

lead to misunderstanding, distrust, suspicion, hostility, factions; with divergent judgments people begin to live in different worlds; with opposed valuations their labors are at cross-purposes; without love, loyalty, faith, there is lacking the buoyancy that enables a community to take lightly the strain imposed by incidental lapses and waywardness.

There are further complications, for human situations not only are the products of previous acts of meaning but also the occasions and materials for further insights, discoveries, innovations. For when natural right prevails, the situation is the product of ongoing intelligence uncovering and realizing ever new possibilities for development. But where natural right is violated cumulatively, the situation becomes ever more the product of inattention, obtuseness, unreasonableness, irresponsibility, conflict. Then what is objective also is absurd. So far from offering the potentiality for new insights, discoveries, innovations, all that intelligence can find is a lack of intelligibility. All that intelligence can serve is the egoism and the conflicts of individuals and groups.

Finally, the dialectic provides a premise grounding both constructive and remedial policies and projects.

In brief, besides intelligence there is obtuseness, besides truth there is error, besides values there are satisfactions, besides love there is selfishness and hatred. Community is built and collaboration prospers as long as intelligence grasps the potentialities of the situation, reasonableness includes the long view, responsibility is ready to sacrifice satisfactions for values, and the momentum generated by love, loyalty, faith overrides the friction due to incidental lapses. But the incidental lapses can become no longer merely incidental but more and more the rule. Then the advocates of Realpolitik smile contemptuously at the futility of appealing for greater love, greater loyalty, greater faith. What alone will work is authority backed by power

like a regulator that ends a movement when its function is fulfilled. We are not far from Eric Voegelin's view of Nous as both a force and a criterion. By the same stroke we are at the origin and the control of the Heraclitean river of meanings, of the concrete and particular meanings that inform human history, if only we can identify within ourselves the immanent principle that generates meanings and controls them, that criticizes them and renews them.

Such an identification is not too difficult. At a first approximation it is the human spirit as raising and answering questions. As raising questions, it is an immanent principle of movement. As answering questions, it is not at once a principle of rest, for if the answer is not satisfactory, its very unsatisfactoriness will give rise to further questions and so keep the movement going. It is when the spirit that raises the questions finds the answers satisfactory that it becomes a principle of rest. In brief, as raising questions it is Aristotle's principle of movement; and as finding answers satisfactory it is Voegelin's criterion and Aristotle's principle of rest. Again, as principle both of movement and of rest that consciously sets and meets immanent norms, it extends the range of Aristotle's nature into the realm of spirit there to make manifest the ground of natural right.

Such is the domestic love of husband and wife, parents and children. Such again on a further plane is the loyalty of civil community, where individual advantage yields to the advantage of the group, and the safety of the individual may be sacrificed to the safety of the group. Such finally is God's gift of his own love flooding our hearts through the Holy Spirit he has given us (Rom 5, 5). It was by that gift that St Paul could proclaim his conviction "... there is nothing in death or life, in the realm of spirits or super-human powers, in the world as it is or the world as it shall be, in the forces of the universe, in heights or depths — nothing in all creation that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8, 38 f.).

#### The Emergence of Common Meaning

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If the normative source of meaning lies within the secret processes of the individual, its flowering into common meaning is best attributed to collaborating individuals. George Steiner has attributed the multiplicity of languages and their ongoing vitality and variation to the creativity of individuals. He has stated that "All communication 'interprets' between privacies." But his theme and main interest is the fact of interpretation, and it is the addition of the ability to interpret to the ability to mean that educes common meaning out of its normative source.

That process, however, is as manifold as the many manners in which people collaborate. The collaboration of primitive fruit-gatherers is more limited than that of hunters or fishers. The advent of large-scale agriculture with its complement of arts and crafts marked a watershed that led to the ancient

high civilizations with their elaborate technical, economic, political, and religious structures, in which along with collaboration there also advanced the cognitive, communicative, efficient, and constitutive functions of meaning. With oral and written literatures there emerged a new plateau in which reflection on human affairs took man beyond the earlier practical differentiation of concern to the pneumatic differentiation of the Hebrew prophets and to the philosophic differentiation of the Greeks. A further and distinct plateau has been reached with the advent of Christianity, the wealth and variety of modern languages and literatures, and the eclipse of logic now reduced to an ancilliary role within the different and larger concerns of method. Scientific method became established in the seventeenth century. Historical method in the nineteenth. At the behest of both philosophy has been being forced into a methodical stance if it was not to lose contact with reality as mediated by the scientists and the historians.

Within a vast process of ongoing collaboration meanings have been created by innovators, diffused by interpreters, institutionalized by the routines of socialization, acculturation, education. There results a sociology of knowledge, for human knowledge is not the achievement of any individual but a common fund to which <sup>each</sup> contributes as fortune favors him and on which each draws according to his diligence and his intelligence. There results a social order, more or less successfully functioning in the essential task of drawing on resources and abilities to meet common and individual needs and desires. There results community, for collaborating involves a common

Yet what precisely is this component or factor. If one places it in universal propositions, self-evident truths, naturally known certitudes, the very universality of the norm confines its relevance to nature and excludes its relevance to historicity. Historicity is always concrete, and the concrete is never just an assembly of abstractions.

Finally, while the dialectic as such only sets forth the alternatives it offers, still its basis in the self-transcendence of enlightenment and emancipation, its critique that does justice to past achievement yet does not spare past aberration, its prophetic voice vindicating natural right through the benefits its observance has brought and the evils its violation has inflicted on the very people that are enjoying the benefits and suffering from the evils

We come to our fourth topic. The first was that common meaning develops in human collaboration; the second that collaboration goes forward on successive plateaus of doing, of speaking, and of development in general; the third that the guiding ideal of enlightenment and emancipation became on our final plateau a self-knowledge that thematized interiority and a self-transcendence that involved an intellectual, moral, and affective conversion.

The fourth topic, then, is the critique of our historicity, of what our past has made us.



## Natural Right and Historical Mindedness

### Introduction

Let me begin with a few introductory words, first, on natural right, secondly, on historical mindedness.

In his well-known lectures on Natural Right and History the late Leo Strauss found the origin of the notion of natural right in the context of Greek philosophy. Initially men had contrasted the constant customs of animals with the varying customs of human tribes, and they had gone on to attribute the constant customs to nature but the varying human customs to convention. Such an attribution, however, was not without a suggestion that what convention had made it could unmake and remake, that underpinning human manners and customs there was no permanent and binding force. It was to preclude such a conclusion that wise men discerned, underneath the manifold of human life-styles, a component or factor, named natural right, that possessed the claims to universality and permanence of nature itself.

In similar vein and closer to our historical concern Eric Voegelin was written in The Southern Review an enlightening article on "Reason: The Classic Experience." I quote:

I shall not deal [he wrote] with the "idea" or a nominalist "definition" of Reason but with the process in reality in which concrete human beings, the "lovers of wisdom," the philosophers as they styled themselves, were engaged in an act of resistance against the personal and social disorder of their age. From this act there emerged the Nous as the cognitively luminous force that inspired the philosophers to resist and, at the same time, enabled them to recognize the

Finally, I have said that dialectic offers a premise grounding both constructive and remedial policies and projects. Its ability to be constructive rests on its enlightenment, on the self-awareness, self-understanding, self-knowledge proper to the third plateau. Its ability to offer remedies rests on its emancipation, on intellectual, moral, and affective conversion.

It needs to be remedial in two manners. First, it has to discover the various manners in which violators of natural right have hidden or palliated or excused or defended their violations. What has been merely hidden, already is admitted to be wrong; it will suffice to set forth as accurately and temperately as possible the evidence for the cover-up. But far greater attention must be given to cases in which violations have been palliated or excused or defended or even publicly approved. For in such cases either the very notion of natural right or the possibility of man respecting it have been called in question. Unless the notion is clarified and the possibility of respecting it acknowledged, it is useless to appeal to natural right. Nor in my opinion will clarity be restored and acknowledgement secured short of the emancipation that consists in intellectual, moral, and affective conversion.

But the dialectic has to be remedial in a second manner. Violations of natural right distort the workings of the polity and the economy. The effects of such distortion are cumulative. They need to be investigated, analyzed, established, at least to the point where it becomes apparent just what developments in the body social are really aberrations. Moreover, distinctions have to be drawn between kinds and degrees of aberration,

between practices that are pernicious and not to be tolerated, others that can best be borne for a while since too great a break in continuity can do more harm than good, others that can be left to benign neglect since they will wither away without positive encouragement.

in History." For down the ages the constants in the expression of natural right are testimonies at once to self-transcendence to / as man's destiny and /group failure as man's lot.

Fifthly and finally, there is remedial action. Critique will reveal incomplete developments and incomplete traditions, and it will endeavor to unravel the

When legitimacy is doubted (or can be doubted), power feels the need to become still more powerful. But every increase of power adds to the attraction of a countervailing force; so in the West the power of popes and bishops was checked by the power of nobles; the power of both by the more concentrated power of kings; the power of kings by the power of parliaments. Even the attraction of countervailing forces can give way to the apparently greater effectiveness of miscarriages of justice, assassinations, crusades, wars of religion, the liquidation of the nobles and their king, the liquidation of the bourgeoisie, and the unprecedented global wars of the twentieth century with its unprecedented power to destroy.

When love, loyalty, faith prevail, values are preferred to satisfactions. When they falter, they tend to be supplemented by the attraction of satisfactions and/or by the threat of their opposite. But while values enrich all, satisfactions are essentially the satisfactions of individuals. They invite the bias of private egoism. More dangerously, they invite individuals to combine, to foster a group egoism, to shift the flow of satisfactions mainly to themselves while imposing the tasks to be performed mainly on others. But bias in one direction suggests and invites an opposing bias; and the greater the oppression of one group by another, the more violent the revindication to be expected.

On the level of truth, fact, reality, we have distinguished between the world mediated by meaning, that is, by experience, by understanding, and by judgment and, on the other hand, the world of immediacy. But in the measure that love, loyalty, faith need to be supplemented by authority, power, force, again in the measure that vital, social, cultural, personal

When legitimacy is doubted or can be doubted, power has to become still more powerful. But the very basis of the increase in power can become rebellious, when treated unjustly, or when misled by seditious propagandists