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Dialectic of Authority

Authority is legitimate power. The dialectic will emerge from a reflection on power and legitimacy.

The source of power is cooperation. Cooperation is twofold. There is cooperation down the ages. There is cooperation at any given place and time.

Without cooperation down the ages human life today would not differ from that of the most primitive tribe. It would be not merely Preaurignacian, as the celebrated ethologist, Konrad Lorenz, has been repeating to students, but would resemble that of the isolated people recently discovered in the forest rain-country in the Philippines. Power today results from all the achievements of the past that have been accumulated, developed, integrated. Any present is powerful in the measure that past achievement lives on in it.

Besides the cooperation that extends down the ages, there is the cooperation that is going on here and now. The group can do so much that the individual cannot do. The group of groups is so much more efficient than the isolated group. Grouping groups is a device that can be reapplied again and again, and, with each reapplication that results in an organic whole, power is multiplied.

As the source of power is cooperation, so the carrier of power is the community. By a community is not meant a number of people within a frontier. Community means people with a common field of experience, with a common or at least complementary way of understanding people and things, with common judgements and common aims. Without a common field of experience people are out of touch. Without a common way of understanding, they will misunderstand one another, grow suspicious, distrustful, hostile, violent. Without common judgements they will live in different worlds, and without common aims they will work at cross-purposes. Such, then, is community, and as it is community that hands on the discoveries and

inventions of the past and, as well cooperates in the present, so it is community that is the carrier of power.

The exercise of power is twofold. For men live in two worlds. From infancy they live in a world of immediacy, a world revealed by sense and alive with feeling. Gradually they moved into a world mediated by meaning and motivated by values. In this adult world the raw materials are indeed the world of immediacy. But by speech one asks when and where, what and why, what for and how often. Answers cumulatively extrapolate from what is near to what is ever further away, from the present to one's own and to others' memories of the past and anticipations of the future, from what is or was actual to the possible, the probable, the fictitious, the ideal, the normative.

As exercised within the world mediated by meaning and motivated by values, power resides in the word of authority. It is that word that brings the achievements of the past into the present; it is that word that organizes and directs the whole hierarchy of cooperating groups in the present; it is that word that distributes the fruits of cooperation among the cooperating members; it is that word that bans from social intercourse those that would disrupt the cooperating society. In brief, the word of authority is the current actuality of the power generated by past development and contemporary cooperation.

To a great extent the word of authority resides in the sum total of current institutions. By this sum total I mean all ways of cooperating that at any time are commonly understood and commonly accepted. Example defines roles and points to tasks. Custom fixes requisite qualifications and links consequents to antecedents. So in the home and in the educational hierarchy, in the learned professions, in industry and commerce, in politics and finance, in church and state there develop a vast and intricate web of interconnections that set the lines along which cooperation occurs and uncooperativeness is sanctioned.

I have employed the word, institution, in its broadest sense. It is the product of use and wont. It is the sum of the ways of cooperating that commonly are understood and commonly are accepted. It changes slowly, for a new common understanding and a new common consent are not easily developed. None the less, it is within the matrix of use and wont that power comes to be entrusted to individuals within community. There is the spontaneous articulation of the kinship group. There is the need of leaders in times of stress. There is the advantage of arbitrators in disputes. There is the role of judges in settling whether injustice has been done and, if so, what satisfaction is to be made. By way of safeguard rules of due process are devised both with regard to the selection of officials and with regard to the manner in which their office is to be fulfilled. Such rules may remain unwritten. The officials may act only in the name of some sub-group in the community. But eventually there are rules that are enacted as laws, and there are officials that act in the name of the whole community.

So we come to a distinction between authority and authorities. The authorities are the officials to whom certain offices have been entrusted and certain powers delegated. But authority belongs to the community that has a common field of experience, common and complementary ways of ^{understanding,} ~~understand,~~ common judgements and common aims. It is the community that is the carrier of a common world mediated by meaning and motivated by values. It is the validity of those meanings and values that gives authority its aura and prestige.

A rhetorical and juridical concept of culture assumed that one and only one set of meanings and values was valid for all mankind. Travel and research have dissipated that illusion. There are many differentiations of human consciousness: linguistic, religious, literary, systematic, scientific, scholarly, introspective. With each differentiation there is a shift of horizon, a transformation of available meanings, a transvaluation of values. So it is that from an empirical

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point of view culture has come to be conceived as the set of meanings and values that inform a common way of life.

Such meanings and values may be authentic or unauthentic. They are authentic in the measure that cumulatively they are the result of the transcendental precepts, Be attentive, Be intelligent, Be reasonable, Be responsible. They are unauthentic in the measure that they are the product of cumulative inattention, obtuseness, unreasonableness, irresponsibility.

Authenticity makes power legitimate. It confers on power the aura and prestige of authority. Unauthenticity leaves power naked. It reveals power as mere power. Similarly, authenticity legitimates authorities, and unauthenticity destroys their authority and reveals them as merely powerful. Legitimated by authenticity authority and authorities have a hold on the consciences of those subject to authority and authorities. But when they lack the legitimating by authenticity, authority and authorities invite the consciences of subjects to repudiate their claims to rule. However, subjects may be authentic or unauthentic. In so far as they are authentic, they will accept the claims of legitimate authority and legitimate authorities, and they will resist the claims of illegitimate authority and illegitimate authorities. On the other hand, in so far as they are unauthentic, they will resist legitimate claims, and they will support illegitimate claims.

Dialectic has to do with the concrete, the dynamic, and the contradictory. Cooperation, power, and authority have to do with the concrete and the dynamic. Authenticity and unauthenticity add a pair of contradictories. The resulting dialectic is extremely complicated. Authenticity and unauthenticity are found in three different carriers: (1) in the community, (2) in the individuals that are authorities, and (3) in the individuals that are subject to authority. Again, unauthenticity is realized by any single act of inattention, obtuseness, unreasonableness, irresponsibility. But authenticity is reached only by long and sustained fidelity to the transcendental precepts. It exists only as a cumulative product. Moreover, authenticity in man or woman is ever precarious: our attentiveness

is ever apt to be a withdrawal from inattention; our acts of understanding a correction of our oversights; our reasonableness a victory over silliness; our responsibility a repentance for our sins. To be ever attentive, intelligent, reasonable, responsible is to live totally in the world mediated by meaning and motivated by values. But man also lives in a world of immediacy and, while the world of immediacy can be incorporated in the world mediated by meaning and motivated by values, still that incorporation never is secure. Finally, what is authentic for a lesser differentiation of consciousness will be found unauthentic by the standards of a greater differentiation. So there is a sin of backwardness, of the cultures, the authorities, the individuals that fail to live on the level of their times.

The complexity of the dialectic of authority ^{inquiry} underscores what experience has long made quite plain. / ~~into~~ into the legitimacy of authority or authorities is complex, lengthy, tedious, and often inconclusive.

A more effective approach is to adopt a more synthetic viewpoint. The fruit of authenticity is progress. For authenticity results from a long sustained exercise of attentiveness, intelligence, reasonableness, responsibility. But long sustained attentiveness notes just what is going on. Intelligence repeatedly ^{graps} graps how things can be better. Reasonableness is open to change. Responsibility weighs in the balance short and long term advantages and disadvantages, benefits and defects. The longer these four are exercised, the more certain and the greater will be the progress made.

The fruit of unauthenticity is decline. Unauthentic subjects get themselves unauthentic authorities. Unauthentic authorities favor some groups over others. Favoritism breeds suspicion, distrust, dissension, opposition, hatred, violence. Community loses its common aims and begins to operate at cross-purposes. It loses its common judgements so that different groups inhabit different worlds. Common understanding is replaced by mutual incomprehension. The common field of experience is divided into hostile territories.

The breakdown of community entails the breakdown of cooperation. Different groups advocate different policies. Different policies entail different plans, and the different groups deploy all their resources for the implementation of the plans that accord with their policies. There may be a seesaw battle between them with the resultant incoherence and confusion. Or one side may gain the upperhand and then exploitation of the other follows.

Just as sustained authenticity results in increasing responsibility and order, increasing reasonableness and cohesion, increasing intelligence and objective intelligibility, increasing knowledge and mastery of the situation, so sustained unauthenticity has the opposite effects. But the remedy for the opposite effects lies beyond any normal human procedure. There is no use appealing to the sense of responsibility of irresponsible people, to the reasonableness of people that are unreasonable, to the intelligence of people that have chosen to be obtuse, to the attention of people that attend only to their grievances. Again, the objective situation brought about by sustained unauthenticity is not an intelligible situation. It is the product of inattention, obtuseness, unreasonableness, irresponsibility. It is an objective surd, the realization of the irrational. A natural situation yields fruits a hundredfold to the sustained application of intelligence. But an irrational situation is just stony ground, and to apply intelligence to it yields nothing.

However, beyond progress and decline there is redemption. Its principle is self-sacrificing love. To fall in love is to go beyond attention, intelligence, reasonableness, responsibility. It is to set up a new principle that has, indeed, its causes, conditions, occasions but, as long as it lasts, provides the mainspring of one's desire and fear, hope and despair, joy and sorrow. In the measure that the community becomes a community of love and so capable of making real and great sacrifices, in that measure it can wipe out the grievances and correct the objective absurdities that its unauthenticity has brought about.

I speak of redemption from within the Christian tradition, in which Christ suffering, dying, and rising again is at once the motive and the model of self-sacrificing love. But if one is willing to attend to the ideal types propounded by Arnold Toynbee in his Study of History, a more general statement is possible. In that study of course Toynbee thought he was contributing to empirical science. Since then however he has recanted. But, I believe, his work remains a contribution not to knowledge of reality, not to hypotheses about reality, but to the ideal types that are intelligible sets of concepts and often prove useful to have to hand when it comes to describing reality or to forming hypotheses about it.

Relevant to present purposes would be Toynbee's creative minority, his dominant minority, his internal and external proletariat, and his universal religion within which a new civilisation arises from the disorder and conflicts of the old. The creative minority are the representatives of progress. They are the leaders that gain the adhesion of the masses by successfully meeting the challenge of each successive situation. The dominant minority are the representatives of decline. They inherit the power of the creative minority, but they are unable to solve the problems that continuously multiply. The internal proletariat is constituted by the increasingly disaffected and disillusioned masses. The external proletariat are the less developed foreign peoples that are beginning to discover the weaknesses of their envied neighbor. In modern dress the internal and external proletariats would have to be related to Kenneth Galbraith's multinational corporations. Religion, finally, in an era of crisis has to think less of issuing commands and decrees and more of fostering the self-sacrificing love that alone is capable of providing the solution to the evils of decline and of reinstating the beneficent progress that is entailed by sustained authenticity.

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I have placed the legitimacy of authority in its authenticity. But besides the legitimacy of authority, there also is the assertion of that legitimacy, its legitimation. Legitimation is manifold. It occurs on any of the many differentiations of consciousness. In early human society it is a matter of myth and ritual. In the ancient high ~~xxx~~ civilizations it became a matter of law. Among the loquacious and literary Greeks law was reinforced first by rhetoric and later by logic. Historians discovered that different laws obtained at different times and places. Systematizers sought to draw up codes that would express the eternal verities for all times and places. Philosophers sought principles that would underpin this or that system. But if the legitimacy of authority lies in its authenticity, none of these solutions is adequate.

By this I do not mean to deny what already I have affirmed. Besides authority there also are needed authorities. If there are to be authorities, then over and above their authenticity there is needed some external criterion by which their position can be publicly recognized. But while this external criterion is a necessary condition, it is not a sufficient condition. The sufficient condition must include authenticity. The external criterion need not be accompanied by authenticity. For in human beings authenticity always is precarious. Commonly, indeed, it is no more than a withdrawal from unauthenticity.

Such then is the dialectic of authority. It was well expressed by Barbara Barclay Carter in her preface to her translation of Don Luigi Sturzo's Church and State when she wrote: "... in every form of social life and in human society as a whole two currents are invariably present, the 'organizational' and the 'mystical' or ideal, the one tending to conservation, to practical const^uctions that perpetuate an established order, the other to renewal, with sharpened awareness of present deficiencies and impellent awareness towards a better future.

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The distinction between them is never absolute, for they are made up of human individuals and reflect the complexity of human minds; their action is an interweaving, the one eventually consolidating something of what the other conceives, yet ~~they~~ they come together only to part anew; the conflict they manifest is the conflict between the ideal and its always only partial realisation, between the letter that kills and the spirit that quickens, and while the Church is essentially the expression of the mystical current in the fact^e of the State... in the Church as in the State the two forces are perennially working."¹

1) Luigi Sturzo, Church and State, London: Geoffrey Bles, 1939, p. 6.