The talk between Joan and the King was long and earnest, and held in low voices. We could not hear, but we had our eyes and could note effects; and presently we and all the house noted one effect which was memorable and striking, and has been set down in memoirs and histories and in testimony at the Process of Rehabilitation by some who witnessed it; for all knew it was big with meaning, though none knew what that meaning was at the time, of course. *For suddenly we saw the King shake off his indolent attitude and straighten up like a man*, and at the same time look immeasurably astonished. It was as if Joan had told him something too wonderful for belief, and yet of a most uplifting and welcome nature.⁴⁴

What had Joan told the dispirited Dauphin, the son of the crazed Charles VI and Isabel of Bavaria, who had effectively disinherited their own child? Years later, de Conte learned that Joan allayed the Dauphin's secret fear that he was Isabel's illegitimate son and therefore without rightful claim to the throne that the Treaty of Troyes, allegedly orchestrated by Isabel herself, surrendered to the son of Henry V. Joan spoke to the Dauphin of the "secret trouble" of his heart, a "doubt that wastes away [his] courage, and makes [him] dream of throwing all away and fleeing from [his] realm." Joan dismisses this doubt, this blot on his manhood, saying, "Thou art lawful heir to the King thy father, and true heir of France. God has spoken it. Now lift up thy head, and doubt no more, but give me men-at-arms and let me get about

⁴³ Twain, *Personal Recollections*, 121–23.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 124–25. Emphasis ours.

my work.⁴⁵ It is this affirmation of his legitimacy that “straightened him up and *made a man of him* for a moment,” temporarily setting him free from his cowardly reliance upon deceitful counselors who reduced him to impotency and inaction.

What are we to make of this episode? What does Twain allow us to see through de Conte's narration? Moreover, what are we to make of Joan's ability to avoid the counselors' trap and, unflustered, pursue her mission? On one hand, Joan's bold confidence in pursuit of her mission and in addressing the fears of the king is reminiscent of de Conte's observation earlier in the novel that “prophecies boldly uttered never fall barren on superstitious ears.”⁴⁶ Joan's bold self-assuredness is enough to convince the Dauphin of his legitimacy in itself. But whence does Joan's conviction and unshakable confidence come? It is noteworthy that Twain never gives us reason to doubt the divine source of Joan's prophecies. The accuracy of her insights and predictions remains a mystery, perhaps even a miracle, throughout the text.

Further, Twain allows his narrator to see another dimension of the episode when de Conte describes the simple yet stunning dress Joan wore when she saw the Dauphin. Joan comes dressed in a “simple and witching costume...which I cannot think of even now in my dull age without being moved just as rhythmical and exquisite music moves one; for *that* was music, that dress—that is what it was—music that one saw with the eyes and felt in the heart.” It is as if, for de Conte, that clothing transfigures Joan, revealing her to be what he later calls “the spirit of France made flesh.”⁴⁷ “Yes,” de Conte reminisces, “she was a poem, she was a dream, she was a spirit when she was clothed in that.”⁴⁸

In Twain's rendering, Joan of Arc makes a man out of nearly every cowering Frenchman she meets by becoming the embodiment of everything that is lovable and noble. She is the living Song of Roland, the physical expression

⁴⁵ Ibid., 125.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 102. Early in the second part of the novel, Joan confronts certain men in her cohort who have conspired to take her life and informs them with a simple confidence, “Neither these men nor any others can take my life before my mission is accomplished... I will inform them of this, and also admonish them.” Once Joan informs these men of this, she also looks sorrowfully at the ringleader and observes that it is a pity that he should plot another's death when his own was so close. De Conte confirms that the man died that very night when his horse stumbled and fell crossing a ford. Neither Twain nor de Conte seems to suggest Joan had any part in orchestrating this conveniently timed death. See Foster, “On the Theme,” 50–53 on the role belief in the divine nature of Joan plays in the novel.

⁴⁷ Twain, *Personal Recollections*, 181.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 121.

of a love worthy of sacrificing their very lives in order to defend.⁴⁹ Even the most unseemly vices might be turned to virtues underneath the gaze of Joan of Arc, as when she forms an unlikely bond with the general La Hire, who is often likened to the devil himself. La Hire is a foil for Joan in every way: she is small, he is enormous; she is very light-skinned, he very dark; she a model of purity, he (and his camp of soldiers) a proverbial den of sin who can hardly speak without cursing. Yet he adores Joan and will do her bidding. And Joan's orders to La Hire suggest she has some insight (whether natural or supernatural) into the nature of men, for her first command is that the "loose women" be banished from the camp, then that "rough carousing" stop, that drinking and all other disorder be brought within strict limits, and that each man must be made to go to confession and daily prayers.⁵⁰

Joan purifies La Hire's camp (and, to some extent, the old devil himself) by transforming their promiscuous longings into singular devotion to herself and to her cause, the cause of France and the cause of God. Indeed, this is evident when, during the battle to lift the seven-month English siege of Orleans, Joan successfully leads the French to an unlikely victory, though, in one of the more dramatic moments, she falls wounded. "Over her and about her, English and French fought with desperation—for she stood for France, indeed she *was* France to both sides—whichever won her won France, *and could keep it forever.*"⁵¹ Joan of Arc becomes, for her men, the noble that they will sacrifice every longing to preserve. She becomes, for de Conte, the Dauphin, and her men, *more* than herself, for she *is* France to them. They will fight for her. And it is no accident that what inspires and ennoble these men to rise above their vices of cowardice (in the case of the king) and promiscuity (in the case of La Hire) is not an impressively large number of armed men or a powerful array of efficient weapons, but a small, beautiful, and courageous woman from Domremy. Twain, like Tocqueville, shows us the limits to the utilitarian thinking prized by Americans, and the heights to which beauty can lead men like the king and La Hire to ascend. Indeed, the beautiful Joan makes men of them.⁵²

⁴⁹ See *ibid.*, 46–52.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 154.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 207.

⁵² It is noteworthy that Twain apparently wrote the novel in part in order to rescue Joan of Arc from the salacious portrayal of her character in *Henry VI Part I*, in which Shakespeare makes Joan out to be a liar, a witch, and the king's bedfellow. That this is part of Twain's aim is evident when, in his essay on Joan of Arc, he observes that "three hundred years ago Shakespeare did not know the true story of Joan of Arc; in his day it was unknown even in France. For four hundred years it existed rather as a

Among these elevated examples of the Dauphin and La Hire a lower (but in no way humble) personage stands out: the Paladin. Throughout the text, the Paladin provides a source of comic relief and serves as another foil for Joan, “a kind of copy of Joan’s own [rise] in miniature,” as de Conte notes.⁵³ Whereas Joan is honest, direct, and admirable, the Paladin is a buffoon whose tales of his own imaginary grandeur in battle are filled with lies so large but so lovable that from time to time they bring his audience to tears. Indeed, the Paladin’s very nickname seems a mockery of any form of pretense to the courtly chivalry of the Paladin tradition, which calls to mind romances of knights in shining armor serving their lady and their king with valor and fidelity. The Paladin, as he first appears, is only a boaster, just as is (we might infer) any man who pretends to chivalry, a mere fairy tale to be chased out of modern men who would so much as hold a door for a lady. At least that is what de Conte’s initial portrayal of the Paladin would suggest. Yet no character undergoes so striking a transformation as the Paladin. In so doing, he becomes a vindication of the very form of manliness at which his name seems to poke fun, and it is none other than Joan who inspires this conversion.

Unlike Joan’s other childhood friends who accompanied her on her reconquest of France, the Paladin is crestfallen when the commission appointed by the Dauphin to investigate the sanctity of her mission clears Joan’s name and she is subsequently named “General-in-Chief of the Armies of France.”⁵⁴ His despair is largely due to the fact that prior to Joan’s embarking on her expedition the Paladin boasted himself into believing that she had promised to marry him. As a result of this, Joan was compelled to defend herself in an ecclesiastical court at Toul, where she cross-examined the Paladin, whose testimony “went rag by rag to ruin under her ingenious hands, until at last he stood bare, so to speak, he that had come so richly clothed in fraud and falsehood.”⁵⁵ How could one guilty of tarnishing the reputation of Joan of Arc and causing her such trouble hope to be anything other than an object of scorn and vengeance once she rose to high rank? Joan’s other childhood companions have hope of (and receive) formal appointments in Joan’s household, but the Paladin refrains from approaching Joan while she makes these

vaguely defined romance than as a definite and authentic history” (“Saint Joan of Arc,” 441). Whereas Shakespeare’s *Henry VI* implies Joan “made a man” of the king in the lowest, most promiscuous sense, Twain sets out to clarify that Joan makes men out of her followers by lifting their gaze to what is noble and away from what is base.

⁵³ Twain, *Personal Recollections*, 149.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 142.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 83.

installations—ashamed, for once, of his actions. Yet Joan calls him forth and speaks to him:

The Paladin entered humbly enough. He ventured no farther than just within the door. He stopped there, looking embarrassed and afraid. Then Joan spoke pleasantly, and said—"I watched you on the road. You began badly, but improved. Of old you were a fantastic talker, *but there is a man in you, and I will bring it out.*"⁵⁶

How will Joan make a man of the Paladin? "Will you follow where I lead?" she asks him. "Into the fire!" he replies. "I believe you," says Joan. Following this exchange, Joan appoints the Paladin to a most preeminent and enviable position; she makes him her standard bearer, one who will stand alongside her, a visible point of encouragement for her own troops and a target of attack for her enemies. A more honorable position on the battlefield does not exist, according to de Conte. The Paladin and his peers are stunned. "If I ever disgrace this trust, my comrades here will know how to do a friend's office upon my body, and this charge I lay upon them as knowing they will not fail me," the Paladin says with emotion. "By the ring of that," observes de Conte, "she has turned this braggart into a hero. It is another of her miracles I make no doubt of it."⁵⁷

While the Paladin never ceases to be a source of comic relief throughout the novel, this episode marks a change in him visible even to his friends. De Conte's conversation with Noël, another of Joan's childhood friends who often plays the straight man to the Paladin's buffoonery, bears this out. When Noël expresses his confusion at Joan's pick of the Paladin, de Conte defends her choice: "You have noticed that our chief knight says a good many wise things and has a thoughtful head on his shoulders. One day, riding along, we were talking about Joan's great talents, and he said, 'But, greatest of all her gifts is the seeing eye.'" Whereas "the common eye sees only the outside of things, and judges by that," Joan's seeing eye "pierces through and reads the heart and the soul, finding there capacities which the outside didn't indicate or promise, and which the other kind of eye couldn't detect." "Joan," de Conte says, defending her choice of standard bearer, "probably knows what is in him better than we do....When a person in Joan of Arc's position tells a man he is brave, he *believes* it; and *believing* it is enough; in fact to believe yourself brave is to be brave." Noël agrees. "She's got a creating mouth as well as the

⁵⁶ Ibid., 147. Emphasis ours.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 147–48.

seeing eye! Ah yes, that is the thing. France was cowed and a coward; Joan of Arc has spoken, and France is marching, with her head up!"⁵⁸

As much as Twain pokes fun at the romantic excesses of the chivalric tradition through the Paladin's character, how much more does he see in that once cowardly "lion"⁵⁹ a model of the manliness that might be drawn forth from men through a similar encounter with Joan of Arc's nobility. Indeed, the Paladin's final deed proclaims this more loudly than all his boasting. During Joan's final battle after which she is taken captive, it is the Paladin who remains defending her until the end.

The little personal guard around her thinned swiftly...When only the Dwarf and the Paladin were left, they would not give up, but stood their ground stoutly, a pair of steel towers streaked and splashed with blood; and where the axe of the one fell, and the sword of the other, an enemy gasped and died. And so fighting, and loyal to their duty to the last, good simple souls, they came to their honorable end. Peace to their memories!⁶⁰

In his final moment memorialized by de Conte we see the man Joan has made of the Paladin. He remains true to his oath and true to his name, dying nobly in battle defending the lady to whom he has sworn to be true. And if this dynamic change can occur in this once hollow-chested boaster, how much more reason is there to hope that Twain's readers might themselves be ennobled by encountering Joan's story through de Conte's retelling?

CONCLUSION: MARTYRDOM AND MEMORY

Twain described his *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc* as a work of love. And, indeed, as the novel draws to its close, it would be hard to see anything but what is lovable in the character and action of Joan of Arc. De Conte calls Joan the "spirit of France made flesh." For Twain, she seems above all to be the spirit of the noble and beautiful made flesh, embodying everything that is good and lovable in mankind.

And yet for all Joan's virtue, for all her inspiring nobility and ennobling of her men, at the end of her life she nevertheless falls into and remains in English hands, largely on account of the Dauphin's inaction. Unlike the Paladin, who rises to the heights of nobility under Joan's gaze, the Dauphin (now

⁵⁸ Ibid., 149–51.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 98, 111.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 304–5.

King Charles VII), who owes his very monarchic legitimacy to the prophecy and valor of Joan of Arc, falls into his habitual cowardice, failing to act when Joan encourages him to do so, and eventually even omitting to send an offer of ransom on Joan's behalf. What are we to make of this? Does it not indicate that Joan is a failure? Has Twain simply told a tragic tale that stirs the souls of his audience but leaves us without hope? What indeed *is* Twain's teaching in the novel? Or has he merely told a story of ages past and times long ago to allow his audience a temporary distraction from whatever misery to which they may be subject?

One of the novel's more comic moments sheds light on Twain's intention in writing his novel. Just after Joan achieves the decisive French victory by winning the battle of Patay and the Dauphin finally allows himself to be crowned at her bidding, Joan's father and her uncle Laxart come to visit her. They are simple men whose experience of the world has not extended much beyond Domremy, and when they enter into the presence of noble lords and ladies and Joan herself, they have little notion of what propriety would require. Even after a day filled with feasts held in honor of their dear Joan, neither Laxart nor Papa D'Arc appear capable of grasping Joan's greatness. She remains in their eyes a child, and in many ways, she is. And so when Joan asks for news of her beloved Domremy, "that simple old Laxart," de Conte tells us, "sat up there and droned out the most tedious and empty tale one ever heard, and neither he nor Papa D'Arc ever gave a thought to the badness of the etiquette of it, or ever suspected that that foolish tale was anything but dignified and valuable history."⁶¹

What exactly were the contents of that tale? Three weeks prior, Uncle Laxart attempted to attend a funeral. But, realizing he was late for the event, Laxart decided to ride a young bull (Joan's previously) to the funeral to make up the time. On the way, the bull naturally lost its temper, bellowed into the village, knocked down some beehives, disrupted the funeral procession, and eventually broke loose from Laxart's control entirely, leaving the old man to suffer alone from an infuriated swarm of bees.⁶² At the end of his woeful tale, Uncle Laxart can only scratch his head and wonder why Joan is laughing. At this point, de Conte interjects, expressing his indignation at Laxart's stupidity:

⁶¹ Ibid., 279.

⁶² Ibid., 279–80.

Yes, both of those old people thought that that tale was pathetic; whereas to my mind it was purely ridiculous, and not in any way valuable to any one. It seemed so to me then, and it seems so to me yet. And as for history, it does not resemble history, for the office of history is to furnish serious and important facts that *teach*; whereas this strange and useless event teaches nothing; nothing that I can see, except not to ride a bull to a funeral; and surely no reflecting person needs to be taught that.⁶³

While in some ways de Conte's unforgiving outrage is as laughable as Laxart's ridiculous tale, it is as if Twain allows his narrator to point to a deeper truth about the purpose of telling a story, particularly if that story is a history as is his *Personal Recollections*. The truth de Conte points us to is that history is a teacher, and the teller of a history ought not to tell a "pathetic" tale if it communicates only what a "reflecting person" would see clearly without much reflection.

What is it, then, that Twain desires to teach? In his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle argues that there is a certain pleasure that accompanies the memory of painful events, for if what is noble or beautiful came from something painful, the memory itself becomes a source of sweetness (1379b1–3). In retelling the story of Joan through de Conte, Twain enshrines a vision of what is noble, the total self-sacrifice of a pure, lovely, virtuous child for the sake of her God and her country, in the memories of his own American readers. This is precisely the audience that de Tocqueville suggests is most likely to exchange what is most noble for what is useful or convenient, and thereby forget the possibility of noble virtue and self-sacrifice that could be the fruits of the very freedom their own regime is constructed to defend. Indeed, we learn through our translator's rare footnotes that even the progeny of de Conte's great-grand nieces and nephews have forgotten what they owe to Joan of Arc, as many of her patriotic relics were destroyed during the democratic excesses of the French Revolution. When the Paladin fell defending Joan in her final battle, the standard he carried so valiantly was eventually smuggled behind French lines and preserved, "safe for all time in the Treasury" of Orleans. Or so de Conte imagines at the time. The translator at this point interjects a footnote:

[Joan's standard] remained there three hundred and sixty years, and then was destroyed in a public bonfire, together with two swords, a plumed cap, several suits of state apparel, and other relics of the Maid, by a mob in the time of the Revolution. Nothing which the hand of Joan of Arc is known to have touched now remains in existence except

⁶³ Ibid., 281.

a few preciously guarded military and state papers which she signed, her pen being guided by a clerk or her secretary Louis de Conte.⁶⁴

The democratic excesses of the French Revolution led to the destruction of the physical memorials of Joan's short and noble life.

In observing Twain's evident love for Joan, the object of devotion in his work "written for love," one cannot but wonder about the consistency of his love for Joan with his reputation of dark humor and cynicism. Indeed, it may be that this reputation stands in the way of our appreciation of his seriousness as a thinker, a seriousness evident in the ending of another of his renowned American classics, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, which, like *Personal Recollections*, contains as much comedy as it does moral seriousness. In it, Hank Morgan, "a likeable young man from Connecticut, endowed with the defining sensibilities of late nineteenth-century America," wakes up in Arthurian England after an unfortunate encounter with a crowbar. Seeing the poverty, disease, slavery, and inequality present in the place of "mythic Arthurian charm," Hank sets out to modernize the kingdom by promoting education, industry, scientific innovation, and democratic rights.⁶⁵ Yet in the end, Hank's project fails, as his attempts to modernize medieval England meet with a counterrevolution of 25,000 knights attempting to defend their way of life. After a final battle of utter destruction, Hank and his victorious boys are sure to die, as they cannot leave the bunker they fight from (or else they will be killed by the people of Arthurian England), and they cannot stay without succumbing to the disease and pestilence of the bodies of thousands of knights that litter the field around them. Hank's modernizing project ends in ruins, and above all else the destruction of the very knights and their way of life the Paladin's nickname calls to mind in *Personal Recollections*. In the name of progress, Hank has razed the noblest aspirations of the medieval world.⁶⁶

After this battle, Hank finds himself on his deathbed in America thirteen centuries later in the presence of Twain, to whom Hank has given the manuscript that records these events and who personally narrates this encounter with the dying Hank. Yet as he lays dying it is not the battle or his technological conquest that remains foremost in Hank's thoughts, but rather the memory of his beloved wife, Sandy, a maid of Arthurian England:

⁶⁴ Ibid., 314.

⁶⁵ Wayne Ambler, "Making Men Modern," *New Atlantis*, no. 23 (Winter 2009): 121.

⁶⁶ While many read Twain's *Connecticut Yankee* as a mockery of medieval chivalry and praise of modern progress, Ambler argues convincingly that it is in fact a satirical ballad of praise to modern progress. See "Making Men Modern," esp. 128–29.

Oh, Sandy, you are come at last—how I have longed for you! Sit by me—do not leave me—never leave me again, Sandy, never again.... Such strange and awful dreams, Sandy!...Yes, I seemed to have flown back out of that age into this of ours, and then forward to it again, and was set down, a stranger and forlorn in that strange England, with an abyss of thirteen centuries yawning between me and you! between me and my home and my friends! *between me and all that is dear to me, all that could make life worth living!* It was awful—awfuler than you can ever imagine, Sandy. Ah, watch by me, Sandy—stay by me every moment—*don't let me go out of my mind again.*⁶⁷

Hank's dying hallucinations are as hauntingly beautiful as they are revealing of Twain's vision of the limits to the modern world's ability to fulfill human longing. Ironically, in Hank's very hallucinations, it becomes clear that his modern aspirations to build a world of progress and utility are what have driven him out of his mind, and his longings for Sandy and "all that could make life worth living"—preserved in the all too imperfect world of medieval England—are all that remain at death's door. In the end, the very progress that aimed to repair the ills inherent to Arthurian England pales in comparison to the way of life it destroys, a life of devotion to God, to king, to family, and to one's beloved.

In his *Personal Recollections*, the last and most obviously loving of his novels, Twain assumes Hank's posture at the end of *Connecticut Yankee*, reaching for Joan in much the same way that Hank reaches for Sandy. Twain and the Connecticut Yankee have switched places, and what is left in the end of both novels is longing for and the memory of what is beautiful. None of the progress and utility of the modern world can do away with that. Through his final novel, Twain attempts to recover the memory of what is noble for his own audience, and in recollecting Joan's words and deeds perhaps even to rekindle and preserve a glimpse of what is lovable, good, and worthy of defense no matter the utility, no matter the cost. Joan's ability to inspire the Paladin, that once faint-hearted coward, is something Twain hopes to preserve for his own audience. And perhaps, should he preserve the possibility of a woman so noble as to turn cowardice into courage, despair into hope, fear into active pursuit of the good, we, too, might remember his lesson.

⁶⁷ Mark Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (Norwalk, CT: Easton, 1983), 274–75. Emphasis ours. Huck's description of Tom Sawyer's excessively romanticized plans to free Jim might be aptly applied to the Yankee: "He had a dream...and it shot him" (*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, 214).

Living Automatically, Living Remotely: On the Contemporary Reduction of Experience and Decision-Making Spaces

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*To the memory of my father,
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Abstract: Technology transforms human life and reduces the spaces of experience and decision making. This article proposes a brief phenomenology of this view of life, systematizes some arguments of contemporary philosophers who have diagnosed this situation by relating technology to capitalism and liberalism (Benjamin, Heidegger, Schmitt, Negri, Blumenberg) and others who have suggested ideas to compensate for it (Land, Agamben, Badiou, Gumbrecht). From this perspective, we finally offer alternatives to think about how to avoid the undesirable consequences of colonization by, and the determination of life by, technology.

Key words: experience, decision, technology, narratives, rituals

1. FROM HOME AUTOMATION TO AUTOMATIC CAR, THROUGH SIRI

In “15 Million Merits,” the second episode of the first season of the TV series *Black Mirror*, the allegory of a future world is presented in which individuals, held at installations where they are limited to producing energy by pedaling on stationary bicycles and surrounded by consumer technology, pornography, and trash TV, are fully integrated in a virtual environment. This environment is no longer just an extrinsic medium or instrument, but one that determines their goals and their own life, to the point that men and women are mere avatars and relate to each other as such in a pixelated environment.

The determination of the meaning of life by technology reaches a higher level of radicalism in the third episode of the series, “The Entire History of You.” People have a storage chip installed behind their ear for the images and sounds they pick up through their eyes and ears. This allows an absolute and permanently accessible memory of everything lived. This technological possibility would mean that our lives would be permanently conditioned by the past because it would not be possible to forget it. This would transform our identity, our sense of forgiveness, the promises we make, and other aspects of the way we live.

This dystopia describes, in an (at least for now) exaggerated form appropriate to fictive art, the life of most individuals in contemporary developed societies. The presence of technology in our life does not simply affect and condition it extrinsically, like an artificial limb that is added to it, leaving intact its nature, but transforms, determines, and produces such life as human life. Subordination or subsumption (using Marx’s terminology, to which I will return later) affects not only the labor force, but all dimensions of human being, giving them new meanings, new purposes, and a new “nature.” Our relationships, our desires, our fears and hopes, our expectations, our way of living and loving, our feelings, our work and our leisure, our language—absolutely everything has been substantially modified by technology. It has never been more evident that our mode of being is now technological. The key point is that technology, unlike what some authors have claimed, is not neutral. As I will argue later, technology is an essential ally of what we can generically call “liberal political culture,” in which, among other things, the parliamentary system and market capitalism converge.

The subsumption of our life by technology implies, among other things, a drastic transformation and reduction of the capacity (moments, spaces) of decision and experience, which becomes superfluous in the face of the automatic operation of processes. Increasingly, machines supply our need to make decisions and transform our way of experiencing so that it becomes unrecognizable. This automatic and impersonal functioning of life presides over our daily lives. Thus, in the domestic sphere robots are taking on an increasingly central role. These do not simply help and complement our action, but transform our way of being in the house and produce an essentially different life. Our refrigerators are programmed to detect deficiencies, to contact the supermarket and request missing products. Our garden irrigation systems measure nitrate and humidity levels and activate sprinklers automatically. We program in advance using our smartphones for activating

and controlling the temperature of domestic heating so that the house is warm when we arrive at night. Our washing machines detect the weight of our clothes and automatically manage the amount of detergent and fabric softener required, as well as the drying time depending on the fabric type. And we also program the stove, the microwave, the closure of the terrace awning according to wind and rain, and other factors. Shutters and lights, air conditioners, and music systems automatically turn on and off in accord with their detection of the presence or absence of individuals nearby.

Clothing and accessories, too, have become matters colonized by sensors connected to the Internet that are able to measure multiple parameters (body temperature, calories consumed, levels of substances in the body, meters walked, etc.) and that can activate the appropriate responses. The use of garments made of tissues capable of analyzing the state of our organism, and administering the appropriate dose of a prescribed drug through the skin, is increasingly widespread. The realm of intelligent fabrics is developing strongly. There are sensory fabrics with applications in home automation, aeronautics, and the automotive industry; others for the monitoring of physiological signals applied in telemedicine and for occupational safety: socks that promote the healing of the skin, antistress sheets, biocide and antidodor underwear, carpets for the control of video games, and even tissues that monitor respiratory rhythm, among others.

The so-called Internet of things (or “in things”) is a good example of the feedback between automatic life and remote communication of which the Internet consists. The concept, proposed by Kevin Ashton in 1999, refers to the connection between everyday objects and the Internet, through both identification devices placed on things and an address that is based on some of the existing protocols. This situation would allow computers to control their status and to activate responses regardless of human action, that is, from spontaneous decisions and interactions between the applications themselves in “the cloud.” In a sense, all objects would become intelligent insofar as they were self-organizing and capable of acting in the light of circumstances and without the concurrence of human decisions.

One of the main actions through which we exercise our belonging to society and our visibility in public space, driving a car, is also gearing up to deprive us of the leading role of decision making: the introduction of driverless cars, that is, of cars that run on autopilot, appears to be unstoppable. Furthermore, it is no longer necessary to know how to write well: self-correctors automatically correct our errata. The screen is a constant source of information that is

unsolicited and not decided upon: sophisticated banners and software agents constantly remind us of our profile and what our tastes and preferences are, offering us products we do not ask for. Moreover, machines have become our privileged and sometimes almost unique partners. This is demonstrated by applications such as Siri, an assistant with its own personality that advises and recommends services by adapting to the tastes of the user and that is able to perform actions for the user based on these tastes.

In general, technology already makes it possible for artificial intelligence (AI) to organize humans. The reason is that there is so much data about each of us (when we accept the licensing terms of a smartphone application, we hand over our data in exchange for using that application) and so much ability to process and identify correlations using algorithms, which can be used to predict our tastes and behavior and, to this extent, condition and guide them. And this is done not by other individuals, but by the devices themselves equipped with AI. That is, information and data explain themselves, self-interpret, and discover cause-effect relationships on their own. And big companies make decisions without knowing why. Thus, eighty percent of exchange transactions are decided by AI. And almost all the decisions of the electricity grid are taken by AI, which locates in real time who needs energy. The human species is evolving in convergence with technology, to the point that it could almost be said that individuals are directed to become cells of a larger organism endowed with its own logic, opaque to ourselves as our consciousness is to our bodily cells.

This loss of the leading role of the decision maker is an indication and a cause of a distance between everyday gestures (basically moving fingers or hands to touch screens) and the results that this generates, which implies a drastic transformation of experience because it is unmanageable by the imagination. Thus, for example, the human mind is unable to take responsibility for the link that can exist between typing a phone number on a smartphone and civil wars for control of the coltan mine that devastate the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda; or between the gesture of turning on a personal computer and the microprocessor assembly lines in Taiwan; or, in short, between the operation of any of our electronic devices, filled with electrodes and microchips, and work in graphite holdings in China or Brazil, and other such cases.

This anti-intuitive and difficult-to-imagine link is analogous to the link between our behavior as consumers and the behavior of capital markets. Contemporary capitalism is increasingly abstract, purely speculative and

financial. This does not mean, as we shall later verify, that it lacks a link with actual work, but that this link is concealed, hidden, and that material work has been affected by technology to the point that its nature has radically changed. New computer technologies have transformed productive processes radicalizing the deterritorialization of the capitalist system. It is not only that the capitalist system tends to lead to globalization, which abolishes frontiers, but, increasingly, that there are more jobs that are carried out at a distance, on the net, online, remotely, and beyond all contact (except typing, looking at the screen and, at most, being seen on it).

2. FROM THE “ALL-SEEING EYE” TO THE DRONE; FROM THE PANOPTICON TO SOCIAL NETWORKS

In an article entitled “The All-Seeing Eye,” published in 1948,¹ René Guénon described a symbol common to both Christianity and Freemasonry, which consists of a triangle in which there is an eye called “the all-seeing eye.” It is a frontal eye that sees everything in the perfect simultaneity of the eternal present. Guénon emphasized his double sense of omnipresence and providence. In parallel, Christian iconography has emphasized various dimensions of God’s being (goodness, sovereignty, justice, etc.). One of them has been God’s ability to see everything (omnivision), the basis of providence. Nothing escapes the sight and will of God.

The ideal of full vision in the service of surveillance and control of behavior reached its clearest expression in the Enlightenment, with the Panopticon of Bentham. The operation of this device was inspired by the model of the eye from which nothing escapes. We owe the most sophisticated and fertile philosophical analysis of the Panopticon to Michel Foucault. In *Discipline and Punish*, he refers its meaning to the disciplinary character of time, which is defined by this new way of seeing. According to Foucault, the Panopticon is a symbol and a cause of the organizing principles of the disciplines and a model of the strategies of control of bodies of the enlightened society. Its objective was to achieve economical surveillance, that is, the most effective surveillance from a single point. The prisoner is seen, but he does not see the inside of the watch-tower and, therefore, does not know if he is being watched, being subjected to a state of continuous surveillance that runs automatically. The decisive thing is that thorough checking of the operations of the body and the imposition of docility and submission are constituents of habits and,

¹ René Guénon, “The All-Seeing Eye,” in *Symbols of Sacred Science*, trans. Henry D. Fohr (Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2004), 422–25.

consequently, of human ways of being.² In other words, the watchful eye of the Panopticon is neither objective nor neutral, but a constituent of the individuals under guard.

Foucault's analysis allows us to understand the essence of the urban landscape as an area of collective surveillance; in cities everything seems ready for production, exchange, and consumption, but also for humans' control and regulation of each other. This principle has reached an extreme degree of efficiency and sophistication owing to contemporary technological development. Two devices stand out because both guarantee at the same time maximum vision and visibility: drones and social networks.

The drone exemplifies paradigmatically the synthesis of the ideals of God's all-seeing ability (omnivision and omnivisibility) with those of action at a distance. Compared to video-surveillance cameras, which are increasing in our cities, the drone incorporates mobility. In this sense, it adds to the attributes of divinity (omniscience, omnipotence, invulnerability) the attribute of ubiquity: the drone sees everything and is everywhere. To these capacities is added the following threat, no less: the drone, as God, watches from above.

According to Benjamin Noys, the drone possesses theological and metaphysical dimensions that imply the desires for transcendence and for destruction that define the Western imagination. Without considering these dimensions it is not possible to understand the essence of the drone. These dimensions, which transcend the functions of surveillance and punishment, have to do with the ability of the drone to construct and legislate a world and to alter the conception of the human. Noys alludes to Adorno's *Minima Moralia* to argue that the new technologies of death call into question Hegel's philosophy of history because they demonstrate that the spirit of the world is embodied in machines without a subject, in robots, whereas in Hegel's philosophy of history the spirit of the world is embodied in individuals. Thus we enter into a new era of modernity in which vehicles without pilots and automatic weapons show and represent the nullity and dispensability of the subject and, to that extent, of reason itself. On the horizon you can see the dream (or nightmare) of the completely automatic drone, without a pilot, making decisions based on algorithms. Obviously, this raises issues of imputation and responsibility.³

² Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 195–228.

³ Benjamin Noys, "Drone Metaphysics," *Culture Machine*, no. 16 (2005): 1–22.

Omnivision and omnivisibility have almost reached perfection with social networks, supported by devices that have a huge capacity to produce vision and visibility. Much has been written about life being exposed to social networks. Here, I will only highlight two unique features which have to do with automatic life and life at a distance. For one, it can be affirmed that, on many occasions, individuals do not use social networks, but are used by them; that is, they do not always exercise control over them, but suffer from them. In social networks it is easy to become an object of analysis, comments, contemplation, scrutiny, and the induction of desires. This contributes to erasing the distinction between the public and the private: social networks constitute a species of agora in which private and seemingly secret gestures can take on a public dimension.

The other characteristic refers to the effects of the transformation of habits. Many of our relationships are mediated by a touch screen. We interact and communicate with people who are at a distance, but are looking at or typing on a screen. We access much content and can see and hear almost anything we want, but on the screen. One of the major symbols of this transition is probably the displacement of books on paper by e-books; and also the replacement of traditional games with digital and virtual games. In a sense, the enhancement of sight and hearing is concomitant with the de-potentialization of touch, taste, and smell. We attend to a different way (neither better nor worse) of experiencing others and the relationship between communication and space.

3. LOSS OF EXPERIENCE, NEUTRALITY, ABSTRACTION, AND SUBSUMPTION: CATEGORIES FOR A PHILOSOPHICAL GENEALOGY OF THE RELATIONS BETWEEN TECHNOLOGY, CAPITALISM, AND LIBERALISM

In this section I intend to elevate to concepts the brief phenomenology of the presence of technology in our lives that I have presented. If I had to coin expressions to synthetically apprehend this presence, I would propose “automatic life” and “life at a distance.” We automatically and remotely live out many of our experiences for most of the day. Both leisure and work are increasingly done through a screen and consist more and more of something that happens on a screen. This massive presence of technology substantially affects humankind’s way of being. During the first third of the twentieth century, and from then onwards, there were many diagnoses of the consequences of the development of technology for life in general and for human life. Many of these diagnoses linked the development of technology and its

colonization of all areas of life with the parallel development of capitalism. Moreover, they considered that technology and capitalism conditioned and fed each other, that is, that technological development was a factor in the development of capitalism, and vice versa.

One of the first philosophers to connect the effects of technological development to the loss of experience was Walter Benjamin. Adopting a Kantian perspective, he identified two historical causes of loss of experience: the world war, which produced such profound and rapid changes that are impossible to assimilate and share, and technology, whose disproportionate development prevents its integration into the human world, which ends up being colonized and transformed by it into an anonymous world, isolated and saturated with signs which do not favor the communication of experiences between generations.⁴ Benjamin associated the ability to experience and to narrate when he linked the loss of experience to the end of the narrative understood as oral transmission based on one's own life, a forger of community and an inexhaustible source of teaching that demands the calm and attention of the listener. The reason for the end of the capacity to narrate is the disappearance of the concept of eternity and the consequent transformation of the concept of death and the sense of time. This transformation entails the disappearance of the legitimating ancestral authority of narration because the narrator purports to tell the histories that have been received from the ancestors.⁵ A consequence is the replacement of experience with mere shock, which is received passively and is nonshareable, which has become the generalized way of life of the masses enhanced by the technical means of production and the apparatuses that flood daily life. It is meaningless to appeal to subjectivity because this life leads to reflex behavior. From this diagnosis, Benjamin's therapeutic proposal was to expand the concept of experience by integrating and articulating individual and collective memory. In his view, only this will allow the shock to become experience by being referred to the continuity of the community in a diachronic and synchronic sense. It is significant that Benjamin, who was always critical of myth, referred to the cults and their

⁴ Walter Benjamin, "Experience and Poverty," in *Selected Writings, Volume 2: 1927–1934* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 731–36. See also Gabriel Amengual, "Pérdida de la experiencia y ruptura de la tradición. La experiencia en el pensamiento de Walter Benjamin," in *Ruptura de la tradición. Estudios sobre Walter Benjamin y Martin Heidegger*, ed. G. Amengual et al. (Madrid: Trotta, 2008), 29–59.

⁵ Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nicolai Leskov," in *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 83–110.

ceremonies as a paradigmatic mediation to extend experience by their ability to renew and articulate individual and collective memory.⁶

A few years later, Martin Heidegger elevated the critique of technology to the ontological plane. In his view, technology represents a violence infringing on the natural rhythm of *physis*, a provocation of Being with potentially catastrophic consequences. In the lecture “What Are Poets For?,” he argues that calculation, markets, and technical dominion of the earth dissolve the human from the human being and the character of thing from things.⁷ And in his well-known “Die Frage nach der Technik,” modern technology is interpreted as a device of imposition on nature in order to reveal her as a simple set of controllable and measurable energy processes. It is a destiny before which human action (that is, politics) cannot do anything. Heidegger is opposed to the development of technology and he professes to access a more initial truth, an access that moves toward a more original unveiling that would be given in and through poetic action.⁸ This diagnosis was a sign of the traumatic postwar context and was in the service of his understanding: in view of the results of the conjunction of technology and the *Wille zur Macht*, the advent of emancipation cannot come from rational action.

Heidegger’s position illuminates by contrast the diagnosis made by another Nazi before the Great War. Carl Schmitt also criticized technology, but not because he considered it an expression of the violence of the will (and, in this measure, of politics), but because of its heterogeneity to it. In an early text on Catholicism he confronted the idea of modern political and economic thought, which he considered akin to technology. In his view, their development leads societies to the absence of purpose and to absolutization of the privacy of interests.⁹ Schmitt regarded modernity as a period lacking an objective foundation for the constitution of a sovereign order and, to that extent, the modern will of the technical mastery of reality is for him a symptom of a Promethean nihilism, a product of the immanence of the epoch and a sign of decoupling with the land. In this sense, the aim of modernity would be to neutralize conflict and secure an order based on accepted values. Since Romanticism, technology and economics have united and have eclipsed all

⁶ Walter Benjamin, “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” in *Illuminations*, 155–200.

⁷ Martin Heidegger, “What Are Poets For?,” in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2001), 87–90.

⁸ Martin Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (New York: Garland, 1977), 3–35.

⁹ Carl Schmitt, *Roman Catholicism and Political Form* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1996), 25–28.

other spheres of action. The goal of such a reductive evolution is to neutralize conflict by identifying a new, more neutral sphere of sense that emerges as a new mediation in the face of which the figure of the decision is unnecessary. Technology and economics seem to have realized the modern yearning for objectivity and rationality; the desire for a complete, rational, and transparent neutralization of conflict. Such a pre-eminence of these spheres of action affects the state, which is reduced to a neutral and technical body, impotent and lacking in legitimacy or sovereignty.¹⁰ Schmitt argued that technology, capitalist economy, and liberal parliamentarism were manifestations of a single spirit that craves neutrality, that is, that seeks the resolution of conflicts through mechanisms that make any decision unnecessary.

In a certain sense, it is possible to affirm that this linkage of technology with capitalism and liberalism has its origin in Marx. Marx had used the term “subsumption” to grasp the relationship of labor to capital in the context of the capitalist system. In his view, the colonization of the different spheres of action by the capitalist *ratio* tends to integrate, surpass, subordinate, transcend, and/or subsume bodily social relationships (force, labor) in processes and abstract results that are producers of realities which are also abstract, such as commodities or values. He distinguished between a formal or incomplete subsumption by which the labor process is integrated into capital and becomes the instrument of creation of surplus value (the form is modified, but not the materiality of the labor process), and a real subsumption, by which capital reaches a complete mystification and the productive forces of labor appear as a productive force of capital.¹¹ This implies a transformation of the work process itself owing to technology (fixed capital): the machine dominates the worker and not vice versa. With real or material subsumption, the fetishism of capital is reinforced, since the social productive forces of labor present themselves as a preexisting reality independent on the will of the worker and of living labor, which are subordinated to them.

The Fordist-Taylorist model of workers’ domination by the machine, which implies a real subsumption, has now largely been overcome. The so-called

¹⁰ Carl Schmitt, “La época de la neutralidad,” in *Estudios Políticos* (Madrid: Cultura Española, 1941), 15, 23–24.

¹¹ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (London: New Left Review, 1976); Marx, “Formal and Real Subsumption of Labour under Capital,” in *Economic Manuscripts of 1861–63*, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1861/economic/ch37.htm>, accessed Jan. 25, 2017. On this issue, see Nicolás Pagura, “El concepto de ‘subsunción’ como clave para la interpretación del lugar del trabajo en el capitalismo actual,” <http://www.catedras.fsoc.uba.ar/heler/16.12.08pagura.htm>, accessed Jan. 25, 2017.

post-Fordist models transform the worker into an individual borrower of a service and reinforce the abstract character of work (that is, as a merely surplus producer). Among other characteristics, new technologies (personal computers, smartphones, etc.) allow the workday to be extended to encompass all day and any place, blurring the difference between personal life and working life. This implies a real subsumption of the whole life of individuals to capital, blurring the difference between life and work. Individuals become a sophisticated piece of the productive system and their capabilities can no longer be developed independently of capital. The automation of work brought about by technology does not diminish the necessary individual working time nor does it create the possibility of an independent communicative sphere (as Gorz argues),¹² but turns individuals into automatons: both producing and consuming (in an outsourced economy consumption is a factor of production and therefore of production of surplus value). This shows that the objective of capital is not to reduce working time, but to increase surplus value. For this reason the whole of life is subsumed to capital, and the value of use subsumed in the exchange. In other words, technology allows the whole of life to be colonized by the logic of labor and capital. There is not an outside capital, and all social production of value through language and cooperation is subsumed into capital, which appropriates it and transforms individuals into part of the machine, into machines properly. Real subsumption creates the illusion that capital reproduces itself independently of labor, but what happens is that this (the social force of labor) is materially subsumed in capital and appears as the force of capital.

Antonio Negri assumes this Marxist diagnosis but maintains that the linguistic, cooperative, and imaginative capacities of the current workforce develop autonomously and independently of capital. That is to say: in a certain sense (at least in their liberating potentiality), those capacities are an uncontaminated outside. He and Michael Hardt have argued that in the present period of development of capitalism, the subsumption of the force of production (that is, of labor) in capitalist relations has made it possible to overcome contradictions and to extend the immaterial job, and has given rise to (or better: has brought forth) a new subjectivity other than the proletariat of societies of sovereignty and discipline, and it is akin to the present society of communication: the multitude. This means that force not only creates goods alienated in capital, but also raises social relations and life, that is, it visualizes the multitude as a new biopolitical class. This would not be incompatible

¹² André Gorz, *Adiós al proletariado (más allá del socialismo)* (Buenos Aires: Imago Mundi, 1989).

with real subsumption, but, on the contrary, a consequence of its passage. By virtue of this, external mechanisms of regulation and discipline give way (and this is an indication and a cause of the decline of nation-states) to a controlled society in which such mechanisms become immanent in the private or social field (“society”) and are democratized by penetrating all bodies and social relationships. Negri and Hardt call this transit the passage from the disciplinary sovereignty of the people to the biopolitical empire of the multitude, which is governed with the instruments of the capitalist system and within the social relationships of real subsumption. Technological development is a determinant of this qualitative leap to subordination, in which capital no longer absorbs something external to it, but something internal.¹³

Negri and Hardt refer to emancipation of a collective subject: the multitude. The multitude constitutes an autonomous and pure force which is the a priori of all production and which is capable of taking control of the processes of machine metamorphosis. It is composed of all the figures of the current social production and its most clear index is immaterial work in the form of social networks based on communication and affective relations. The multitude’s resistance is exercised in immanent processes of an ontological character and with no identity or unity. Negri and Hardt’s argument is very abstract and counterfactual, but we could exemplify these processes by pointing out events such as spontaneous manifestations, the increase of communicative flows, the growth of cooperativism, and so on. However, all examples are inadequate. The only thing that is clear is that the liberation is referred to ontological events devoid of mediations and which do not depend on any human will, since the multitude is a diffuse set of singularities.¹⁴ In other words, there is no mediation (that is, clear and recognizable procedures) for the global emancipatory situation because it is already happening; it is a form of political organization and a political project whose possibility, spurred on by the contradictions of capitalism, becomes effective in the present. One consequence is that there is no place for the individual subject, for his action and his decision. These are referred to the event of the multitude, which is not a collective subject but an unrepresentable and counterfactual ontological reality, a set of relations and a workforce formed by new technologies and expressed in the biopolitical network.

¹³ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 35–38, 230–49, 305–8.

¹⁴ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 87–90, 121–24, 222–25, 360–87.

In short, new technologies of communication have radically transformed and uprooted the economy, money, leisure, science, devices of domination, and the state itself. Real subsumption has reached a point of no return and has no alternative. Individuals seem to have lost all prominence, seem to have been dissolved into the flow of algorithms, of automatic reactions, of abstract procedures, of remote control, of remote action, of virtual relationships, of online contact, of disembodiment, and other such phenomena. Is it reversible? Is there an outside? Is it possible to think of an emancipatory historical action? What would its conditions be? Is there at least some compensation?

4. ACCELERATION, USE, MILITANCY, PRESENCE, LATENCY: SUGGESTIONS FOR AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE COLONIZATION OF LIFE BY TECHNOLOGY

The brief phenomenology of the presence of technology in our lives and the philosophical genealogy of the relations between technology, capitalism, and liberalism that I have proposed using arguments from various philosophers are in the service of the thesis that, in a certain sense and to a large extent, we live automatically and at a distance, and this implies a loss of experience and spaces for decision making.

The issue of how to deal with the impoverishing, depersonalizing, alienating, and nihilistic consequences which the massive presence of technology in human life supposedly produces in the context of contemporary societies is not new. This issue was a concern to a number of German thinkers who, from the 1930s to the 1960s, identified the need to reinforce the subjective dimensions of European citizens in order to resist the demands of the accelerated capitalist industrial society, whose technical-scientific *arkhē* dissolved, according to them, the traditional cultural legacy.

Hans Blumenberg belongs to that context. In his view, the danger of technology in the life of men stems from the fact that, like science, it monopolizes the hope and expectations that humans can aspire to (or that can be attributed to them). Technology dissolves the need for a unitary sense (of world or life) by offering a set of particularities that can be solved with its competition, that is, technically. In this sense, it produces an emptying of the meaning that exists in the world of life, that is, in the set of prereflexive and unquestionable experiences, certainties, and evidence that gives meaning to everything that

is affirmed and enables communication itself. Technology proves the contingency of this world of life and determines it.¹⁵

This colonization of the world of life by technology (in the jargon of Habermas, we would say by “systemic rationality”) has today reached its highest degree so far. My position is that the total subsumption of human life is irreversible and, therefore, to suggest we can escape from it is meaningless and merely leads to melancholy. Moreover, this subsumption is neither wholly good nor wholly bad, but has both positive and negative elements. These must be identified, with the awareness that such identification cannot claim to be objective and neutral, but only coherent with a way of life that self-sustains and self-legitimizes critically, comparatively, and permanently as a source of joy and happiness.

In order to argue this position, I will gather arguments from various contemporary philosophers who have at least indirectly alluded to this question. I will mention some of them and some of their ideas by classifying them into two large groups: those whose suggestions presuppose or demand the maintenance of a traditional (or approximately traditional) concept of subject and those who propose alternatives that imply liquidating or overcoming the whole (concept of) subject.

To begin, then: There is a set of arguments with a family resemblance that Benjamin Noys has called “accelerationism.” Such arguments acknowledge the eroding consequences of life brought about by the technification and productivity of capitalism, but, contrary to traditional humanist solutions and alternatives, they propose the increase of such speed and acceleration, the increase of abstraction, technification, productivity, and consumerism with the aim of radicalizing its dehumanizing, uprooting, and deterritorializing power, with the purpose of sinking it completely and definitely, and thus reach a posthuman state. The main theoretical source of this acceleration is the Marxist thesis that it is possible to combat capitalism by accelerating its contradictions. Behind this thesis lies a teleological premise: that the development of productive forces will bring an implosion of capitalism and a liberation which will consist of the integration-dissolution of man into constant capital, that is, into the machine, so that a posthuman state will be reached.¹⁶

¹⁵ Hans Blumenberg, “The Life-World and the Concept of Reality,” in *Life-World and Consciousness: Essays for Aron Gurwitsch*, ed. L. Embree (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1972), 425–28.

¹⁶ Benjamin Noys, *The Persistence of the Negative* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), ix–xi, 5–11; Noys, *Malign Velocities: Accelerationism and Capitalism* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2014), 13–23, 36–62.

In the 1970s, Deleuze and Guattari alluded to this accelerationist strategy in *The Anti-Oedipus*.¹⁷ And in the 1990s, Nick Land and colleagues at the University of Warwick linked this thesis to certain literature and music that reflected the accelerationist-capitalist ideal of human-machine integration. Land based his thesis on the idea that the state has humanistic residues and its regulatory action does not accelerate capitalism and therefore curbs its dehumanizing and solvent potential (of the bourgeois ego and, in this measure, of itself). His proposal is to take the “machinic” revolution (i.e., relating to machine, robotic, and so on), deterritorialization and the market, and elements of the capitalist system (especially a neoliberal one) to their extreme. The objective is that the acceleration of flows causes the productive forces to surpass all control and penetrate human life to dematerialize the bodies, which is achieved by integrating variable capital (manual labor) into constant capital (machines). Liberation refers to the arrival of a state in which decisions are made by nonhuman, impersonal agents (microbiotic particles, data flows, machines, etc.). Land does not conceive the “machinic” as a transcendent reality opposed to social relations, but as a reality that integrates, dissolves, and deterritorializes them in a process that transcends any anthropomorphic stage.¹⁸

In another way, the remission of *the liberation* of man to the liberation of *man* is also defended by Giorgio Agamben. Criticism of the instrumental ratio is a central objective in his thought. His work can be understood as a denunciation of the loss of experience in the modern world and an effort to find places for a type of experience that is not submitted to the means-ends *ratio*. In his view, modern man (and an even more contemporary man) is incapable of having and transmitting experiences. And the cause is not only wars, but mere daily life in a big city, where there is an accumulation of events without any translation of it into experience. Such experience is not mere “knowledge,” but a story “of” and “with” authority. From these premises, he suggests a theory of experience as a prelinguistic and therefore presubjective reality. This presupposes that the constitution of the subject “in” and “by” language also constitutes the expropriation of that experience.¹⁹ In other

¹⁷ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 239.

¹⁸ Nick Land, “Machinic Desire,” *Textual Practice* 7, no. 3 (1993): 471–82; Land, “Making It with Death: Remarks on Thanatos and Desiring Production” and “Circuitries,” in *Fanged Noumena: Collected Writings 1987–2007*, ed. R. Mackay and Ray Brassier (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2013), 261–87 and 289–318.

¹⁹ Giorgio Agamben, *Infancy and History: The Destruction of Experience* (London: Verso Books, 2007), 5–10, 65–72.

words, the loss of experience is an essential event and a consequence of Western anthropogenic devices, whose nature is sovereign and biopolitical.

But Agamben does not propose the recovery of childhood as a historical object; he rather refers experience to the fact that language is not the totality of the human, but that childhood is the transcendental homeland of history. This thesis is the basis for postulating a life beyond sovereignty and biopolitics—a life that renders justice to the potential character of man, that is, a life that renounces all concrete forms of life to be limited to being only *that way* apart from all property or form, a life that remains in potentiality. In his view, the messianic life described by Paul involves the rejection of all property (including identity), which would be replaced by its mere use, and the emancipation of every form-of-life in favor of maintaining one's own power intact. Agamben sees this way of life exemplified in the Franciscan *usus pauper*.²⁰

Along with these arguments, which suggest getting free of the biopolitical devices of instrumental reason by abandoning the concept of subject, there are others that claim the centrality of decision making and the need to find new forms, new times, and new places for it to occur, as well as experiencing one's own body. It should be emphasized that in this case the objective is not to recover a notion of substantial subjectivity. On the contrary, experiences happen and occur to the subjects evidencing their lack of foundation and deconstructing them. Experiences and decisions are not, therefore, events that immunize the subject, but, on the contrary, they ex-pose him, they dis-pose him.

A philosopher who stands out for his claim about the subjective decision (properly, a constituent of subjectivity) is Alain Badiou. From a complex development of ontology as a mathematical discourse on being, and of phenomenology as a logical discourse about appearance (change, event), he claims a (notion of) subjectivity that constitutes itself by constituting the truth of the event that exceeds it, that is, by intervening in a situation by affirming an inconsistency in it (that is, an event), being faithful to it and transforming it. Thus, truth is neither discovery nor *adaequatio*, but a production supported by a fidelity through which subjects are constituted and situations are transformed; that is, truth is the constitution of the consequences of an event. In other words,

²⁰ Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 4–15, 25–28, 60–72; Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 12–17, 60–63, 125–50; Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the "Letter to the Romans"* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 30–33, 42–45; Agamben, *The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Form-of-Life* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013), 5–8, 75–78, 85–116, 145–65.

truth relates to the particularity of a situation in which an event happens owing to the faithful decision of a subject who is constituted as such by it.²¹

According to Badiou, the current representative democracy, which is supported by the ideologies of the universalism of equivalence (monetary and legalistic) and democratic materialism, implies the end of politics and is at the service of capitalist domination. He sets in opposition to this the communist substantive egalitarianism and the exceptionality of the subject. One consequence is that politics has to deal with the fidelity and the decision of the subject, and this means that it is not a means, but an affirmation, and that it has to do more with finalist areas than with the instrumental *ratio*. If the existing situation is the law of the market and capital-parliamentarism, which dictates its own necessity and inevitability, that is, the impossibility of any alternative (the end of history), politics is the affirmation of the possibility of such an alternative, an undeductible and improbable reality, absolutely heterogeneous to technology.²²

The last author I will mention is Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht. He also stands out for having diagnosed a loss of experience in the life of contemporary cities and for having defended the need to identify spaces to experience our corporality. In his view, the contemporary globalized world has inherited the great pathology of accelerated modernity, namely, the devaluation of the body as a constituent part of subjectivity. The Cartesian cogito is proof of the privilege granted to thought as the principle (*arkhē*) of subjectivity and seat of self-affirmation of the human being. And the Enlightenment gave birth to the sphere of politics as the principal result of human action understood as a transforming agent of the world: political institutions and public space in general would be the principal products of a culture based on interpretation. For the modern and contemporary Western subject, the world is an interpretable matter, an occasion for the production of knowledge by transcending its mere phenomenal surface. This implies underestimating the materiality of the signifier or expression in the face of the spirituality of meaning. It also implies making the temporal dimension, not the spatial dimension, the basic

²¹ Alain Badiou, *Being and Event* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 13–31, 66–69, 420–32, 536–41; *Breve tratado de ontología transitoria* (Barcelona: Gedisa, 2002), 114, 153–69 (English version: *Briefings on Existence: A Short Treatise on Transitory Ontology* [Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005]).

²² Alain Badiou, ¿Se puede pensar la política? (Buenos Aires: Nueva Visión, 1990), 45, 56; *Reflexiones sobre nuestro tiempo: Interrogantes acerca de la ética, la política y la experiencia de lo inhumano* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones del Cifrado, 2006), 31–33; *De un desastre oscuro. Sobre el fin de la verdad de Estado* (Buenos Aires: Amorrortu, 2006), 43–45; *Compendio de metapolítica* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo, 2009), 67–69 (English version: *Metapolitics* [New York: Verso Books, 2005]).

structure of subjectivity, of the knowing subject's activity. The consequence of this vision or attitude (which Gumbrecht calls "metaphysics") has been the orientation of the knowing subject to the past or to the future, as well as the possibility of forming and technifying (that is, denying) the body—in short, the negation (of experience) of the present and of the body. New technologies of global communication (of information and of capital) have made it possible to intensify this culture that gives privilege to meaning and purely empty utopias (the infinite circulation in the virtual network), at the expense of the dimensions of desire, corporality, and physical contact, among others.

From this diagnosis, Gumbrecht claims a culture of presence (that is, of bodily contact) against the primacy of the culture of meaning and interpretation that has been imposed in the West. He does not deny meaning, but rather conceives experience, especially aesthetics, as an oscillation or interference between effects of presence and effects of meaning. And he identifies poetry as a paradigm of such oscillation. More specifically, he proposes a compensation for the alluded-to modern pathologies by implementation rituals that affirm the present owing to experiences of celebration that have no objective other than themselves; for example, the practice of sport and attendance at sporting events, visits to museums, and so on. These are experiences whose value does not come from their link with the past or the future, nor do they seek to reconcile or articulate thought with the body, but to keep all the simultaneities within reach.²³ Behind this argument is the conviction that in all experience there are latent elements that determine the way in which reality is experienced, and this requires abandoning the idea that experience is a transparent and controllable reality for the consciousness. On the contrary, latency is an indication and a factor that reality always exceeds the content of its presence and, therefore, is also an indication of the finitude of the experience imposed by the temporal dimension of consciousness. Latency and finitude are insurmountable conditions of our experience.²⁴

²³ Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 25–28. In the field of contemporary philosophy, the person who has stood out by questioning the meaning (of meaning) and claiming contact and exposure is Jean-Luc Nancy. See *A Finite Thinking* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003).

²⁴ See Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *After 1945: Latency as Origin of the Present* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013); José Luis Villacañas, "Latencia. La elaboración de la vivencia originaria," *Dianoia* 76 (2016): 3–28.

5. BEYOND THE INSTRUMENTAL RATIO: REFLEXIVITY, NARRATION, SHARING, RITUALITY

I have used the categories of acceleration, use, militancy, presence, and latency to allude to ideas and arguments present in works of various contemporary philosophers that can contribute to thinking up strategies to cope with the colonization and overdetermination of our lives by technology. Such colonization and overdetermination entail, among others, negative and impoverishing consequences: a life (in a certain sense) lived remotely and automatically, in which spaces and moments for experience and for decision making are reduced. This real subsumption of life involves leaving the horizon of expectations, hopes, and decisions in the hands of technology. It also implies the stifling of unforeseen possibilities, decisions, doubts, and questions by referring to devices that do not admit unforeseen possibilities, decisions, doubts, and questions. What is imposed then is a decadent life in which the erratic character of man (who is a rooted and foreign being at the same time) is replaced by an unproductive, self-destructive, and fictional errancy. This is dominated by a feverish and nonsensical movement that is merely a simulation of emptiness under a fiction of autonomy, a mere variation of a single way of relating to others and to things: consumption.²⁵

However, it must be postulated that such vacuum and suffocation cannot be total. Or, rather, it is necessary to live as if they might not or need not exist. This means opting for forms of life in which certain human dimensions cannot be dispensed with. Or even better, in which we do not want to dispense with them and, especially, with the clash and tension between the meanings provided by them and the area of contingency and finitude.

Certainly, the abstraction that is proper to technology and capitalism is irreversible, so the resistance to its totalization must be considered from this perspective. This requires renouncing alternatives that idealize a return to primitivism, or traditionalist or localist strategies, or idealizations of animality, and the like.²⁶ Any such bet is merely theoretical and more abstract and counterfactual even than the domain it intends to fight with.

Similarly, it is unthinkable (nor, to this extent, does it seem possible to propose it as an alternative) to appeal to a type of experience that is not

²⁵ See Luis Sáez, *Ser errático. Una ontología crítica de la sociedad* (Madrid: Trotta, 2009), chaps. 1, 2, and 6.1.

²⁶ As, in a sense, it is inferred from Vanessa Lemm, *Nietzsche's Animal Philosophy: Culture, Politics and the Animality of the Human Being* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009).

mediated by concepts, that is a “pre-” or “para-” linguistic experience. Our linguistic condition is irreversible. The paradox is that the mastery of sophisticated concepts, in addition to an exercised emotional intelligence and an education of sensitivity, constitute the insuperable mediation to access experience and be able to be affected by it; that is, in order for the experience, not mere scientific knowledge, to become a source of legitimacy and guidance. Experience is not concepts, but these give us the measure of that experience, and without them there is no experience. In other words, experience must be articulated in concepts. Language is our insurmountable horizon, even if it is to be questioned and transcended by an unpredictable event. Experience is not just language, but it is also language. This means that it is transmissible, apprehended by memory and anchored in tradition. As Koselleck argues, experience is a present past in which rational elaboration and unconscious forms of behavior merge.²⁷

It is a mistake and a vain goal to pretend to offer a catalog of virgin experiences or procedures to increase the scope of decision making. Rather it happens that decisions are not taken, but they happen to us; experiences are not made, but they make us, they happen to us. It is not possible to address them nor provoke them. This is an index and a factor of their questioning of subjective identity. For this reason, to diagnose a loss of experience and a reduction of decision-making spaces and, at the same time, to claim both, does not mean to propose a return to an idea and a *praxis* of substantive personal identity, but rather the opposite.

But while it is not possible to program or produce experiences, it is possible to prevent them, to obstruct them. Such obstruction is what happens in the immunized life that we seek with the neutrality of technology. In other words, there are fewer and fewer experiences and less possibility of making decisions because we immunize ourselves from them. In everyday life there is less room for surprises and for the need to decide. As we have seen, technology colonizes and overdetermines the rest of the discourses, seeking and helping individuals to settle down with protocols that render decision making superfluous and that exclude all unpredictability, that is, all experience.

Nevertheless, the realities of human life are today, as always, inevitable and universal: birth, friendship, love, breeding, aging, illness, death, and so on. There is never a lack of historical events to experience; what is missing

²⁷ See Reinhart Koselleck, “‘Space of Experience’ and ‘Horizon of Expectation’: Two Historical Categories,” in *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 255–76.

is of another order. On one hand, there is a lack of education of the sensibility, aptitude, and attitude to make experience, to produce it, to develop it, to constitute it; what is lacking are metanarratives (those so reviled by proponents of *pensiero debole!*) “from” and “to” the experience. On the other hand, instrumental *ratio* dominates everything. It is necessary to implement places and moments to interrupt the instrumental *ratio*, that is, the means-ends *ratio*. Both are transcendental conditions of experience and they are related, although this may seem paradoxical.

With respect to the first condition, it is necessary to revitalize the virtuous circle existing between authority’s tradition and the authority of tradition. This cannot be done without the contribution of modern and contemporary criticism. But the work of critical reception cannot mean giving up the fertility of myths and inherited rituals as a framework for integrating (individually and communally), sharing (with the present and the ancestors), and transmitting the events and experiences of everyday life. Without such a prior framework, there is no experience but only trauma and impoverishment of reality and of oneself. Cult expands experience because it articulates the elements of the individual memory with those of the collective memory, which renews and updates. Whichever way one looks at it, inherited stories, narratives, and rituals are necessary to assimilate events and these should not destroy us but rather reinforce our identity (a critical identity, exposed), and contribute to our coexistence. The reason is that only such narratives and rituals (and this includes everything from plastic arts to family meals at weekends, from the beginning and end of academic ceremonies, to the rituals of the legal order, from the customs to celebrate the transition to adulthood, to the various liturgies [or nonreligious gatherings] to welcome the newborn in the community, and similar examples) allow us to link our present events with past generations, individual memory and diachronic collective memory. Science and technology do not allow this intergenerational articulation, but only a synchronous linkage (also necessary).

In order to have experiences it is not enough to consume experiences and novelties; it is necessary to have a reflection that elaborates as memories and expectations the latent conditions of all experience. Faced with the accelerated time of a hypertechnified society, experience requires a work of subjectivity incompatible with passivity and the surrender of autonomy. If we want the accelerated flow of messages around us to have a meaning that transcends its mere ephemeral circulation, reflection is necessary—not a self-absorbed and solipsistic reflection, but one that is exercised through the

narrative oriented to being shared and the reflection stimulated and developed by the ritual, which is a concentrated community memory that guides and enriches expectations.

For this reason, one cannot live without a worldview (*Weltanschauung*) that is nourished by a renewed and critical reception of the inherited myths and its inseparable rituals. It is not a question of returning to “live in the myth,” but a “work on myth,” an endless reception of them that prevents their function being occupied exclusively by the instrumental *ratio* of technology, which, although necessary for life, is structurally presentistic, merely pragmatic, accelerated, changing, and contemporary in its meaning-giving function. In addition, the *ratio* of technology is inexorably nihilistic, concealing human finitude and totalizing any expectation other than the affirmation and consumption of itself.

This condition is inseparable from another that may seem contradictory to it. From the previous condition it is inferred that it is not enough to increase the intensity or quantity of novelties; rather, it is necessary to have renewed contexts of meaning accredited in its legitimacy and ability to induce the integration, sharing, verbalization, relativization, and so on of events, in order to send such novelties to those contexts. But to interrupt the interruption of experience, it is also necessary to have another way of contact not mediated by the existing concepts and purposes; that is, it is necessary to relate to the world in a different way than through the mediation of sense and meaning. In short: we must overcome the dialectic means-ends, the logic of the instrumental *ratio*, in order to simply be exposed, dis-posed. This suggestion presupposes that indications and factors of experience are, among others, the following: limited control over things and events in the world; passivity and surprise; unprogrammability and unreproducibility of the experience; questioning of individual reconciliation and identity; personal transformation; boredom; play; and gratuity.

That there is no contradiction between the two conditions is shown by taking note of cult (narration and ceremony, liturgy), since this, while it links us with collective memory, concentrates and fixes our attention on the act itself, subtracting it from the dialectic means-ends. Cults are a pure ancestral gesture that turn our participation into pure renewed gesture, experience.

Similarly, the relationship between the “linguistic production” of experience and its relationship to the event is demonstrated by the fact that only narrative, which redesigns or refigures time, allows us to contemplate history

as an event, that is, as a contingent reality. The unpredictability and contingency of the consequences of an action are proof of the meaning of what is experience and event, namely, possibility and freedom. Hence the greater intensity of the experience of the defeated, who have experienced that things have not happened as they expected and desired.

Natural Justice and the Nature of Justice in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*

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Abstract: Aristotle's notoriously difficult statement that natural justice is changeable has led some contemporaries to argue that Aristotle does not hold that natural justice functions as a standard against which to judge political laws and constitutions. In this essay I argue the contrary. However, the naturalness of natural justice must be understood in connection with the fact that justice belongs to the polis, which is a community of roughly equal persons who are governed by law. The polis itself is natural but in a qualified way, more or less as a hybrid could be said to be natural. While the *Nicomachean Ethics* as a whole is a kind of redemption of such virtue as is within reach of ordinarily decent human beings, the discussion of justice comes close to rendering transparent the inferiority of such virtue to the virtue of the philosopher, which Aristotle ultimately agrees with Plato to be most natural, most fit for human beings.

INTRODUCTION

Probably no passage in all of Aristotle's moral and political writing has tested the powers of interpretation among his commentators so much as his statement, in chapter 7 of Book V of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, that natural justice is changeable (1134b30). Aristotle himself testifies to the difficulty, for he says that the changeability of everything men deem just causes some persons to deny that natural justice even exists. These persons hold that all justice is but a matter of convention. They are like the characters Callicles and Thrasymachus in Plato's dialogues, the latter insisting in the *Republic* that justice is "the interest of the stronger," by which he means that it is whatever those in commanding authority declare it to be. For his part Aristotle insists that the persons who say that are wrong. They are not, however, completely wrong.

Their problem is that they are victims of an oversimplification that arises from a misperception. That is, they see, or think that they see, that what is by nature is unchanging and unchangeable, “just as fire burns both here and in Persia,” whereas only what is derived from convention varies from place to place and time to time. Aristotle responds that only among the gods is it the case that nature and natural justice are unchangeable. As we might put it in our own sort of parlance, only if we imagine there to be gods who have duties towards one another would it be the case that justice among them would be unchangeable. They might have their conventions, one may suppose, but what they *are* would remain ever the same. Among us human beings, however, *everything* changes. In its widest scope, this would be to say that our very nature changes. And it is this that is so baffling and troubling; for how can we understand the very distinction between what is natural and what is conventional—merely conventional—except by thinking that what is conventional is of the here and now whereas what is natural is always and everywhere the same? Most especially, how can natural justice be a standard by which we measure the value of our actions and the rules that govern those actions if it be but a temporary and provincial standard?¹ It is no wonder that Thrasymachus thought what he thought or why that thought continues to tempt many people of our own times and in fact of all times.

I contend that we might advance our understanding of this issue if we opt not to rush headlong into it but rather sidle up to it, so to speak, following more closely the rhetorical structure, that is, the textual context, of Aristotle’s whole discussion of justice in *Ethics* V. Reading Aristotle requires patience; he must be allowed to guide us through his own terms. Nevertheless we would not be following naively from the beginning. We make a deliberate choice to return to the beginning and as we proceed we expect to see how each section of the argument contributes to the lesson of the whole. We expect that that lesson will contain the answer to the issue that we already believe to be the central one. This being the case, there is one more observation that is in order at the very outset. That is that Aristotle says that the distinction between natural justice and legal or conventional justice is “easy” to see. There are difficulties correlative with the fact of the distinction but men are generally

¹ This difficulty has led some commentators to conclude that Aristotle advances no notion of natural justice that can function as a standard. Thus Bernard Yack holds that “Aristotle is not...defending the existence of natural, inherently correct standards of justice. He is, instead, arguing that the need for citizens to make and argue about judgments of the intrinsic justice of their actions is something that develops naturally within political communities” (“Natural Right and Aristotle’s Understanding of Justice,” *Political Theory* 18, no. 2 [1990]: 216). Similarly, see Tony Burns, *Aristotle and Natural Law* (London: Continuum, 2011).

aware of the distinction itself. There is, however, another point about which men typically go quite wrong. That is what he says in chapter 9.

Human beings suppose that doing justice is up to them and hence also that what is just is easy. But it is not. For to have intercourse with the neighbor's wife, to strike someone nearby, and to put money into someone's hand is, they suppose, easy and up to them, but to do these things while being in a certain state is neither easy nor up to them. Similarly too, people suppose that to know the just and unjust things is in no way to be wise, because it is not difficult to comprehend what the laws say (but these are not the just things, except incidentally). But how the just things are done and how they are distributed—this is indeed a greater task than to know what is conducive to health, since even here to know about honey, wine, hellebore, cauterizing, and cutting is easy, but to know how one must administer them with a view to health, and to whom and when, is as great a task as to be a physician. (1137a5–14)²

Now this is amazing. To act *unjustly*, in the full sense, is not even possible for us. And yet, we misunderstand ourselves precisely with respect to this fact. At this one's head begins to swim and we feel we are in danger of losing our moral bearings. Are we not even capable of such guilt as we may feel or attribute to others? If we are not already thinking “beyond good and evil,” it does seem that we are invited to adopt a posture from which we will reassess the status of our whole moral responsibility. Or in other words, it would appear that Aristotle's argument is intended not merely or primarily to describe what is meant by “justice,” or to be an encomium to justice, but also to be a critique of justice—of the impulse to justice. Or might it be the case that the best encomium to justice entails the critique of justice, lest it be befouled through an excess of intensity?³ Regarding this matter too it makes sense to pay attention to the textual, rhetorical structure of Aristotle's discussion in Book V.

THE DISTINCTIVENESS OF JUSTICE AMONG THE OTHER VIRTUES

So, to begin, Aristotle assures us that justice is a characteristic, as are the other virtues he has discussed in the previous books. It is not a capacity, or a science. We might reflect, though, that with respect to justice as distinguished from the other virtues this assurance is especially important, since we might well think that in a certain respect justice *is* a science, or as

² All quotations from the *Nicomachean Ethics* are taken from *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Robert C. Bartlett and Susan D. Collins (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

³ Thucydides's presentation of Cleon is a perfect example of how such intensity can lead to something foul.

requiring a science. This would be the case when we think of justice as a relationship between or among persons—a relationship that a person who has the virtue of justice wishes to exist and does not violate where it does exist. Justice in this sense would be something that one could know, and surely that knowledge would be a necessary ingredient of the person's having justice as a virtue. At the same time, though, to stress the element of knowledge could be problematical, since the knowledge of something, anything, would be as useful in the destruction of that thing as it would be towards bringing it about. As Socrates argues in the *Republic*, justice as a knowledge would be as much the knowledge of how to steal as how to guard and protect. Aristotle's opening statement on the subject, that justice is a characteristic rather than a capacity of a science, avoids this issue but it does so in the manner of an abstraction from it rather than full response.

So justice is one of the virtues, and hence a characteristic. But what is it specifically? There are obviously many disputes about it that require clarification and resolution, especially since among the disputants are those who deny that it even exists. Aristotle proposes that we begin, then, from what might be more evident and clear, namely *injustice*. Perhaps this means that while the issue of justice is a matter of much sophisticated, sometimes sophisticated, debate, few or perhaps no men are devoid of passionate response to what they perceive as injustice, especially if it is perpetrated against themselves. In any case, starting from this, Aristotle observes that justice comes to be spoken of in two broad senses. On one hand we think it wrong for a man to have or want to have more than his proper share—what he deserves in relation to what others have. This sort of justice is one virtue among the several that Aristotle has discussed in the preceding books. It is justice in a “partial” sense. Then there is another sense of justice that is more complete. People condemn it as wrong if someone puts oneself above the law so that in this sense justice is tantamount to lawfulness or law-abidingness. Since the law governs everything that we might do, either prescriptively or proscriptively, justice as lawfulness is in a way complete virtue. Quoting Theognis, Aristotle calls it the sum of the virtues (1129b30).⁴ But this is not meant in a simple arithmetical way. He means that justice enables us to employ any and all of the other virtues in our relationships with others. “For many people are able to use virtue in dealing with the members of their household, but in their

⁴ In making the case that justice in the complete sense is equivalent to lawfulness Aristotle asserts that whatever the law does not forbid it commands. Liberals are sometimes offended by this. Aristotle's stance in the dispute involves his thought that the finality and comprehensiveness of the authority of the law entails the idea that the polis has as its aim the comprehensive human good for its citizens.

affairs regarding another, they are unable to do so" (1129b33–35). We might take courage as an example. A warrior might fight like a tiger, in a courageous spirit, and that would be simple courage. But were he to do so for love of his fellow citizens, or his city, or *for the sake of* his duty, then his courage would be an aspect of justice as well. We might say that in justice the other virtues are more virtuous. Aristotle promises that he will discuss justice in this broad sense in the latter part of Book V, that is, in chapters 6–11.

Towards the end of the initial chapter lies another issue—another at which Aristotle subtly hints. This is that insofar as justice in the broad sense enables one to exercise all the virtues in their full sense, then, as one aspires to be just, one would have to aspire to rule. This follows from the fact that ruling and only ruling is that activity that comprehends and so completes all other human activities as subordinate.⁵ He quotes approvingly a saying of the ancient sage Bias, that “office will show the man,” “for he who rules is already in relation to another and within the community” (1130a1–2). What? Does this mean that the competitive struggle for dominion is in accord with justice—that it is motivated by a concern for justice? Is it therefore true at least in this way that “justice is the interest of the stronger” if by “stronger” is meant “ruler”? That does appear to be the implication. Aristotle keeps it just below the surface by adding, almost in the same breath, that justice in the broad sense of virtue in relation to others is typically thought to be “another’s good,” for that is also part of the implication. Bias sees that all men are, like himself, anxious to serve.⁶

PARTIAL JUSTICE

So much for chapter 1. The issues at which it hints serve as a prologue for what remains. Aristotle gets down to business in chapters 2–5 by discussing justice in the partial sense. It will be important not to have ignored these early chapters if we are to understand the full import of what comes afterwards.

Justice in the partial sense has to do with one’s share of such things as we might enjoy or suffer in good or bad fortune. “It is manifest...that there is

⁵ Cf. Aristotle, *Politics* III.4. All references are to this work are to Ernest Barker, *The Politics of Aristotle* (London: Oxford University Press, 1979).

⁶ Susan Collins has drawn out with great clarity the tension between justice as a human good for which one might long versus “another’s good.” The argument of this paper, however, is that Aristotle’s rhetorical purpose in this book is not merely to lay bare that tension but to lead his readers towards an appreciation of a Socratic/transmoral sort of justice. See Susan Collins, *Aristotle and the Rediscovery of Citizenship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 76–80.

a certain other, partial injustice, apart from the whole...which has the same name because its definition falls in the same genus. For both exercise their capacity in what concerns another person: but the one injustice pertains to honor, money, or preservation—or to some one thing if we were to encompass all these by a single name—and arises on account of the pleasure associated with gain” (1130b4–5). Thus a person might commit an act of adultery and so manifest the vice of moral weakness or immoderation but were he to do it for money it would be an act of injustice in the partial sense. With justice thus understood there is another distinction that must be observed: that between justice in distribution as from a common store versus justice as rectification, which governs a transactional exchange. Now *all* justice involves equality in some way or other. Regarding distributional justice the equality is what is involved in a proportion. That is, where there are many contributors to a common store, the ratio between any two contributions should be equal to the ratio between the benefits those contributors receive. As the verbal formula runs, “to each according to his contribution.” Aristotle draws out his explanation of proportionality to some length; but he mentions almost in passing what is the real matter of dispute in the administration of distributive justice. That is, “all men do not mean the same thing by merit; rather, democrats say it is freedom; oligarchs, wealth; others, good birth; aristocrats, virtue” (1131a26–27).

As for rectifactory justice, the equality that it involves is that between things exchanged, that is, the value of what is exchanged between parties to a transaction. Justice requires that one gives as good as one gets. Perhaps of most interest, Aristotle explicitly includes *involuntary* transactions as well as voluntary ones in this discussion. Involuntary transactions are exchanges that one party wishes not to make. They may happen either by stealth or trickery or by open violence. Justice of this sort has to be meted out by an authority—a “judge.” Aristotle’s point here is that the judge does justice when he restores the equality between the parties. That is, he deprives the perpetrator of his ill-gotten gains, or the value thereof, and restores them to the victim. Noteworthy here is that this is *all* that justice requires. The consideration of what we might call “punition,” punishment qua punishment, is lacking. To see this point one might consider as an example how libel is typically treated in contemporary legal systems. A suit might be brought and the judge might award both restorative and punitive damages to the plaintiff. For Aristotle, rectifactory justice in involuntary transactions does not call for punitive damages.

The point here can hardly be stressed too heavily. Aristotle knows of course that when people suffer an assault they in their anger demand recompense, typically in the form of seeing that their assailant suffer as they have suffered, and what they have suffered. This feels like justice itself. That is why the old Pythagoreans identified justice with “reciprocity” (*to antipeponthos*), that is, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. It might seem only right that the wrongdoer be paid back. There are many people in Aristotle's time, as in our time too, who agree with those Pythagoreans; but they are wrong. The anger that demands reciprocal harm is not really a demand for justice. Aristotle's teaching is calmer. It is more in keeping with what Socrates says to Polemarchus in the *Republic*, that justice is helping friends and harming no one; therefore, so far as intentions go, the just person intends no harm.

After having distinguished reciprocity from justice, Aristotle follows by saying that in one context they are the same, namely, in voluntary exchange. Between a seller and a purchaser, the rectificatory justice is reciprocal; however it has to be understood that the reciprocation be “proportional.” He explains as follows. For there to be a fair exchange between two different goods, say shoes and houses, the goods must be equalized. That is to say, they need to be made or held comparable according to some common measure. This was precisely the reason that money was instituted, Aristotle says. It exists in order to measure the exchange value, and so make possible the voluntary exchange, between different goods. So if one house is worth x dollars, or minae or whatever, and x amount of money will purchase 1000 shoes, the effective rate of exchange between houses and shoes will be $1/1000$. The price of shoes or houses in terms of money is not altogether arbitrary though. One must still ask *why* the equivalent of 1000 shoes can purchase one house—why not 2000? The answer that Aristotle gives to this question is need: “All things must be measured by some one thing, as was said earlier. This thing is, in truth, need, which holds all things together. For if people should not need anything, or not in the same way, then there will either not be exchange or not the same sort of exchange” (1133a26–30). Money is a convention by which men agree to measure their relative needs, hence the very word “currency” (*nomisma*) derives from the word for convention or law (*nomos*).

Fair rates of exchange are determined by how much we need of what the other party offers. Money makes the exchange possible by providing the common, agreed-upon measure of those needs but it does not determine them. What does determine what we need? A modern economist might complain that what Aristotle says about just this is insufficient and unclear. Thus

one might infer that Aristotle is arguing that what we need is a function of our very nature; that indeed nature establishes a hierarchy of human needs and that therefore those things most needful are and ought to be of the greatest value or price. This is the notion of the “just price,” which modern economics insists is a fallacy. For surely water is more needful than, say, diamonds, in any amount, and yet a glass of nice cold water is and ought to be priced less than the jewel on my bride’s finger. Economics can never reach clarity unless we sever the connection between natural need and price, or exchange value, and see instead that prices are determined by the relative scarcity of what is offered for exchange in relation to the intensity of the demand for that same thing. This is Economics 101; it is represented by the most basic graph that shows a supply and a demand schedule intersecting at just that point where seller and purchaser agree to a fair exchange. It is not “need” but rather demand, more precisely “effective demand,” that is important. This is only right, for do not people have a right to pursue their own individual happiness by their own lights and not have some authority dictate to them what they “need”?

Contrasting modern economics and Aristotle in just this way, though, makes of Aristotle’s argument something of a straw man. It is the case that modern economics brings to bear a different understanding of human community, political community, from Aristotle’s. One might put it that when the modern notion of “goods,” as in “goods and services,” replaces the Aristotelian notion of *the good* as the fundamental principle that governs the community, then what Aristotle calls “household management,” *oikonomika*, comes into its own as “economics,” modern economics. This does not mean, though, that Aristotle sets up an abstract idea, “nature,” from which he says that relative prices are or can be derived. He knows perfectly well that our needs operate within circumstances and that these vary depending on how men are differently situated and on their differing ways of life. What might be needed in a fishing village is different from what is needed among hunters or farmers, and so the relative prices of fishhooks will vary. What he does argue is that there *ought* to be a high level of stability among the relative prices of things, especially within a community. His argument is similar to what even modern economists see as the benefit of relatively stable currency. That is, it makes for greater security when people can count on their money retaining its purchasing power in the future. Aristotle extends this point so as to hold that not only money but all goods should maintain their relatively constant exchange value, and for the same reason. A producer should be able to count on being able to receive much the same price for his product tomorrow as he depends on getting today.

As for exchange that will occur in the future, if there is no such need of it now, money is like a guarantee for us that it will occur when there is need of it, since someone who brings money ought to attain what he needs. Now, money undergoes this same thing as well, for it is not always possible for it to be equal. Nevertheless, it tends to stay more constant [than does the value of particular commodities]. Hence *all things ought to have a value assigned to them*; for in this way there will always be exchange, and if there is exchange, there will be community. (1133b10–15; emphasis added)

Not just money should be stable, but the relative value of all the things that money buys. The fundamental reason that modern economics would find this thought unsupportable is that we tend to believe in the normalcy of technological progress. Fixing prices as Aristotle recommends would of course depress investment in new products and new forms of production. That is obvious. Still, many thoughtful people today are inclined to wonder whether continued unregulated technological innovation might bring about more pain by way of social dislocation and very uneven distribution than it offers by way of the further relief of our estate. Perhaps Aristotle is entitled to his implicit doubts as to whether progressive change is always or even generally a good thing.

JUSTICE IN THE MORE GENERAL SENSE

The final paragraph of chapter 5 is a summary of all that has gone before in Book V. Its final sentence is worded so as to say that the discussion has been concluded, and brought to a close. Despite this, Aristotle goes on for six more chapters in which he will discuss several matters of importance with regard to justice in the broader of the two senses that he distinguished at the beginning—justice as the sum of all the virtues insofar as they bear on our relationship to others.

Beginning, then, with chapter 6, Aristotle's first point is that a person might commit an act of injustice while still not being an unjust person *ipso facto*. Some editors and commentators have speculated that this initial thought, in the first paragraph of chapter 6, is out of place insofar as it pertains more directly to the topics of chapters 8 and 9 than it does to what follows immediately in chapters 6 and 7.⁷ The paragraph can be understood as appropriately placed, though, if we adopt an enlarged attitude towards

⁷ See, e.g., Martin Ostwald, *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999), 129n40. Bartlett and Collins, however, note that there is no ground for this speculation in the MSS (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 103n29).

Aristotle's style. He appears to be concerned to lead us to what he wants us to understand by asserting stipulations that are not always tied directly to a line of argument but are instead governed by a rhetorical principle. In the present case he leads off with what is a major point that governs the whole remainder, a point that we need to hold in mind. That is, we are warned not to be confused by the fact that men do commit acts of injustice willingly: this does not, or at least may not, mean that they *are* unjust. That is, it does not mean that they willed injustice itself.

There follows another stipulation. Justice in the broad, political, sense applies only to persons who are relatively free and equal and who are, as such, able to be and are in fact members of a law-governed community—the polis. There are standards of propriety which bear a certain similarity to justice among persons who are not so free and equal but justice strictly speaking does not exist among them. The relationship between parents and children might be mentioned as an unobjectionable example. So injustice means to assign to oneself more than one deserves by virtue of one's status in the polis. Aristotle avers that this is why men put their trust in law rather than personal rule. Law is “no respecter of persons,” as we say when we are praising it. We might state this categorical quality of the law by saying that the law can base one's entitlement not on who he is but rather on what he is and what he does from the point of view of the polis itself, and this is justice.

The argument is fragrant with the sweet smell of legitimacy. There is a conundrum associated with it, though, which Aristotle mentions in this very context, albeit not with an explicitness that would befoul the air. What, he asks, would be the just return to a “true ruler” who would be the guardian of equality and fairness itself? What would be justly owed to the guarantor. . . of justice? One might think that the only possible answer to this question is “everything!” Indeed, *he* the guarantor might think so. Aristotle, of course, does not explicitly endorse this conclusion; however, he does indicate that anything less than everything might be deemed “insufficient” by such a one and that for this reason they “become tyrants.” It would be reckless to say that this thought amounts to a defense of tyranny, still less an account of the psychology of the tyrant (à la *Republic IX*). It is shocking nonetheless. We do learn that even a tyrant may feel that he deserves what he desires and grasps.

To reiterate: men commit unjust acts but it is not always the case that such acts make them or mark them as unjust in the fullest sense. Already we begin to wonder: do they ever? That is, do men ever commit acts of injustice knowing them to be unjust and intending the injustice? Before we are

brought to see Aristotle's answer to that question and to see the implications of that answer there is another matter that needs to be established. That is that as regards political justice, some part of it is merely legal, in the sense that prior to a law's being enacted acts that the law would forbid are in themselves matters of indifference. We do not dispute whether it might be more or less just to drive on the right-hand side of the road but once a law has made such a determination it then is a serious matter that everyone obey it. There is, however, another part of political justice that is not like that. This part is natural, and is often ground for the most serious disputes. Now Aristotle avers that it is not hard to see which of the things that are politically just belong to the camp of the natural and which merely legal. And indeed, it is not hard; it is obvious that men do not dispute seriously over every sort of law. The real issue, though, is whether there actually is anything that is naturally just, or is it the case that when men dispute over such matters they are confused by a belief in something that does not exist? Aristotle knows that there are some people who hold just that. They base their opinion on the fact that everything that is recognized as naturally just is changeable, in the sense that it varies from place to place, but what is natural is the same everywhere. "Just as fire burns both here and in Persia." Aristotle insists that the people who hold this view are wrong; but they are not completely wrong. He does acknowledge that what is recognized as just in both the legal and the natural sense is changeable, and indeed equally changeable. How can this be?

Contemporary students of Aristotle owe a debt of gratitude to Leo Strauss for underscoring the significance as well as the difficulty of the passage at hand. As is well known, Strauss sought, in his *Natural Right and History*, to defend as a serious matter the issue of natural right, redeeming it from the forces of historicism and relativism. From Strauss we learn that there have been two alternative lines of interpretation of Aristotle's statement, dating as far back as the Middle Ages: the Thomistic and the Averroistic. According to Thomas, Aristotle's statement that natural right is changeable has to be understood in a "qualified" way. It means that while there are in fact immutable, valid principles of natural right, these serve as axioms from which more specific, changeable rules are derived, for instance, that one ought return what one has borrowed. Averroes on the other hand represented the view of Jewish and Islamic Aristotelians, according to which what is changeable is rules of right and wrong that are in fact conventions; but some of these are ubiquitous conventions that exist in all political communities as a matter of necessity. A prohibition against murder would be an example. To put it briefly, Thomas's

interpretation has it that what is truly natural is *not* changeable;⁸ Averroes that all right is changeable because it is *not* strictly speaking natural. Yet Aristotle says that all natural right is changeable. Strauss's quest for a third alternative employs a kind of circumstantialism. That is, he claims that Aristotle holds that beyond any commutative or distributional justice there is justice in the sense of the common good. And so, "In extreme situations there may be conflicts between what the self-preservation of society requires and the requirements of commutative and distributive justice. In such situations, and only in such situations, it can justly be said that the public safety is the highest law."⁹

So now there are three "formidable opponents." But especially the example of the third one bids us to be undaunted in attempting to express our own criticisms, provided we do so with all possible care and circumspection. In the passage at hand, it does not appear that Aristotle is talking about extreme circumstances. He appears to be referring to *variations* among political communities regarding natural justice under normal circumstances. That is, he appears to be saying that the varying notions of what is just are not all merely matters of convention despite the fact that they do vary. Can we make sense of the passage if we read it in this way?

To think this matter through I propose that we observe and elaborate the statement that natural justice is changeable as are all human things. That is, it is not only notions of what is just that vary among men but other matters too; everything human is subject to change. Aristotle does give an example, not of natural justice but of another aspect of human nature that is subject to change. By nature the right hand is stronger but it is possible that anyone can become ambidextrous. As the twig is rebent, so grows the tree. But is the ambidextrous man less natural than one who is right-handed as is true of the generality, or is he even more so? It appears that what Aristotle has to mean is that there *is* a human nature but it is a peculiar sort of naturalness that involves a certain

⁸ Mary Keys has demonstrated that Thomas was aware that his interpretation of Aristotle's thought did not conform exactly with what the philosopher wrote. She quotes Thomas as saying that he changed Aristotle's "water into wine," by which Thomas meant that he read a greater moral depth into Aristotle than was there in the original. Keys clearly approves. See Mary M. Keys, *Aquinas, Aristotle, and the Promise of the Common Good* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

⁹ That things which are normally advantageous, healthy, or good can be bad under extraordinary circumstances is a fact that pertains throughout nature, not only among human beings and human things. Aristotle's example of something that is natural yet changeable insofar as it is human is that whereas the right hand is normally stronger, all men can become ambidextrous. The example suggests the *alterability* of human things, including human nature. Such alterations are not confined to exceptional circumstances. See Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 160.

latitude or malleability such that there can be a variety of modes of being human.¹⁰ To think further about his example, in many kinds of city or community it might not matter much which of one's hands was dominant, if either one. However, in a city like, say, Sparta, where the whole city was organized around the production of a citizen soldiery trained to fight in a phalanx, ambidexterity might be a tremendous advantage. Now it is true that the training that is required to overcome what nature supplies as raw human material would itself belong to the realm of legal enactment. Aristotle indicates as much by saying that "as for things that are just by agreement and in reference to advantage, they are like measures: the measures for wine and corn are not everywhere equal; rather, where wine and corn are bought, the measures are greater, and where they are sold, smaller." That is, various legal enactments serve what are perceived as advantages among various ways of life (1135a1–4).

If Aristotle were to leave the matter at this one might conclude that his real meaning is that we humans can overcome our natures. His thought would be like that "existentialist" slogan, "man makes himself." Nature, for us, would be but a matrix, while human life would derive its distinctive forms, its meaning, and its elevation from an exercise of human freedom. This, though, is decidedly not his meaning; for if it were, it would follow that there could be no one way of life that would be best for man as such. Human *nature* would not be a standard against which to compare and evaluate the variety of forms of human life and common life. Aristotle insists, however, that this is not so. In the very last sentence of the paragraph under consideration he states, "but everywhere there is only one regime that is in accord with nature, the best regime (1135a5).¹¹ Let us try to elaborate. There are a variety of ways of life, of regime. Each one involves rules some of which involve judgments that are by no means matters of indifference among the members but which reflect a notion of what is just by nature. Political justice, we recall, is itself something that exists only within a polity that is composed of roughly free and equal members who govern themselves through law. Justice, then, has an aspirational quality, as the law reflects what the city aspires to. Might it be said, though, that each polis aspires to its own standard of justice and that what Aristotle means by his sentence is that there is one regime by nature best for each city everywhere? Even so, men must think that it is owing to circumstances that they are prevented from fully realizing whatever they aspire to,

¹⁰ This malleability is what makes possible the very distinction between nature and convention and thereby it is what makes possible a distinctive meaning to the term "nature."

¹¹ This one sentence is probably the major stumbling block for such readings as those of Bernard Yack and Tony Burns.

and that very thought implies, as a correlative, that some circumstances are more fortuitous than others. So what would be best under the most fortuitous imaginable circumstances? That would have to be best simply—everywhere and always the one best regime.

What, though *is* that best regime? At just this point of the text he does not say; however later on, in the context of how various forms of friendship reflect and exist in various forms of regime, Aristotle does say quite simply that of the three nondeviant forms of regime, “the best of these is kingship” (1160a35). Is that, though, his full and final answer to the question of the best regime? At this point more than one commentator thinks it necessary to resist. If, as does seem necessary, we turn to the *Politics* to illuminate the issue, we are confronted with an apparent ambiguity. There too Aristotle writes of kingship as in some sense best (*Pol.* III.6, 12–17), and yet he also praises the aristocratic republic as the ideal regime (*Pol.* VII and VIII).¹² The ambiguity is more apparent than real, however. Kingship and aristocracy can each be properly said to be best, each in their own way. Aristocracy is the best regime insofar as it is ruled by and for those who represent because they embody what the polis is all about: human well-being, virtue, happiness. The *Nicomachean Ethics* as a whole is a description of such persons. Kingship is the theme of the discussion of proportional justice that concludes Book III of the *Politics*. As we saw in our earlier comment on this same issue in the *Ethics*, justice requires that one’s status within the polis be in accordance with one’s contributions to the general good. However, the complicated nature of the polis is such that contributions are required that are of different sorts, and there is no nice mathematical ratio by which they can all be measured. The contributions of, for example, the soldiers, the farmers, the tradesmen are incommensurable, such that the polis, *any* polis, is always beset by a contention regarding justice. The polis is a kind of open wound. Having revealed that problem (chapter 12) Aristotle turns to his discussion of kingship. The lesson is that only kingship resolves the problem of political justice for the polis. It “resolves” it, though, by transcending it. It is a rare “solution,” but where it is possible, say, by virtue of there being one person superior in all relevant criteria to all the rest, that person should be absolute ruler. Aristotle says explicitly in this context that this sort of rule is beyond law and also,

¹² This has caused one commentator, Jesus Vega, to conclude that Aristotle waffles: “Even Aristotle says that more than one constitution might be the best one,” citing the distinction between *Politics* III and VII. In this way Vega seeks to evade or undermine what is for him the troubling significance of Aristotle’s flat statement that there is one best everywhere. See Jesus Vega, “Aristotle’s Concept of Law: Beyond Positivism and Natural Law,” *Journal of Ancient Philosophy* 4, no. 2 (2010): 27–28 with n55.

by the same token, beyond justice. It exemplifies a sort of propriety that is more like that of a father's rule over his children than that of a statesman. The "polis" takes on the character of a large family. In sum, kingship is best where a polis has transformed into something simpler than itself. In reality, kingship exists in a very primitive context where it might actually happen that one person is so preeminent over any and all others that there would not really exist contesting claims to rule (1288a20–30).

Natural justice is changeable, then, because justice in all its forms belongs to a mode of human existence that, whatever its specific form, is defective. One understands as does Aristotle the peculiar thing about the naturalness of human nature if one says that it is our nature to be defective. Still, if Aristotle's whole treatment of political life and of justice becomes fully intelligible only if we graduate to the posture of his critique of justice itself, it is also necessary to see that, and to see why, Aristotle obscures that critique in his compact, subtle, and sometimes ambiguous prose. His expressions are full of hints. In the present case, those people who think that everything just exists by convention do say something that "has an element of the truth." Were it not to be true we would have to be as free of defect as are the gods.

Justice, even natural justice, is relative to time and place. It depends on particular features of each polis. If we are to avoid attributing to Aristotle a simple relativism on this basis it must be by way of explaining his correlative assertion that there is one regime that is everywhere the best. Even if the foregoing attempt at such a reconciliation is correct, though, it still leaves unanswered the bald question, *What is justice?* True, Aristotle has explained the meaning of "partial" justice as rectification in transactions and proportionality in distribution, but useful as these points are they serve to indicate rather than to settle the fundamental issue. As regards rectification, everyone who has thought about this recognizes that sometimes making good on a debt is not good or just, as when one has borrowed a weapon from someone who has become mad, for example. Similarly, distributive justice depends upon a proper assessment of each contribution, typically requiring a comparison among incomparables. Considerations like these demonstrate that the previous discussion of partial justice was not a complete account of a discrete, albeit subordinate, phenomenon but was itself partial. Full clarity requires that we understand what justice is in the full sense—but do we?

In the last, brief paragraph of the chapter under consideration Aristotle very subtly gives us an indication of his thinking about this matter. The paragraph is admittedly hard to interpret but if we stress its connection with the

immediately foregoing, it appears that Aristotle is indicating his substantial agreement with the account of justice that emerges from Book IV of Plato's *Republic*. That is, justice is each member of the polis doing his or her own work (*Rep.* 432e–433a).

Each of the just and lawful things is related [to various acts that accord with them] as universals are to particulars. For whereas there are many particular acts, each of the just and lawful things is one, since it is universal. An act of injustice differs from the unjust, and an act of justice differs from the just. For what is unjust is by nature or by enactment, but this very thing becomes an act of injustice once it is done; yet until what is unjust is done it is not yet an act of injustice, though it is unjust. The case is similar also for an act of justice (though this is more commonly called a “just action” [*dikaiopragēma*], whereas an “act of justice” [*dikaiōma*], is a correction of an act of injustice). In reference to each of these, we must examine later what forms it takes, how many forms there are, and with what sorts of things each happens to be concerned. (1135a5–10)

Even though it is formally true that justice and injustice are each exemplified by their specific acts, Aristotle expects that his reader will imagine more easily how this is with respect to injustice and unjust acts. An unjust act, for example, would be a violation of the law; and this would be the case whether or not the law in question involved justice in the natural sense or merely by enactment. Lawlessness is naturally unjust. What, though, is an act of justice? Is it, by way of contrast, an act that abides by the law? This hardly seems to be a contentful notion. Justice in this sense would be merely that feature of each person doing his or her particular task or duty—in itself scarcely anything. It seems indeed likely that this is the reason Aristotle “postpones” his discussion of the various kinds of justice and injustice. In fact, however, nowhere in Aristotle's extant writings does he pay off this promissory note. Are we to conclude that Aristotle just let the point drop, as if forgetfully? Or is it not much more likely that he intends the lesson to be derived from the very fact that his promise is unfulfilled?

Only now, Aristotle insists, now that we understand what is just and unjust, are we able to say with full understanding that a person acts justly or unjustly when his action is voluntary. Clarity about this point has been the aim announced at the beginning of chapter 6 but before we could address it we needed to understand the nature of justice as something humanly changeable, albeit natural in a special sort of way. The discussion will commence in chapter 8 and then achieve its fundament in chapter 9, where Aristotle will

reveal the real difference between his philosophical view of justice and what we might call, with pardonable imprecision, the moral view.

It is fairly obvious that we do not perform an act of justice or injustice if the act is involuntary, even though in a certain sense the act itself might be just or unjust. There are mistakes, and mishaps whereby an act might be just or unjust in an incidental way; and Aristotle is at some pains to explain what these things are and why they are not acts of justice or injustice in the full sense, whereby we would be guilty if it were an act of injustice. More arresting is the statement that follows, that even a voluntary act of injustice may not be of such a sort that it marks a person as unjust, or wicked. His example, the single example he offers to illustrate this point, is an act performed out of anger. Now we might respond to Aristotle that we should try to control our anger, just as we should try to avoid making mistakes and risking mishaps that would have unjust consequences. To be sure we should, if we care about justice. Aristotle's point at hand, though, is that just as accidents do happen despite our best precautions, sometimes anger does get the better of us and in a case like that the real responsibility lies with the one who provoked our anger, taking advantage of an all-too-human weakness. An unjust act due to anger would be voluntary but it would not be *deliberately chosen* and for that reason would not be an unjust act in the fullest sense. Indeed, Aristotle notes, one *always* presumes when angry that one has justice on one's side. It might be justice in one's own case that one presumes, and so mixed with self-interest, but it is never simple self-interest. All anger involves a reference to justice and a concern for justice.

That all anger involves a concern for justice is a psychological fact that invites the profoundest reflection. It does not mean that justice *is* the satisfaction of anger. We want the presumption of our anger to be true; but we know that it is not necessarily true. To put it metaphorically, anger must look beyond itself, to the higher authority of knowledge so as to confirm, or disconfirm, what it presumes. This is of course the foundation of the role and rank of the auxiliary class in the *Republic* in their subordination to their rational ruler. When we subordinate our own anger to our reason we have to overcome thinking that our own hurt is sufficient evidence that we were dealt an injustice. We need to call to mind what Aristotle is showing us here to be the case, namely, that only voluntary acts performed out of deliberate choice could be unjust in the full sense—in the sense worthy of our anger, so to speak.

But do any acts of *that* sort even exist?

Aristotle begins chapter 9 by acknowledging that there still remains a perplexity regarding what has been said about suffering and doing injustice. He then quotes from Euripides's play *Alcmaeon* and asks whether there might be some truth in the words, despite their being strange.

“I killed my mother, brief is my speech.”

“You voluntarily and she voluntarily,

Or she [not] voluntarily and you not voluntarily?” (1136a12–14)

This is not the first time in the *Ethics* that we have heard of *Alcmaeon*. Earlier, in Book III, Aristotle had referred to it. *Alcmaeon* was said to have offered an absurd excuse for the crime of matricide. Sadly, we do not possess the text of Euripides's play. Martin Ostwald, however, informs us that “an ancient commentator on this passage tells us that *Alcmaeon*'s motive for killing his mother was to escape the curse of his father.”¹³ *Alcmaeon*'s father had laid the curse on him as a means of avenging himself against his wife, *Alcmaeon*'s mother, in return for her inducing the father to attend the ill-fated expedition of *Seven against Thebes*. Aristotle refers to the play as if it would be well known to his immediate audience. We might speculate that in his play Euripides was presenting an intriguing examination of the whole phenomenon of guilt and moral responsibility. However that might be, Aristotle had earlier dismissed as absurd *Alcmaeon*'s appeal to circumstances as exonerating him from the matricide. There are some crimes so heinous that no circumstances can excuse them and in this particular case the circumstances were ones *Alcmaeon* could have and should have borne. This makes good sense in connection with the overall thrust of Book III, which is to defend moral responsibility as such against objections that Aristotle treats as sophistical. Most importantly, while he grants there that a person might be led to sin out of confusion deriving from some deficiency of character, one should nevertheless be praised or blamed insofar as one is responsible for the very formation of one's character, at least partly. Now in Book V, however, *Alcmaeon* returns, this time by way of the direct quote, promising to shed light on acting and suffering unjustly.

What, then, is it that is “strange” about the quotation? It is that the respondent assumes that the matricide could not have been suffered willingly unless the perpetrator was willing as well. And if it was an unwilling act, it must have been suffered unwillingly as well. Why would this be so, though? It might seem that logic would permit two other possibilities: (1) that the

¹³ Ostwald, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 53n2.

matricide was willingly performed upon an unwilling subject, or (2) that it was unwillingly performed on a willing subject. The words suggest, however, that these are not actual possibilities and the question is why. What is it that limits what we can will to do or suffer?

In the sequel Aristotle concentrates his attention on what we can suffer willingly. Can one suffer injustice willingly? The answer, strictly speaking, is no. Aristotle reminds us of the distinction carefully drawn in the previous chapter between an act that is “*ipso facto*” unjust and one that is merely incidentally unjust, and he says here that the same distinction applies to suffering injustice. One can, then, suffer an injustice willingly but only in the incidental way. He is at pains to defend this assertion against what he appears to presume might come to someone’s mind as a decisive contrary example. What about when a person voluntarily harms himself in the way that a morally weak person might do? In such a case the person believes he is doing wrong—that he is committing an injustice in the broad sense—and it is himself whom he believes is wronged. The act is not inadvertent; in some sense it is willed. So is this not a case where someone suffers injustice voluntarily?¹⁴

It is not. Maintaining his assertion that no one suffers injustice willingly, in the strict and full sense, Aristotle now says that the definition of acting unjustly needs to be amended. It must include that the act was performed against the wish of the recipient. On the basis of this emendation of what it means to act unjustly, Aristotle can say that although a morally weak person suffers an injustice, and suffers it at his own hand, he does not strictly speaking suffer injustice willingly. “Rather, he acts against his wish. For no one wishes for what he supposes not to be of serious worth and the person lacking self-restraint supposes that he ought not to do what he proceeds to do” (1136b6–9). In the case at hand, the doing and the suffering are two sides of the same coin. So if the act be contrary to the doer’s wish, then in the same sense it is contrary to the sufferer’s wish. Aristotle will devote a much fuller discussion to the topic of moral weakness later in Book VII. What he has stated in the present context, however, is sufficient to show that the self-referential act of a morally weak person does not constitute an exception to his general rule: that no one suffers injustice voluntarily.

In considering the foregoing argument we have been presuming that the injustice one might suffer is a harmful injustice. What, though, about unjust

¹⁴ Note that this argument does not apply to an immoderate person, whom Aristotle discussed in Book III. That person does harm himself but he does not believe that what he does is wrong, so in no sense does he even appear to intend to do wrong.

benefits: could we not experience such injustices voluntarily? Aristotle's answer involves the same strict distinction between incidentally unjust acts and ones ipso facto unjust that he has been insisting on all along. Yes, one might receive the benefit of an act voluntarily but not the injustice of it. He explains further, when an unjust distribution is made, the guilty party is the distributor; only in a secondary, less blameworthy sense does guilt attach to the recipient. What, though, when the distributor and the recipient are the same person? To see the importance of the answer to this question we need to understand that this is not a special case. On the contrary, Aristotle observes that whenever an unjust distribution is made it is *always* the case that the distributor receives some sort of benefit: perhaps a kickback, or the satisfaction of revenge. And it is this that was the real motive for the unjust act. What the distributor, or indeed any perpetrator, wishes is, strictly speaking, the gain, not the injustice. Was the gain not itself unjust? Maybe, but it is not that that made it gainful, or wished. So if to commit an injustice in the full sense one must wish for and deliberately choose the injustice itself, the conclusion to which we have been led is that this simply does not happen! To reiterate, no one wishes something that he does not believe to be morally good.

Only now are we able to understand the thought that concludes this ninth chapter of Aristotle's book on justice, Book V of the *Ethics*. The thought actually concludes the whole of Book V. There is a contrast between two different attitudes towards the whole subject of justice, one of which we recognize as representing a more ordinary view, or we might term it a more moral view, and the other a philosophical view, which is in one way more forgiving and in another much more demanding. People think that it is easy to be just, since they think that what justice requires is simply forgoing acts that are unjust, such as laws forbid. Everyone is presumed by this view to know what justice demands; the hard thing is to do it. This, though, is precisely what Aristotle has labored to refute. No one ever wishes to do what he knows to be unjust, speaking in that same strict mode that he has required all along. The hard thing, the *very* hard thing, is to know it. Being just in this way involves relating to one's fellows in something like the way a doctor relates to patients. It is a standard that would govern a bestowal from one to a recipient when, for whatever reason, one wishes the recipient well. Readers of the *Republic* will recognize how Aristotle has brought his argument round to an endorsement of that one definition of justice that is there advanced and which is never rescinded: justice is helping one's friends and harming no one.

Of course who *are* one's friends, and what precisely *is* help, are the questions that make justice in this sense so extremely demanding. The difficulty is not so much in knowing what is good. It is, rather, in knowing what of that which is good is good for whom. People's confusion regarding this question is an aspect of why they need the polis, but what the polis demands, that is, justice, points towards a form of authority that is beyond any possible polis.

What, finally, of *Alcmaeon*? If we have drawn out Aristotle's thought correctly it is possible to interpret the passage he quotes as a fitting prologue. Alcmaeon confesses; he killed his mother. The respondent answers in a manner of a judge, one who understands the soundness of Aristotle's view of justice. Alcmaeon could not have willed the matricide as an act of injustice, for that would be impossible. He must have felt it to be an act of justice, perhaps as punishment. If punishment is to be just, though, must it not involve the acceptance of guilt on the part of the recipient and, hence, acceptance that the punishment is indeed just? To inflict harm on an unrepentant sinner can never fully slake the thirst for justice. So if "he" was willing, "she" must also have been willing. And yet when we put it that way, her willing acceptance of the "punishment" means that there are no more grounds for Alcmaeon's anger. Wherein, therefore, is the need for the punishment? One guesses that this, or something close to it, was the lesson of the play, that Euripides saw as did Aristotle that our most serious concern for justice must ultimately take us beyond the moral presumption of justice.

EQUITY

The previous chapter has put us in mind of a standard of justice that is beyond political/legal justice, beyond, that is, what most men think. It is however not beyond the common sense of the matter to understand that action and judgment according to the law can have consequences that are perverse, in the sense of being contrary to what is or appears to be the aim of the law itself. When this happens we need to have recourse to considerations of equity (*epieikes*) so as to correct for the mistake whereby the law "misses the mark" owing to its universality. Aristotle now, in chapter 10, considers this matter. It is important that we realize that equity is not a standard that is beyond legal justice, in the sense of being better than justice or more fundamental. This in fact is a principal thrust of the chapter under consideration and we understand why it is the next subject we have to discuss following what we learned from what preceded immediately. Equity is not a higher standard than legal justice (if it were, justice in that ordinary sense would

not be good!); on the contrary, it is the same standard. A judgment according to equity rectifies the mistakes that may occur under the law, in a way that corresponds to what the lawgiver would have said if he were present. Equity functions, so to speak, within the context of a legal system and when we are driven to refer to it we are still obliged to operate within the parameters and the aims of the law. In this respect, Aristotle's argument provides more support for what in contemporary juridical parlance is termed "originalism" than it does the opposite. Equity requires that we be as originalist as possible.

Why, though, should there be a need for equity? Why cannot human laws be as adequate to govern our lives as, say, the laws of physics are thought to govern material particles? "Concerning some matters it is not possible to speak correctly in a general way. In those cases, then, in which it is necessary to speak generally, but it is not possible to do so correctly, the law takes what is for the most part the case, but without being ignorant of the error involved in so doing. And the law is no less correct for all that: the error resides not in the law or in the lawgiver but in the nature of the matter at hand" (1137b13–19). This same fact means not only that a law may sometimes need to be corrected for in a particular case by a consideration of equity but also that there is or are classes of things that no good law could even be enacted and which must be governed by "a special decree." There is something tantalizing about these remarks; and Aristotle provides no examples of what he means. The chapter simply bids us to consider how it might happen that a law would forbid an action that in a particular situation equity demands to be performed so as to preclude a graver offense. To understand this fully we would need to understand why there should be such recalcitrance in the material of which actions are made to be governed adequately by law. Is it entirely a matter of variation in circumstances, or must the explanation also involve an incommensurability among different and unequal people's needs?

In the subsequent book of the *Ethics* Aristotle will discuss thematically the subject of prudence (*phronēsis*). Perhaps that discussion will throw some light back on the issue of the need for equity. We can say already from this vantage point, though, that prudence is not the same thing as equity, or the knowledge of the equitable. Prudence has a much wider field. It deals with matters of strategy as well as of friendship—it includes some things that may be higher or lower than justice and equity. At its most commanding level, prudence issues orders to the lawgiver or is itself lawgiver. Equity strives to be faithful to the lawgiver. It belongs appropriately to the discussion of justice, that summary

virtue that exists only “among those for whom law is natural, namely those for whom there is equality in ruling and being ruled” (1134b 14–15).

CONCLUSION

I have argued that in Aristotle's text there is a subtle contrast between a more ordinary sense of justice and a philosopher's justice. The former is, in its fullest extent, the virtue that causes one to honor the law and to obey it. This notion of justice entails a reverence for the majesty of the law, as comprehending the highest human good. However, especially in chapter 9, this view of justice, “more admirable than the morning star and the evening star,” loses some of its luster. Another notion of justice begins to emerge that requires a transcendence of the perspective that nearly all men share. In this chapter especially, Aristotle employs language that is meant to be intriguing, thus to direct our thinking beyond the bare words. The reason is that the gap between the two notions of justice is in fact the gap between the two ways of life, which he knows to be fundamentally unbridgeable. From the perspective of nonphilosophers, the justice of philosophers looks not to be justice at all. It certainly does not seem moral. There is a slogan, conventionally attributed to Aristotle, though not to be found in any extant text, that runs, “justice consists in moderation regulated by wisdom.” Whoever it may have been who attributed these words to Aristotle, they are in perfect harmony with the philosopher's notion of justice. The philosopher *does* good, but being sensible he is moderate in doing good. He is good to his “friends” and even to them he does only such good as is good for them. The model that makes this at least somewhat intelligible is Socrates.

If I have succeeded in the foregoing it will have been to recapitulate an account of justice that many thoughtful contemporaries will find disappointing. As one observant reader, who has a gift for forthrightness, puts it:

This is connected to what I was calling the “deflationary view of justice.”...For us justice is the central and ethical and political concern. For Aristotle, it is a virtue of character of the just citizen first and foremost. For us, the key issue—whether justice is by nature or by convention—is only treated in a few cryptic sentences explicated with a few examples (V 6). Instead Aristotle devotes significant effort in several chapters to what must only seem a sophism to modern political and moral philosophers—whether one can be unjust to oneself.¹⁵

¹⁵ The quotation is from Colin Anderson, in an unpublished paper delivered at Hiram College in 2012.

The reaction is understandable; but do we really have a warrant for feeling deflated? To speak of “the contemporary view of justice” is, of course, to speak of something that is full of tensions of its own. Still, one can say with the author of the passage just quoted that some of our contemporaries would find both notions of justice that I have identified in Aristotle to be flawed. The more common, moral notion appears “deflated,” even banal, and the idea that there could be a way of life, indeed *the* life fit for human beings, that excludes almost all human beings is either flatly unintelligible or rejected with a moral shudder. The reason has something to do with the “individualism” that is featured in both modern political philosophy and in Christianity—a thing that has a lower status for Aristotle’s Greeks and for Aristotle himself. And yet, on the other hand, perhaps we are not so much wedded to the idea of “individualism” as we are constrained by it. Few indeed are unaware of its problems. As is well known, at or just after the dawn of modern political philosophy Thomas Hobbes had repudiated any notion of a human *summum bonum* and had, therewith, repudiated any notion of justice beyond what the sovereign representative dictates. Justice means keeping to one’s agreement to obey, an agreement that every natural individual person has an unalienable right to grant or withhold. It appears from our experience, however, that people cannot live on the level of such neutralism. What Hobbes held to be our natural freedom and equality over the next two centuries came to be thought of as standards, the standards that define a just society. Today we see, albeit reluctantly, that those standards fall short. Equality, unless it be equality in freedom, is the footprint of the tyrannical despot, while freedom, mere freedom, is a negative notion that fails to illuminate fully the question of how we should live.

Our contemporary dogmatism of democratic individualism, freedom, and equality is but the attempt to define justice, or to return to an idea of justice, on the level of philosophical neutralism. It is a hopeless endeavor. I contend that the appeal that Aristotle does seem to have among many students today derives precisely from the fact that he takes us beyond the slogans of contemporary public life towards a more serious, searching examination of what is always the fundamental question of public life, namely, What is justice? In its clam, patient, incredible boldness, this examination has then to point us beyond the justice that must govern public life towards that other life that it befits us to honor.

In Search of the Comprehensive Science: The Way to Philosophy of Alfarabi's Plato

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Over three-quarters of a century has passed since Richard Walzer and Franz Rosenthal published the first Arabic edition of the *Philosophy of Plato*, and half a century since Muhsin Mahdi produced an excellent translation of the entire trilogy. Despite the lapse of time, Alfarabi's *Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle* remains an imposing work, much praised but little understood.¹ Leo Strauss's pathbreaking essay, now also over seventy years old, has not been forgotten, but nor has it been consistently followed up.²

Part of the challenge of interpreting the work lies in its original form: while the second and third part present the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle, respectively, the first part, titled "The Attainment of Happiness," does not pretend to be anything but a novel treatise composed by Alfarabi himself. While it is easy to perceive some overlap between the three parts, it is extraordinarily difficult to discover any consistent relationship between them. Each

¹ Alfarabi, *Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, trans. Muhsin Mahdi, rev. ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001). The three parts of the treatise have yet to be combined into a single Arabic edition. I cite the following: *Tahṣīl al-Sa'āda* (Beirut: Dār al-Andalūs, 1983); *Falsafat Aflāṭūn*, ed. Franz Rosenthal and Richard Walzer (London: Warburg Institute, 1943); *Falsafat Aristūṭālīs*, ed. Muhsin Mahdi (Beirut: Dār al-Majallat Shi'r, 1961). The numbers in Mahdi's translation correspond to the Arabic text of the *Philosophy of Plato* and *Philosophy of Aristotle*, but not to the Arabic text of the *Attainment of Happiness*, so in citing it I have provided the references to both English translation and Arabic original. I cite these works initially by their full title and afterward by abbreviations.

² Leo Strauss, "Farabi's *Plato*," in *Louis Ginzberg Jubilee Volume* (New York: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1945). A noteworthy exception, about which I will have more to say later, is Christopher Colmo, *Breaking with Athens: Alfarabi as Founder* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005), 55–88.

has an entirely distinct beginning, end, and subject matter, as if Alfarabi has collected three very different animals and stuffed them into the same pen.

A hint concerning the thread that unites the work may be found in the title, the only among Alfarabi's extant works to contain the word "philosophy." This seemingly banal observation points to a major feature of the work. While some of Alfarabi's works, such as the *Political Regime*, do not even mention philosophy, and others do so only rarely, all three sections of the trilogy dramatically introduce this term. Yet the context is unique in each case. In the *Attainment of Happiness*, philosophy comes to light only after the conquest, governance, and education of several nations has been proposed (*Attainment of Happiness* [AH] 38.19 [88]). In the *Philosophy of Plato*, the meaning of philosophy is clarified only after the popular arts and ways of life prevalent in the cities have been examined (*Philosophy of Plato* [PP] 12.14–15). In the *Philosophy of Aristotle*, philosophy's necessity is demonstrated only after a thorough investigation of all the logical methods, sciences, and beings (*Philosophy of Aristotle* [PA] 132.1). Besides, while Alfarabi does aver, at the end of the first section, that Plato's and Aristotle's philosophy have the same purpose (AH 47.9–11 [97]), his accounts of their respective philosophies seem to have very little in common. So while the word "philosophy" does provide a common thread linking all three parts, a quick perusal of its meaning in each of them brings familiar interpretative challenges to the fore.

Another statement by Alfarabi helps justify the apparent divergence between Plato and Aristotle. Both philosophers gave an account not only of philosophy, but of the "ways" (*turuq*) to it, as if there are multiple equally good paths to a single end (AH 47.5–6 [98]). The implication is that while Alfarabi's Plato discusses politics, religion, poetry, and moral qualities, and his Aristotle logic, natural science, and metaphysics, both philosophers arrive somehow at the same goal. The tripartite treatise thus offers three entirely distinct paths to philosophy, one pursued by Plato, another by Aristotle, and a third by Alfarabi himself. A full understanding of the treatise would require a book-length comparison of these three ways. My more modest purpose here is to examine the way to philosophy pursued by Alfarabi's Plato. In order to emphasize the peculiarity of this way, I will occasionally compare the way of Plato to the way of Aristotle and the way of Alfarabi himself.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF PLATO: AN OVERVIEW

The *Philosophy of Plato* is by far the shortest of the three parts. It recounts a series of investigations carried out by Plato, ascribed to various Platonic

dialogues: every dialogue known to us, except for the *Minos*, is included. As demonstrated by Strauss,³ subtle and unexpected changes in the choice of terms color the argument as it unfolds. The accounts of each dialogue are recognizably Platonic in many respects, but none come close to adequately summarizing any single Platonic work. Although obviously inspired by Plato, the protagonist is also created by Alfarabi. I will nonetheless call him “Plato,” under the assumption that we all understand whose Plato is meant.

The *Philosophy of Plato* is the middle section of the trilogy, but also, as Strauss and Mahdi have both noted, the most independent.⁴ The first of the three philosophers in time, Plato makes the fewest assumptions about philosophy or human perfection. Unlike Aristotle, he does not begin with any previous philosopher in mind (PA 59): even his teacher Socrates does not figure in the early stages of his quest (PP 12.6). Unlike Alfarabi himself, he does not presuppose any immediate knowledge of earthly and heavenly happiness or profess the need to realize it in the nations and cities (AH 2.1 [49], PP 3.1).

Despite his early starting point, Plato arrives at philosophy rather quickly. Slightly before the midpoint of the treatise, he is ready to unveil philosophy as the art supplying the science that he seeks (PP 12.10–16). How, exactly, does he arrive at this conclusion? Plato’s argument divides cleanly enough into four main segments: first, he determines that knowledge of the beings and a virtuous way of life are required for happiness (PP 3.1–4.10); second, he refutes the claims of Protagoras and Meno, that such knowledge cannot be attained (PP 4.11–6.2); third, he examines the generally accepted logical arts, and their usefulness in attaining this science and way of life (PP 6.3–9.10); fourth, he makes the same inquiry with regard to the practical arts (PP 9.11–12.6). Of course, Plato’s understanding of philosophy continues to develop far beyond what he has established at this point. I will consider each of these four sections in turn, and then incorporate this analysis into a more general interpretation of the *Philosophy of Plato* as a whole.

While Mahdi’s translation is generally praiseworthy, four of its features may make it harder for the English reader to follow my interpretation. First, the term *‘ilm* is translated as both “knowledge” and “science.” Second, the term *ṭarīq* is translated as both “method” and “way.” Third, the terms *shay’* (thing) and *amr* (matter or affair) are not translated with any consistent

³ Strauss, “Farabi’s *Plato*,” passim, esp. the footnotes.

⁴ Muhsin Mahdi, *Alfarabi and the Foundation of Islamic Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 197; Strauss, “Farabi’s *Plato*,” 360n7.

English equivalents, or, in some instances, even translated at all. Fourth, the difference between the roots ‘*a-r-f* and ‘*a-l-m*, signifying two different kinds of knowledge, disappears in translation. I will attempt to explain these terms and their significance at various points in the article.

THE NEED FOR COMPREHENSIVE SCIENCE

Plato begins with the plausible assumption that humans, like every other being, have a perfection (PP 3.1). His starting point for examining perfection is not philosophic tradition (see PA 59.5), but common opinion. He immediately begins to investigate the claims to perfection made by the various kinds of people around him. In the course of his investigation of the prephilosophic world, Plato discovers that perfection is most commonly viewed through the lens of envy. He therefore lists the enviable things: health, soft skin, beauty, possession of a large family, many friends, and many lovers, as well as honor, wealth, and power over one’s city or group. But Plato himself is unimpressed. He defines the highest “perfection” as “happiness,” and is quite sure that the enviable things do not bring happiness, even though most people assume that they do (PP 3.9–11). Plato detaches the object of his quest so completely from envy that he almost never mentions it again: the one exception comes in conjunction with views of perfection that are evidently not his own (see PP 11.7).⁵ For genuine human happiness, something else is needed (PP 3.12). In considering what this “other thing” might be, Plato determines that “an indefinite knowledge” and “indefinite way of life” must bring happiness.⁶ The search for the right kind of knowledge and way of life requires a healthy contempt for the opinions of one’s fellow humans and the things these opinions lead them to envy and seek. Such indifference to envy may be difficult for many of us to acquire, but Plato seems to acquire it rather easily. It is the first, and perhaps the easiest, step on his way to philosophy.

The desired knowledge and way of life are yet to be defined. But Plato seeks to reassure impatient readers by proposing an astonishingly quick definition of the desired knowledge (*‘ilm*): it is the “knowledge of the substance

⁵ Christopher Colmo drew my attention to the importance of envy, but he downplays the difference between the large role of envy in conventional views of perfection and its minimal role in Plato or Alfarabi’s own view. I therefore do not see how the early emphasis on envy announces that Alfarabi “is not a Platonist” (Colmo, *Breaking with Athens*, 58–59).

⁶ Mahdi’s translation of “certain” is misleading because it can mean “definite,” whereas the Arabic term *mā* clearly means “indefinite.” This confusion is significant because Alfarabi’s Aristotle, unlike Plato, does speak of a “certain science” in the definite sense (*‘ilm al-yaqīn*, PA 74.7).

of each of the beings” (PP 4.2–3).⁷ The unusual “knowledge (or science) of the substance of each of the beings” is not mentioned in Alfarabi’s own classification of the sciences, in which every science examines a particular class of beings: mathematics examines numbers, physics bodies, and political science actions and customs.⁸ In the first part of his trilogy, Alfarabi follows a similar schema, proceeding from mathematics, to natural science, to metaphysics,⁹ and finally to political science, all of which are assigned a particular subject matter (AH 8.10–16.20 [55–64]). The peculiar kind of knowledge sought by Plato seems more comprehensive than the conventional sciences. Is it, therefore, an ensemble of all the sciences? Later in the treatise, Plato places this science “among the sciences” (PP 6.4), without even trying to define these other sciences. However all-encompassing the “science of the substance of each of the beings” may appear to be, it does not devour all of the other sciences in its wake. This might be because “beings” do not include all “things,”¹⁰ a possibility to which we will return. The status of this science among the other sciences remains as mysterious as its subject matter.

The meaning of the term “substance” (*jawhar*) is also somewhat enigmatic. While Plato speaks again of beings and the science that investigates them on numerous occasions, he returns to substance only once, in conjunction with linguistic science (PP 7.4). We will examine that passage in due course. Alfarabi himself does speak quite extensively about substance, but only when discussing thinkers other than Plato. In the third part of the treatise, Alfarabi indicates that the philosophical concept of substance, and its application to both natural things and human perfection, was treated far more systematically by Aristotle (PA 66.2–3, 87.9, 132.9). Alfarabi himself follows Aristotle’s cue, discussing the term at great length in the *Book of Letters*, as the Arabic translation of the Greek *ousia*. Substance signifies either a natural being of which qualities are predicated, such as stars, earth, air, water, fire, animals, plants, and humans, or the definition that makes known the essential character of that being.¹¹ In seeking the substance of each of

⁷ The Arabic word *‘ilm* can, like the Greek *epistēmē*, mean both knowledge and science, which is why Mahdi, as previously noted, translates *‘ilm* in both ways, according to context.

⁸ See Alfarabi, *Enumeration of the Sciences (Iḥṣā’ al-‘Ulūm)*, ed. ‘Uthmān Amīn (Cairo: Maktabat al-Anjlu al-Misriyya, 1968), 94, 109, 124.

⁹ Alfarabi explains that even metaphysics has a strictly limited scope, treating “exclusively” the beings that are “beyond nature” rather than being or substance as such (AH 12.14–19 [59–60]).

¹⁰ As Strauss suggests (“Farabi’s *Plato*,” 389).

¹¹ See Alfarabi, *Book of Letters (Kitāb al-Ḥurūf)*, ed. Muhsin Mahdi (Beirut: Dār Al-Mashriq, 2004), 100–103.

the beings, Plato hopes to apprehend not any chance fact about them, but rather their fundamental character. But does he ever succeed in clarifying what substance is? Plato does not even attempt to do so in conjunction with the science of the substance of the beings, offering no further explanation of substance whatsoever.

While Plato investigates the desired science and offers a provisional definition of it, he does not go even this far for the desired way of life (*sira*). He turns instead to an investigation of happiness, describing its main features and distinguishing between the real and imagined variety. Plato does add that the “virtuous way of life” brings about the achievement of “this happiness,” but as Leo Strauss has pointed out,¹² the ambiguous antecedent does not tell us whether he means the real or imagined happiness (PP 4.6–10).

We conclude that the meaning of “the science of the substance of each of the beings,” and of “the virtuous way of life” that leads to happiness, remains obscure. Two attempts to resolve this obscurity are intriguing. Strauss argues that this science must be the “art of demonstration.”¹³ The word “demonstration” does not occur in the *Philosophy of Plato*, as Strauss himself indicates, so he implies that the demonstrative art is the “other faculty” required beyond dialectic in order to attain this science (PP 9.8). To be sure, demonstration follows dialectic in the Aristotelian Organon, but can we safely apply Aristotle’s thought to Plato? Christopher Colmo argues that Alfarabi implicitly criticizes Plato for sanctifying knowledge and philosophy without knowing whether it exists.¹⁴ I would respond that Alfarabi’s Plato is perfectly aware of the questions that surround his definition, and aim to develop that response in the rest of this article.

At this stage of the investigation, Plato most emphatically does not know if the desired knowledge and way of life exist. He has courageously abandoned the things sought by the vast majority of humankind for the sake of what is initially a mere hope. In order to ensure that some of his readers go with him, Plato consciously lures them onward with promises of comprehensive knowledge and virtue, before indicating just how difficult it is to attain them. Those who do follow Plato may be puzzled to discover that his definition of this knowledge or way of life does not in itself undergo any obvious development. He repeatedly, and quite maddeningly, refers back to “this knowledge,” “that

¹² Strauss, “Farabi’s *Plato*,” 385–86.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 364–65, esp. nn20–21.

¹⁴ Colmo, *Breaking with Athens*, 55–69, esp. 56–58, 60, 63.

knowledge,” “the desired knowledge,” or “the knowledge of the beings,” as well as “this way of life.” I will assume, safely I hope, that all of these phrases take “the knowledge of the substance of each of the beings” and the “the virtuous way of life” as their antecedent. To understand what Plato might mean, we need to consider the course that the rest of his argument takes.

THE FLIMSY GROUND OF THIS SCIENCE AND THE TURN TO ART

As rapidly as Plato may formulate his definition of comprehensive knowledge, he is just as quick to acknowledge that he stands on shaky ground. Although human beings “aspire” to a knowledge of this sort (PP 4.12–14), its very existence is exposed to the familiar objections of people like Protagoras and Meno, who deny, each in his own way, that such knowledge is by nature attainable. Protagoras argues that “the knowledge natural to humans” is a matter of individual opinion and belief (PP 5.1–4), while Meno maintains that learning as such is impossible, beyond the knowledge given us haphazardly by nature and chance (PP 5.14–17).

Plato rebuts Protagoras simply by reiterating the claim that humans have a single perfection which is attained by the knowledge that he has just described (PP 5.5–6). As pleasant as it may be to thrust the troublesome sophist Protagoras aside, it is not clear how this repetition advances the argument. Meno’s objection is a harder, but perhaps more valuable, nut to crack. In order for Plato to refute Meno, it has to “become clear to him” that learning is not the result of mere nature or chance, but the consequence of some sort of art (*sinā’a*, PP 6.1–4). The importance of the introduction of art cannot be overestimated. Plato promptly begins to investigate the “generally accepted arts” (PP 6.8) of his time in order to find the art that provides the desired science, and this search takes up the next two sections.¹⁵ While Plato never seems to take seriously the generally accepted claims to happiness with which he so brusquely dispenses in the first paragraph, he is intrigued by the generally accepted arts. One could say that the arts, founded as they are on some kind of rules (*Enumeration of the Sciences*, 57–58), offer more promising ways (*turuq*, PP 6.6) toward certain knowledge than social or political opinions inspired primarily by envy (PP 3.2, 11.7). It is widely believed that the arts can be learned, at least by somebody with a modicum of natural ability, so Plato may effectively appeal to them in response to the claims of Meno and his ilk, in the

¹⁵ Colmo asks why “Plato continues to investigate at this point,” since he “already knows the knowledge that brings perfection” (*Breaking with Athens*, 63). The answer is that Plato still does not know how to attain such knowledge.

same way that people today appeal to “science” in response to “relativism” or “facts” in response to unproven political claims. Yet on this note, it is striking to observe that Plato does not appeal to the particular sciences. Despite alluding to the existence of multiple sciences distinct from “this science” (PP 6.4), he does not bother to investigate any of them. Plato’s neglect of the sciences is rather puzzling: wouldn’t mathematics and natural science, for example, help Plato in his quest? In the first part of the trilogy, Alfarabi urges his contemporaries to learn these sciences (AH 8.10–13.1 [9–20]). Perhaps Plato declines to investigate these partial sciences because he suspects that they deal only with particular classes of beings, and are unable to show the way to the more comprehensive science of the beings that he seeks. If that is the case, then Plato’s way to philosophy is determined by his assumption that there is a comprehensive science, which must be sought not through partial sciences, but through broader and more flexible methods. The logical arts considered by Plato, in contrast to the sciences, all concern a variety of classes of beings.

One could say that for Plato the way to philosophy passes not through the narrow rigor of science, but through the openness of what we might call the liberal arts. Yet this very openness also constitutes a risk, leaving the investigator exposed to error. While the logical rules developed by Aristotle protect the investigator from error in the study of the sciences (PA 85.6–86.19), something less tangible is required by Plato. In order to keep himself and his reader on the right path, he offers not a method but a concise and subtle description of each of the theoretical arts (PP 6.10–9.10).

THE INVESTIGATION OF THE SIX THEORETICAL ARTS

Alfarabi’s account of Plato’s investigation of the six syllogistic arts devotes a single paragraph to each art. Its terse summaries may appear, at first glance, extremely monotonous, as Plato briefly investigates each art before stating its inadequacy. A second glance, however, reveals great discrepancies between each art. Not one of them employs the same methods, examines the same subjects, or produces the same results as its counterparts.

None of the six arts leads to the desired knowledge or way of life. At the same time, all of Plato’s investigations are fruitful, since in every case he states either the knowledge given by the art (PP 6.15, 7.7, 8.4) or the value of the art (PP 7.19, 9.5). All of them succeed, in some form or another, in bringing Plato closer to his goal. This applies especially to sophistry, which is ridiculed in no uncertain terms, but acknowledged to have some kind of “value” as well (PP 8.10).

Each art has at least one characteristic that is not shared by any of the others. Religious speculation, for example, gives some knowledge of both the beings and ways of life (PP 6.15–16; cf. 8.2–4). The linguistic art seeks knowledge of the substances of things: this is the only place apart from 4.2 where the word “substance” occurs (PP 7.4). It is also the only art that provides unambiguously a “way” (*tariq*) to the desired science (PP 7.7; cf. 7.17, 8.9). Poetry alone has a strong interest in “natural beings” and “the desired way of life,” along with some value “for being human” (PP 7.14, 7.19). Rhetoric is the only art that reflects by means of “opinion” on both beings and ways of life (PP 8.2–3). Sophistry is the only art whose aims, actions, and practitioners are thoroughly examined, and whose primary subject is “matters” (*umūr*, PP 8.14–15). Finally, dialectic alone is said to be “extremely valuable” in the quest for the desired knowledge (PP 9.5).

The six arts divide into three pairs. The first pair, the religious syllogistic art and linguistic science, are conventional arts linked to the doctrine of a particular religion and conventional rules of a particular language.¹⁶ Poetry and rhetoric, the central pair, are popular arts that reach the largest number of human beings. Plato describes the two investigations as “similar” (PP 8.1), and indicates their broad dissemination by describing their audience with the pronoun “us” (PP 7.13, 8.2). Sophistry and dialectic, in contrast, are investigative arts practiced by the elite that purport to seek knowledge rather than any way of life (PP 8.7–10, 9.4–7). Dialect follows directly “after” sophistry just as the linguistic art follows directly “after” religion (PP 9.3, 7.1).

Based on these observations, I propose a tentative account of how Plato’s investigation progresses. The investigation of religion gives a certain amount of knowledge of the beings, but nothing about their substance. It also gives some knowledge of ways of life, but not necessarily the desired, virtuous way of life. This knowledge, however insufficient, moves Plato’s investigation forward (PP 6.12–17).¹⁷ The linguistic art, in contrast, does not examine beings or ways of life, but “the substance of things,” with “things” replacing “beings” (PP 7.4–5). The focus on “substance” suggests a greater interest in the essential character of things than is displayed by the religious art. But “things,” unlike “beings,” could be figments of the imagination that do not exist outside the soul (*Book of Letters*, 128). Such fictitious “things” are often created

¹⁶ Alfarabi, *Enumeration of the Sciences*, 58–59, 131; see Strauss, “Farabi’s *Plato*,” 374.

¹⁷ While religious investigation may be the “lowest step of the ladder of cognitive pursuits” (Strauss, “Farabi’s *Plato*,” 373–74), it is undoubtedly a useful step.

by the poets (PP 7.11)¹⁸ of the particular language to which any given linguistic art is restricted. The religious art fails because it examines beings but not substances, whose existence it may not even recognize. As Alfarabi's disciple Maimonides explains, the predominant schools among Muslim theologians taught that every being was created and recreated at every instant by God.¹⁹ Examining beings in this way presupposes that they have no essential character, and therefore leads either to religious dogmatism or complete *aporia*. The linguistic art fails because it does not recognize the difference between conventional names or imaginings and the things that actually exist outside of the soul. Yet by introducing the question of the substances that the names signify, the linguistic art helps move beyond the indefinite notion of being proposed by the religious syllogistic art and thus provides a way toward the desired knowledge (PP 7.7).

While the religious syllogistic art examines beings, and linguistic science examines the substances of things, poetry focuses on the natural rather than the conventional and the human rather than the divine (PP 7.14, 19). Following Plato in Book X of the *Republic*, Alfarabi explains in more specialized treatises like the *Epistle on the Canons of Poetry* that poetry consists of wide-ranging imitations.²⁰ Poetry speaks to "us" by opening up our mind to the widest variety of human characters, as well as natural phenomena, through imitation of them. It expands the investigator's world from the closed horizon of a particular religion or language to the broader human and natural sphere. It is less successful, however, as a method (*tariq*) of instruction. It gives familiarity rather than precise knowledge or science: the term translated as "knowledge" near the bottom of the paragraph (PP 7.16–18) is *ma'rifa* rather than *'ilm*, roughly equivalent to the English distinction between familiarity and knowledge. The implication is that poetry, despite its value for being human (PP 7.19), may not give us any scientific knowledge at all. Furthermore, Plato emphasizes that the most widely accepted poetic method leads us far away from everything he seeks (PP 7.19–20). Unlike rhetoric and dialectic, poetry does not figure among the methods of instruction later employed by philosophy (PP 15.18–16.3; cf. BL 150.3–16). So while

¹⁸ Mahdi omits "things" from his translation: "that of which poems and poetic statements are made" should be "the things of which..." For the view that "beings" are prior to "things," but that the knowledge of the two is interrelated, see Strauss, "Farabi's *Plato*," 389–90.

¹⁹ See Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 1:194–214, esp. 200–203.

²⁰ Alfarabi, *Epistle on the Canons of Poetry (Risāla fī Qawānīn Šinā'at al-Shi'r)*, trans. A. J. Arberry, *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* 17 (1938): 267–78.

rhetoric receives considerably less attention than poetry, it does supply some scientific knowledge (*ilm*, PP 8.4), and might in that respect be more useful in philosophical investigation. One can more profitably investigate the beings by means of rhetorical premises and arguments based on opinions, than by using poetic images. The rhetorical investigation of the beings paves the way for more elaborate sophistical and dialectical methods.

For an art that is apparently so fruitless, Plato's account of sophistry is unusually detailed, covering three separate Platonic dialogues (PP 8.11–12, 8.16). It includes an isolated statement about the value of sophistry, in the midst of what appear to be scathing critiques of it: sophistry supplies neither this science nor a way to it, and the matters (*umūr*) on which it reflects do not even pertain to science (PP 8.9–10, 8.14–16). Sophistry does not ponder either beings or things, natural or otherwise, but “matters” or, as I might prefer to translate, “affairs.” It is the only theoretical art to focus on the affairs that are contrived by humans. It does not seek knowledge, but rather manipulation of the audience, interlocutor, or judge. The still lengthier account of sophistry in the *Philosophy of Aristotle* spells out all of its ingenious devices, designed to win the argument by inducing confusion, error, or even shame and silence (*Philosophy of Aristotle*, 81.8–83.17). Yet Alfarabi's Aristotle, like Plato, insists on the importance of learning sophistry. A student cannot count on succeeding in his dialectical training unless he knows about sophistry, and how to both avoid and defeat it. He needs to understand not merely things and beings, but the complexity of the affairs in the midst of which his investigations will take place. By way of illustration, the sophist Protagoras asserts that people reflect mainly about *umūr* (PP 5.1), while Plato invokes an *amr*²¹ of his own order to vanquish him. It seems to involve stubbornly repeating his earlier argument about the existence of the knowledge of the substance of the beings, contrary to Protagoras's own claim (PP 5.5–7).²² Plato therefore takes pains to learn everything about sophistry, its practitioners, its aims, and its subject matter, before engaging in dialectic.

The final art, dialectic, is “extremely valuable” for attaining the desired knowledge. It holds the promise of distinguishing many of the things (*ashyā'*, 9.6–7) examined by the linguistic art and used in poetry, finally paving the way for “this knowledge” of the substance of the beings. Despite his evident

²¹ *Umūr* is the plural of *amr*.

²² The term *amr* falls out in translation: those who “speculate about things” in fact speculate about *umūr*, and “contrary to what Protagoras asserts” is rendered more literally as “the matter is contrary to what Protagoras says about it.”

progress, Plato emphasizes that dialectic is merely for training, and “another faculty” is still needed (9.8–9). His investigation remains incomplete.

THE VALUE OF THE PRACTICAL ARTS

Having exhausted the liberal or “theoretical” arts, and determined their insufficiency for attaining the knowledge that he seeks (PP 9.11–12), one might expect Plato to finally turn to the sciences, such as physics or mathematics. Yet he proceeds to investigate, not the sciences, but the practical arts. It is as if a student steeped in poetry, literature, and logic in high school should inexplicably decline his acceptance letter from Harvard or MIT and take up auto repair instead. The following discussion attempts to explain this puzzle.

Plato’s initial assumption is that the practical arts contain some science, albeit mixed with practice (PP 9.14–18). But when he considers whether the sciences they contain contribute to the desired knowledge and way of life, he reaches the conclusion that one would expect: these arts do not seek the highest perfection at all, but merely usefulness and gain (PP 9.18–10.3). Plato is thus exempted from learning the details of auto repair after all. What, then, is the purpose of his excursion into the rigidly practical sphere?

There are two translations that may conceal an important part of the meaning of this passage from English-language readers. First, the “useful and gainful things” are in fact “matters” (*umūr*), the same entities that were examined by sophistry. In following up his discussion of sophistry, Plato continues to direct the gaze of the student toward the “affairs” that humans actually seek. Second, as Mahdi does explain in note 3 to page 58, “good” translates the same term (*fādīl*) that is usually rendered as “virtuous,” as in the phrase “virtuous way of life” (PP 10.4, 10.9–11). The turn to the practical arts raises the question of concrete human goods and ends in a way that the more refined but less purposeful theoretical arts could not. These ends come to light as either necessary and useful or gainful and virtuous (PP 10.3–6). The association of the virtuous with the merely profitable in the eyes of the multitude tends to confirm Strauss’s interpretation of the early reference to the “virtuous way of life” as an entirely vulgar one.²³

Once the “matter [*amr*] of all the practical arts” has become clear, Plato begins to investigate the things that they pursue, namely, the necessary, gainful, and virtuous (PP 10.7–8). Just as Plato’s investigation of the theoretical

²³ PP 4.8 with Strauss, “Farabi’s *Plato*,” 385–88.

arts never examines the necessary or gainful, so it never examines virtue, rendering it unable to approach the heart of the question of happiness or the desired way of life. That same investigation is unable to distinguish between what is held to be true by the multitude and what is truly the case, as Plato does so frequently in the rest of the work (PP 10.10, 13.4 *et passim*; cf. 7.3). Plato examines the useful from the point of view of the vast majority of human beings, along with the many different things that they find gainful and virtuous. He then proceeds to compare the view of the multitude to what is truly useful, gainful and virtuous. He determines that there is some kind of relationship between the two, although that relationship is not fully elucidated at this point (PP 10.10–11.2). Part of the problem may be that the truly necessary and virtuous has yet to be fully defined (cf. 13.1–3).

Plato turns, without any explanation, to investigate a way of life rooted in the hypocrisy of feigned manliness,²⁴ and then the ways in life that seek pleasure (PP 11.4–12.6). These subjects appear at first glance to have little to do with the discussion of the necessary and gainful arts that preceded them. For one thing, they aim above and beyond the narrow goals of the practical arts. Unlike the arts, these ways of life pursue not merely use and gain, but some kind of perfection or end (PP 11.4, 12.2). The necessary and profitable as conventionally understood do not in themselves consider any ultimate perfections (PP 10.2–3), goals sought by the multitude no less than by philosophers. The comparison between the gainful and useful according to the multitude and what is truly gainful and useful leads to the conclusion that the practical arts which purport to be for the sake of nourishment or money alone in fact arouse fantasies of the masculine power or intense pleasure that may be procured by their successful pursuit.

The reintroduction of “that desired perfection” and “the desired end” (*ghāya*) raises several questions. First of all, does “that perfection” refer to the genuine or ignorant perfection (PP 11.4; cf. 4.8–9)? The latter interpretation is suggested by some striking similarities between this passage and Plato’s original investigation of popular notions of perfection. These are the only places in the work where Plato treats the things through which “human beings become enviable” (PP 3.2, 11.7). Many of the perfections that Plato first perceived to be envied by the people around him, such as ancestry, honor, and power, are likely to be viewed as manly (PP 3.1–8). “The desired end,” in contrast, can

²⁴ The Arabic *rajula* is translated by Mahdi as “fortitude,” a rendering that Mahdi himself corrects in note 1 (PP 11.7–9). Note that *rajul* (man) occurs in 11.7 and 11.9, while *insān* (human being) occurs only in 11.7.

only refer to the one end previously mentioned, namely, knowledge of the beings, “the greatest of ends” (PP 4.2–4).²⁵ Plato asks whether the way of life he describes might attain the most widely esteemed perfections, on one hand, and the highest end of knowledge, on the other.

Plato’s answer to his own question seems at first glance to be incomplete. Most glaringly, he does not even attempt to resolve whether manly hypocrisy attains perfection. Instead, he drops “this perfection” after the first line, while he repeats the term “end” no fewer than seven more times.²⁶ The omission of “this perfection” from the rest of the paragraph might amount to a tacit admission that the enviable way of life described in the paragraph often does attain the widely esteemed perfections listed at the beginning of the work. Plato’s attack on this way of life therefore comes from the point of view of knowledge. He is quite sure that the practitioners of this way of life lead us very far away from the desired end (11.14–15). They affect to pursue a “noble” end such as knowledge (11.6), but actually attain only the ends of hypocrisy, false persuasion, and quarrelsomeness (PP 11.9–11.11). They are identified with two men (*rajulain*) known as sophists. Sophistry is not only an art feigning knowledge, but a way of life as well (PP 11.6, 10). Despite the emptiness of sophistry’s pretensions to knowledge, which confuses astuteness in *umūr* with genuine understanding,²⁷ its way of life often wins favor with the multitude, who are impressed less by its claims to knowledge or virtue than by the macho fortitude it exudes (*rajula*, 11.7). Yet so contentious a way of life appears to leave only quarrels in its wake. A distinction emerges between the manliness that most human beings envy and the gentler, more useful “humanity” acquired by philosophy (PP 13.3).

Plato concludes the section by investigating pleasure (PP 12.1–6). Like manliness, pleasure would seem to result from some of the enviable perfections,

²⁵ This interpretation involves taking sides in a philological issue, so it is only fair to explain that issue to the reader. Relying on a sole manuscript reading, Mahdi inserts *kamāl* (perfection) for *ghāyya* (end), and translates as such (PP 4.4, n3). He is understandably puzzled by the rare mention of “end,” but does his preferred reading of the more commonly used “perfection” make sense? It repeats, needlessly it seems, a term that has just been used (PP 4.3). More importantly, would Alfarabi be able to speak of the “desired end” in 11.4 without having mentioned it previously? This consideration, above all, gravitates in favor of the standard manuscript reading.

²⁶ To translate this term consistently would be terribly awkward in English, but probably necessary for grasping Alfarabi’s whole meaning. Mahdi translates it as “end” on lines 5, 7, 15, “extreme” on lines 9 and 10, “limit” on line 11, and “far away” on line 15. I would consider the translation “end in hypocrisy,” “end in sophistical persuasion,” and “end in contentiousness” intelligible enough in English and more revealing of Alfarabi’s meaning.

²⁷ The word *amr* recurs in 11.8: “this way of life” is more accurately rendered “this matter.”

such as soft skin and many lovers (PP 3.4–6). Yet Plato does not include envy in his brief investigation. He also replaces “this desired perfection” with “the desired perfection,” which might refer to genuine perfection (PP 11.4, 12.1, 4.3–4, 7.4). Unlike manliness, pleasure seeking straddles the line between imagined and genuine perfection. Pleasure covers so much ground because it divides into many distinct types: the way of life (*sīra*) of those who pursue manliness is spoken of in the singular, while both the ways of life (*sīr*) and pleasures (*ladhāt*) of the pleasure seekers are spoken of in the plural (PP 12.1, 11.5). Alfarabi elsewhere defines the most widely pursued pleasures as food, drink, sex, imagination, and play.²⁸ While these pleasures do not contribute to the attainment of desired perfection in any way, true pleasure arises from the practice of that perfection. This pleasure is ascribed to Socrates (PP 12.2–6).²⁹ Plato determines that the life of his teacher Socrates, if pursued without any hindrance, is the pleasant life, in contrast to the envied but turbulent life of sophists and potentates or soft and insecure life of hedonists.³⁰ Plato is now on the cusp of discovering philosophy, as the art that provides the desired knowledge (PP 12.14). The discussion of pleasure and its various forms is therefore the final, indispensable step toward reaching Plato’s initial goal.

Plato’s investigation has at the same time advanced and come full circle. It began by enumerating the enviable ways of life, followed by the conclusion that not they but knowledge provides happiness. Plato stated this conclusion, but did not prove it. Realizing that only art could offer a precise definition of knowledge and happiness, Plato turned to an investigation of the liberal arts such as poetry and dialectic. They helped Plato advance along the way toward philosophy, by attuning his mind to the variety of methods, things, and beings, but proved unable to investigate the human good. Plato therefore turned to the humble practical arts, whose goal is concrete human gain. Yet the gain that the vast majority of humans obtain through these arts is tentative and indefinite. The practical arts are not self-sufficient, or satisfied with their own ends. Instead, they are usually pursued for the sake of macho display or pleasure, the two ends for which the multitude of humans yearn. This leads Plato back to the enviable things that he listed, but did not fully understand, at the beginning of his search. He now perceives the motives

²⁸ See Alfarabi, *The Political Writings*, vol. 2, trans. Charles Butterworth (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015), 77–78.

²⁹ I take this ascription somewhat more literally than Strauss: see Strauss, “Farabi’s *Plato*,” 385. Strauss is right to argue that Plato disagrees with Socrates, but that disagreement is yet to manifest itself at this point.

³⁰ Alfarabi, *Political Writings*, 2:78.

behind the goods that most humans seek, and the contribution, positive or negative, that they might make to his philosophic quest. His redefinition of these goods as manliness and pleasure is once again followed by the subject of knowledge, this time understood as philosophy. Human rather than manly, pleasant rather than hedonistic, philosophy emerges as the only true good. It is only by means of the thorough understanding of ordinary human pursuits that philosophy finally comes into view.

PHILOSOPHY: SCIENCE, ART, OR WAYS?

Plato introduces philosophy as the “theoretical art” that “supplies the knowledge of the beings” (PP 12.11), or the novel art that succeeds where all the generally accepted arts have failed. The long-sought art has finally been discovered, and the science of the beings revealed. But the triumph feels somewhat hollow: it is hard to escape the impression that something does not add up. The “knowledge or science [*ilm*] of the substance of the beings” has long been dangled as the prize, yet the way to it fails to define substance or being, or investigate any of the particular sciences. To strengthen our suspicion, we note that neither science nor even art is mentioned with any great frequency in the rest of the treatise. Is this because their value for philosophy has already been established, or because Plato begins to doubt it?

Plato never again suggests that philosophy provides the desired science. “This science” does return in the context of the best city, but it is no longer supplied, or even investigated, by the philosophers. The philosophers, who are “the highest part of the city,” stand equally aloof from “the succession of men” whose role in the city is to investigate the sciences, and the “rulers” who combine the theoretical and practical sciences (PP 20.10, 20.16–20, 21.3–5). The philosopher who manages to flourish in the imperfect cities does not seem to possess science either, or seek to guide his fellow humans toward it. Instead, he focuses on gradually reforming their opinions, laws, and ways of life, directing them toward the true and virtuous without ever reaching it (PP 22.15–23.7). The final sections of the *Philosophy of Plato* do indeed vindicate philosophy, but not its science-bearing role.

The demotion of science is accompanied by a growing emphasis on the philosopher himself. Plato discovers that the activity most characteristic of this kind of human is not science or even art, but reveling (PP 14.4–15.17). Along these same lines, the “other faculty” (*quwwa*) required by the philosopher in addition to dialectic is probably not demonstration, over which

Plato passes in silence, but the “faculty of love” (*quwwa ‘ala al-mahabbah*)³¹ possessed by Socrates (PP 22.5, 9.8). The philosopher is characterized less by his narrow scientific rigor in the pursuit of truth than by his capacious enthusiasm for it. Indeed, we may ask if an enthusiastic, potentially disorderly activity, which the majority of humans might identify with madness (PP 14.13), goes together with the relative orderliness of science or even art.

Plato’s most immediate and consequential attempt to restore some order to a philosophy on the verge of dissolving into wild revelry involves the use of “ways” (PP 15.18). Plato promptly investigates three pairs of ways: division and bringing together, rhetoric and dialectic, and oral instruction and writing (PP 16.1–7). The first pair is necessary for the “man who aims at philosophy,” and thus part of the way to it. This pair would seem to describe, in retrospect, what Plato himself was doing when he classified and distinguished the various arts according to certain qualities. The second pair, rhetoric and dialectic, were initially investigated as independent arts, but become useful for philosophic instruction only when transformed into versatile ways that are subordinate to the demands of philosophy. One aspect of this newfound flexibility lies in the philosopher’s willingness to use both elements of a third pair, speech and writing. Plato suggests that both methods of communication have value, but that the former should be employed first. The character of philosophic instruction thereby evolves as it proceeds. Four distinct ways of instruction emerge: rhetorical speech, rhetorical writing, dialectical speech, and dialectical writing. Taken together, Plato suggests these ways do form a novel kind of art, but one that cannot be classified among the conventional arts (PP 16.11–12). Plato thereby salvages the notion that philosophy is some kind of art, although after this statement he does not mention the word art again.³²

Toward the end of the treatise, Plato reiterates and broadens his flexible approach to philosophic instruction by introducing a fourth pair of ways: in order to fully succeed in his dealing with his fellow humans, the philosopher needs to master both the “way of Socrates” and the “way of Thrasymachus” (PP 22.1–8). The former involves “scientific investigation” of the virtues for the sake of the elite, while the latter consists of “formation of character” of the youth and the multitude, presumably through nonscientific methods.

³¹ Mahdi translates this phrase “power of love.”

³² There are some parallels between this passage and the first half of the *Attainment of Happiness*. There, too, Alfarabi announces the importance of “ways” or “methods” (*turuq*). He then urges his contemporaries to better understand the methods that they are using to treat each problem, arguing that a heterogeneity of methods is necessary owing to the heterogeneity of problems: taken together, knowledge of these ways constitutes an “art” (*Attainment of Happiness*, 3.4–19 [49–50]).

Philosophy cannot be called a science because the term applies to only some of its methods, and even those Socratic methods that are scientific are said to investigate, but not to prove (PP 22.2). The deft maneuverings and many ways of philosophy must be aware of their own limits. An obstacle to certain knowledge that looms large in the *Philosophy of Plato* is its incomplete understanding of substance: Plato recognizes the conventionality of the notion of substance presented in the linguistic art but does not return to the subject. His strongest hint about the character of philosophic knowledge is unfortunately lost in translation: when mentioning the “things that a man ought to know in order to become a philosopher,” Plato employs the root ‘*a-r-f*’ instead of ‘*a-l-m*’, just as he did when describing the familiarity acquired by poetry and its value for being human (PP 16.8, 7.18). Knowledge of the beings has been replaced by familiarity with the things. Philosophy has the broadest grasp of the phenomena, natural, imaginary, and contrived,³³ but does not claim scientific knowledge of them.

WHAT JUSTIFIES PHILOSOPHY?

I wish to conclude by revisiting once again the question raised so forcefully by Christopher Colmo: Can Platonic philosophy, in Alfarabi’s view, justify itself? Colmo argues that for Alfarabi’s Plato, philosophy cannot supply knowledge of anything, including itself and its way of life.³⁴ On the basis of our analysis, I would rephrase this question as follows: Even though philosophy does not provide complete knowledge of the beings, does it provide satisfactory knowledge of the desired way of life?

The investigation of philosophic reveling and its ways leads to the conclusion that philosophy is an unconventional art and, even more emphatically, the “truly virtuous way of life” (PP 16.12). Colmo’s intricate analysis does not fully reckon with this unusually direct statement.³⁵ The subsequent investigation concerning Socrates’s choice of death over a vicious, brutish way of life that rejects philosophic inquiry, as well as its conclusion in defense of its choice (PP 16.14–19.11), makes little sense unless the virtue and humanity of the philosophic life has been proved beyond a reasonable doubt. As Muhsin Mahdi observes, Alfarabi’s Plato ultimately “says a great deal about the desired way of life...but tells you very little about the desired science.”³⁶

³³ Or, to use Alfarabi’s Arabic terminology, with the *mawjudāt*, *ashyāʾ*, and *umūr*.

³⁴ Colmo, *Breaking with Athens*, 72–74.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 76–77.

³⁶ See Mahdi, *Alfarabi and the Foundation*, 198.

Colmo makes the plausible objection that Alfarabi's definition of "true" virtue and philosophy is obscure, so that much of what he says about the philosophic way of life is negative. Yet Colmo's prolonged and inconclusive reflections on the meaning of "true" risk failing to see the wood for the trees.³⁷ Certain positive features of the philosophic life can be gleaned simply from assessing the *Philosophy of Plato* as a whole. The philosopher approaches the heterogeneous problems posed by the investigation of beings and virtues through disparate ways and methods, in both instruction and practice. The final section provides a concrete illustration of how the philosopher should practice his craft in the imperfect cities in which he is forced to reside. "The perfect human, the human who investigates, and the virtuous"³⁸ should be able to profitably engage his fellow humans by writing discrete letters seeking only incremental reform of the corrupt laws and customs of the particular communities best known to him (PP 22.14–23.6). The philosopher's skepticism, devotion to truth, and acceptance of the imperfect societies of his time allows him to gradually guide his compatriots, without stirring up dangerous passions against himself or others, or promising the complete knowledge of the substance of the beings that lies beyond our ken.

For the present author, along with others who may never become perfect philosophers, what does Alfarabi's account of the ways to philosophy mean? His description of its variability and flexibility ought to be useful in guiding all students of philosophy. Since philosophy is not a science but a combination of ways, which adapt themselves according to subject, audience, and circumstance, the paths to it are multiple. This view is reflected in the tripartite structure of the trilogy. Alfarabi, Plato, and Aristotle were three philosophers each of whose path appears at first glance to have little in common with that of his peers. In the end, however, "their purpose is the same, and they intended to offer one and the same philosophy" (AH 47.9–10 [97–98]). Each found his own way to philosophy on the basis of his distinct experience, education, and milieu. We, the readers, are invited to do the same. I conclude just as Alfarabi concludes the trilogy: "Therefore philosophy must necessarily come into being in every human in the manner possible for him" (PA 133.2–3).

³⁷ Colmo, *Breaking with Athens*, 78–83.

³⁸ That is to say, philosophers "who have reached the goal of philosophy": see Strauss, "Farabi's *Plato*," 381.

Review Essay

Henry T. Edmondson III, ed., *Flannery O'Connor: A Political Companion*.
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Flannery O'Connor's Augustinian Politics

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Hawthorne, Melville, Emerson, Poe, Whitman, Dickinson, James, Frost, Faulkner, Stevens—all the major imaginative writers of this “nation with the soul of a church,” as Chesterton called it, have been either vaguely religious at best or outright heretical at worst. (I count T. S. Eliot as more British than American.) This is not to demean or denigrate their work. On the contrary, our sub-Christian artists deserve their canonical status; indeed, they rank high among the eminent figures of the entire Anglophone tradition in literature. I also admit that Flannery O'Connor belongs to the second rank of American writers rather than the first. Her work has neither the volume nor breadth of theirs. Yet as our one unapologetically Christian author, she strikes depths and beholds realities that they do not. Thus must she be reckoned with at almost every level—the aesthetic and the religious, the cultural and the historical, but also the political.

This claim may seem wrongheaded, for she is often regarded as a non-political figure. “The topical is poison,” she declared. Fiction that seeks to offer commentary on political events is little other than propaganda. Rarely does she deal with conventional politics in her prize-winning fiction, nor in her magnificent letters (*The Habit of Being*), nor even in her fine collection

of essays (*Mystery and Manners*). Yet, as Henry Edmondson declares in his able introduction to *Flannery O'Connor: A Political Companion*, her work is political in the Aristotelian sense. For O'Connor as for Aristotle, politics has little to do with electoral or diplomatic matters. Rather is it "the overarching discipline, the inquiry concerned with all areas of study having relevance to the virtuous life and with those matters that contribute to 'human flourishing'" (1-2). This collection is thus a happy corrective to the notion that O'Connor's work sets its sights entirely on "the tree-line of infinity" without regard to the good life (*eudaemonia*) that stands on this side of the eschaton.

The consensus of the contributors to the *Companion* is that, as a Roman Catholic steeped in the theology of the church, Flannery O'Connor refused to separate the two realms. A Christian in politics, like a Christian in art, operates at what she called "a peculiar crossroads where time and place and eternity somehow meet. [The] problem is to find that location." John Sykes argues that O'Connor did not join the Vanderbilt Agrarians in locating this juncture within the southern past. For such important thinkers as John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, Donald Davidson, Robert Penn Warren, and Andrew Lytle, the antebellum South united the sacred and secular in what they regarded as a virtual medieval polity governed, as Sykes says, "by tradition, a social hierarchy, a code of manners, systems of kinship, and love of the land" (26).

The Agrarians set their vision of this ideal society over against the grasping avarice of the industrial North, with its Yankee ethos of individualist competition and commercial enterprise. Hence their conclusion that the South was a superior "feudal society without a feudal religion" (26). O'Connor would have none of it. As Sykes shows, she rejected their utilitarian regard for religion. The Agrarians would have turned the Gospel into an instrumental means for saving what they regarded as classical southern culture. For her as for St. Augustine, the Incarnation requires Christians to put *all* earthly polities—lest they become demonic—under the transformative judgment of the City of God. Unlike the Agrarians, O'Connor was drawn to the God-drunk, Christ-haunted, folk believers of the Bible Belt, poor blacks and poor whites alike. Their wild and often comical fanaticism was a healthy reproach to the high-cultured denizens of both the dismissive northern Left and the nostalgic southern Right.

Understood as one but not the only element in a proper ordering of the polis, the question of racial justice dominated the public life of O'Connor's time. Three of the essays bear directly on her treatment of it. Benjamin Alexander, Michael Schroeder, and Margaret Whitt all deal with O'Connor and

the question of civil rights. They note that O'Connor was no sort of racist, that she in fact saluted the work of Martin Luther King Jr. as a necessary corrective to the inveterate racial evils of her region and nation. Two of her best stories, "The Artificial Nigger" and "Everything That Rises Must Converge," are profoundly antiracist in their moral and political implications; they deal with the deadly results of racial moralism as well as racial bigotry. Yet both stories are concerned primarily with *whites*, especially the damage that whites have inflicted on themselves by abusing Negroes—especially in blinding themselves to their own sin. Sykes argues that, at least in this one regard, O'Connor allied herself with the Agrarians. Like them, she conceived of the southern legacy—especially the Civil War and its awful aftermath—almost entirely in white terms. For a writer who admired the South as a culture drenched in scripture, she rarely attends to its many injunctions to seek the good of the earthly city (cf. Jeremiah 29:7) as it pertains to all of the oppressed, including the many injustices inflicted on southern blacks by southern whites.

On other matters concerning the welfare of the human city, O'Connor's politics are admirable indeed. Farrell O'Gorman devotes his essay to O'Connor's abiding regard for those who are allegedly unworthy of human existence. Erskine Caldwell's *Tobacco Road*, published in 1932, had depicted the poor whites of rural Georgia as human refuse, as the off-scourings of the earth, multiplying like cats, fit at best to be despised, at worst to be sterilized. O'Connor's home city of Milledgeville was the site of a huge insane asylum where such enforced sterilizations were still taking place in the 1950s. The eugenics movement was alive and well in much of the nation, led by such figures as Margaret Sanger and Oliver Wendell Holmes. Rather than inveighing against their attempt to rid the world of its unwanted and unworthy, O'Connor offers telling fictional critiques of it in such stories as "Greenleaf," "The Lame Shall Enter First," "The Displaced Person," but also *The Violent Bear It Away*.

This novel features a school psychologist named Rayber who wishes his imbecile child Bishop had never been born and who in fact allows his son to be drowned. O'Connor answers such moral maleficence not with appeals to human rights, not even the right to life, but by creating convincing portraits of freaks and lunatics, delinquents and "white trash." Her rich characterization proves them to be irreducibly mysterious and free. They cannot be reduced to the calculations of social scientists because they are formed in the divine image. Hence her lapidary judgment about all attempts to "cleanse"

the human race of its allegedly “unworthy” members. It occurs in O’Connor’s introduction to *A Memoir of Mary Ann*, the account of an Atlanta child whose grotesque illness made her seem fit for euthanasia: “When tenderness is detached from the source of tenderness, its logical outcome is terror. It ends in forced-labor camps and in the fumes of the gas chamber.”

Three other essayists treat O’Connor’s moral identification with outcasts and misfits—and with their rightful place within the body politic: Sarah Gordon, Gary Ciuba, and the present writer. Gordon shrewdly links Edith Stein and Simone Weil as two women whose work O’Connor admired. They were alike in having Jewish origins and being God-hungering mystics. They were different in that Stein became a Christian convert and Carmelite nun who perished at Auschwitz, while Weil came near to embracing Christianity but finally refused baptism, believing that such “consolation” would have spoiled the authenticity of her Christ-like identification with the world’s poor and outcast. O’Connor saw something slightly monstrous in Weil, but was drawn to her nonetheless: “I would like to write a comic novel about [such] a woman [as Weil]—and what is more comic and terrible than the angular intellectual proud woman approaching God inch by inch with ground teeth?” (130).

Had O’Connor lived long enough to have studied Weil’s work carefully, I believe that she would have discerned that Weil’s refusal of baptism had a deeply antipolitical character, since Weil repudiated citizenship in any polis whatsoever. Gordon quotes the crucial passage but fails to discern its disturbing gnosticism: “I do not want to be adopted into a circle,” Weil declared, “to live among people who say ‘we’ and to be part of an ‘us,’ to find I am at home in any human *milieu* whatever it may be.... I feel that it is necessary and ordained that I should be alone, a stranger and an exile in relation to every human circle without exception” (133). For Weil, the earth and all of its institutions constitute a realm of unmitigated necessity and suffering that seems to be the work of an evil Demiurge. Hence her extreme envy of Christ. For Weil, God’s abandonment of Christ on Golgotha subjects him to the ultimate *malheur*—the affliction at work in the mindless necessity that drives all things human and natural. Thus did Weil seek to take such affliction upon herself, serving as a virtual savior in loving others without self-interest: “Wherever the afflicted are loved for themselves alone,” she wrote, “it is God who is present” (135). Her earlier rejection of the Eucharist may have been a portent of her final gnostic scorn for the most basic human sustenance. She died at age thirty-nine from illnesses exacerbated by her prolonged fasts, as

she refused to eat anything more nourishing than what French prisoners of war were being allotted.

Gordon's limits in assessing O'Connor's regard for Simone Weil are even more seriously marred by her obvious anti-Catholicism. She is disturbed, for example, that the Guizacs, the family of Polish refugees who have come to live on a Georgia farm in "The Displaced Person," are Roman Catholic rather than Jewish. Gordon claims that O'Connor thus ignored the overwhelmingly Jewish character of the Shoah—and of its analogous sources in the racist South no less than Nazi Germany. It matters not to Gordon that Holocaust images abound in O'Connor's fiction, that she and her mother offered refuge on their farm for such a displaced Polish family as the Guizacs, that she thus could enter their world existentially as well as imaginatively, or that she brings the complacent white landlady, Mrs. McIntyre, under fierce judgment for her treatment of the Guizacs.

Not only does Mrs. McIntyre declare that she is not "responsible for all the extra people in the world," but that "as far as I'm concerned...Christ was just another D.P." There are few more theologically astringent moments in the whole of Holocaust literature than in O'Connor's identification of Christ himself as the ultimate Jew who was either displaced or else crucified afresh at Bergen-Belsen, Dachau, Buchenwald, etc. Ignoring the shattering implications of Mrs. McIntyre's confession, Gordon offers her own sourly obtuse judgment: "the story may be said to sidestep the horrific deaths of 6 million Jews in order to present a Christian—indeed a Catholic—narrative of the Fall....The Holocaust itself seems to function in this story as that nightmare 'over there.'" Nowhere in the story, she complains, does O'Connor remind the reader that "it is the Jews who [were] the object of Hitler's horrifying... vision of racial purity" (142). Gordon seems unaware that Hitler's systematic razing of Warsaw in 1944 was planned before the war, that it was aimed not at incinerating the handful of remaining Jews but at annihilating the whole of Roman Catholic culture as it was centered in Warsaw, thus breaking the back of Polish resistance to his monstrous scheme to create the Third Reich. Almost a million people—most of them Catholics, perhaps the Guizacs among them—lost everything when the Nazis flattened Warsaw.

Such opacity is compounded by Gordon's wondering why Robert Brinkmeyer, in his 2009 book entitled *The Fourth Ghost*, did not include O'Connor among other southern writers who were sympathetic to Fascism (135). Nowhere does Gordon cite any time or place in O'Connor's life and work where she exhibited any sympathy whatsoever with *il Duce* and his

ilk—because, of course, there are none. Worse still is Gordon's claim that Edith Stein's death has been exploited by Roman Catholics, who were allowed to establish a Carmelite convent at Auschwitz and to erect a towering cross in a nearby field. Without any regard for O'Connor's own high estimate of Stein, she approvingly quotes an ex-priest named James Carroll who is outraged at the raising of St. Edith Stein to the church's altars. According to him (and Gordon clearly agrees), "the canonization itself was based on a knowing deception at the highest levels of the Catholic Church," for it demonstrated the "lengths to which the Church was prepared to go to renegotiate its own history during the Holocaust." For him as for Gordon, this is yet another episode in the "long history of [the church's] contempt for Jews" (141). Starting with a wrong-headed complaint against a single short story, Gordon ends by leaving O'Connor behind in order to make a wholesale condemnation of the Roman Catholic Church as inveterately and intrinsically anti-Semitic. *Caveat lector.*

Gary Ciuba's essay presents similar difficulties, even as he offers an interesting interpretation of the friendship between O'Connor and Roslyn Barnes. They were both supporters of Pope John XXIII's attempt to establish a sort of Peace Corps for Catholics via an organization called the Papal Volunteers for Latin America (PAVLA). Barnes was one of Rome's "best and brightest" who volunteered as lay missionaries in this endeavor. They sought to confront what Ciuba names "socioeconomic injustices, government hostility, a critical shortage of priests, and possible threats from communism" (222). Barnes was trained for this work by Msgr. Ivan Illich at his celebrated Center for Intercultural Formation (CIF) in Cuernavaca, Mexico. O'Connor knew that Illich was something of a firebrand who sent home half of his volunteers because they could not withstand the rigors of his training. O'Connor congratulated Illich for holding fast. She confessed to Barnes that Illich's operation was "a school for sanctity." Invoking the title of her second novel, O'Connor declared that such steadfastness "is surely what it means to bear away the kingdom of heaven with violence: the violence is directed inward" (225).

Yet it is not at all clear that O'Connor endorsed the full anticlericalism of Illich's program. As Ciuba observes, Illich was a virtual missionary in reverse. He sought to undo what he perceived to be the missionary conflation of the Gospel with Western values. For him, the Catholic Church of Latin America had established a far too snug relation between the civil and religious realms. The church's "politics of benevolence," according to Illich, was based on good deeds that masked the assertion of ideological power. Drawing on the

Christian idea of *kenosis* (self-emptying)—which holds that the Second Person of the Trinity assumed human form in the person of Jesus of Nazareth without ceasing to remain divine—Illich insisted that his students should repudiate their own bourgeois privileges in order to radically enflesh the Word in Latin America. “The missionary must leave behind not just his or her home,” Ciuba summarizes Illich’s teaching, “but also the language and culture that covertly or openly—sometimes even arrogantly—bear the values and economy of the evangelist’s native land” (227). Thus was *Nudum Christum nudum sequere* Illich’s own Latin motto: “Naked I follow the naked Christ.”

There was something highly idealized, indeed radically romanticized, about Illich’s theology. Can one entirely abandon one’s inherited, formative past? What would remain but a cipher? One always begins with one’s own tradition, no matter how sharply one puts it under the judgment of other traditions one may encounter. Ciuba never asks whether Illich’s sharp critique of conventional Catholic missions was prompted as much by his quasi-Marxist ideology as by his love of Christ. There is no indication that O’Connor ever embraced Illich’s program, even though she despised all conflation of the Gospel with Americanism and other “isms.” Hence my doubt that O’Connor can be posthumously drafted into support for Illich’s enterprise, especially via the slender evidence provided by her letters to Roslyn Barnes. O’Connor had been dead for fourteen years when, in 1968, Illich was called to Rome to answer church complaints against him. Given his ever-leftward tendencies, O’Connor would not have been surprised that he left the priesthood and became a roving guru until his ideas fell out of favor in the 1980s, though he lived on until 2002.

O’Connor’s doubt about Illich seems to have surfaced when he warned Roslyn Barnes to cease trying “to be an Irish Catholic.” As a recent convert to Rome, Barnes had no clue that Illich was summoning her away from conventional Catholicism as (in his view) it was embodied in the faith of Irish immigrants, and so she asked O’Connor to explain the term “Irish Catholic.” “‘You are in the presence of one,’ says I, bowing” (*Habit of Being*, 497). That O’Connor was not merely jesting about her own traditionalism is made evident in a letter to Cecil Dawkins written three months earlier. O’Connor’s closest epistolary friend, Elizabeth Hester, had complained that Dawkins was “conservative.” “If she thinks you are conservative,” replied O’Connor, “what does she think about me?” (*Habit of Being*, 486).

Concerning O’Connor’s politics, one matter needs special clarification—namely, her attitude toward homosexuality, as I seek to make clear in my own

contribution to this *Companion*. It was worked out most thoroughly in relation to Elizabeth Hester, O'Connor's closest epistolary friend; in fact, O'Connor's richest, deepest, most theologically provocative letters are written to Hester. Yet theirs was an unlikely friendship. In her very first letter to O'Connor, written in 1955, Hester accused her of being a Fascist. Yet O'Connor discerned a keenness of intelligence and a depth of character in Betty Hester that should not be turned away. Gradually over the course of their nine-year friendship, Hester made it evident that she had "a horrible history." Her grievous past included the father's abandonment of his daughter and wife and the suicide of Hester's mother in the thirteen-year-old girl's presence, as well as Hester's own rejection by the lover with whom she had eloped. Hester had also been dishonorably discharged from the U.S. Air Force because of her open lesbianism. Unable to find work suited for her talent, Hester remained a brilliant intellectual—she corresponded with Iris Murdoch, for example—confined to mind-numbing work at a retail credit office in Atlanta. O'Connor's patient counsel and steadfast support led Hester to be received into the Roman Catholic Church in 1956, under O'Connor's sponsorship—only to lapse six years later and finally to end as a suicide in 1998.

Since O'Connor never had long-lasting romantic relations with men, and since several of her friends were confessed lesbians, many critics assumed that, with the 2007 opening of her previously unpublished letters dealing with Hester's lesbianism, O'Connor would be "outed" as a lesbian herself. Far from it, O'Connor follows Augustine's summons to embrace the sinner while rejecting the sin. Admitting her previous failures in works of corporal mercy, O'Connor promises nothing but charity toward Hester herself: "I have a tendency...to dismiss other people's torments out of hand, but this one, being yours, will have to be partly mine too. It only hurts me because it has hurt you and inasmuch as the temporal effects can still hurt you now." "I can see how very much grace you have really been given," O'Connor concludes, "and that is all that is necessary for me to know in the matter. What is necessary for you to know is my very real love and admiration for you" (October 31, 1956).

Flannery O'Connor's quiet acceptance of Betty Hester's lesbianism is remarkable in several ways. Surely the most obvious is that O'Connor neither condemns nor congratulates Hester. Instead, she summons her not to be defined by her sexuality. Just as O'Connor's identity was not fixated on her fatal illness, neither should Hester's identity be centered in her lesbianism. "The meaning of the Redemption," she tells Hester, "is that we do not have to be our history and nothing is plainer to me than that you are not your

history.” Accordingly, O’Connor does not promise Hester an easy freedom from her vexed condition. Instead, she calls her to join St. Paul in filling “up in [your] flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church” (Col. 1:24). What Augustine called the *ordo amoris* required Hester and O’Connor alike to redirect and reorder their loves to their highest end; that is, to the love of Christ by participating in his suffering through a sacrificial life of chastity.

The key to O’Connor’s politics of human sexuality lies in her concern with *purity*. “I am always astonished,” she declares to Hester, in an early letter, “at the emphasis the Church puts on the body. It is not the soul she says that will rise but the body, glorified. I have always thought that purity was the most mysterious of the virtues.”¹ O’Connor owned two of Josef Pieper’s books, and from him she may have learned the link between bodily purity and spiritual truthfulness. Pieper vigorously rejected the Cartesian split between soul and body that turns the soul into a fabled ghost haunting its machine-like corpus, so that what we do with our bodies does not really matter. They have no essential relation, for Descartes and his latter-day disciples, to our spiritual core. O’Connor seems to be getting at Pieper’s counterclaim that we do not merely *have* bodies, but that to a great extent we *are* our bodies, so that what we do with them determines who we are. Our spiritual condition is thus inextricably bound with our physical acts—the most intimate of which is sexual. “Sex is not simply the functioning of a biological appetite,” writes George Sim Johnston. “It is a deep bonding between two individuals. It is an exchange of persons, and not simply an exchange of pleasure between consenting adults.”

Purity, O’Connor tells Hester, “is an acceptance of what God wills for us, an acceptance of our individual circumstances. Now to accept renunciation, when those are your circumstances, is not cowardly” (CW, 976). Such self-abnegation entails neither cringing passivity nor gelatinous quietism. “Resignation to the will of God,” O’Connor writes Hester yet again, “does not mean that you stop resisting evil or obstacles. It means that you leave the outcome out of your personal considerations. It is the most concern coupled with the least concern” (CW, 1137).

The politics of O’Connor’s art also had a decisively Christian and Catholic shape. Though O’Connor claimed, slightly in jest, that she read Aquinas for twenty minutes every night before bed, she seems to have acquired her

¹ Flannery O’Connor, *Collected Works* (New York: Library of America, 1988), 953.

knowledge of St. Thomas indirectly through Jacques Maritain, especially *Art and Scholasticism*. From Thomas mediated by Maritain, she learned that art is a virtue of the practical intellect, and thus that its excellence lies in the quality of the thing made rather than in the character of its maker. This freed O'Connor from thinking that her work should serve as her sort of evangelism in behalf of the church. Hence her desire not to be known as a Catholic writer but simply as a writer. Yet John Roos demonstrates that O'Connor may have absorbed a good deal more of Thomas than we have previously thought. He thus offers a strong Thomistic and quasi-Aristotelian reading of "The Displaced Person" by showing how the story turns Mrs. MacIntyre's farm into a microcosm that opens up large political questions: What constitutes a properly ordered society? Who shall hold power and for what ends? What is the role of civil religion? Is grace prior to virtue? Should society be based on a contract for the sake of mutual benefit? What is the place of competition in determining the fundamental mode of human relationships? How might an unjust regime be reformed?

There is not space to pursue such questions in detail. Suffice it to say that the story reveals that O'Connor was no mean student of politics. Roos demonstrates O'Connor's keen (if implicit) critique of Hobbes and Locke and Jefferson. The Guizacs are a dire threat to the MacIntyre farm because they seek, in their own untutored fashion, the true polis as defined by Thomas and Aristotle—namely, that "material wealth is bounded by the common good, in which the whole is for the benefit of all the parts." Mrs. McIntyre and the Shortleys, by contrast, have defined the good as "the maximization of individual utility." Operated as such a regime, the farm becomes a countrified version of a death camp: "Humans become interchangeable, substitutable, and ultimately expendable" (285). In a discerning footnote, Roos observes that O'Connor was seeking for alternatives to "the optimistic view of unchecked progress in the enterprise of mastering nature and transforming it into our own image" (299). Long before St. Pope John Paul II was to name the horrific results of such "progress" "the culture of death," O'Connor's work resonated with other such counterprogressives as Hannah Arendt, Leo Strauss, Jacques Maritain, and Eric Voegelin.

Fr. George Piggford's essay on O'Connor and Baron von Hügel gets at the core of her politics by showing how she wrestled with the modernist crisis in the Roman Catholic Church. Her reading of Michael de la Bedoyère's biography of von Hügel revealed to her that there are two kinds of modernism rather than one. The first modernism was condemned by Pius X in 1907

under the heading of “agnosticism” as “the synthesis of all heresies.” At its heart lay the modernist claim that “God is immanent in man” (103), and thus that Christian theology need begin not with divine self-revelation but with human self-understanding. When immanent reason is made the foundation of things, then the transcendence of God and much else is called into question: “the authority of scripture and tradition, the divinity of Christ, and the conscious institution by the historical Jesus of the episcopacy and the papacy” (102). The most well-known exponents of this condemned kind of modernism were Alfred Loisy, George Tyrell, and Friedrich von Hügel.

How can it be that O'Connor was such a great admirer of the papally censured von Hügel? The answer, according to Piggford, lies in the difference between the early von Hügel, who mistakenly fell under the sway of Loisy, and the later von Hügel, who came to espouse the other and healthier kind of modernism anticipated by John Henry Newman. Unlike the former, the latter never questions Dogma as the *constituted* faith of the church, but it does remain open to the ongoing *constitutive* development of doctrine according to what von Hügel called “the best and most abiding elements in the philosophy and the scholarship and conscience of the later and latest times” (110). O'Connor was drawn to the mature von Hügel, Piggford argues, with his insistence on (1) the difference between imperfect nature and perfect supernature; (2) the revelation of supernature in historical events (what he called its “happenedness”); (3) the nature of true freedom as the liberty not to sin, even to be unable to sin; and (4) the costliness of salvation through heroic charity and “painful encounters through nature with God/supernature—encounters that are experiential, real, and partake of the eternal” (117).

There is neither world enough nor time to follow Piggford's deft analysis of O'Connor's fiction according to such premises, though one can detect how a visionary politics would issue from them—as we shall soon see. For the nonce, it is important to correct one error in his essay that courses throughout almost all of the other essays in this companion—namely, the notion that O'Connor was an uncritical admirer of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. She at first regarded him as a sort of Catholic Darwin, a latter-day Aquinas who had achieved a synthesis of Christian revelation and evolutionary science. When in 1961 the editors of the *American Scholar* asked several artists and intellectuals to name the single most important book published in the last three decades, O'Connor nominated *The Phenomenon of Man*: “His is a scientific expression of what the poet attempts to do: penetrate matter until spirit is revealed in it. Teilhard's vision sweeps forward without detaching itself at

any point from the earth.” She likened his theology to St. Paul’s, quoting Teilhard’s claim that humanity “is very far from being created, neither in its individual developments nor, above all, in the collective terminus toward which it is directed.” Teilhard refers to his celebrated concept of the Omega Point, the mystical Christic culmination beyond time wherein the increasing development of human consciousness engendered by the evolutionary processes shall issue in the final concord of all things. O’Connor finds in Teilhard a healthy antidote to the pious otherworldly idea that human perfection consists “in an escape from the world and from nature.” We are meant to cooperate with nature so as to complete and fulfill its purposes, as she had learned from St. Thomas—not to liberate ourselves from matter.

Yet gradually O’Connor’s ardor for Teilhard began to cool. In her review of *The Divine Milieu*, for example, she salutes Teilhard for the spirit more than the substance of his work. She praises the intensity of his passion in seeking to take the Gospel into the very bastion of secular science—but not his success in doing so. She says he is more poet and mystic than scientist and theologian. In a later review, she acknowledges the criticism that Teilhard may not have distinguished “adequately between the supernatural action of Christ and the purely natural ascent of evolution.” In her final commentary on Teilhard, published in 1963, she salutes his absolute loyalty to the church, despite the suffering and exile that it cost him, when his work had been condemned and he was silenced. His attempt to reconcile evolution and revelation was a failure, she admits, though “the failure of a great and saintly man.” We may still emulate “his life of faith and work,” she concludes with muted praise, “even though his books remain incomplete and dangerous.”

Hence my own conviction that O’Connor’s readers have missed the sly irony at work in the Teilhardian title of “Everything That Rises Must Converge.” It is taken directly from his essay entitled “Omega Point,” found in *The Future of Man* (1950). Far from being an echo of St. Paul’s eschatological vision of the final cataclysmic triumph of good over evil at the Parousia, Teilhard’s claim is all too reminiscent of Polonius’s juvenile advice to Laertes. Edmondson quotes it here: “Remain true to yourselves, but move ever upward toward greater consciousness and greater love! At the summit you will find yourselves united with those who, from every direction, have made the same ascent. For everything that rises must converge!” In the eponymous story, it is not “greater love” that triumphantly arises and then converges. Instead, an ingrate son commits virtual matricide against his racially prejudiced but well-meaning mother. Their calamitous clash of wills converges in

his harrowing vision of her death, as he finally enters “a world of guilt and sorrow.” O'Connor suggests that such inveterate evils will persist, both politically and personally, until the End.

Even if I am right about her ironic, indeed parodic, use of Teilhard in this story, I remain puzzled that so many eminent Catholic theologians have endorsed his work without severe reservation: Avery Dulles, Henri de Lubac, Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI, St. Pope John Paul II, etc. None of them, so far as I can tell, ever complained about Teilhard's belief that war is an intrinsic energizer of the earth's evolutionary process, that the Holocaust exhibited the necessary freedom of humanity to “try everything” if it is to achieve greatness, or that there is no intrinsic dignity and equality among the human races. “When he was in Ethiopia,” Teilhard's biographer notes, “he described the natives as ‘magnificent bronze animals,’ and he maintained the right of more developed nations to assist, forcibly if need be, the progress of more primitive peoples.”

Hence my own question: What must Flannery O'Connor, as well as the numerous theologians who have endorsed Teilhard's work, have registered when clapping eyes on his call for eugenics? We must cease to rely, he wrote in his signature work, on “*the crude forces of natural selection*” (his emphasis), and to replace them with “a nobly human form of eugenics.” Surely she or someone with her keen theological discernment might have stood athwart Teilhard's evolutionary juggernaut shouting STOP! upon reading such quasi-Nazi/Soviet/Maoist claims as these (emphasis in the original):

Eugenics applied to individuals leads to eugenics applied to society. It would be more convenient, and we would incline to think it safe, to leave the contours of that great body made of all our bodies to take shape on their own, influenced only by the automatic play of individual urges and whims. “Better not interfere with the forces of the world!” Once more we are up against the mirage of instinct, the so-called infallibility of nature. But is it not precisely the world itself which, culminating in thought, expects us to think out again the instinctive impulses of nature so as to perfect them? Reflective substance requires reflective treatment. If there is a future for mankind it can only be imagined in terms of a harmonious conciliation of what is free with what is planned and totalised. Points involved are: the distribution of the resources of the globe; the control of the trek towards unpopulated areas; the optimum use of the powers set free by mechanisation; the physiology of nations and races; geo-economy, geo-politics, geo-demography; the organisation of research developing into a reasoned organisation of the earth. Whether we like it or not, all the signs and

all our needs converge in the same direction. We need and are irresistibly being led to create, by means of and beyond all physics, all biology and all psychology, *a science of human energetics*.

This brings us to the final and most important matter to be considered with regard to O'Connor's politics—namely, her regard for the work of Eric Voegelin. There is no doubt that Voegelin decisively shaped her Augustinian vision of the rightly ordered polis. She reviewed the first three volumes of his five-volume *Order and History* for her diocesan newspaper. The first of these, *Israel and Revelation*, enabled her to discern, as the late Marion Montgomery here notes, that Israel and Christianity mark a sharp break, not only with archaic cultures of the Near East, but also with the high civilizations of Greece and Rome. Prior to the biblical era, time was seen largely in cyclic, repetitive, virtually deterministic terms. But with Israel as God's elect People, with Christ as their prophesied Messiah, and with the church as the true human community, time was no longer regarded as circular. In a very strict sense, history was born; that is, time was understood as a unilinear, even if jagged, movement. No longer spinning repetitively in its own orbit, time becomes a forward-moving albeit also a rough process and tense drama. As with Augustine, so with Voegelin: everything—from each individual person to entire cultures—must now be measured by the Christian phenomenon, whether they are undergoing a transcendent ordering or disordering of their existence.

It is not difficult to discern why O'Connor the orthodox Catholic would be drawn to Voegelin's vision of the divine as definitely and uniquely irrupting into human existence, setting everything else in relation to it. John Desmond has written most definitely on this matter, and here again he emphasizes the Voegelinian character of O'Connor's work. He contends that her prophetic stance is grounded in what Voegelin called "the leap of being"—that is, the personal and objective encounter of human beings with Christ in what Voegelin called "an ontologically real event in history." "Revelation and response," he added, "are not a man's private affair; for the revelation comes to one man for all men, and in his response he is a representative of mankind" (339). O'Connor also drew on Voegelin, as Desmond argues, because he identified many modern malignancies as Gnostic.² By this he meant that, like the ancient Gnostics, ideologies such as Communism and Nazism seek to transcend the world's disorder by *gnosis*—that is, extraordinary insight,

² Gerhard Niemeyer has rightly challenged Voegelin's conflation of ancient and modern gnosticism, showing that they differ as much as they overlap. See Niemeyer, "Loss of Reality: Gnosticism and Modern Nihilism," *Modern Age* 22 (Fall 1978): 338–44.

special learning, esoteric knowledge. Accordingly, they then aim to “immanentize the eschaton,” to use Voegelin’s most famous phrase. They try to make the eschatological Kingdom immanent within history through various abstract proposals of social reform, all of them done in the name of good, but all of them also wreaking huge horrors, by ignoring fallen humanity’s radical embeddedness in the particulars of time and place and tradition.

As with O’Connor’s putative endorsement of Ivan Illich’s revolutionary politics, so with her link to Eric Voegelin: it is problematic at best. Montgomery notes that O’Connor did not live to witness Voegelin’s drastic turn in volume 4 of *Order and History* entitled *The Ecumenic Age*. He quotes a sentence in which Voegelin virtually disavows his earlier claims about the uniqueness of biblical revelation and the birth of linear history: “History is not a stream of human beings and their actions in time, but the process of man’s participation in a flux of divine presence that has eschatological direction” (351). Gerhart Niemeyer, in an essay vindicating Voegelin’s project as essentially Christian, nonetheless identifies the movement of revelation in Voegelin’s vision as always from man Godward, not the other way ’round—as in all orthodox accounts of the divine self-disclosure. Rather than speaking of God’s own determinative act of self-identification in the nation of Israel and the person of Jesus Christ, Voegelin returned to the Platonic notion of man’s “erotic tension toward the divine Beyond.”³

Lee Trepanier is far more astringent than Niemeyer in noting the differences between an Augustinian and a Voegelinian vision of history:

When the fourth volume of *Order and History* was published in 1974, scholars expected Voegelin to complete the ascending branch of his project’s great cycle with a study of Christianity and then proceed down the slope with an exploration of modernity. To everyone’s surprise, Voegelin broke with his initial program, revising his theory of history so as to drop many of the Christian elements, ignoring Christian civilization after Paul, and admitting that he himself had been engaged in a project of “historiogenesis”: a unilinear and progressive construction of history where material is rearranged to allow only one line of meaning to emerge. . . . The arrival at a completeness in meaning in the unfinished process of history was impossible for Voegelin, as a philosopher, to accept. All we had was the search itself: the only absolute truth that humans could obtain is the search for the *histories* of order with no finality of meaning ever possible. Voegelin’s new project

³ Gerhart Niemeyer, “Christian Faith, and Religion, in Eric Voegelin’s Work,” *Review of Politics* 57 (Spring 1995): 103.

would not construct a narrative of meaningful events arranged on a timeline but rather analyze a web of meaning with a plurality of nodal points and patterns. Although this new approach was open to tracing genuine Christian strands of significance, it precluded any effort to interpret history in terms of a single, Christian meaning.⁴

It hardly needs saying that Flannery O'Connor could never have endorsed "the search for the *histories* of order with no finality of meaning ever possible." The problem was not that such a flattening kind of historicism was too threatening, but rather that it was too comforting. It turns the created order into an endless flux which has neither Origin nor End. Though Voegelin fought valiantly against the notion that order in history is humanly constructed, especially as such a notion ended in Communism and Nazism, he found no ultimate ground for opposing them. To speak of the divine flux lands us back with Heraclitus at best, with Heidegger at worst. The Augustinian way is far more difficult precisely because it depends on the *scandalon* that even so irenic a thinker as Aquinas clearly affirmed: revelation/grace/church do not destroy reason/nature/history; they complete and perfect them precisely by transforming them.

Flannery O'Connor's politics were scandalously Augustinian because they set the earthly and heavenly cities in drastic opposition by their respective loves: "In the former," declared Augustine, "the lust for domination lords it over its princes as over the nations it subjugates; in the other both those put in authority and those subject to them serve one another in love." In the *civitas Dei*, competition and domination are not the rule, he adds: "possession of goodness is in no way diminished by the arrival, or the continuance, of a sharer in it." As in Cain's murder of Abel, so in the murder of Remus by Romulus, the *civitas terrena* is built on rivalry, on the need to establish power over others. Denying any final sharing of goods, the earthly city depends on enemies for it to function properly, so that war comes to play a creative no less than a destructive role, as we have seen in Teilhard and (to a lesser extent) in Voegelin.

Yet neither Augustine nor O'Connor sets the two cities in easy binary opposition. William Cavanaugh observes—in a sentence that could be used to define the Augustinian quality of Flannery O'Connor's fiction—"evil is often a parody of the good,...vice imitates virtue, and...sin is often committed by those seeking after real goods, even if in the wrong way." Even the search

⁴ Lee Trepanier, "Eric Voegelin and Christianity," *First Principles*, <http://www.firstprinciplesjournal.com/articles.aspx?article=1162>.

for unity within the earthly city imitates God's own desire for the unity of humankind. Again, Cavanaugh puts the matter clearly:

For Augustine, the unity of people is the goal of both the heavenly and the earthly cities. The heavenly city sees that God's purpose in history is to gather humanity into the unity of Adam before the fall. God's creative purpose is for unity—since Adam has fallen and shattered, like a china doll, into countless pieces, the purpose of redemption is to bring them all back together in the body of Christ.⁵

In a single lapidary claim, Henri de Lubac declares what O'Connor embodies, ever so subtly, in her fiction: "The world was made for the church." Her characters often get only a glimpse of this saving vision, often only in the moment of death, but a millisecond of prophetic truth suffices to save not only persons but also nations, states, kingdoms, empires. This surely is the heart of Flannery O'Connor's politics.

⁵ William T. Cavanaugh, "An End to Every War: The Politics of the Eucharist and the Work of Peace," *Religion and Ethics*, <http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2016/01/19/4390491.htm>.

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Zuckert's Synthesis of Socrates and Machiavelli

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Catherine Zuckert's volume on Machiavelli presents itself as, and may very well be, the most comprehensive study of Machiavelli available to us. Machiavelli's major works are eloquently examined throughout their multilayered interconnections, whereby historical, rhetorical, and theoretical/philosophical approaches to the Florentine's work are integrated in the interests of comprehensiveness, or so as to minimize partialness (3).¹ Zuckert's own approach is both illuminated by and reflected in the utilitarian message she discerns at the heart of Machiavelli's secularist works: the highest good is a common good coinciding with the satisfaction of the greatest number of

¹ Intertextual references are crucial to Zuckert's work, which emphasizes that every single text by Machiavelli is illuminated and completed by his other texts. The thesis is intriguing, especially considering the manner in which it may be used to neutralize literalist critiques of Machiavelli. Yet the thesis risks at once becoming its own victim, by exposing itself to the relativizing claim that there is no hierarchy of senses, messages, or audiences, and that Machiavelli's final word ought to be read in a "Machiavellian" manner, in terms of a "balance of powers." Zuckert may find coherence in approaching Machiavelli in a Machiavellian manner (33), but the approach risks taking its target for granted, in which case we would neutralize, not merely some literalist critique of Machiavelli, but *all* radical criticism—all criticism open to the essential conditions of possibility of Machiavellianism. Reading Machiavelli in a Machiavellian manner is no less philosophically problematic than reading modernity from the standpoint of modernity (a practice Zuckert's mentor Leo Strauss would stringently critique): in both cases, we shut ourselves to the very possibility of discovering a world in which what we take for granted is expendable, if not simply false.

The difficulty in question is exacerbated by the fact that Zuckert hardly confronts *philosophical* alternatives to the one she offers, most notably with respect to her reading of the American Founding as a Machiavellian enterprise (in a *liberal* sense of the expression). Beyond a few marginal allusions, *Machiavelli's Politics* offers no account of readings of the American Founding as philosophically antithetical to Machiavelli's secularism.

people or desires (see, e.g., 11, 21, 78, 80, 291, 467, 475). This is not to say that Zuckert does not ultimately privilege a philosophical approach to Machiavelli, who, she argues, inspired by Leo Strauss, was a philosopher, that is, someone who “did not accept any authority but reason and was willing to reason or inquire about all things” (9–11).² Yet, as Zuckert confirms, Machiavelli revolutionized the meaning of philosophy, which he secularized in the sense that he severed it from theological (traditionally, highest) concerns in the act of binding it inexorably to popular or vulgar ones (11, 173, 295). By the same token, Zuckert’s inquiry into Machiavelli ultimately draws us to philosophy, not as one mode of investigation among others, but as the result of the integration of the historical and the rhetorical/literary, in the medium of philosophy narrowly understood (13). Machiavelli’s thought is supposed to come to light through the logical interplay of “things” (historical circumstances) and “words” (rhetorical strategies)—not as their transcendent mean, but as their consummate harmonizing (362).

Machiavelli’s own ethics departs from Aristotle’s classical appeal to virtue as a mean, favoring instead an appeal to virtue as opposite of vice *tout court*, whereby, as Zuckert stresses, “there can be no middle position” (77). Yet Zuckert further argues that Machiavelli preaches self-restraint or moderation in all dealings, both public and private (compare 80–81, 154–55, 280). Does this mean that Machiavelli “returns,” if unwittingly, to the classical notion of virtue as a “middle position”? In effect, what Machiavelli rejects is not a “middle position,” or moderation, but the classical notion of “middle” as transcending (“vertically”) the whole horizon of excesses, or vicious extremes. The middle ceases to be an end in itself *presupposed* by the extremes, in the act of becoming a “balance of powers” instrumental to universal satisfaction or pleasure (15, 78, 268): instead of raising us above all excesses, Machiavelli’s “middle position” would, so to speak, raise all excesses into the realization of the common good. In balancing each other, excesses would serve a good cause, ultimately coinciding with the establishment and preservation of “the rational society” (11). In Hegelian terms, Machiavelli’s virtue consists of the “sublimation” (*Aufheben*) of vice—a sublimation susceptible to being ratified and defended by good laws and good arms (where “good” entails accessibility

² Socrates’s example, among others, tells us that a philosopher as philosopher can indeed accept certain laws as authoritative. Zuckert’s definition of “philosopher” ought therefore to be revised to refer to unwillingness to accept any authority *as an end in itself*, or as incompatible with natural reason. Where we understand reason *as* authority—all the more where it is *the only* acceptable authority—we are already treading in the footsteps of merely one special approach to philosophy, namely, that of the modern Enlightenment, or more specifically, of Machiavelli.

to the plebs: 22, 300–301, 331, 474; on the limits of “law,” including religious law, see, e.g., 98, 141, 143, 265, 474). Any virtue purporting to rise heroically above all vice would be but a mask of vice, rather than a cure against vice. Herein do we find the heart of Machiavelli’s anti-Platonism. The Florentine replaces Socratic heroism (entailing the primacy of love over fear: 14) with a demythologized heroism that uses both good and evil in order to rise beyond both (34, 84, 130, 309, 469). Machiavelli’s own hero, his enlightened “Prince,” is neither a mere *grande*—a conventional nobleman—nor a mere plebeian, but a plebeian “guardian of liberty” who has risen to great heights, integrating knowledge of masters and that of slaves into a master’s self-knowledge (43–44, 132). Having given the sufferance of the plebs (“the wretched of the earth,” we might say: 125, 302) a superlative dignity, Machiavelli’s hero is no ordinary prince, but a prince guided by Machiavelli’s mind; or rather, the hero is Machiavelli himself having gained a seat of authority (43–44, 46).

Having appealed to Strauss’s *Thoughts on Machiavelli* beyond its first chapter (2), Zuckert succeeds in arguing against the widespread view of Machiavelli as a propounder of tyranny, or outright teacher of evil.³ In order to adequately assess the writings—most notably *The Prince*—that have long served as “evidence” for the demonizing of Machiavelli, we should “balance” them against other writings—most notably, *Discourses on the First Decade of Titus Livius*—specifically aimed at liberating a people from tyranny, rather than at consolidating the authority of a tyrant. If *The Prince* educates the tyrant to tame a people (lest he repress them: 155), the *Discourses* educates the people to tame the prince, or ruling class (85, 460). When the two “educations” are properly combined, they yield the constitution of a “democratic republic” (2, 21), not unlike the American one (460). In both educations, the aim is to find both internal and external balance: on one hand, each “humor” or character—that of those who want to rule and that of those who do not want to be ruled (even as they have not yet risen to desire to rule)—is to reach in “fear” a middle ground between love and hatred of its political counterpart (80, 84–88, 92); on the other hand, the plebs’ fear of the patricians and the patricians’ of the plebs balance each other into the establishment of “the free way of life” or republic (143) embodied in a polity as envisioned, after Machiavelli and via Montesquieu, by America’s Founding Fathers (compare 3, 37, 69, 95, 150, 164, 182, 245, 454, 460, 474). We are supposedly at the dawn of a Realpolitik (15, 37) embracing the very religious establishments that separate

³ Machiavelli’s “democratization” of vice alone stands in the way of all readings of Machiavelli as teacher of tyranny (37).

Machiavelli's times from ancient Rome. If Christian rhetoric (represented notably by a "fox": e.g., 82–83, 90, 390, 397) does not allow the Florentine's world to return to a naive faith in Fortuna (181), it may be nonetheless useful to support a might (represented notably by a "lion": 82, 140–41, 192) by far superior to that of classical antiquity—a might or power that does not limit itself to treading within limits set by nature, but that attempts to conquer nature, to overcome it, if only by turning it against itself, by channeling it, as fuel, into the creation of a new world (11, 17, 24). In sum, Machiavelli uses Christianity (69, 118) not merely to return to antiquity, but to improve upon it (116; on the fraudulent use of religion to satisfy private desires, see especially Zuckert's third chapter on the *Mandragola*: 283–97; on religious fraud as instrumental to the common good, see, e.g., 138–39).

Zuckert does not spell out the manner in which Christianity may be actively beneficial to Machiavelli's project, beyond the boundaries of cunning. The link between Machiavelli and the church is presented as incarnated by Savonarola, whose primary fault seems to have consisted of a lack of political straightforwardness or transparency, typical of most Christians (27–28, 133). Nothing is said of Savonarola's outright rejection of Dante's Renaissance inheritance, as signaled, for example, by the Dominican's incitation of public bonfires in which humanist books and paintings were deemed to be as "vile" as ordinary artifacts catering to feminine vanity.⁴ Be that as it may, Zuckert's Machiavelli emerges roughly as a secular Savonarola, a liberator for whom the otherworldly is a mere pretext for establishing worldly order (28). No more intimate nexus is discerned between Machiavelli and Christian theology. Zuckert does not explore, for instance, the Florentine's debt to the Christian notion of *felix culpa*—where evil is used for the good as a necessary stepping stone—or more generally, to a Christian "liberal morality" that even Nietzsche and Heidegger would fail to abandon.⁵

⁴ Foremost instances of Zuckert's downplaying are (1) her account of Savonarola's flaws, (2) her silence before Machiavelli's rejection of Dante's "Renaissance" (a rejection most vividly displayed in Machiavelli's *Discorso o dialogo intorno alla nostra lingua*, which Zuckert refers to briefly only once [283] and without any mention of the *Discourse's* anti-Dantean intent), (3) silence before the crisis of both reason and authority (not to speak of the rise of global mercantile despotism), arguably a necessary outcome of the unfolding of Machiavelli's modernity, as examined most notably by Leo Strauss, and (4) philosophical readings of the American Founding as anti-Machiavellian both in letter and in spirit. Thus, while Harry Jaffa is never mentioned, Strauss is never shown, as he could have been, pitting the American Founding against Machiavelli (e.g., in *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, Strauss states that "the United States of America may be said to be the only country in the world which was founded in explicit opposition to Machiavellian principles" [Leo Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 13]).

⁵ Machiavelli's discernment of love as a mask of fear is not entirely un-Christian, insofar as his

Zuckert's Machiavelli's lesson appears to be *positively* indebted especially to ancient materialism (16, 58–59, 121); otherwise, both the past and the future appear to be incidental to a Machiavellian instrumentalist liberalism that happens to find its closest concrete partner in American constitutionalism. Accordingly, Zuckert denies that Machiavelli could have understood himself as “the founder of modernity,” on the double ground that he did not have a “scientific” understanding of nature (10), and that, as Pierre Manent has argued, Machiavelli could not have foretold modernity (9–10). Whether or not modernity—and its contemporary crisis of identity—unfolded out of a Machiavellian revolution, Machiavelli himself could not be held responsible for the uses to which he may have been put. Thus can Zuckert link Machiavelli to the founding of American republicanism, even assuming that the modern mechanistic reading of nature in terms of scientific “laws,” as well as the whole “history of modernity,” has *unfolded* (perhaps, then, mindlessly or mechanically) out of Machiavellian principles (no less than modern nihilism unfolds, according to Heidegger, out of ancient “Platonism”).

While Zuckert openly addresses a wide variety of modern personalities, from academia to politics, as having responded, whether favorably or unfavorably, to Machiavelli's work, three visually inconspicuous footnote references are most significant: two are to Nietzsche and one is to Heidegger (5–6, 58). Neither German is, however, mentioned in the book's index.⁶ Zuckert's relative silence easily lends itself to being understood as moved by apologetic interest in tying Machiavelli's Prince (superior to traditional *grandi*) to American republicanism, as opposed to, for instance, the *ill repute* of a supermanly race born of Nietzsche's morality of “beyond good and evil.”⁷ On another front, while confirming Machiavelli's pre-Socratic inspiration (10, 16, 75), more

emphasis on a sovereign, if only unfortunate, need to be “not...good” (475) or “bad” (77, 80, 150)—whereby love is sustained in fear—is reminiscent of Christianity's universal terrible mercy (to echo Poe's *The Black Cat*), where eternal judgment, or the threat thereof, consummates divine love of sinners or enemies. Otherwise put, we love either as much as we fear, or as much as we are fearsome. As for a “love beyond all fear,” just as the Virgil of Dante's *Inferno* I, it would be entirely indifferent to (in no manner resentful of) any divine judgment.

⁶ As far as I could tell, Nietzsche and Heidegger are the sole index exclusions. Zuckert's volume is otherwise diligently edited, containing merely occasional minor typos: e.g., 7 (“sensible” for “sensory”), 8 (“populi” for “popoli”), 67 (“astuzia fortunate” for “astuzia fortunata”), 341 (Castracani read as “castrated dog” rather than “dog castrator”), 465 (“esercitato” for “esercizio”), 388 (“Giovannie” for “Giovanni”).

⁷ Machiavelli's anticipation of Nietzsche (and, to some extent, of Heidegger: 58) is tacitly, though equally saliently, evoked where Zuckert stresses Mansfield's partial rhetorical departure from Leo Strauss (12–13). On Machiavelli's move “beyond good and evil,” see further, e.g., 3, 11, 65, 67, 75, 77, 185, 475. On Machiavelli's “prince” as a Nietzschean-like Superman who masters the Fortuna in function of which Nature is to be understood, see further 43–44 and 60 (the will to overcome Nature presupposes a conception of Nature as susceptible to being overcome, in the first place).

or less tacitly, Zuckert invites appreciation of an intimate affinity between Machiavelli and Socratic or Platonic idealism, provided the latter presupposes pre-Socratic “materialism” as Machiavelli’s republican constitutionalism presupposes violence and tyranny, not to speak of empire.⁸ The crucial difference between Plato and Machiavelli would then pertain, not to their goal (and political effect), but to the Florentine’s unprecedented “transparency” in dealing with the material conditions of freedom: unlike his Greek contemplative predecessor, Machiavelli resists being harmonized with Christianity (361).⁹ Zuckert’s work brings Machiavelli’s transparency to bear upon ancient Platonism, seemingly aiming at filling the gap between the Greek and the Italian. Thus, for instance, Zuckert’s Socrates agrees with Machiavelli in “count[ing] religion but a childish toy” (1; compare 141 and 326).

With Machiavelli, it becomes clear that human society is based not on desire, but on a fear grounding all desire (35–36, 46, 138, 147–50, 360, 465). Ironically, it is the primacy of fear over desire (reflected in Machiavelli’s materialistic idealism) that makes of Machiavelli, as opposed to Plato, by far the keenest defender of freedom above honor (24, 58, 79, 128–29, 255): not only does fear engendered by natural threats drive men to live under laws, but fear engendered by rulers engaged in expanding republics saves the demos from “corruption” or loss of self-reliance (129–33, 148–51, 263, with 12–13, 19). Whence the need enduring republics have to maintain an imperialistic impulse alive, whereby a beastly combination of force (“the lion”) and fraud (“the fox”: 390) works hand in hand with respect for laws and care for popular consent, or easily manipulated public opinion (1, 155, 170, 472). Lest a people’s fear of being ruled be eclipsed by a widespread anarchic desire to rule (a desire fostered, e.g., by “redistributive policies” incarnating a tyrannical wish “to make the rich poor” and “the poor rich” [162, 473] as opposed to a genuinely republican duty “to keep the public rich and their citizens poor” [160]), strife between a ruling class and its plebs is to be preserved under the law and for the sake of the common good (160–62). In short, the key to freedom is government-mediated expansionistic competition, strife, or war (157–77, 315, 469), in the absence of which republics would implode, as freedom would turn against

⁸ On the fundamental coincidence of empire and republic, where, e.g., public elections easily serve as masks of private interests, see, e.g., 48–49, 52–53, 56–58, 60, 65, 72, 90, 166–67, 265, 460, 463. On Machiavelli’s anti-imperialist message, see, e.g., 76, 79, 91, 262, and 460.

⁹ Whereas Plato presents Socrates as an apologist for philosophy, Zuckert’s Machiavelli aims at improving, if not altogether perfecting, politics (118 and 363). Incompatibility between Socrates and Machiavelli is thus far from evident. An academic Platonist might thrive in and even celebrate a Machiavellian world.

itself, giving rise to civil wars (451, 468). Zuckert's reading of Machiavelli thus invites the conclusion that republicanism and imperialism (the latter marked by "a truly monarchical or single executive power": 135, after Mansfield; cf. 13) need each other, as the form and matter of a free life (compare 135, 164, 176, and 281–82). More particularly, Zuckert's work invites us to appreciate that the American Founding experiment confirms Machiavelli's enduring relevance as a guide for all those otherwise at risk of mistaking tyranny (financial or otherwise) for the grace of boundless freedom.

Zuckert's general argument strongly suggests that the crisis of late modernity depends upon a misunderstanding or forgetfulness of modernity's Machiavellian inception. Most auspicious would then be a "return to Machiavelli," entailing a defense of political stances that have become a staple for certain contemporary American Republican strands favoring imperialism or expansionism (aimed, as seen, at averting corruption); popular autonomy (especially legal and military, entailing a people's open access to weapons); governmental expedient use of religion (141); and the rejection of redistributive policies as feeding into tyranny. Yet, Zuckert's work further suggests that a defense of Machiavellian politics is not incompatible (if only in academic circles) with a cherishing of Platonism's lesson concerning the superiority of philosophical contemplation with respect to politics: especially since the American Founding, a Machiavellian political scenario is fully compatible with the primacy, otherwise eclipsed by Machiavelli, of the philosopher over the nonphilosopher. Zuckert's reader is thereby justified in asking whether the author ultimately succeeds in transcending a Romantic or "metaphorical" approach to Plato.

Concerning the divide between Machiavelli and Plato, it would be false to state that whereas Machiavelli dares consider evil, Plato blinds himself to evil, taking refuge in a "Platonic love" of Panglossian-like chastity. The key issue is the capacity to learn evil without *using* it.

Attainment of purely theoretical knowledge of evil presupposes a capacity to investigate the foundations of morality; it entails access to principles underlying "good and evil," principles further allowing us to discern, with Plato's Socrates, a good untainted by any evil. For us to tread a Socratic path, as opposed to a Machiavellian one, we would need to recognize, along with Leo Strauss, "eternal ideas" as "absolutely essential."

Machiavelli's own investigation of good and evil is made possible by recourse to a ground of all moral distinctions: Machiavelli is neither

merely a historian, nor merely a historicist (8–9). Yet, as Zuckert indicates, Machiavelli's political knowledge does not presuppose knowledge of the eternal. Indeed, Machiavelli's starting point is an Epicurean material vortex (10, 16–17; Zuckert does not speak of a “vortex,” but simply of “matter in motion”). Yet, Machiavelli departs from Epicurus (296), we might say, by reading him through Plato (359–61). For Machiavelli, matter is, as it were, stable enough to serve as the ultimate foundation of free societies (362–63). In fact, to quote the Strauss from whom Zuckert has “learned a great deal” (118), for Machiavelli knowledge of human or worldly things presupposes knowledge of natural things as “the invariable ‘world’ itself.”¹⁰ Herein do we find the key to Machiavelli's *philosophical* turn to “history” (9, 11, 15). If, as Zuckert argues, “Machiavelli could not possibly have understood himself to be the founder of modernity” (9), Zuckert's work invites nonetheless the conclusion that Machiavelli lays the foundations for the *philosophical* historicism usually associated with names such as Hegel and Heidegger.

¹⁰ Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 18.

Bonnie Honig, *Public Things: Democracy in Disrepair*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2017, 144 pp., \$65.61 (cloth), \$19.93 (paper).

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Bonnie Honig's book makes the case for a common democratic life in a period of intense neoliberal privatization. Her twist on this common theme is to suggest that "public things"—the objects and infrastructure that operate as conditions of a common world in which democratic citizens live and relate to one another—provide the enchanting, collecting environment needed for democracy to flourish. In many respects her analysis of the problem is right: our world is run according to the logics of utility and efficiency. So much energy is spent on the search for efficient means to our various ends that the ends themselves fade to the background as means themselves increasingly become ends. We play sports not for enjoyment but for fitness. And fitness is for better sleep and a longer life. A longer life is for a longer and more productive career. And a career is for more wealth; and more wealth provides the means for good food and fitness... Around we go, endlessly pursuing efficient means. Instrumental rationality surpasses all.

Government is usually understood in these terms, providing the infrastructural means for people's various purposes. Government, the great enabler. Honig objects to this view, arguing that "there are reasons other than efficiency for embracing public things. Public things are part of the 'holding environment' of democratic citizenship; they furnish the world of democratic life. They do not take care of our needs only. They also constitute us, complement us, limit us, thwart us, and interpellate us into democratic citizenship. This is true of sewage treatment plants and railroads" (5). She offers "a political theory argument in favor of embracing publicness in democratic life, for the sake of democratic life, because public things constitute

citizens equally as citizens, or ought to, and can be made, sometimes, by way of actions in concert, to deliver on that promise” (11). She is concerned about the “discursive disintegration” (26) of the democratic populace. The beauty of public things is that they take highly individualized and individualistic people with their fantasies of omnipotence and invest them “with a sense of integrated subjectivity, responsibility, agency, and concern” (11). In this way, public things are an essential condition of democratic self-government.

Now Honig is a self-identifying member of the “progressive Left” and this limits the resources on which she can rely to make the case for a fulsome civic political life. The Left is good at criticizing neoliberalism and economic privatization, but falls short on a constructive alternative. Few take socialism or communism seriously. Progressives usually end up supporting some type of liberal individual autonomy project on strictly egalitarian terms. Honig attempts something different, calling upon political thinker Hannah Arendt and child development theorist D. W. Winnicott to argue for an enchanted world of public things to deepen and enliven democratic life. From Arendt she derives the idea of “work,” the creations of *homo faber* that have permanence and stability to anchor otherwise isolated, shifting individual identities. From Winnicott’s work on object permanence she sees a complement to Arendt’s account of work, labor, and action in *The Human Condition*. Winnicott’s idea is that the omnipotent infant is lord of all; nothing exists outside of him or her. But when the infant develops an attachment to a blanket or doll or toy car, s/he begins to learn of a world beyond the self. The child alternately wishes to embrace and destroy the object; but it lasts and functions as a holding environment in which the child understands his place among other objects, subjects, and the wider world. From Winnicott and Arendt Honig understands that things are important to humans; they constitute the world.

One of Honig’s most effective metaphors is that of the table, the family’s equivalent of a public thing. The table is a fixed object existing through time and serving as the object of attention and affection, and a rallying point for eating and conversation. It “holds” us, binding us together, helping to make a family more than a random collection of individuals (52–53). Yet another is Big Bird, the iconic yellow character from *Sesame Street*, public broadcasting’s public thing that is part of the mental furniture of the lives of many.

Honig’s third and final chapter is dedicated to a discussion of the enchanting character of public things, now articulated as the politics of hope and play—how best to grapple with the loss of public things and how to re-create

them in new and often difficult conditions. Her texts are a book by Jonathan Lear, *Radical Hope*, and a film by Lars von Trier, *Melancholia*. This is perhaps the least successful of her three chapters, not least because the texts in question are little known. She struggles for the language and images to guide us to the resuscitation or re-creation of public things in the face of environmental decay, corporate bulldozing, and colonial oppression.

Her conception of “public things” is slippery and inchoate. She does not define the term. She is satisfied with examples since this book is more a rumination than a technical presentation. Nonetheless, it is fair to ask about the nature of public things, if only by thinking about her examples. Parks are paradigmatic public things, as are public squares. In European cities the center is often a square characterized by free entrance, spontaneous congregation, and civic events. The town square was also where the well was found. But many public things are more or less utilitarian in character. They may have more or less utility in different periods. Libraries are public but increasingly operate as warm spots for poor people looking for free Internet access. Libraries themselves have fewer and fewer books. And parks attract people but the walkers and sitters usually have their heads down, scanning the web and social media posts. They are in public in body but not in spirit or mind.

Honig waxes eloquent about public telephones, whose importance after a decade or more of inattention became acute after Hurricane Sandy. But the telephone seems antithetical to public things: devices for individual, private use (witness *Katz v. United States* [1967]), exclusive conversation, most often for utilitarian rather than affective purposes. Honig perceptively observes that emergencies are among the remaining circumstances in which public things are valued. But this was the only reason for the public phone’s brief renaissance. And can a phone in any case rise to the level of a public thing?

Honig discusses Hydro Quebec as a public thing. In the early 1960s the Quebec provincial government nationalized private electricity providers and created a Crown corporation. So the corporation became a public thing; it became an object of some affection as a symbol of the modernizing Quebec state. It stood as a shining example of the move away from Quebec’s Catholic, more rural, agrarian past. But in this very sense it was a case of a *disenchanting* public policy. Hydro Quebec is all about state building: a tool for the province’s autonomous economic development, a place where budding francophone engineers and management types could get good work, a piece of Quebec’s francization program, and a source of revenue for the burgeoning Quebec welfare state. These all sound like highly utilitarian uses of Hydro

Quebec. The corporation is now a global behemoth, no doubt looked upon with some ambivalence by local populations around the world. The public thing can actually be an engine of disenchantment.

The Quebec government's hydroelectric policy speaks to another concern: nationalism. As a progressive leftist, Honig is understandably wary of nationalism. But the reader wonders where the enchanting character of public things stops and nationalism begins. Honig strains at the limits of liberalism and its valorization of individual autonomy. The theory of public things gives her a means of transcending the individual. So does nationalism. What is the difference? Is nationalism good? And is there some new thing that would replace it, if it is bad?

Honig's book raises another set of questions. Public things are unifying and this is what Honig finds attractive about them. But she acknowledges that public things likewise divide people. A railroad, for example, is a nation-building unifier, a symbol of purpose and achievement against the odds. (Think of the challenges associated with getting a safe rail passage through the Canadian Rockies.) But it is part of a colonial project of confinement and assimilation of aboriginal peoples (24ff.). Statues are commemorations of a people's past, but recent events in the United States make clear how divisive these commemorations can become. Her answer to the charge that public things divide as much as they unify is that public things need care, attention, and occasional renovation and updating. This may be so, but then the permanence and resilience of public things is compromised, and the churn of change and disorientation proceeds apace.

Like most academics, Honig travels a lot, but she dislikes having to go into the "box" at the airport to be body scanned, hands over her head. Protocols require passengers explicitly to "opt out" and then be screened by different means. Honig refuses to speak these words, to the consternation of officials. Later in the book, we see why "opting out" so exercises her. She sees in opting out a creeping privatization of the public realm, the carving of exceptions to otherwise democratic rules and procedures that should apply equally to everyone. Differentiated service erodes the public. Accordingly, she disdains the Kentucky marriage commissioner who wishes to be excused from performing same-sex marriages. The commissioner would like to "opt out" of performing this public service for conscientious reasons while retaining her job (32–34).

As I write this, the Quebec government is responding to the fallout of its new law that bans face coverings for all persons who deliver or receive public services. The government's argument is that for security reasons everyone's face ought to be exposed in the public realm. In this sense, I suppose, faces are public things. The other argument, less forthrightly advanced, is that in a secular society Quebecers should confine their particular, differentiating religious scruples to the private realm, thus preserving public space as an undifferentiated commons. Critics who know some history also know that this is largely window dressing: the major reason is anti-Muslim animus. Many Quebecers are offended by the sight of niqab-wearing Muslim women.

Honig is distressed by racial and ethnic animus. And she seems receptive to conscientious objection in respect to military service. She offers an unpersuasive distinction between conscientious objection to military service and opting out of the performance of same-sex marriage. And it is odd that she accepts conscientious objection. After all, a country's military forces are quintessential public things, at the heart of what a political community is all about. Does she think a country's defense forces are inessential to the integrity of the political community? It is hard to say, since she does not address the point. Her argument is incomplete for not having addressed this feature of the coercive apparatus of democratic societies.

The paradox here is that as the state becomes larger and more intrusive, it penetrates people's lives more comprehensively and clashes with their private ideas of the good and the sacred. Either the public things are to steamroll diverse beliefs, or accommodations will have to be made. But Honig is highly ambivalent about accommodations, because these look to her like creeping privatization, the triumph of neoliberalism over democracy. In Canada the law of reasonable accommodation is highly developed. If a person's particular commitment or condition can be accommodated without harming the overall purpose of the general law or policy, and if undue hardship is not imposed on the entity asserting the policy, then that person's particular situation must be accommodated. A ramp has to be installed outside a building, a law against face coverings must be relaxed, an employee must be given a day off on his or her Sabbath, and so on. Necessarily, the uniform, undifferentiated character of the law and related public things is diluted. Would Honig object to this, or is the robust protection of public things simply incompatible with other democratic norms?

The greater the conceptual distance that public things move from Arendtian labor needs to works of symbolic significance like statues, the

more freighted and divisive they become—that is, the more they fail in the unifying, enchanting project for which Honig hopes. For example, sewers and fire departments provoke little rancor, but statues of Robert E. Lee and certain names of schools and roads at times produce conflict and even physical harm. We seem to live in a climate of repudiation: each investigation of the past debunks rather than valorizes, or at least understands, it. These days the progressive agenda is tied to a politics of identity that targets conservative projects of preservation, continuity, and permanence. The politics of identity, in turn, owes much to the Marxian critique of bourgeois order, a critique in which the veils of tradition and the sacred are ripped away to expose the naked self-interest by reference to which the ruling class dominates all others. Progressives believe in... well, progress. For them, the future is felicitous possibility, the past a tale of oppression and woe; the political project is to move society from the past to the future. The disturbance, if not the destruction, of public things is a necessary and salutary feature of progressivism. The political theory of public things is at heart a conservative project, at odds with progressive politics. I am not sure Honig comes fully to terms with this.

Honig's is a thoughtful and provocative book, one that prompts the reader to think about important things in interesting ways. It struggles with some of the tenets of liberalism and attempts a sophisticated approach to transcend at least some of liberalism's more intemperate tendencies. But I suspect that the book does not go deeply enough. It examines a problem of modernity but within the assumptions of modernity. Neoliberalism's instrumental rationality takes us to Bacon, Hobbes, Heidegger, Weber, Charles Taylor, and George Grant, among many others. Honig's references to enchantment evoke Max Weber. But we never get there. An important opportunity missed.

Seymour Morris Jr., *Fit for the Presidency? Winners, Losers, What-Ifs, and Also-Rans*. Lincoln, NE: Potomac Books, 2017, 387 pp., \$32.95 (cloth).

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Seymour Morris offers a portrait of fifteen recognizable characters in American political history, selected not according to a strict methodological scheme but rather because they represent eclectic examples of presidents, failed presidential candidates, and those who could and should have run for president but did not. It is not made clear why some personalities are included and others omitted. Morris is not a social scientist, but he is interested in drawing general conclusions from an examination of a sample. The book is not a catalog of greats, but an assortment of persons with diverse qualities, in diverse contexts, and with different fates. Included are some outstanding presidents: Washington, Lincoln, and Reagan. Washington is the aristocrat who distinguished himself in the War of Independence and in constitution making. One of his merits was that he had no sons; this reassured those who would otherwise have feared that the presidency would become a hereditary office. (Some wished to refer to him as His Highness, a title he rejected.) Lincoln is the mediocrity who rose to greatness in office. FDR is mentioned only in passing. Whatever one's qualms about the selection of subjects, the reader is entertained by portraits of colorful characters and is often urged to conclude that little is new in our contemporary reflections on leaders.

At first blush, Morris's analytical scheme is annoying. He imagines himself a head hunter for a large organization and examines the candidates' "CVs" and others' opinions of them. Morris disavows the notion that leadership in government is the same as leadership in any complex organization, but the form suggests otherwise.

Some excellent people fail or do not have the opportunity to run for the presidency. George Marshall is the latter-day Washington whom Roosevelt passed over as a running mate in 1944. William McAdoo was highly promising but a near miss for the Democratic nomination in 1920 and 1924. DeWitt Clinton and Wendell Willkie are among the best of the also-rans.

Some win but perform poorly. Hoover is one and his obvious gifts and accomplishments are dimmed by other debilities, not the least of which is an inability to communicate. He was too much the technocrat and too little the politician. Others have fatal flaws mixed with extraordinary traits and accomplishments. Morris puts William Randolph Hearst, Jefferson Davis, and Robert Kennedy in this group.

Good leadership seems to be like good porridge: neither too hot nor too cold but just right. Some sort of golden mean applies to the successful presidents. Of Lincoln it was said, "Just the right thing, at the right time, and in the right place." Good presidents have ample experience, but an unsavory past can be a burden. Patience is critical to leadership, but vacillation is a killer. Presidents should be active, but not rash. Leadership at times requires the drawing of lines in the sand, but compromise is often necessary and bull-headedness is often a vice. A judicious mix of the love of ideas and of people is better than a fixation on the "science" of public administration. Some leaders reflect too much and others not enough. Morris reaches for an account of leadership that places most stock on judgment and on the reading of people, on context, on issues, and on timing.

On the matter of judgment, more reflection by the author would have made the book a more informative read. What is the nature of judgment? In what does it consist? How does one acquire it? Can it be learned, or is it a gift of some kind? This ground has been well plowed by ancients like Aristotle and moderns like Isaiah Berlin. Berlin, for example, refuses to accept that there is a science of politics derived from natural laws, or that a theoretical knowledge of political life can be directly applied by politicians. The claim that it can be, Berlin argues, is commonly made by totalitarian movements and has repeatedly ended in disaster. Berlin prefers the language of gift or instinct; political leadership, he writes, requires "considerable personal experience and natural aptitude."¹ "In the realm of political action, laws are far and few indeed; skills are everything." Statesmen "grasp the unique combination of characteristics that constitute this particular situation—this and no

¹ Isaiah Berlin, "On Political Judgment," *New York Review of Books*, October 3, 1996, 26–30.

other.” Political judgment requires a direct acquaintance with particular facts and a sense of what is relevant and what is not, what fits with what, and what consequences flow from what acts. Bismarck is high on Berlin’s list of leaders with excellent political judgment. So are Lincoln and FDR. The former is discussed in Morris’s book, the latter not. But Morris is correct to say that the best qualification for the presidency is experience. Lack of qualifications is not a qualification.

Instead of an account of presidential leadership based on the nature of judgment, Morris gives us a version associated with the rhetorical presidency,² the image of the president as a talker, soother, consoler, encourager, inspirer. This is not the Founders’ vision. In fact, the idea of president as a national moral figure was for many Founders the beginning of tyranny. The president was originally imagined to be a more modest figure who would overshadow neither Congress nor the states. Morris sees the beginning of the ascendant president in the person of William Harrison, winner of the 1840 election and in office for only a brief period before his untimely death. He was the man of the mythical log cabin, though in fact he was born an aristocratic Virginian. He loved the West and was the “common man’s” president.

The fitful rise of the rhetorical presidency became the staple account of good leadership in the twentieth century, hastened by the development of radio and television. Morris accepts the idea of the rhetorical president uncritically, criticizing candidates for their lack of the common touch and inability to inspire. Here Hoover get a failing grade, while Reagan passes with flying colors. The rhetorical president threatens to outgrow the constitutional limits of the office and alter the delicate balances that have safeguarded limited democratic government in the United States. But one cannot gainsay the need for the common touch in a democracy. This is among the lessons of Shakespeare’s *Coriolanus* and *Henry V*. At the same time, the presidency requires much more than this ability to “connect.”

Morris emphasizes the value of independence in presidents and presidential aspirants. Wealthy presidents are prized precisely because they do not need the money they could accumulate from corrupt uses of the office. So the land-owning Washington and the successful Tilden earn Morris’s praises. Yet Wendell Willkie and George Marshall were not wealthy men, but were incorruptible nonetheless. So not wealth but character is decisively

² Jeffrey K. Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

important. Morris leaves out of his study shiftier personalities like John Kennedy, Richard Nixon, and Bill Clinton, whose conduct diminished the office.

We live in a moment of intense interest in the presidency and the institutional context in which it operates. The 2016 election was among the most disruptive in memory and the victor has smashed many of the norms associated with good presidential leadership. But books like Morris's confirm that the more things change, the more they stay the same. Like Donald Trump, William Randolph Hearst was wealthy and showed little knowledge of or interest in the processes of politics. Also Like Trump, Jefferson Davis had a poor grasp of history, Wendell Willkie quickly switched from Democrat to Republican (making enemies in both camps), Henry Wallace was very much a loose cannon, Robert F. Kennedy lied and exaggerated, and psychiatrists pronounced Barry Goldwater unfit for the presidency. None became president, while President Trump embodies in his person so many faults and weaknesses distributed among these many others.

Morris has high regard for Ronald Reagan, the Great Communicator, whose policy smarts and sense of timing exceeded all expectations. Two things about Reagan stand out. He worked members of Congress frequently and effectively. And he lived by his Eleventh Commandment: never speak ill of a Republican. The current president does not read books. Should he begin to do so, he could do worse than go directly to the chapter on Reagan in Morris's volume.

David Johnston, Nadia Urbinati, and Camila Vergara, *Machiavelli on Liberty and Conflict*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017, vi + 423 pp., \$50 (hardcover).

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This is an era of sixteenth-century quincentennials. This past year has marked the five-hundredth anniversary of the beginning of the Reformation, or at least the anniversary of the publication of Martin Luther's *Ninety-Five Theses*; the date was marked with celebrations in Germany, academic conferences around the world, and even a commemorative stamp, featuring Luther and Philip Melanchthon, by none other than the Vatican Post Office. As this philatelic commemoration shows, the extent to which a sixteenth-century text is interpreted for today can be very far from the historical context of its origin.

The year 2013 marked the quincentennial of the completion of Niccolò Machiavelli's *The Prince*, but this text and this anniversary contrast with Luther's. Unlike the *Ninety-Five Theses*, for which we can give the precise date of publication (in a letter of October 31 to the archbishop of Mainz), *The Prince* was not published until five years after Machiavelli's death in 1527, and the precise date and details of its 1532 completion have left few clues for posterity. Luther's theses were very quickly reprinted and caused immediate disputes that led to schism. Controversies inspired by *The Prince* lay largely dormant until the mid-sixteenth century. The *Ninety-Five Theses* are easily related to the evolution of Luther's theology of *sola fides* and what would soon emerge as his biblical hermeneutic of "Law and Gospel." In contrast, even the precise relationship between Machiavelli's *The Prince* and his *Discourses on Livy*, his two chief political works, is enigmatic; each text claims to contain all he knew and had learned. The text ostensibly on princes contained key

teachings on republics; the other text supposedly on republics contained key teachings on princes.

No wonder then that an edited collection of the essays of some of the world's best Machiavelli scholars would show such range of interpretation and arguments. *Machiavelli on Liberty and Conflict* is the outcome of a conference at Columbia University's Italian Academy for Advanced Studies in December 2013, the quincentennial year of *The Prince*. This book exhibits the startling diversity of ideas in the scholarship on the sixteenth-century Florentine. In the first page of the introduction, the editors aptly quote the late great early modern historian Felix Gilbert: "Machiavelli's teachings are so rich that in them each succeeding century can find answers for the political issues which are its main concern, and the myth of Machiavelli can grow and vary without losing contact with the personality which inspired it." This volume attests to the veracity of Gilbert's claim: there is an undeniable richness to the source that demands contraries in its interpretation.

Within the introductory essay, the editors also claim that the book is in the "celebratory" tradition, which, as they outline, began in Italy in the mid-nineteenth century, when nationalist movements had led to state unity. In 1869, the quarter-century of Machiavelli's birth, the focus had been on the famous conclusion to *The Prince*, in which he exhorted the Medicis to seize Italy and free her from the barbarians. Machiavelli's writings appeared particularly relevant to an age with new foundings taking place within old political settings. For the editors, this period marked the rebirth of Machiavelli scholarship. Their introductory essay traces that scholarship from the *Risorgimento* into the twenty-first century. This in itself is a notable feature of the book; there have been few such detailed studies of the history of that scholarship, especially since it involved academic and political movements on both sides of the Atlantic and in multiple European languages over the past century and a half. In the end, the purpose of the opening essay is to demonstrate the contentious reception of *The Prince* through all of these contexts, and thus continued timely political relevance of this seemingly simple book on effective princely rule. The anniversary conference invited presenters to reflect on one of four themes, which in turn became the basis for the book's fourfold sectional division.

The first section, "Between Antiquity and Modernity," focuses upon Machiavelli's place in the history of political thought. Was he the last of the ancients or the initiator of a new and modern conception of politics? To what degree did Machiavelli appropriate or repudiate the classical and Christian

traditions? It is fitting that the first essay offered in this section is by Harvey C. Mansfield, whose contribution gives the usual high level of insight and provocation that political theorists have long come to expect from him. In this essay, Mansfield argues that Machiavelli invents a new standard of necessity based on a consequentialist “effectual truth” that is considered good not in a classical sense, but only in a new sense of the desired political effects. For Mansfield, Machiavelli’s standard of necessity demands a perennial return to political foundations in order to maintain the regime. Next, Giovanni Giorgini presents a different perspective on the moral problem of necessity and the prince with “dirty hands”: instead of a new morality or moral code, Machiavelli’s statesman, according to Giorgini, must act badly under exceptional duty without himself becoming corrupt. The challenge for the statesman is one of education: to know when his hands must get dirty for the sake of the common good and the preservation of the state. In the third essay, Gabriele Pedullà challenges the argument made by Gennaro Sasso—that Machiavelli wrote against opponents who championed the contemporary Venetian aristocracy against ancient Roman republicanism. Instead, Pedullà writes, there was no opposition between proponents of Venice and Rome, and Machiavelli’s defense of the Roman republic in *Discourses* I.6 was the basis for opposition to the Roman model that started with Francesco Guicciardini. Miguel Vatter concludes the opening section with an essay on the contentious interpretation of statesmanship and civil religion. In Vatter’s account, Machiavelli’s republicanism is founded on a combination of “ancient theology” and “prophetology.”

The second section of the book, “*The Prince* and the Politics of Necessity,” focuses on Machiavelli’s “tragic” view of politics, which stressed conflict and consequences rather than ideals. Yet the contributors in this section challenge that prevailing interpretation. Who better than the authoritative Quentin Skinner to begin with his defense of Machiavelli as a thoroughly humanist political thinker? Skinner’s thesis asserts that liberality and faithfulness remain essential to the Machiavellian prince, especially that he may avoid hatred while preserving the state. For Skinner, *The Prince* does not advocate the abandonment of traditional princely virtues, but seeks to redefine what these virtues had been believed to prescribe. Erica Benner follows with a perceptive essay on the oscillation in *The Prince* and the *Discourses* between what she calls Machiavelli’s “two realisms.” On one hand, Machiavelli argues that human beings are untrustworthy and so political orders need unilateral, amoral, and immoral actions; on the other hand, he advocates for the political strength and safety of trust and collaboration. Stephen Holmes’s

essay concentrates on emergency preparedness and risk mitigation in *The Prince*. In Holmes's reading, popular loyalty becomes the best protection for Machiavelli, thus princes ought to be good to the people and exercise self-restraint, because otherwise princely virtue in adversity ultimately leads to undermining the popular foundation of the state. Paul A. Rahe concludes the section with a provocative examination of the often-neglected "Of Ecclesiastical Principalities" chapter of *The Prince*. For Rahe, this chapter speaks to Machiavelli's wider intentions: it shows the power of an army of believers. Princes ought to emulate the church in the control over minds; for Rahe, this is an example of Machiavelli's propensity towards totalitarianism.

The book's third section, "Class Struggle, Financial Power, and Extraordinary Authority in the Republic," contains an insightful essay by Benedetto Fontana that attempts to explain how Machiavelli could present the Gracchi reforms negatively while presenting Roman factional conflict positively. In Fontana's reading of Machiavelli, the Gracchi's faults were their failed methods, not their intentions. Next, Jérémie Barthas argues that in arming the people, Machiavelli sought to establish Florence's financial autonomy from the *grandi*. In turning from mercenary forces to mass conscription, Machiavelli favored public debt financing and weakened the power of oligarchs. Marco Geuna concludes the section with an analysis of Machiavelli's consideration of classical dictatorship. Geuna shows that he held the powers of the dictator to be essential for the preservation of republics in recurring emergency situations.

The last section, "Machiavellian Politics beyond Machiavelli," contains five essays on the legacy of Machiavelli within the republican tradition of political thought. Jean-Fabian Spitz leads off with a critique of Skinner's interpretation of Machiavelli's republicanism. For Spitz, Skinner's Machiavelli is problematic in that it takes freedom as the product of institutions, whereas institutionalization in Machiavelli should be seen as a threat to that freedom. John P. McCormick follows with a deeply textual analysis of the *Florentine Histories* to argue that that work does not signal a new sympathetic turn to the nobility. McCormick sees reinforcement of republican politics in a text that is sometimes thought to represent Machiavelli's "conservative" break from the *Discourses on Livy*. Luca Baccelli's essay criticizes the "realist" and "republican" interpretations in favor of a view that focuses on political innovation that preserves freedom. Baccelli's Machiavelli is much more radical in the history of political thought than either of these common interpretations would allow. Michele Battini returns to the subject of the citizen army,

but here to emphasize the need for social and patriotic unity. A coming together of interests, wherein the soldier sees that his own reasons and needs are sought in fighting for his city's interests, must accompany Machiavelli's mass conscription strategies. Finally, Marie Gaille's essay examines Louis Althusser's interpretation of Machiavelli to show the usefulness of the concept of "conjuncture." Althusser's Machiavelli helps discover a new method of "conjuncture embedded" political thought.

This impressive volume contains essays highly useful to political theorists and historians of political thought. Though generally aimed at an audience of experienced scholars rather than students or neophytes, most essays are nevertheless clearly written and persuasive. Some are so compelling that from one chapter to the next a reader may come to hold fast to contrary things about Machiavelli—that he is both a humanist republican and a totalitarian, for instance. This collection shows that "Old Nick" still has the power, like Cesare Borgia whose bisection of Remirro d'Orco is related in chapter 7 of *The Prince*, to leave us "satisfied and stupefied."

Thomas G. West, *The Political Theory of the American Founding: Natural Rights, Public Policy, and the Moral Conditions of Freedom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017, 420 pp., \$93.31 (hardback), \$31.47 (paperback).

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Thomas West is a talented political theorist with wide-ranging interests. He has written fine translations and interpretations of works by leading philosophers, ancient and modern, in the canon of Western thought. Yet West has also taken a special interest in a political theory, or perhaps a political morality, that I will call here natural rights republicanism. By natural rights republicanism I mean a doctrine incorporating the main tenets of the Declaration of Independence: “all men are created equal[,] they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights,” and they are entitled to be governed under laws and institutions established with their consent.

The American Founding is West’s second book-length account of natural rights republicanism; it comes twenty years after his first account, in *Vindicating the Founders*.¹ *Vindicating* was written primarily for intelligent lay readers and high-school students and educators; *The American Founding* seems aimed primarily at college students, graduate students, and professors interested in American political theory and/or the canon of Western political theory. In addition, *The American Founding* makes a narrower argument than *Vindicating* did. The argument of *Vindicating* was normative; the book justified and rehabilitated natural rights republicanism from criticisms familiar from modern politics and scholarship. *The American Founding* is

¹ Thomas G. West, *Vindicating the Founders: Race, Sex, Class, and Justice in the Origins of America* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997).

descriptive; after he saw how *Vindicating* had been received, West concluded that “there [was] a more pressing need for explanation than vindicating” (3).

Accordingly, *The American Founding* is primarily a work of explanatory political theory, or of intellectual history. The book explains the basic tenets of natural rights republicanism. It shows how Americans who subscribed to those tenets justified them and tried to implement them in practice. *The American Founding* does not present natural rights republicanism as the only morality influential in American political practice; West recognizes and draws due contrasts between natural rights republicanism and views held by British loyalists, proslavery southerners, Progressives, and modern thought leaders who find appeals to natural rights unbelievable. Even so, the book does show that, from the beginning of the eighteenth century through at least the early twentieth century, natural rights republican principles were subscribed to by a wide range of thought leaders and implemented in American practice.

Part 1 of *The American Founding* supplies an overview of natural rights republicanism. Chapter 1 interprets the Declaration of Independence and other fundamental sources to explain key concepts. People are political equals in that they are equally “individuals who are neither the masters nor the slaves of other people” (25); they have and deserve “inalienable” or natural rights understood as nonconventional freedoms to pursue their own reasonable life goals in different spheres of life—self-preservation, liberty, property, free religious exercise, and the pursuit of happiness (25–42). West then refutes (in chapter 2) contemporary impressions whereby natural rights republicanism constitutes an incoherent “amalgam” (43) of disparate British, Roman, Christian, and rights-based philosophical sources, and contrasts (in chapter 3) natural rights equality (equality of opportunity) with welfare-state equality (equality in distribution of resources). West proceeds to explain (in chapter 4) in what sense and why nature supplies a foundation for equal and natural rights, what the state of nature is and means (chapter 5), and why equality and natural rights require government with the consent of the governed (chapter 6). Chapter 7 closes part 1 by sketching the main goals, in foreign and domestic policy, that follow from the fundamental principles discussed throughout part 1.

To show how natural rights principles relate to policy, parts 2 and 3 study two different fields of policy. Part 2 focuses on public morality. Citing *The Federalist Papers*, state constitutions, and legal treatises, chapter 8 explains why a political regime dedicated to individual freedom might justifiably restrict freedom to protect and reinforce public morals. Chapters 9 and 11

identify the main institutions maintaining such morals: organized religion, public education affirming and teaching the natural bases of morality, public laws prohibiting immorality, and social opinions praising the virtues and blaming the vices. Chapter 10 studies family law and policy as a case study: both to channel sexual passions and to ensure the begetting and formation of children, government may and should restrict sexual activity to conjugal sex within heterosexual marriages. West then surveys (in chapters 12 and 13) the virtues emphasized in a republican community—the “social” virtues, such as justice, moderation, temperance, industry, and frugality.

Part 3 studies the relation between natural rights political principles and economic policy. Chapter 14 explains natural property rights, rights of exclusive use protecting people’s free exercise of their faculties to acquire the resources necessary for survival or rational improvement. Chapter 15 traces the main policy implications that follow: to give ownership clear meaning in positive law; to facilitate ownership; to define the kinds of property uses that noxiously harm neighbors; and to define and prohibit nuisances. West then traces the justifications for freedom of contract and markets (chapter 16) and for sound money (chapter 17). In chapter 18, he studies the Founding Era debate between Jefferson and Hamilton about whether American government policy should be set primarily to promote the interests of farmers or of bankers and manufacturers.

The American Founding is an excellent resource for any college- or graduate-level course on the history or the politics of the United States from the colonial period up to the New Deal. To show how natural rights republicanism was understood, West cites and quotes extensively from state constitutions, laws enacted by colonial and state legislatures, judicial opinions, executive policies, legal treatises, election pamphlets, and religious sermons. Very few history or political-theory books cite source materials this far-ranging; no book explains the political principles informing those source materials more effectively than *The American Founding* does.

The American Founding also brings to light features of natural rights republicanism overlooked in other accounts of the American Founding or of various classical liberal theories. Many contemporary scholars pigeon-hole theories of politics by whether they are libertarian or communitarian.² Natural rights republicanism is a little of both. As parts 1 and 3 show, such republicanism is libertarian in its dedication to equality and natural rights.

² Or, whether such theories are liberal or republican. See 44–46, 166–69.

But as part 2 shows, it is communitarian in that it justifies vigorous protection of the public morals—provided that those morals inculcate respect for equality and natural rights.

The American Founding also provides instructive lessons about the roles that prudence and practical reason play in theories of natural rights. As West explains, when natural rights principles supply the basic goals for a political regime, they “do not dictate answers to all questions of policy, law and government structure”; “the more one descends from the laws of nature and natural rights into policy details, the more the prudence of politicians will be needed” (7). West’s portrait of the Jefferson vs. Hamilton debate is representative; notwithstanding their disagreements, the two leaders “were really fighting over means, not ends” (374).

Although *The American Founding* is an important book, it is not without limitations. Throughout, there are many comparisons between the common approach West sees in the founders’ views and the political theories of Plato, Aristotle, Locke, Nietzsche, Leo Strauss, and many others. These comparisons may be engaging for political theorists who (like West) are familiar with the canon of great political philosophers. For many readers, however, such comparisons will seem distracting. Such readers can simply skip these side discussions, and focus on the passages of the book most focused on West’s explanatory claims.

There is another and more important limitation in *The American Founding*: as much as West tries to focus on explaining, on more than one occasion he engages in a little vindicating. The challenge West faces is familiar and understandable. West is trying to describe a common political morality as a value-neutral social scientist would, but it is extremely difficult to separate the “is” and the “ought” when studying such a morality or any other shared normative enterprise.³ For example, even when actors agree on the basic tenets of such a morality, they may disagree on the precise justifications for those tenets. It may then be hard for the social scientist to synthesize their views as one common view. West faces this problem in chapter 4, when he presents the grounds on which various founders believed that nature can and does supply a standard for evaluating human action. West recounts from the sources several different possible bases for natural standards. Among others: God made nature such a standard (82–87); conscience gives people an

³ See, for example, John Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 1–19; Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, rev. ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 35–80.

innate or natural moral sense (87–89); and natural equality and rights follow from people’s capacities for rational happiness (92–94). West suggests that the last ground, rational happiness, “is probably the one that appears most often” (92) in the source materials. That suggestion states a descriptive conclusion. Before arriving at that conclusion, however, West dismisses appeals to an innate moral sense, on the ground that “even those founders who spoke of the moral sense were half-consciously aware of the insufficiency of their own argument” (89). Similarly, West downplays appeals to religion, because it seems to him “striking how little evidence is provided for . . . assertions” that natural rights and equality have divine support (86). In each case, West purports to be making an assessment about how often founders appealed to specific natural standards of evaluation. In each case, however, West seems to be dismissing appeals that founders did in fact make on the ground that those appeals do not seem convincing. In each case, a judgment about an “ought” seems to be shaping an explanatory conclusion about an “is.”

Here is another challenge for an explanatory social science project like *The American Founding*: even when such a project describes a common morality successfully, the description is bound to suggest normative implications. Logically, of course, an explanation of a political morality and practice does not imply an endorsement of either the morality or the practice. And in *The American Founding*, West does announce that he means to explain without endorsing. Nevertheless, when a descriptive project shows that a community’s practice is more structured and coherent than commonly thought, such a demonstration legitimates the practice described. West notes how James Madison (in *Federalist*, No. 49) predicted that the Constitution would gradually acquire authority as it became old and acquired “that veneration, which time bestows on everything” (263). From time to time, *The American Founding* seems to suggest that similar veneration should be bestowed on the principles and practices West explains. For example, when West examines marriage and family policy in chapter 10, his explanation of why earlier American leaders believed no-fault divorce was problematic (237–41) seems to drift into normative criticism of divorce-tolerant contemporary attitudes and policies.

Again, however, these challenges are unavoidable when describing a common political morality or any other shared normative enterprise. And a serious political scientist *should* seek to describe and make political phenomena understandable—for the purpose of evaluating and criticizing later. In *The American Founding*, West does not prove that natural rights republicanism is useful or true. But he is quite right to suggest, as he does in closing,

that such republicanism “might continue to prove useful [and] might even be true” (410). And by instructing readers how a morality of natural rights and republicanism has operated in practice, West enables us all to evaluate whether such a morality is useful, true, and even worthy of recovery.

Elías José Palti, *An Archaeology of the Political: Regimes of Power from the Seventeenth Century to the Present*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2017.

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Elías José Palti makes what he describes as a study of “the political,” a term that he claims was “originally coined” by Carl Schmitt in *The Concept of the Political* (1932), in his effort to trace its trajectory from the seventeenth century through the present. He distinguishes “politics” from “the political” by explaining that the former represents “one instance of social totality,” by which he appears to mean a unity between politics and society, while the latter “refers to the way diverse instances are disaggregated and mutually articulated” (xvii), which anticipates the dissolution that Palti will describe in his book. Among the unique features of Palti’s work is his effort to develop his argument within “a broader historical-intellectual perspective” (xx). Throughout the book, he offers interdisciplinary examples from art, literature, and music in conjunction with his discussion of the works of political theorists and events. Palti uses this broader focus to underscore the comprehensive nature of the transformation of the political.

Two significant experiences that he identifies as disenchantments define the period addressed in his book. The first “disenchantment” occurs during the period that encompasses generally the Baroque era (1550–1650) and particularly the Reformation and the break with the single Catholic presence (which he later describes as “God abandon[ing] the world,” 172). The second “disenchantment,” which comes more than three centuries later, is, according to Palti, the recognition of the illusory nature of transcendent things. The disenchantments are significant in that Palti uses them to trace a trajectory of the political through a conceptual presentation. Beyond providing a new

understanding of the political, Palti's effort also aims to elicit insights into the foundation of modern democracy.

Palti's aim throughout his work is to recast the political in a manner that dramatically differs from the understanding of politics that can be traced back to Aristotle. As a prelude to discussion of the first disenchantment, he offers in his first chapter's section "The Twists in the Ancient Theory of the Forms of Government" a brief review of Aristotle, Aquinas, and Dante on forms of government and in particular on monarchy. But he misrepresents Aristotle's "opinion" when he states that, in Aristotle's view, "the art of politics consists of combining social elements" and that it is about "avoiding conflict between the many and the few, the rich and the poor, and ensuring that no social group is excluded from the process of political decision making, which would generate dissent and would threaten the stability of the polis" (5). Aristotle argues in the *Politics* that human beings, by nature, are political and social creatures who are naturally drawn to form political communities for the sake of living well. This is dependent upon the presence of law and justice, which also provides a means to address conflict, but there is no suggestion that the reason governments are established is to avoid conflict. That Palti's trajectory of the political leads far afield from Aristotle's politics will become increasingly apparent, but his interpretation of Aristotle makes clear why he stated at the outset that politics is an instance of social totality, as noted above.

Returning to Palti's trajectory, among the questions that he asks at the outset is, "How was it that theology became *political theology*?" (3). The emergence of absolute monarchies in the Baroque era is significant because, according to Palti, the monarch believed he shared the divine essence, which differentiated him from his subjects. As Palti explains, he put himself "in a situation of transcendence and preeminence with respect to those over whom he exercised power" (10). This change answers Palti's question and demonstrates the crucial political shift that began to take place in thinking about theology and politics.

Palti argues that El Greco's *The Burial of the Count of Orgaz* provides a visual representation of the structure of Baroque thought and mirrors what is happening in the political realm. The heavenly figures in the top half of the painting direct their gaze upward, while the Count and the attending religious and political figures in the bottom half gaze downward. Two figures stand out: the priest in the bottom half of the painting, who is looking upward, and a young boy, who is looking outward. The mediating figures of the priest and the boy (the priest as mediator between the earthly and the heavenly, the boy as mediator between the figures in the painting and the

observers of the painting) serve as links between two worlds, yet are outside of or alien to both worlds. Yet the priest (whose vestments reproduce the folds of the sacred, like Christ's garments) as mediator occupies the center of the political stage, "the only one who is now able to reestablish communication between the sacred and the profane and restore to the world its lost unity" (13). Recalling that this is the era of the first disenchantment, the author argues that this painting is representative of God retiring from the world, which leaves a figure of a mediator that is "torn by its dual nature, at once sacred and profane, universal and particular" (13).

This dualism and its relation to the larger theological and political debate is significant. It begins to respond to the question of how theology became political theology (the mediating figure of the priest). Also, the first disenchantment (God abandoning the world) gives rise to the artificial and conventional in the world of politics. We can draw a parallel to the premodern absolute monarch, whose divine nature also separates him from his subjects. The question is whether he can serve as mediator when, like the priest and the boy, he has a paradoxical relationship. He is no longer truly of either world, a circumstance which also highlights that his rule is merely conventional. In addition to the upheaval with respect to God and the absolute monarch, the very concept of what defines the community is called into question. Palti claims: "This means that *a community is never immediately one, immediately congruent, with regards to itself*. The principle of unity that constitutes it as such comes to it from an external source. This is what 'the political' designates" (26, emphasis in the original). Palti's distancing of the political from the ruler and the community is the first step in a trajectory that ultimately leads him to conclude that "the political" is just a fiction. Palti rejects a traditional history-of-ideas approach because he believes it is inadequate to the task of understanding the structure of Baroque political thought. He argues instead that there is a new kind of logic, "the folding logic," that provides a means to understand the paradoxical nature of the Baroque. Quoting Deleuze (from *The Fold*), Palti contends that "the baroque refers not to an essence but rather to an operative function, to a trait. It endlessly produces folds" (30). Recall that Palti included the word "twists" in the title of the section on prior philosophers and theologians as well as a description of the folds of the priest's garments.

Throughout *An Archaeology of the Political* Palti draws on the theories of Deleuze, Foucault, and other postmodern theorists to structure his work and advance his argument. The book is composed of four chapters and a conclusion. Following chapter 1, "The Theological Genesis of the Political," discussed

above and which introduces the theory of the fold, the subsequent chapters study the political from the vantage point of its relation to power through the use of interdisciplinary examples (such as artists, literary figures, and composers), modern theories, and intervening political events. While Palti's argument follows a linear progression, this by no means suggests a linear pattern of development of the political. Instead, each century casts the political against the backdrop of contemporary events. Chapter 2, "The Tragic Scene: The Symbolic Nature of Power and the Problem of Expression," addresses the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and is identified with the age of representation and a logic of folding. The tragic scene reflects the contradiction and split lives (recall the duality discussed above) of the citizenry: "as citizens (legal subjects) and as Christians (moral subjects)—playing the two roles simultaneously without ever managing to fuse them" (34). Palti observes, "The *political* that at that moment emerges is, in the end, *nothing but the intermediary space opened by this double impasse*" (43, emphasis in the original).

Continuing with the temporal designation and reference to an identifiable age, chapter 3, "The Discourse of Emancipation and the Emergence of Democracy as a Problem," discusses the nineteenth century, identified as "a logic of undifferentiation/identification in the age of history" (xx). History is identified as the "new master signifier around which the entire political discourse would become rearticulated" (104). Palti cites Foucault, who argued that the paradox of an *objective transcendental* is the key conceptual device on which this regime of knowledge rested. The consequence of this "conceptual shift" is the redefinition of the meaning of the concept of political representation: "The goal became finding an existential type of identity between the governing and the governed, a link that overcame the strictly political-legal relationship and could bring it into being" (104). Recall that the second disillusionment, which delineates one of the parameters of Palti's study, is the recognition of the illusory nature of transcendent things. At the end of chapter 3, Palti moves closer to this position by explaining his description of the logic of undifferentiation/identification in this age and coupling it with this redefinition of political representation: "This attempt at undifferentiation/identification between the political and the social expressed the ideal of a radical immanence. The political order was no longer a realm outside of society but a function of it, one within a system of functions, the means of its own self-constitution" (106–7).

The discussion in chapter 3 gives yet another marker of the political, but the events of the twentieth century discussed in chapter 4, "The Rebirth of the

Tragic Scene and the Emergence of the Political as a Conceptual Problem” (the logic of leap in the age of forms), explain a break with the idea of history as a teleological, evolutionary course. “Once deprived of the teleological certainties provided by the evolutionary views of the nineteenth century, the revolutionary enterprise becomes one of subjective self-affirmation” (112). Among the consequences of what Palti calls “a drastic reversal” (112), “the realm of foundations is detached from immanence and placed again on the side of transcendence, which would nevertheless become radically redefined regarding the seventeenth century: *it is no longer the home of the universal...but...the source of contingency...dislocating the immanent logic of systems*” (113, emphasis in the original). Palti explores the work of several contemporary authors throughout the chapter, but this observation captures the trajectory of the political as he sees it. “If the political order has a natural basis, if it demands one, that natural basis always remains indefinable, conceptually ungraspable...From this point of view, democracy is defined as an ‘atopology’ of values; their nature as pure excess impedes identifying them with any particular social place or political subject” (144). Palti’s closing remarks in chapter 4 sum up what the political has become to him: “Once that logic is detached of any end, however, once it is no longer inscribed within a temporal horizon, a teleological framework, a given view of historical becoming, the subject becomes locked into the circle of its own self-generation. And this marks the term of the play of transcendence/immanence that hitherto articulated the horizon of the political” (165). The second disenchantment is therefore the recognition of the illusory nature of transcendent things. In the words of Alain Badiou, “The political has never been anything more than a fiction” (166).

Palti observes in his conclusion that the political “is not an eternal category, but a contingent reality” (179). He poses several questions in his summation, including “How can a sense of community be articulated, once it is deprived of every reference to an outside?” “What sort of political practice is possible after it is deprived not only of all objective guarantee but also of subjective sustenance?” and finally “What kind of political practice might take place beyond the field of the political?” (179). Palti argues that these questions are critical yet unsolvable today. Instead of this admission of defeat, a radical reassessment of Palti’s assumptions and arguments about politics and the political is more likely to provide answers. The stakes are great and the consequences potentially catastrophic if politics fails. Palti traces one trajectory in his book; it behooves us to redirect the trajectory, to embrace politics and return the political to a central role in the formation of just communities founded on universal principles.

Nelson Lund, *Rousseau's Rejuvenation of Political Philosophy: A New Introduction*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, xv + 282 pp., \$129 (cloth).

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Nelson Lund has written a deeply thoughtful and trenchantly argued introduction to Rousseau's political philosophy. It is not an introduction in the usual sense. Beginners who enjoy thinking hard will find the book a good first approach to Rousseau, but long-time readers of Rousseau will find detailed and challenging arguments, intended to reopen the question whether Rousseau "jettisoned important elements of classical thought" and thus ushered in a "crisis of modernity" (2–3). Lund builds a case that Rousseau shared deep underlying agreements with Plato and Aristotle. He admits Plato wrote in such a way as to make it nearly impossible to enlist him as an advocate for a destructive political agenda (5) and that Rousseau appears the opposite in this regard; his writing is "frequently outlandish on its face." But different political situations explain this different rhetoric: unlike in ancient Greece, modern philosophers had become "respectable and politically powerful. In Rousseau's view, this development was a threat to healthy political life." Plato and Rousseau take different paths to protect philosophy and politics from each other. Lund acknowledges debts to Leo Strauss and Straussians for some of his ideas and ways of reading, but he debates both, often with harsh criticisms for misinterpreting Rousseau. If, he thinks, we pay careful attention to how Rousseau made use of Plato (and Aristotle), we can make use of Rousseau in something like the same way (7). By doing so, we can find nature's "guidance" (89) on important issues: women's roles, marriage, and constitutionalism.

Lund postpones these applications in order to build a foundation in nature, spending two full chapters on human evolution and the evolution

of language. He makes the strongest case I have read that man is naturally asocial. He does so with the best of intentions—not to tear down morality but to build it up in a rational way. In the pure state of nature, man was not yet human (31). Our ancestors may have been like orangutans, whose sociality is limited to mother-child relationships: “fathers have no role beyond insemination.” “In most environments, orangutans spend *almost all of their adult lives foraging alone*” (53, emphasis added). “In captivity, they readily form complex social relationships,” but this fact merely serves to show that social behaviors that animals have the ability to perform are not necessarily behaviors they *must* perform or, indeed, are happiest performing. Modern humans may be left with natures acquired during such a solitary stage (of foraging), despite the fact we have changed ourselves, through language acquisition, in remarkable ways that make it difficult to satisfy that original nature anymore.

Lund admits that nothing is proved by orangutans (54): of the “three extant great apes,” others are more social: “gorillas generally live in patriarchal family bands...and chimpanzees are cooperative and contentious hunter-gatherers.” Hence our “fundamental ape nature lent itself to all these possibilities.” Some even conjecture that orangutans’ ancestors were *more* social, and that the species has cycled in and out of sociality (cf. 25–26). Lund seems to confess we know nothing to base “guidance” on: “Modern science has no direct evidence at all about the life followed by our earliest human ancestors” (58). Why then come down so strongly in favor of solitariness? Lund keeps up a trenchant dialogue with Straussians who doubt there ever was such a state of nature, or who wish to uphold natural sociality (15, 55ff.). In his debate with Roger Masters, he points out that *amour propre* requires social interactions, which inevitably trigger it (57). But since the social interactions are not biologically determined, the *amour propre* is not determined either.

Our “perfectibility” was natural in the sense that latent potentiality for huge change was always present in us. But only external accidents—such as environmental changes—caused us to perfect ourselves in the precise ways we did. Perfectibility “involves the acquisition of qualities that *conflict* with our underlying natures.” One thinks of the multiple roles of human society—there are no natural-born financial analysts. No specific way of life is natural in the sense of corresponding “to our natural range of inclinations and powers.” We are not like bees or herd animals where the individual is necessarily “at the end of a few months what it will be for all its life; and its species is after a thousand years what it was in the first year of that thousand” (12, quoting the *Second Discourse*).

If no way of life is natural, is one still naturally best? For Rousseau the naturally best life occurs at the last stage of the state of nature, “nascent society” (13). “Savage society...provided for the optimal, though not ultimate, development of human faculties” (17). Only in primitive society does man’s reach not exceed his grasp (contrast 14–15 with 31). “Unhappiness consists in the disproportion between our desires and our faculties, or in the sum of unsatisfied desires” (157–58). “It might seem to follow that human happiness should be sought in minimizing our desires” but then “a part of our faculties would remain idle, and we would not enjoy all of our being” (quoting *Emile*). This is despite the fact that savage peoples are “frequently at the edge of starvation” (22).

Lund includes a long, fascinating illustration from a primitive society, the Bushmen studied by Elizabeth Marshall Thomas. He admits the Bushmen have only some of the features of Rousseau’s state of nature. But he includes them because the Bushmen were at great pains to overcome the *amour propre* that Rousseau stresses—their durable solution lacks “the rulership and subordination entailed in all forms of political society” (27–28), in particular, female subordination to males. They keep *amour propre* in check, rather than not having it at all. He speculates that women’s subservience to a male provider is a modification of her natural subservience to child (need to nurse, maternal pity). Men’s acceptance of rulership over both was possible, in the absence of *amour propre*, only if he, too, first acquired a subservience to his child (26; cf. Lucretius, *De rerum natura* 5.1017–23).

With a carefulness belying his daring, Lund interprets Aristotle as not believing in the fixity of species, or not necessarily (41–42). Rousseau disagrees not with Aristotle but with a Christianized Aristotle, a disagreement Rousseau signals via allusions; Lund’s Rousseau takes Hobbes’s position, namely, that Aristotle himself may not have believed in “*Entities*, and *Essences*,” in the words of the *Leviathan*, but “writ it as a thing consonant to...their Religion” (43). Lund notes that Aristotle qualifies his endorsement of the naturalness of the polis with a conditional: “Every city exists by nature, *if indeed the first communities really also do*” (12, emphasis added), meaning husband-wife and master-slave pairings. Rousseau denies that such first communities, “other than mother-child pairs,” exist by nature. Lund is incisive: “The fact that nature permits us to reap benefits from living in cities does not imply that cities exist ‘by nature.’ If it did, one could almost as easily say that Sea World exists by nature if dolphins live longer and more easily when they are protected from predators and cared for by veterinarians” (51).

Yet if dolphins learned to hunt better, or communicate better, in captivity, would not the picture be changed? The ancients tied naturalness to the emergence of the philosophic life. If we read past Aristotle's overstatement (the city is "by nature," *phusei*) we can see that the "very different notion of naturalness" (50) he introduces, that is, teleological nature, may be a weak claim that some social arrangements are "in accordance with nature" (*kata phusin*) because they inculcate good habits or perfections that become second nature. To say that a man of intellectual virtue is more fully natured than a savage is radically contentious, for Rousseau. Lund later says that "rethinking the notion of the beneficence of nature...requires a lot more than allusions to the life of the philosopher or the contemplative life" (257n81). We are thus left with "spontaneously arising on its own" as the only nature to which we can refer. Nature equals compulsion.

The book has postponed playing Rousseau's trump card ("overwhelming evidence," 15) proving asociality: his language argument. Such postponements are a feature of the book, which cuts no slack to readers unwilling to wait. Even in turning to the *Essay on the Origin of Languages*, we must first look at Plato's *Cratylus* to see what Rousseau might have seen beneath its surface, before getting to Rousseau's own account—a postponement in keeping with the program announced at the start. Man is the only animal having speech that goes beyond "natural language" (e.g., bird calls) into a compositional and conventional language. Our ability to have such language permits "general ideas" (48; but contrast 80)—on these depends the "perfectibility" that brutes never acquire. Lund later summarizes the argument: "First, because language is acquired rather than natural, there must have been a time when human beings lived without language. And because all human societies...are inseparable from language...our kind is naturally and profoundly non-political" (227). Second, the potential for language must have been there, but "this potential would have been unleashed only as a result of natural accidents (such as earthquakes and droughts) that pushed humans into environments where the isolated existence of the first ages was not practicable" (227–28). One might quibble that an era before language was a nonhuman era; the question would then become how important the genetic legacies are that have been handed down to us from that era.

Chapters 4–6 turn to Rousseau's political and moral guidance, based on his discoveries in human nature. In the *Letter to d'Alembert*, Rousseau uses Plato's *Laws* for a "highly conservative political goal": to preserve the modicum of ancient civic friendship still alive in Geneva and impossible in Paris

given the latter's distorted relations between the sexes. The *Laws* envisions extreme sexual equality only because, in Crete and Sparta, the danger was that women would "be neglected by excessively manly men" (125). Geneva has the opposite danger: that "men will be unmanned by giving women excessive and inappropriate attention." The public glorifying of romantic love is the great enemy to happy marriage (129). Single-sex social gatherings will then become Genevan versions of the Athenian Stranger's common meals and will provide an anchor for modern civic friendship (131–32). The *Letter* undertakes to defend an education we can assume women were already getting in Geneva: namely, the inculcation of expectations that their lives should be "centered around their roles as wives, mothers and caretakers of the household, and to accept this as the natural order of things" (124, emphasis added). Just as Lund doubts the Athenian Stranger's arguments from nature—for instance, that only procreative sex is natural—believing instead that his outlawing homosexuality and some forms of adultery is intended to promote conjugal friendship between husbands and wives (113–14), so he finds Rousseau's own arguments from nature—that shame is natural in sex and especially natural in women—transparently deficient (127). Instead, "Rousseau screams" his real reason: " 'As if all the austere duties of the woman were not derived from this alone, that a child ought to have a father!' " Genevan women must make a real sacrifice (142–43): staying home and letting husbands be heads of household. But this sacrifice is no greater than reason demands. Because humans are solitary animals, we can assume, husbands will not generally wish to undertake the burdens of fatherhood without great cultural attention paid to them in compensation. Failing that, women will continue to have children, but children will not have fathers. This account certainly seems prescient. Hence Rousseau's rhetorical attempt to naturalize the traditional feminine role. In this chapter and the following one—a long and fascinating study of the *Emile* and several letters in comparison to Plato, Locke, and others—Lund argues that Rousseau wants us to believe that Nature points women toward a "kind of marriage in which her share of rulership is largely indirect" (212). Rousseau may have undercut his own rhetoric by saying so plainly (elsewhere) that humans are naturally asocial (even outdoing Hobbes in "provocative amoralism," 227). In modern contexts, such hypocrisy usually delegitimizes. Lund could counter that some belief in asociality was already current owing to Hobbes and Locke. Yet natural sociability cannot have been an entirely lost cause, at least for the precise audiences for whom Rousseau's naturalistic rhetoric was intended. Here one senses a weak teleological argument: children cannot "make use of all their being" (growing up

into rich moral and intellectual beings) without fathers and intact families. Cultural fatherhood could then be said to receive a tincture of naturalness from its relation to children's natures, although such a "second nature" would be a habit in accordance with nature, rather than a natural compulsion. Such a habit might even combat natural compulsions (e.g., sexual desires oriented outside marriage). But the rhetorical situation demanded of Rousseau *both* that he employ naturalistic arguments like the ancients' *and* that he undercut such naturalism in more obvious ways than they did.

The final chapter applies Rousseau's principles of right to American constitutionalism, particularly to the issue of direct democracy. To secure a hearing for Rousseau's principles of right, Lund demolishes theories of natural rights. If correlative duties (to respect the rights) do not coexist with rights naturally, then Lund finds natural rights to be a play on words, adding nothing to understanding (217, 219–220, 222). He is convincing with Hobbes, but the treatment of Locke is less satisfactory. Obligation is up front in Locke (223), but Lund challenges it on the grounds Locke admits people do not always acknowledge obligation. Here again, for something to be natural, it must be bound or compulsory. Locke's state of nature is not bereft of sociality but only of *civil* society: we are not polis animals, but we are social animals. Lockean liberalism thus has it both ways, divesting sociality (e.g., paternity) of its political claims while preserving it in its own, private sphere. As to whether natural rights are vitiated by the lack of correlative duties, how would Lund answer Lincoln's speech on the *Dred Scott* decision? The Founders believed all humans equal in their possession of "certain unalienable rights": "They did not mean to assert the obvious untruth, that all were then actually enjoying that equality, nor yet, that they were about to confer it immediately upon them. In fact they had no power to confer such a boon. They meant simply to declare the right, so that the enforcement of it might follow as fast as circumstances should permit." *Natural* rights have served us well during the two greatest crises: the birth of the nation and the Civil War.

Rousseau's alternative to liberalism (242) is to create unnatural ties of affection among citizens through a thoroughly politicized system of education. "Nature lacks a moral component"—*all* rights stem from property, hence from the defense of rich against poor, that is, justice stems from a usurpation (230). Since there is no going back, the crucial problem is to render "legitimate" something that began as usurpation (231–32; cf. the famous opening of the *Social Contract*). Legitimacy is accomplished through the "general will." Lund interprets the general will as desire for a common interest, something

like a family achieving a pleasant meal together by each suppressing (or being willing to suppress) his first choice of where to eat (234). Legitimacy is not wisdom, and the individual members can be mistaken about their true interests without shaking legitimacy (235). The difficulty is that a sovereign people can never rule directly; they must delegate to a smaller body, a “government” (245), which will have its own small-group general will, often opposing the whole group’s general will, that is, government will be a faction. Rousseau agrees with the *Federalist* about separation and balancing of powers *as expedients* (254), but for the people assembled to have only once settled on the constitution, as ours has, is not conducive to legitimacy (246). Periodic assemblies are required. Lund presents evidence that Rousseau’s insistence on direct democracy is a rhetorical overstatement (249–50). He concludes that we are to see direct democracy as “a desirable possibility, and that real efforts ought to be made to put it into actual practice as a check on the usurpative nature of all governments” (252–53). Rousseau warns us against *excessive* reliance on representation.

Lund moves next to a Supreme Court case that harms direct democracy, the 1995 *U.S. Term Limits, Inc. v. Thornton*, which struck down an Arkansas referendum imposing term limits (258ff.). After three terms in the federal House, or two in the federal Senate, a candidate could no longer appear on the ballot and would have to campaign as a write-in. Justice John Paul Stevens wrote the majority opinion striking down the measure “apparently because of his hostility to direct democracy” (261). Rousseau would see the endpoint of Stevens’s logic as the “abolition of citizen participation” (262). Lund worries that a Court might decide that the representative form is the *only* republican form of government (263). He would like to see Congress, *per impossibile*, impose some obstacles to the Supreme Court, for example, jurisdictional rules making the Court spend more time on ordinary, less glamorous cases and forcing the Court to study the law by preventing the use of law clerks. He does not mention recent ballot initiatives, for example in California, that seem to have done more harm than good by binding the hands of representatives. One wonders if more direct democracy would not set a ball rolling that could shake whatever legitimacy representation still enjoys.

Further cavils: Lund is not above appealing to the authority of “modern science.” I would have called the anthropology on which he mostly relies “social science,” at best, or more accurately, social thought. The scientific method is limited by the ability of its practitioners to generate hypotheses to test; one wonders if the genius of Rousseau is not still remotely supplying

anthropology's best hypotheses—the main ones that get tested (to the detriment of other possibilities). Lund sometimes regards Plutarch's histories of Sparta and Rome as “recorded fact” (225). On the questions of Rousseau's undercutting his own legitimacy and of why his enormous influence was particularly strong among thinkers Lund would regard as cranks (cf. 267), it is perhaps unfair to ask an introduction (even of this special kind) to say more about the reception of his naturalistic rhetoric: how did the *faux* natural arguments separate themselves from true arguments for natural solitariness such that each could find its target audience? Whom did they convince and for how long? Were not the former always destined to be overwhelmed by the latter? Lund with his voluminous reading is well positioned to provide such an account in a future study. What his present study has achieved is remarkable.

Alexander S. Duff, *Heidegger and Politics: The Ontology of Radical Discontent*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015, xi + 214 pp.

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This book, a study of the relationship between Heidegger's thought and his politics, begins with a dilemma familiar to many who have studied Heidegger. On one hand, we cannot brush aside Heidegger's thought easily, as many who say that his Nazism defines or exhausts his thought wish. Something in Heidegger undeniably speaks to us, challenges us in ways not easily forgotten. On the other, despite what others might hope, Heidegger's thought cannot be cleanly severed from his politics, including his engagement with the Nazi party. The problem for anyone who would have us think more about Heidegger is thus: how exactly are we to understand the relationship between the dangerous elements of his thought and whatever it is in it that still speaks to us? Is what we have to learn from Heidegger merely a negative lesson? Or is there something positive there, despite or perhaps because of the manifestly problematic consequences of his thought?

Duff aims to show how "Heidegger's focus on and formulation of how the question of Being relates to human life entail a paradoxical and radically discontented politics" (17). To understand his thesis, it helps to start with what Duff describes most fully at the end of his book, Heidegger's political stance. As commentators before him have done, Duff notes two at least initially quite different stances towards politics in Heidegger. One is a moment of resolve and resolution, expressed in Heidegger's life most notably in his actions and speeches as rector of Freiburg University in 1933–34 and member of the Nazi Party. The other moment is quietism, in which Heidegger asserts that genuine thoughtfulness cannot and should not try to act in the world. This moment is familiar to readers of the "Letter on Humanism" and from the interview

from *Der Spiegel* in which Heidegger claims “only a god [i.e., not a political movement] can save us.” Duff’s task is to show how these apparently contrary moments reveal something about Heidegger’s formulation of “how the question of Being relates to human life,” something that is presumably still worthy of our thought and reflection.

In fact, this book spends most of its time explaining how Heidegger got to the moment of resolve and resolution and what that moment meant to him. Duff suggests that politically Heidegger at this time is best understood as a peculiar kind of revolutionary. Heidegger believes that human life, at least in the late modern epoch, is characterized by a thoroughgoing fallenness, superficiality, and lack of any greatness of spirit, and he traces this to the human tendency to refuse to face up to the genuine questionableness and fragility of our existence. The unreflective nihilism of our times is ultimately due to our obliviousness to the question of Being; yet, Heidegger thinks, our openness to that question is the very thing that makes life human. At the time of *Being and Time* and the years immediately thereafter, Heidegger thinks that the appropriate response to this situation is revolution, total revolution. This revolution cannot be a merely academic or hermeneutic matter, as if it were simply a matter of changing the leadership at a professional association. Rather, it must be, in Duff’s words, “a total theoretical-practical transformation of the everyday” (187). It follows that only some strong political authority could accomplish what Heidegger has in mind. Compromise and moderation must be rejected, since they easily become captured by the very obliviousness to Being that must be overcome. Toughness is the order of the day. Heidegger’s political stance clearly has some kinship with right-wing or conservative movements. Yet, properly speaking, he is neither conservative or progressive as we normally understand those terms. Heidegger does believe that any worthwhile politics must be particularist rather than universal, and in this sense he shares some views with conservatives. But he does so, Duff suggests, only as a means for completely overcoming the status quo, which in a sense brings him closer to left-wing revolutionaries. Moreover, the revolution as envisioned by Heidegger cannot be a one-time thing, since everydayness does not vanish but continues to distract us from the question of Being. The revolution Heidegger envisions at this moment, then, is both thoroughgoing and incompletable. Because of the Being-occluding power of everydayness, “perpetual instability” or ever-renewed revolution is the “mark of authentic politics.”

The striking thing about Heidegger is that this political stance seems to have been a consequence of his philosophical thought, not the product of a preexisting political commitment. The main work of Duff's book is to show what in Heidegger's thought in the 1920s prepared him for this view of politics. Chapters 1 and 2 deal with Heidegger's earliest mature writings, which deal with (or are in correspondence with) Edmund Husserl, Paul Natorp, neo-Kantians like Wilhelm Windelband and Hermann Cohen, and Karl Jaspers. In these writings, we find Heidegger arguing that ethics as traditionally conceived is superficial because it privileges stability and intelligibility and refuses to face up to the questionable foundations of human experience. Yet at the same time, Heidegger still holds on to the notion characteristic of the German Idealist tradition, that philosophy has responsibility for shaping culture: to be ethical one must be a philosopher (61). On Duff's telling, then, the pre-*Being and Time* Heidegger already articulates a considerable practical dilemma: on one hand, the philosopher rejects all inherited ethical and political standards as mere attempts to impose a specious clarity on the world. On the other, that same philosopher must be the paradigm or guide for political and social life. The philosopher must rule, even while all traditional ethical and political guidance has been rejected, leaving only the imperative to raise the question of Being.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 extend this analysis into an interpretation of *Being and Time* (with occasional segues into other texts). Chapter 3 takes up the ambiguity or doubleness of Heidegger's concept of "everydayness" in *Being and Time*. On one hand, everydayness is just the way that we all exist pre-reflectively. It is the way the world first comes to us—Duff calls this its "disclosive" aspect—and so not something we could ever leave behind or do away with simply. On the other, there is a deep tendency in "everydayness" to make the world more intelligible and stable than it is by covering up the ways in which our opinions and practices break down. Duff calls this the "occlusive" aspect of everydayness. A sophisticated version of this tendency, Heidegger thinks, is at work in the major philosophies of the Western tradition, which impose rationality and intelligibility on the world. Chapter 4 extends Heidegger's analysis of everydayness to social life, which is marked by the same ambiguity. We are "essentially communal" beings (93), especially with regard to our thought about the character of the world we live in (or the question of Being). Yet the social dimension of our existence does not mean that we typically treat each other in a manner befitting our humanity. Even when we are with others, we tend not to see them as they are, but only as they are defined socially. We tend to treat them as just another tool. More

troublingly, we tend to see ourselves in the same way and to define ourselves in the light of the opinions of *Das Man*, the anonymous “they.” Yet while reliance on the opinions of others makes the world more manageable and predictable, it also makes us more superficial and less authentic. Chapter 5 brings us to the crisis of Heidegger’s thought. What if the ability to face up to the uncertainty and anxiety lurking underneath the surface of ordinary life is in fact the greatest and most authentic thing about us and the chatter of everyday life only alienates us from ourselves? If so, philosophy must take on an active role in political life, taking up the task of shattering illusions, of holding up the truth of our fundamental ignorance of Being, a task that necessarily puts it on a collision course with everyday life.

In chapter 6, the capstone of the book, Duff shows how this analysis of the human condition leads to a specific politics: a revolution against everydayness in the name of the question of Being. But since everydayness permeates all of human life, Heidegger’s revolution must be a total revolution requiring violence and even ever-renewed violence. From here we begin to understand why Heidegger was attracted to the Nazis. It is not that Heidegger started out as a Nazi or even that Heidegger was an adherent of all aspects of Nazi ideology, such as racism. (Whether this claim can be sustained in the light of the recent publication of Heidegger’s *Black Notebooks* from the 1930s is a question.) It is rather that, for the reasons just sketched, Heidegger has a powerful attraction to a total revolution (67–69). The Nazis came along at the right time to appear, for a moment, as though they could be the vehicle for the revolution Heidegger had in mind.

Duff’s book provides an extremely helpful guide to Heidegger’s early texts, all the more needed since many political theorists tend to focus on (relatively) more accessible later texts such as the “Letter on Humanism.” Yet since the political reflections of those later texts depend on the failure of the hopes of the earlier texts, those later texts may well not be fully intelligible without a full understanding of the earlier texts: all the more reason to welcome Duff’s work. Yet we are now in a better position to pose to Duff’s work the questions with which we started. What is it in Heidegger’s thought that leads to his “paradoxical and radically discontented politics,” and is there, in Duff’s opinion, something positive to be learned here beyond our marveling at Heidegger’s political missteps? As I understand Duff’s argument, Heidegger’s most important philosophical theme is the “doubleness of everydayness,” which “both occludes the most important question but also points the way toward disclosing it” (20). Everyday opinion both gives us access to

the world (or Being) and prevents us from seeing it clearly. Because he cannot either simply affirm everydayness or simply reject it, Heidegger's thought contains a deep tension that manifests itself more publicly in the two modes of his extremist politics: total revolution or complete passivity. This is a helpful set of observations, and it seems safe to assume that Duff thinks that this theme is indeed a problem or a question of interest in its own right, independently of Heidegger. But if this tension in Heidegger's thought is the matrix of his politics, what is the more adequate account of everydayness? What would such an account even look like? It is a sign of the excellence of this book that it provokes questions that, given the nature of the project, it cannot answer.

There is another question germane to Duff's core concerns that is worth raising here. While Duff does explain the two modes of Heidegger's politics (revolution and passivity), because of the scope of his book, he focuses to a large extent on the first mode. But this neglects the post-1933 developments and downplays Heidegger's own self-critique. For example, in his letter to the rector of Freiburg University of 1945, when he was asking to be allowed to rejoin the faculty, Heidegger claims that by the mid-1930s he had recognized that the Nazis were another manifestation of nihilism. Did Heidegger himself come to think that the revolutionary moment in his thought so well described by Duff was a delusion and a mistake? And how does that change our judgment on the core of his thought? Duff points to this issue near the end of his book by remarking that the quietist inclination "follows the revolution and thus comprehends the revolution" (193). Of course, there may well be defects in Heidegger's later thought rooted in the same tensions in his understanding of everydayness that Duff finds in his earlier thought. But those defects would have different manifestations and thus presumably need their own account: is the thought of the late Heidegger open to the same objections that the thought of the early Heidegger is? Those who still wrestle with Heidegger's thought, early and late, will find Duff's book a most useful companion.

Denise Schaeffer, *Rousseau on Education, Freedom, and Judgment*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014, 240 pp., \$72.95 (hardcover), \$32.95 (paper).

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Denise Schaeffer's *Rousseau on Education, Freedom, and Judgment* is an exploration of the in-between. The reason for this is that Rousseau was himself, on Schaeffer's reading, a theorist of the in-between. Schaeffer resists approaches that would associate Rousseau with extremes of individualism and collectivism, or, in her words, "seductive enchantment" and "rational detachment," describing him instead as a "theorist of middle states" (192). Judgment, the primary object of Schaeffer's attention, is the faculty that best captures Rousseau's proclivity for the in-between, because it sits between sentiment and reason, oscillating between the two, always, Schaeffer emphasizes, under the guidance and supervision of figures with a claim to wisdom. In this sense, Schaeffer suggests that judgment, though not a central concept in Rousseau's philosophical system, captures, perhaps better than others (e.g., imagination, reason, sentiment), the essence of Rousseau's epistemology and moral psychology.

While Schaeffer associates her approach with Mark Cladis and Jonathan Marks,¹ who also emphasize the in-between, I would suggest that her book might also be situated within another salutary trend in Rousseau studies, which emphasizes commonalities and continuities among what otherwise appear to be antithetical or mutually exclusive images of unity: the solitary and the citizen, sentiment and reason, individualism and collectivism, and

¹ Mark Cladis, *Public Vision, Private Lives: Rousseau, Religion, and Twenty-First-Century Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Jonathan Marks, *Perfection and Disharmony in the Thought of Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

so forth. It is a trend I would associate primarily with Laurence Cooper and Christopher Kelly, who have suggested that Rousseau's disparate texts might be productively read as aspiring to a particular conception of being or the extension of being.² For Cooper and Kelly, it is being or the extension of being that provides the unifying or consistent impulse, while for Schaeffer it is judgment, which she sees at work not only in the moral education of *Emile*, but also in the civic education of the citizen and even in the solitary contemplation of the *Reveries*.

The bulk of Schaeffer's book is a careful, nuanced reading of judgment in *Emile*, of the process by which *Emile* develops a reflective capacity to govern himself. As a stand-alone reading of *Emile*, the book will be indispensable for anyone looking to understand Rousseau's most formidable text. The writing is lucid and erudite; Schaeffer's analysis moves successively through Rousseau's argument, lingering on all of the key moments in the text, such that, as a reader, one feels oneself to be in good hands, to have chosen a reliable guide.

But Schaeffer's intent is less to provide an interpretation of *Emile* than it is to use *Emile* to outline a theory of judgment that is operative throughout Rousseau's philosophical system.³ Although Rousseau's approach to sovereignty and self-government depends on citizens with a capacity for reflective judgment, Schaeffer argues that he does not provide a full account of judgment in his explicitly political writings. For that, we must consult *Emile*, which *does* provide a guide to the judgment required of the free and equal citizens of Rousseau's republic. So, in reading *Emile*, Schaeffer distills an approach to fundamental epistemological, moral, and political questions that might be applied beyond the scope of that particular text to Rousseau's work more broadly and possibly even to democratic societies writ large.⁴

² Laurence D. Cooper, "Between Eros and Will to Power: Rousseau and 'the Desire to Extend Our Being,'" *American Political Science Review* 98, no. 1 (2004): 105–19; Christopher Kelly, *Rousseau as Author: Consecrating One's Life to the Truth* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003). I have tried to contribute to this line of interpretation as well by emphasizing the impulse toward communion in *Rousseau's Ethics of Truth* (New York: Routledge, 2017), chap. 2.

³ In this respect, the book makes an important contribution to our understanding of epistemology in the Enlightenment; it acts, for example, as a useful supplement to Michael Frazer's inquiry into the relationship between reason and sentiment in the Enlightenment (*The Enlightenment of Sympathy* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010]).

⁴ Here Schaeffer makes a significant contribution to the literature on the role of sentiment in politics, which I would associate with scholars like George Marcus (*The Sentimental Citizen* [University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002]), Cheryl Hall (*The Trouble with Passion* [New York: Routledge, 2005]), and Martha Nussbaum (*Political Emotions* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015]).

Typically Rousseau's fundamental political problem—to “find a form of association by means of which, each, uniting with all, nevertheless obeys only himself and remains as free as before”—has been seen by readers as a procedural problem, by which Rousseau describes a set of institutionalized practices that enable citizens to remain as free in society—having agreed to all of its attendant constraints—as they were in the state of nature. By contrast, Schaeffer describes the fundamental political problem as formative. If citizens are to legislate for themselves (which was for Rousseau a basic requirement of justice) and if force and freedom are to be reconciled (which Rousseau demanded), it will be because citizens have developed the ability to make good use of their freedom. In this Schaeffer gets at the core of Rousseau's political project, which is to theorize the conditions under which popular sovereignty might be exercised in a manner that serves the common interest.

If it is not obvious by now, Plato looms large in this book. In reading Schaeffer, one feels oneself being pulled toward the *Republic*, particularly Socrates's use of imagery to entice citizens toward virtue. Reflective judgment, like Plato's true opinion, is neither pure reason nor pure sentiment but is instead a mixture of the two. It is an in-between state, suited to human beings “as they are,” superior to prejudice but a far cry from philosophy, complete with shadows and reflections—Schaeffer prefers the term “chimeras”—projected by the wise (the tutor, the Lawgiver) and intended to elicit good judgment from subjects. We cannot do without our illusions, Schaeffer argues, although we may be able to relate to them with some measure of detachment as we come to understand that we can be moved by them either viscerally (through their appeal to sentiment or emotion) or rationally (through an appreciation of the function they perform). While some illusions are nothing more than mere prejudice, others can be the object of critical reflection and bear some “essential relationship to truth.” Chimeras that begin as an appeal to sentiment or emotion might “dazzle and inspire” but can also ultimately provoke “critical reflection and judgment” (5).

Part of the brilliance of *Emile* is that, as readers, we are simultaneously witnessing the pupil's education to reflective judgment and being educated ourselves through the application of a kindred method. Schaeffer shows how the figure of Emile operates as a chimera for the reader, conveying at once Rousseau's theory of education and instantiating it with respect to the “spectatorship” of the reader (9). As Emile's judgment is developed, so too is the reader's. And Schaeffer executes a comparable double move in her book, which begins by describing a straightforward political problem and moves to

a discussion of human psychology—to an account of what it takes for human beings to exercise judgment well and why it is through indirect education that judgment is most effectively developed and refined. In so doing, she too uses what is ostensibly one thing—an interpretation of *Emile* on judgment—to accomplish something else, that is, to cultivate good judgment in her readers.

While indirect education is not always problematic, the use of chimeras raises some troubling questions with respect to the freedom of pupils and citizens. Schaeffer does not ignore these questions; in fact she is sensitive to the ways in which the techniques necessary to the cultivation of reflective judgment can, as she puts it, “sacrifice genuine self-rule” (5). While the book is more exegesis than critical analysis, Schaeffer acknowledges the perils of making freedom dependent on properly educated judgment. It is probably the case that *Emile*’s education, dependent as it is on the heavy hand of the tutor, is quite simply not a model for modern citizenship. The challenge, Schaeffer suggests, is to develop a democratic capacity for reflective citizenship, one that can be cultivated not through the kind of authoritarianism that Rousseau describes but by each citizen, individually, consistent with genuine self-rule. Citizens must somehow be both seduced by, and critically aware of, chimeras and the sway they hold over them. Schaeffer admits that this is a problem for her reading of Rousseau no less than for Rousseau himself (14–15).

The most controversial piece of the book is surely Schaeffer’s (extensively defended) claim that Sophie’s judgment is not only as developed as *Emile*’s but possibly even more so (136). While it is true that Rousseau does not “deprive women of their capacity to judge or to reason as moral agents” (138), most of Rousseau’s interpreters have situated Sophie’s education within the context of a patriarchal framework, in which men are citizens and women are domesticated in service to the production of those citizens. Yes, Sophie develops the qualities of full-fledged personhood, including judgment, but she does all of it so as to be more pleasing to *Emile*, to be capable of satisfying not only his sexual desire but his *amour propre* as well.

Finally, I would note that there is an austerity to Schaeffer’s reading on judgment that can sometimes feel closer to an ancient Greek ethos than a Rousseauian one. In emphasizing the in-between, there is necessarily less emphasis on Rousseau’s moments of unreflective ecstasy in, for example, republican citizenship, solitary reverie, and religious communion. I wonder if Schaeffer, in remaining in between, does not fully convey the ways in which the extension of being was sublime for Rousseau. Schaeffer concedes that the middle states she emphasizes are quite rare in Rousseau’s corpus, alluded

to “only indirectly and fleetingly” (192) in *Emile* and occasionally in Rousseau’s other texts (193–94). I would suggest that this may be the case because judgment was for Rousseau less an end in itself than it was a condition for the recuperation of ancient harmony in the context of modern alienation. Judgment is our best bet in imperfect circumstances, but Rousseau’s truly redemptive moments—floating on Lake Biemme, silent communion in Clarens or with Christian brothers, planting a stake for a public festival in the *Letter to d’Alembert*—are not in-between moments. Schaeffer characterizes these images as chimeras, intended to draw on our imagination for purposes of cultivating judgment. I would suggest that the inverse is equally the case—that Rousseau’s education to reflective judgment is part of a larger aspiration to recapture the wholeness and harmony of the state of nature amid the fragmentation and mediation that structure modern society.

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Serdar Tekin has engaged in an extraordinary project to clarify the complexities of explaining and justifying the democratic founding of a constitution. As if foreshadowing the possibility of Tekin’s project, in 1938–39 constitutional scholar Charles Howard McIlwain presented a series of lectures at Cornell University on the theme of constitutionalism (*Constitutionalism: Ancient and Modern* [Liberty Fund, 2010]). McIlwain cited approvingly Thomas Paine’s aphorism that “a constitution is not the act of a government but of a people constituting a government” (20). After having surveyed political conceptions of how to understand the relationship among people, constitutions, and governments, McIlwain concluded, “The phase in the development of these political conceptions...is the latest phase in that development, what might be called the ‘self-conscious’ phase, in which the people are thought of as creating their constitution by direct and express constituent action. But I think enough has been shown to prove that this latest phase is only the outcome of an earlier and a much longer one, in which constitutions were thought of not as a creation but as a growth; not as a national code so much as a national inheritance” (21).

McIlwain incorporated Cicero’s claim that the people’s inherent right—the doctrine of constituent action or power—establishes the legitimacy of the act that founds a constitution of their own making, which act is itself but a phase of a much longer growth or experiential process (24). Although with no reference to McIlwain’s lecture, Tekin refuses to accept that “enough has been shown to prove” the evolutionary character of the doctrine of constituent power. He explores theoretical challenges among the interrelated facets of

constitution making, including constituent power and popular sovereignty, intersubjective experience and the paradox of the democratic founding, and hermeneutics and the temporality of founding acts and internal circularity. Tekin's in-depth exploratory effort is extraordinarily comprehensive and profound in his analyses of relevant modern and contemporary arguments—including those of Arendt, Derrida, Habermas, Hegel, Hobbes, Kant, Rawls, Rorty, and Rousseau, among many others.

With Rousseau's epigraphic admonition—"it would be well to examine the act by which a people is a people"—as the backdrop for his exploration, Tekin observes that the engine that drives the growth of "what binds different people into 'the people' is collective action, that is, the political experience of constructing life together" (6). Furthermore, collective action also explains why "the politics of constitution-making is at the same time a politics of people-making." Nevertheless, Tekin does not shy away from the intellectual rigor of competing arguments that attempt to clarify or challenge the doctrine of constituent power.

Tekin considers the argument of Abbé Sieyès that further develops Paine's declaration (98–100). According to Sieyès, there exist three claims embedded in Paine's notion of constituent power, wherein the people actively create the political conditions to found a democratic constitution: moral, juridical, and political. The moral claim finds its roots in social contract theory and the freedom of individuals to participate in the contract's design, the juridical claim in the natural law of the state of nature, and the political claim in the necessity of popular representation on a grander scale. Tekin contrasts Sieyès's argument with that of Carl Schmitt, who asserts that Sieyès is merely providing an answer to an incorrect question (100–101). That is, Sieyès presents his concept of constituent power as an answer to the question, Who has the right to form a political association? Instead, argues Schmitt, constituent power should be understood as an expression of popular will, which then would place it in a position to answer the correct question: Who has the sovereign right to act on this will? Effectively, Schmitt transforms Sieyès's moral claim to one of Rousseauian political freedom, his juridical claim to a misidentification of a universally acknowledged natural law, and his political claim to the reduction of direct democracy to representative government, all of which then justifies Schmitt's sovereign ruler.

Tekin considers Hannah Arendt's critiques of both Sieyès's and Schmitt's arguments, which find that Sieyès's reliance on freedom of the will undermines pluralist democracy, while Schmitt's reliance on the absolute authority

of the sovereign ruler undermines any possibility of democratic participation (105). He finds attractive Arendt's own position that "the exercise of constituent power must remain faithful to the intersubjective experience of collective action which brings about such power in the first place" (148–49). Tekin argues that intersubjective experience is key to understanding the interface between the people of Rousseau's admonition and the founding act of constitution making of Paine's observation. He endorses theories of deliberative democracy as the only suitable approaches "for exploring the complex nexus between constitutional claims of popular sovereignty and the practice of constitution-making in our pluralistic age" (4). But Tekin recognizes a paradox embedded in the promise of deliberative democratic theory: "how is it possible—or is it ever possible—to begin democratically, especially when there is no democracy before?" (7).

Tekin investigates a broad array of arguments that attempt to resolve the paradox of the necessity of a democratic people to found a democratic constitution, which is itself a necessary condition for the creation of the democratic people. Some philosophers argue that the presence of the paradox itself is due to a category mistake and thus does not exist, or the paradox apparently does exist but is misunderstood as to why it exists and thus can be resolved when properly understood. Tekin explores Hegel's argument that the paradox is of trivial significance owing to the lack of agreement about the "meaning of popular sovereignty and its proper sphere of application" (40). Given that popular sovereignty is itself only a function of the established political institutions through which it must operate, it consequently has no existence either apart from or prior to the institutions themselves. Thus, argues Hegel, the paradox results from a category error that improperly defines the nature of popular sovereignty. While Hegel shifts popular sovereignty from the category of dynamic or efficient cause to static or formal cause, Tekin considers Derrida's conflation of definitions in the apparent distinction between formal and final causes in the paradox: "Contexts are unsaturated, conventions are dynamic, and both are essentially exposed to indeterminacy" (45). The paradox can be resolved, argues Derrida, only when it is recognized that the very act of founding a democratic constitution assumes the presence of its own democratic justification. Moreover, the democratic justification is not only hidden from view but is an empty artifact, and thus "'the people' arrives only after the fact."

Tekin is dissatisfied with Hegel's theoretical deflection of the presence of the paradox by absolving the people of sovereign responsibility for any

founding acts and with Derrida's linguistic deflection of only an apparent role of constituent power in founding acts by defining such roles as hollow and used as subterfuge for politically manipulative purposes. Upon further examination, Tekin identifies an inherent epistemic difficulty in both arguments. Hegel and Derrida are posing the problem of the paradox of democracy as a logical problem that cannot be resolved, which leaves deliberative democratic theory at an impasse. Or, the logical propositions are worded such that the paradox is resolved but the doctrine of constituent power vanishes and thus leaves democratic theory as inconsequential. And yet, Tekin notes, founding acts of constitution making have historically had popular bases that expressed moral justifications for the constitutions that emerged—despite the presence of the paradox of the democratic founding.

By approaching the paradox as a logical problem, says Tekin, one interprets the paradox of the democratic founding in a way that interchanges the decisive significance of the logical problem for the crucial role of democratic politics or hypostatizes the founding itself. That is, hypostatization transforms a political issue into a logical puzzle, “which [in the case of the paradox of the democratic founding] rules out the notion of democratic founding at its core” (10). Consequently, to resolve logically the puzzle of the paradox in order to find the source of democratic political legitimacy is self-defeating. Nevertheless, the paradox still exists. Tekin asks, “If the paradox is permanent, however, isn't it plausible to assume that the possibility of responding to it is also permanent?” (54). If so, reconciling the legitimacy of constituent power in the face of the paradox of the democratic founding does not present a logical problem but a heuristic problem. As a heuristic problem, the paradox of Rousseau's epigraph can be attenuated by engaging in a hermeneutic circle to explicate Arendt's (and McIlwain's) emphasis on the intersubjective experience over time (55).

According to Tekin, “Rousseau sees in founding moments not only a paradoxical circularity, but also an extraordinary window of opportunity to negotiate this paradox and relax its grip” (59–60). Since the people are in need of having their will generally applied, a lawgiver must provide the legal framework to create social expectations and community values to meet the demands of the general will, such that the people authorize the lawgiver to create a democratic society—hence, the paradox. However, Tekin suggests, the people have themselves been “in the making” over time (as previously suggested by McIlwain), such that the “favorable conditions” for the lawgiver are constantly present. In fact, “the task of the lawgiver is first and foremost a hermeneutical one” (66). Rousseau's lawgiver serves not as an architect to

design a society according to what is best for the people, but as an interpreter of the people's will to provide legislation that meets their needs at any given moment. To avoid hypostatization, Tekin interprets Rousseau's lawgiver as one who is "supposed to read the text of collective action and shared experience" of the people (67).

Tekin also addresses Rousseau's view of any democratic founding as a one-time event. He employs Kant's solution to Rousseau's problem of temporality, which provides for the emergence of Rousseau's democracy over time and from diverse starting points. That is, while Rousseau focuses on how the democratic founding of society begins, Kant focuses on how any society evolves, regardless of its beginnings. Consequently, Tekin observes, any lawgiver must establish a legal structure to maintain order so that the people may seek and discuss right principles and facts: "What ultimately matters is not how the state is originally constituted, but the rationalization and republicanization of state power over time through piecemeal and gradual reform" (73). In this way, says Tekin, "the hermeneutic character of legislation and the collective action of the people" may be sustained while evolving temporally.

The hermeneutic circle's interrelated components—the people, the general will, the lawgiver, and the law—evolve dynamically and cyclically over time. Nevertheless, at any given moment the normative origin of a democratic act finds its justification in the act itself. To address the challenge of internal circularity, "all appeals to a transcendental source of normativity" must be avoided (121). To this end, Tekin discusses Habermas's thesis of "co-originality," which asserts that "public and private autonomy, or popular sovereignty and human rights, mutually presuppose each other." Through a socially derived need for active and open deliberation, or what Habermas calls "communicative freedom," Tekin concludes that the constitutional relationship between democracy and law is both circular and cyclical but nonetheless self-legitimizing.

In this prodigious and intelligent contribution to democratic theory and constitutionalism, Tekin deftly engages his "interlocutors" and their insights into the liminal phase of theoretical clarification when constitutions are founded. His defense of the appropriate epistemic approach to explaining and defending deliberative democracy deserves serious attention in a world that too often fails to affirm the simultaneous importance of—and tension between— processes and objectives.

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