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Common Good and Common Action

Yves R. Simon

ANARCHY is rarely or never upheld with consistency. In the pedagogy of Rousseau, there is a set purpose to let the child be guided by natural necessity rather than by human command, and to let him learn from the experience of physical facts rather than by obedience. "Keep the child solely dependent on things; you will have followed the order of Nature in the process of his upbringing. Never oppose to his unreasonable wishes any but physical obstacles or punishments resulting from the actions themselves — he will remember these punishments in similar situations. It is enough to prevent him from doing evil without forbidding him to do it . . ." (Emile, II). Remarkably, the theory that the method of authority is a poor substitute for the pedagogical power of nature has been accepted, in varying degree of enthusiasm or reluctance, by most schools of pedagogy and has demonstrated lasting power. Yet the authority of parents and tutors is present throughout pedagogical theories, even when it is passed over in silence. Childhood is the domain where the suppression of all authority is obviously impossible. The most radical constructs of anarchy, as soon as they rise above the level of idle rhetoric, admit of qualifications so far at least as the immature part of mankind is concerned. Anti-authoritarian theorists, with few exceptions if any, do not mean that authority should disappear or that it can ever cease to be a factor of major importance in human affairs. What thinkers opposed to authority generally mean is that authority can never be vindicated except by such *deficiencies* as are found in children, in the feeble-minded, the emotionally unstable, the criminally inclined, the illiterate, and the historically primitive.

The real problem is not whether authority must wither away: no doubt, it will continue to play an all-important part in human affairs. The problem is whether deficiencies alone cause authority to be necessary. It is obvious, indeed, that in many cases the need

* In drafting this paper I have been helped by two friends who were kind enough to act as my secretaries, Professor Robert Bunker of Highland University, N. M. and Mrs. Pauline Ryan. Let this be an expression of my gratitude.

for authority originates in some defect and disappears when sufficiency is attained. But the commonly associated negation, that authority never originates in the positive qualities of man and society, is by no means obvious and should not be received uncritically. The supposition that authority, in certain cases and domains, is made necessary not by human deficiencies but by the very nature of man and society — this supposition is not evidently absurd. To hold, in some *a priori* way, that it does not deserve examination would merely evince wishful thinking of the least scientific kind. The truth may well be that authority has several functions, some of which would be relative to deficient states of affairs and others to such features of perfection as the existence of human communities, their actions, and their achievements.

If any functions of authority originate in nature and plenitude rather than in deficiency, it can be reasonably conjectured that they are relative to common existence and common action. Granted that in many cases authority merely substitutes for self-government, the theory that it also has essential functions must be tested first in the field of community life. But the definition of this field presupposes an inquiry, no matter how brief, into human sociability.

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GROUNDS AND FORMS OF SOCIABILITY

The Needs of the Individual

It is perfectly obvious that the needs of the individual call for the association of men; yet significant implications of this proposition are commonly ignored. For one thing, the notion of individual need is often restricted, in most arbitrary fashion, to needs of a biological, physical, material character. The necessity of mutual assistance and division of labor in the fight against hunger and thirst, cold, wild beasts, and disease is more commonly expressed than the immense and almost constantly increased service that society renders to individuals in intellectual, esthetic, moral, and spiritual life. Any improper emphasis on the physical needs served by society suggests that the purposes and the requirements of social life are contained within a sphere of material goods. Concomitantly, it is often taken for granted that the goods of the spirit are altogether individual and that their pursuit is an entirely individualistic concern. Thus, human life would be split into a part socialized by material needs and a nobler part distinguished

both by spirituality and individual independence. To dispose of this construct, just think of what a beginner in the sciences owes to the daily assistance of society. A comparison between a student in our universities and a man self-educated in the wilderness would involve a good deal of fiction, but we have all the data needed to compare, with regard to proficiency, students separated by a few generations. In the fields where the social life of the understanding is most successful — mathematics, physics — the men of the younger generation can solve with the resources of ordinary intelligence problems which were hardly treatable for geniuses of earlier ages.

By another unwarranted restriction of meaning, it is often held that a need is necessarily self-centered. In fact, the notion of need expresses merely the state of a tendency not yet satisfied with ultimate accomplishment. Among the tendencies which make up the dynamism of a rational being, some are self-centered and some are generous; all admit of a state of need, and the need to give is no less real than the need to take. Consider the grounds of friendship and the ways in which a man is related to his friends. A young fellow, uncertain about what he is and what he wants to be, with little background, no estate, no steady position, with much anxiety, will be looking for friends in a context of self-centered needs. No ethically unfavorable connotation attaches to the notion of a need centered about the self. Whether the center of a need is within the self or beyond it depends upon the nature of the tendency involved and is antecedent to moral use. Needs relative to such goods as food and shelter are self-centered by nature and remain self-centered in the most disinterested man despite all the generosity which enters into his way of satisfying his needs and of relating their satisfaction to further ends.

But some needs have their center beyond the self; a man whose personality features contrast with those of the young fellow described just above still needs friends. He does not depend on the help of friends for food or shelter, for his fortune is already made; he is not in the least motivated by the expectation of physical care in case of disease, for he is in good health and anyway has little fear of disease and death; neither does it occur to him that he may need friendly attention to soothe him in case of emotional disaster, for his nervous balance is well assured; and he does not feel that the company of friends is necessary to him as protection against boredom, for he does so well in the company of his ideas,

his memories, his books, and familiar belongings that the threat of boredom is not felt. We are describing a distinguished instance of mature development, strength of character, soundness, dominating indifference, freedom. Yet this accomplished person needs the company of loved ones, inasmuch as his very state of accomplishment intensifies in him every generous trait and every tendency to act by way of superabundance. He needs to give. True, the center of the act of giving is found in the beneficiary of the gift, and the gift is primarily designed to satisfy a need in the receiver. Yet the gift satisfies also a need in the giver. Such a non-self-centered need may attain a high degree of intensity. The accomplished person whom we are considering would be unhappy if he knew no children to please with Christmas presents, and his homecoming from happy journeys would be gloomy if no one expected him to bring jewelry or dresses from the remote land. His knowledge would give him little joy if he had no chance to impart it to eager intellects, and the very firmness of his character would seem to him a tedious advantage if it should never result in a friend's achieving greater mastery over himself.

For the sake of clarity, we have used the example of a firm and accomplished person to describe other-centered needs. In such persons generosity is most obviously noticeable. However, other-centered needs exist in all; they secretly move the last of men. To appreciate the power and the social significance of other-centered needs in everyone, it suffices to remark that in case of frustration the tendency to act generously becomes the most redoubtable of antisocial drives. Men would rather stand physical destitution than be denied opportunity for disinterested love and sacrifice.

The Common Good

The question now arises whether the needs of the individual are the only cause of human association and whether, correspondingly, society has no purpose beyond the satisfaction of individual needs. The word "individualism," which so often is made worthless by confusion, admits of a precise sense insofar as it designates the theory that the single purpose of society is the service of the individual. The individualistic interpretation of sociability appeals to souls trained in humane disciplines and possessed of an exacting sense for the human character of everything that pertains to society. As soon as it is suggested that the purpose of human effort

lies in an achievement placed beyond the individual's good, a suspicion arises that human substance may be ultimately dedicated to things as external to man as the pyramids of Egypt. In all periods of history, voluminous facts signify that under the name of common good, republic, fatherland, empire, what is actually pursued may not be a good state of human affairs but a work of art designed to provide its creator with the inebriating experience of creation. The joy of the creator assumes unique intensity when the thing out of which the work of art is made is human flesh and soul. The artist's rapture is greatest when he uses as matter of his own creation not marble and brass but beings made after the image of God. "The finest clay, the most precious marble — man — is here kneaded and hewn. . . ."¹ True, the common good conceived as a work of art and a thing external to man is merely a corruption of the genuine common good. In this world of contingency, every form or process admits of imitation; in human affairs, the most dreadful counterfeit is often so related to the genuine form that it appears, with disquieting frequency, precisely where the genuine form is most earnestly sought. An inquiry into the common good must involve constant awareness that its object may, at any time, be displaced by deadly counterfeit.

To answer the question of whether the association of men is designed to serve not only the needs of the individual but also goods situated beyond individual achievement, we should turn our attention, first, to the limitations of individual plenitude; then we may be able to understand, just by glancing at the daily life of human communities, how these limitations are transcended.

Individuals are narrowly restricted with regard to diversity, and inevitable circumstances hold in check the desire for totality which belongs to rational nature. In terms of essential causality, there is no reason why one and the same man should not be painter, musician, philosopher, captain of industry, and statesman. In fact, personalities developed excellently on more than a very few lines are extremely rare, and significant limitations can easily be found in Leonardo da Vinci and Goethe. The rule to which all men are subjected in varying degree is one of specialization for the sake of proficiency. This rule entails heavy sacrifices even in the most gifted. A man highly successful in his calling accomplishes little in comparison with the ample virtualities of man.

¹ F. Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* (Garden City, N. Y., 1956), p. 24.

He has failed in a hundred respects. Only the union of many can remedy the failure of each. But of all the restrictions inflicted upon the boundless ambition of our rational nature, the most painful concerns the duration of individual achievements. Within the temporal order we would feel hopeless if the virtually immortal life of the community did not compensate for the brevity of individual existence. Death is known to be particularly hard and surrounded with anxiety for those who end their days in individualistic loneliness.

These are the familiar facts referred to by a well-known text of Aristotle, ordinarily summed up in the following words, "The common good is greater and more divine than the private good."² "Greater" expresses a higher degree of perfection with regard both to duration and to diversity. "Divine," as translating the Greek *theion*, does not designate so much a godlike essence as a participation in the privilege of imperishability. In this world of change, individuals come and go. The law of generation and corruption covers the whole universe of nature. This law is transcended in a very proper sense by the incorruptibility of the species and the immortality of human association. The masterpiece of the natural world cannot be found in the transient individual. Nor can it be found in the species, which is not imperishable except in the state of universality; but in this state it is no longer unqualifiedly real. Human communities are the highest attainments of nature, for they are virtually unlimited with regard to diversity of perfections, and virtually immortal. Beyond the satisfaction of individual needs the association of men serves a good unique in plenitude and duration, the common good of the human community.

Partnership and Community

To state the problem of authority, we still need an inquiry into the basic forms of association. The main patterns of human societies are the mere partnership and the community. Of course, these two types may combine, but the obscurity of mixed realizations just renders more valuable the understanding of typical forms. Let us first consider familiar examples. A merchant succeeds in convincing an owner of capital that money invested in his business would bring nice dividends. By the terms of their contract, any profits will be divided according to a definite ratio.

² *Eth.* 1. 2. 1094 b 7.

Then the merchant goes to the market, and the money-lender sits back and awaits the event. Their "common interest" was celebrated in expectant toasts, but they are not engaged in any common action designed to promote any "common interest." The merchant works by himself or with his employees; he does not work with the money-lender, who remains a silent partner. Where there is no common action, there is no common good. These two men do not make up a community. What they call their "common interest" is in fact a sum of private interests that happen³ to be interdependent.

In contradistinction to mere partners, the members of a community — family, factory, football team, army, state, church . . . — are engaged in a common action whose object is qualitatively different from a sum of interdependent goods. Whereas the contractual relation is normally the sufficient rule of the mere partnership, our problem is precisely to decide whether the community normally calls for the kind of rule known as authority.

To conclude this preliminary inquiry, let us remark that contract and community can be related in diverse ways. (1) The association established by contract may be of such nature that the relation between the associates remains exclusively contractual. The money-lender and the merchant exemplify such a case. (2) The association founded by contract may be of such nature as to involve a common action. When they sign a contract, partners may be entering into a society which is not a mere partnership. Such is the case, for instance, in the hiring of labor. Production demands that manager and laborer act together, and neither has the character of a silent partner. However, communities of this type can, in most instances, be dissolved at will, or according to terms specified by the initial contract. (3) The community founded by contract may not be dissoluble at will. It may even be of such nature as not to be dissoluble at all. Because the contract is the only rule of the mere partnership, it is commonly assumed, by unwarranted inference, that persons associated by contract neces-

³ The notion of contingency conveyed by "happen" is understood here with strict propriety. The fact that the capital of the enterprise, or part of it, is owned by a lender, is accidental to the commercial operations: these would not be essentially different if the merchant had inherited all the capital he needs. Consider, on the other hand, the cooperation of the surgeon, his assistant, the anesthetist and the nurses in the treatment of a surgical case: it would not occur to anybody to say that the purposes of these persons just "happen" to be interdependent. Their unity is not a sheer happening.

sarily remain mere partners and can dissolve their association. The relation between man and wife involves a character of stability determined by the very nature of the man-and-wife community. Yet this community was founded by contract.

If nothing abnormal occurs, the need for authority is never felt in a relation of mere partnership. The contractual arrangement which, as such, is absolutely equalitarian, suffices. A decision by authority will be necessary only if the working of the contract is impeded by such accidents as misunderstanding, bad faith, or unforeseen conjuncture. Thus, if all human societies were mere partnerships, authority would never be needed except on account of some fault or accident. The deficiency theory of authority would be entirely vindicated.⁴

⁴ In fact, when the theory of anarchy took hold of a thinker free from any connection with the spirit of individualistic revolt and possessed with a strong sense for order and the excellence of the human association, this theory assumed the form of a contractual system — supplemented, however, with an authoritarian treatment of the relations involving significant deficiency. The social philosophy of Proudhon owes nothing to the romantic exaltation of primitiveness, cosmic emotion, infrarational life, individualistic solitude, and rebellion against society. The work of a mind intensely dedicated to “the creation of order in mankind” (the title of a book of Proudhon, 1843) and convinced that the masterpiece of the universe is human society, the Proudhonian theory of anarchy consists in an ambitious plan for the extension of contract to many relations traditionally settled by way of authority. For some time Proudhon recommended and promised the withering away of the state. Yet, a day came when he realized that every step in the conquering of the state was accompanied by a residual assertion of political authority, which thus proved irreducible and perennial. Proudhon’s anarchism finally matures into a theory of federation, and there is no longer any question of eliminating the state. Rather, the state itself is forced into a contractual relation. In this reconsidered theory of anarchy, the general endeavor to substitute equilibrium for subordination, and contract for authority, does not spare the state; but instead of being, in Utopian fashion, driven out of existence, the archetype of authority, the state, is treated as the perennial partner of liberty. Insofar as authority itself enters into a contractual arrangement, the ideal of anarchy is not given up.

To the indignation of many, this unyielding anarchist, Proudhon, abides by the most uncompromising standards of traditional authoritarianism with regard to the family community. The inexperience of the child vindicates, with no need for elaboration, authority in the paternal relation. The case of the woman is not so obvious, and the intuitive genius of Proudhon, always somewhat awkward when there is a question of dissociating the components of an historical trend, never succeeded in avoiding misinterpretations. Proudhon did not explain quite convincingly in what respects the woman is equal to man and in what respects she is not. On his deepest level of thought, he believes that she is incomparably more subject than man to those irrational drives which originate in the cosmic part of human nature and in which he sees the worst enemies of justice and freedom. The deepest reason of Proudhon’s aversion to Rousseau

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THE UNITY OF COMMON ACTION

Assuming now the features proper to the kind of association described as community, let us state the problem of united action. Every community is relative to a good to be sought and enjoyed in common. But, by the very fact that a community comprises a number of individuals, the unity of its action cannot be taken for granted: it has to be caused. Further, if the community is to endure, the cause of its united action must be firm and stable. Since rational agents are guided by judgment, the problem of bringing about unity in the action of men resolves into the problem of insuring the unity of their practical judgment. For example, the family community would cease to exist if each member did not judge — for one reason or another — that he ought to reside in this particular locality and in this particular house. A farm would soon be ruined if those engaged in the production of wheat did not all judge — again, for one reason or another — that these fields ought to be put into wheat this year. A factory could not operate if the members of its personnel did not all judge that a definite schedule ought to be observed. A deliberating assembly is indeed a community designed to stand disagreement, yet in order that it should exist at all, there must be some agreement regarding the place and time of its meetings, regarding the rules of procedure, and regarding some principles. In these and all similar cases, unity of judgment cannot be procured by rational communication. The believers in a social science which would, under

is that, in his interpretation, the philosophy of Rousseau delivers man and society to the infrahuman powers of emotions, passions, natural spontaneity, and cosmic drives, and that Rousseau calls freedom precisely this submission to the infrahuman. Because of this greater subjection to cosmic nature, the woman is a permanent minor and needs to be guided by father, husband, brother, or son. At times Proudhon reveals that authority, which he generally seems to confine within the family, has a part to play whenever a deficient state of affairs makes it impossible for men to do by themselves the things that mature people are supposed to accomplish without guidance. In his remarks on the American Civil War in *La guerre et la paix*, first published in 1861, ed. C. Bouglé and H. Moysset (Paris, 1927), pp. 176-180, he goes so far as to write, by one of those paradoxes which cast obscurity on the best parts of his work, that Southern slavery supplied the proper circumstances for the training of primitives who had somehow to acquire the discipline of labor. Thus, the social philosophy of Proudhon is a theory of order through a system of contractual anarchy supplemented with a deficiency theory of authority.

circumstances of perfect enlightenment, eliminate the decisions of authority — and those of freedom as well — assume that the kind of necessity which makes demonstration possible extends to the particulars of social practice. But, clearly, such propositions as “It is good for us to live in this house,” and “It is proper that our assembly should meet at noon,” admit of no demonstration. Philosophical prejudice alone may cause failure to perceive the contingency in which such propositions are engaged. United action demands a principle that works steadily amidst the overwhelming contingencies of perishable existence. Rational communication, which is bound up with essential necessities, is not such a principle.

Does it follow that unanimity is under all circumstances an uncertain and precarious principle of unity in action? This question requires that we consider a community whose members are, without exception, ideally virtuous and enlightened persons. Unanimity is well known to be a most precarious achievement in communities afflicted by such common deficiencies as ignorance, prejudice, selfish interest, and the like, but our purpose is to decide whether authority is ever needed independently of deficiencies. We must bear in mind, accordingly, a group free from stupidity and ill-will. If such a group were a Utopian fiction, it still could play a part in the understanding of society. In fact, there exist groups whose members are all intelligent and morally excellent; that these groups are very small makes no difference for the purposes of rational analysis.

Rational Communication and Affective Communion

Since unanimity cannot be established in these practical matters by the power of demonstration, the ideally clever and virtuous members of a community cannot be unanimous in more than fortuitous fashion unless a determined course of action is demanded by the virtuous inclination of their hearts. Whenever wisdom has to find its way in the midst of circumstances contingent and possibly unique, the certainty of its judgment results from its agreement with honest inclination. An ethical issue universal in character — say, a general problem of justice — can be answered, as St. Thomas puts it, in either of two ways, the way of cognition and the way of inclination. In the way of cognition, the answer proceeds from principles by logical connections. This is how the moral philosopher is supposed to answer questions, and no other method is acceptable

in philosophy, because no other method procures certainty in knowledge as knowledge.⁵ But an honest man unacquainted with deductive processes may find the answer intuitively and in incommunicable fashion by feeling that such and such a way of doing things pleases or revolts his sentiment of justice.⁶ Provided his is a genuine virtue — as distinct from emotional counterfeits — and is sufficiently developed, the judgment dictated by such a sentiment of

⁵ The words "is supposed to" are not used casually. Moral philosophy is still in a rather primitive stage, and moral philosophers commonly fail to render obvious the deductive connection of their answers with the self-evident principles of the moral order. Their answers may still be true and good and worth adhering to: but the cause of their certainty is an inclination, not a deduction, and for a conclusion so attained to be safe, the philosopher's — or the theologian's — inclination must be sound, which is the same as to say that the fellow must be possessed, first, of genuine virtue and, second, of all the conditions and instruments required for the regular functioning of virtuous inclination as cause of true practical judgment. Of course whoever writes a book of ethics, whether philosophical or theological, likes the reader to believe that every bit of it is scientifically established: in case it were not, the only guaranty of his statements would be the perfection of his virtue: a thing that moralists, understandably, do not like the public to inquire into.

⁶ Such words as "heart," "sentiment," etc., must not be allowed to convey the belief that the determination of the right and the wrong ever is entrusted to *emotional* reactions. Let it be said that there exist inclinations of a purely intellectual character, the best example of which is the familiarity of a man of science with his own scientific field; thus, he is able to put his finger on the true statement a long time — a few years or a few centuries — before this statement is demonstrated. The inclinations which assure the determination of the right and the wrong in contingency are not of purely intellectual nature. They pertain to the appetite and can be termed *affective* with propriety provided it is understood that the appetite of man comprises, as its principal part, the systems of desires and aversions born of rational apprehension, that is, the will. The affective inclination which alone can determine the right and the wrong when demonstration is powerless is *principally* the inclination of the will, an inclination born of intelligent apprehension, and constantly strengthened by dedication to truth. Inclinations of an emotional character are by no means excluded, but they are subordinated. It often is a *feeling* of charm or disgust which notifies us that — perhaps in spite of appearances — there is something definitely right or wrong about a situation; but if such a feeling were let loose, and allowed to work outside an integrated system whose principal part is the will, we would run into all the absurdities of the doctrines, so popular at the end of the eighteenth century and in the Romantic period, which give infra-rational sentiment ultimate control over the determination of the right and the wrong and the utterances of reason. The "conscience" of the Savoy Vicar (J. J. Rousseau, *Emile*, Amsterdam, Jean Neaulme, 1762, III, 114) would not perform any of the wonders that Rousseau describes if it were not precisely this: an inclination antecedent to reason, more *native* than anything born of understanding, closer to cosmical energies, closer to animals and plants and other things of nature, and closer to sheer existence.

agreement or aversion is certain. By love for what justice demands the heart of the just is shaped after the pattern of justice, and his inclination is one with the requirement of his virtue. To say that a will is virtuous is to say that its movements coincide with the demands and aversions of virtue itself. Between the ethically good appetite and ethical goodness there exists a unity of nature, a con-naturalness, which constitutes a dependable source of practical truth. Because the just will corresponds in all its movements to the object of justice, the inclinations experienced by the just are like statements uttered by the object of justice. Here, according to the words of John of St. Thomas, "Love takes on the role of the object."

It is entirely by accident that we can demonstrate so little about the requirements of justice or chastity, considered in their intelligible universality, but it is not by accident that nobody can demonstrate what the rule of justice consists in under individual, historically-conditioned, absolutely concrete, and possibly unprecedented and unrenewable circumstances. Here the rule of justice is not uttered by an essence and cannot be grasped by the demonstrative power of the intellect. It is uttered by the love which is the soul of the just and it can be learned only by listening to the teaching of love. Take for instance the problem of ownership in case of extreme necessity. Our sense of justice acknowledges that a starving person, without money and without liberal friends, has a right to save his life with food that he cannot pay for. No doubt, such a proposition can be demonstrated, and St. Thomas successfully designated the middle term of its demonstration when he remarked that in case of necessity all things become common.⁷ But argumentation will never establish a logical connection between the theory of property and the answer that *I* am looking for when, already weakened by hunger, I wonder whether my case is actually one of extreme necessity. A man in need will know for sure whether his necessity is extreme or not if and only if he is so just as to feel how far the right of his neighbor and his own right go, so temperate as not to mistake an accidental urge for a real need, and so strong as to fear neither the sufferings of hunger nor the resentment of his illiberal neighbors.

Thus, whereas a question relative to an ethical essence can be answered both by way of cognition and by way of inclination, the

⁷ *Sum. Theol.*, ii-ii. 32.7 ad3.

way of inclination alone can procure an answer when a question of human conduct involves contingency. This holds for the rules of common action as well as for those of individual conduct. Political prudence is no less dependent upon the obscure forces of the appetite than prudence in the government of individual life. However, with regard to unity of judgment among men, there is a significant difference between individual prudence and any prudence concerned with the conduct of a community. The prudence of the individual normally involves something singular and peculiar — it would almost be appropriate to say “eccentric.” In their hopeless search for guidance amidst the obscurities of action, men easily assume that problems of individual conduct are the same for all, or at least for many, and that the rule which led one to a happy solution can be confidently followed by others. This assumption works sometimes, when problems are not significantly modified by individual circumstances; yet it is false, and may at any time bring about disastrous effects, for, in the broad field that lies beyond determination by ethical essences, it never can be said *a priori* that individual features are irrelevant. A life of moderate work and strict parsimony may be precisely what a certain family needs, but misfortune may befall a neighboring home unless the line followed is one of rather lavish expenditure at the cost of strenuous work, and in still another case real wisdom may paradoxically require liberal spending, an abundance of leisure, and willingness to go into debt. Of such contrasting rules of action, some may prove sound in a great number of cases and some may prove harmful save for rare exceptions. Yet it is never possible to know in advance — prior to an investigation of whatever unique features a case may comprise — that the rule required in this individual case is not precisely the one which would prove unsuited to nearly all other cases. Because of the possible relevance of unique features in the determination of individual prudence, each man is threatened with the contingency of having to make his decisions in utter solitude and to act like no one else. The anguish of such solitude is more than most men can stand, hence the tendency to take refuge in uniformity and conformity, even though precious features of individual destiny may be destroyed by adherence to common practice.

When the prudence of men is concerned with the welfare of one and the same community — their community — individual

features have, in principle,⁸ nothing to do with the making of a wise decision. Among the most significant data, some are, indeed, strictly unique, but they pertain to the community's unique history and thus tend to cause agreement rather than diversity of judgment. Any common pursuit, on no matter how humble a level, is a welcome remedy to the anguished solitude of individual prudence. To be sure, science is a factor of human unity, but it is in a world of abstraction that it causes men to elicit identical judgments. In common action alone does concrete existence, with all its determinateness, with its character of totality, its location in time, and its contingency, tend to procure unity among men. Assuming that our community is made entirely of clever and well-intentioned persons, whatever is needed for its welfare is the object of unanimous assent. Affective communion achieves what cannot be expected of rational communication: it brings about unanimity of judgment in the life of action. Again, every certain judgment concerning what we have to do under concrete circumstances is dictated by an affective motion and owes its certain truth to its agreement with dependable inclination. But when the pursuit is that of a common good, the part played by affective and secret determinants is no longer an obstacle to unity of judgment among men. Wills properly inclined toward the same common good cannot but react in the same way to the same proposition, if what this proposition expresses is definitely what the common good demands. In groups small enough not to involve much error and bad will, the adherence of all to decisions that are necessary though indemonstrable brings about marvels of united action. As to larger communities — say, cities or nations — where all sorts of evils and deficiencies are inevitable, situations resembling unanimity and entailing most of the effects that unanimity would entail are a comparatively frequent occurrence. Consider the case of a nation attacked by a neighbor eager for territorial expansion. That

⁸ To see why the qualification "in principle," is necessary, consider the case of a leader who knows that, under the circumstances, he cannot resign, and that it is he, and no one else, who has to guide the community toward a certain goal. Two ways, *a* and *b*, are open; *a* would be preferable if it were not for a feature pertaining to the individual history of this leader, who cannot resign, but, his individual history being what it is, *b* ought to be preferred. In fact, whenever an individual feature modifies the ability of a leader to carry out a certain policy, this feature belongs to the system of data that *public* prudence is confronted by and has to reckon with.

resistance is better than appeasement cannot be demonstrated, and many citizens do not have the civic virtue which would procure indefectible adherence to what common salvation demands. Yet history shows that spontaneous unity often characterizes the reaction of peoples in this predicament. If there were a question of polling opinion, it would be impossible to speak of unanimity. There are traitors, collaborationists, neutralists, abstentionists, honest men deceived by overwhelming illusions, and passive citizens without an answer to a question that never actually reached their minds. But these disrupters of unanimity are comparatively few, and they carry so little weight as to make little difference. Practically and for all significant purposes, the situation is about what it would be if unanimity were realized.

But after having recognized the marvels that unanimity, or quasi-unanimity can work, let it be remarked that *unanimity is a precarious principle of united action whenever the common good can be attained in more than one way*. All that has been said in the foregoing about the power of unanimity simply makes no sense except when the way to the common good is uniquely determined. If the common good can be attained in more than one way, neither enlightenment nor virtue, but only chance, can bring about unanimity. Accordingly, if unity of action is guaranteed by no other principle than that of unanimous agreement, it becomes an entirely casual affair, the result being either stalemate or divided and destructive action. Circumstances may be such that the happy life of a man-and-wife community can be easily attained either in Washington or in New York, but if one member of the community prefers, with the best of intentions, Washington, and the other, with an equally virtuous disposition, New York, the principle of action by unanimous agreement determines the separation of these well-meaning spouses.

There is nothing wrong with a man who, so far as he is concerned, likes to drive on the right hand side of the road, and nothing wrong with the fellow who, if he had his own choice, would drive on the left. Thus traffic rules cannot be decided by the unanimous consent of enlightened and virtuous drivers. Assuming that all good citizens are agreed that the public budget cannot be cut below such and such an amount, it is obvious that the money needed for public purposes can be gathered, without injustice or particular harm, in a diversity of ways. Citizens may, without there being anything wrong with their intelligence or inten-

tion, take diverse stands with regard to such methods of taxation as sales tax, gross income tax, or a combination of both. In military operations, either of two plans of attack may provide a reasonable chance of victory, but defeat is certain if the attacker's power is split between the two plans. Among the most experienced and dependable leaders, some prefer one plan and some the other. There is no reason why they should be unanimous, since each plan, insofar as those things fall under human providence, is a way to victory. Among the many ways of playing a concerto of Bach, several satisfy the requirements of great music, and highly qualified musicians will clash as to how the fourth Brandenburg Concerto should be played. Yet the members of an orchestra cannot be allowed conflicting interpretations of a concerto. In fact, any conceivable instance of common action, if considered in all its modes and particulars, admits of being carried out according to one or another of several methods, all leading to the common good.

Knowledge and Freedom

To the proposition that authority, as the cause of united action, exercises an essential function, a function made necessary not by any evil or deficiency but by the nature of common action, it is currently objected that any multiplicity of ways leading to a common purpose is an illusion that social science, if better developed, would dismiss. The problem involved here is that of choice, and it pertains to the subject of liberty more directly than to the subject of authority.

When the theory of liberty is not enlivened by some sort of ethical enthusiasm, it often is surrounded by a cloud of misgivings, as if liberty could be preserved only by cherished ignorance and should yield to unique determination as soon as the truth is known about the proper way to our end. Indeed, everyone's experience tells of deliberations that bear on illusory as well as genuine means. If proper information comes before decision is made, and excludes the illusory means — the lines of action which, in spite of appearances, do not lead to the end but to failure and perhaps disaster — everything is better in all conceivable respects. Considering that a wholesome simplification takes place whenever an illusory means is ruled out, we sometimes dream of carrying simplification down to the state of unique determinateness, and we like to imagine that in perfect acquaintance with the real state of affairs the lines of action originally listed as means would, with but one ex-

ception, be identified as so many illusions. It is easy to see that this postulate expresses aversion to the mystery involved in free choice as well as to the darkness of contingency. Relations characterized by sheer determinateness, without contingency and without freedom, offer an average type of intelligibility which has been constantly preferred by rationalism. Indeed, any feature of contingency is a restriction on intelligibility, but the world of reality may be such as not to be intelligible in all respects. It is, after all, a question of fact, and we must be ready to accept whatever conclusion is reached by the scientific and philosophic description of the world. Freedom, on the other hand, if there is such a thing, would involve extraordinary plenitude of being, causality and intelligibility. But the more intelligible is not always the more easy to understand. In all scientific disciplines there are admirably simple views and methods which remain inaccessible to all but a very few scholars. Why are these things so hard to grasp? Not because they lack intelligibility, but rather because they are so excellently intelligible that only the best intellects are proportioned to them. With a mind open both to the restricted intelligibility of things contingent and to the secrecy of freedom, it is possible to inquire into the meaning of choice without begging any question. Let the problem be stated in these simple words: Is choice necessarily narrowed down to one genuine and one (or several) ungentle means? Is choice necessarily between one good and one (or several) evils? *Is there such a thing as a choice among goods?* Can there conceivably be several means to an end? In a comparison of agents, should it be said that some are restricted to one or few means and that others have a wide variety of means at their disposal?

As soon as these questions are posed without any prejudice relative to the intelligibility of things, experience supplies the basic answers. Several diets can maintain the health of a healthy man, but a diseased organism may need, as a *sine qua non* of survival, what everyone calls a strict, uniquely determined, diet. An ordinary student, to attain proficiency in mathematics, needs all the complex system worked out by academic societies — teachers, textbooks, treatises, discussions, tutorials — but in the case of genius alternative means make it possible to dispense with much of the academic apparatus. It has been remarked that when a new pedagogical method is tested by a born teacher, success proves nothing, for born teachers are known to achieve success with

almost any method; in order to know how good a method is, it is better to have it tested by an undistinguished teacher who depends heavily on the quality of the method used.

A man trained in one craft and unable to do any other job has to work in uncongenial conditions; the man with many skills can afford to be more particular about the circumstances of his employment. No one would say that the broader choice open to the man with many skills originates in ignorance and illusion; clearly, it results from a greater power and presupposes more and better knowledge. An industrial enterprise with little capital must produce only that which will surely bring immediate returns; the privilege of contributing extensively to diversity and novelty in the market belongs to firms better financed. It is a commonplace of American history that waste of natural resources was determined initially by an acute shortage of manpower. The only ways of development open to a young community placed in natural abundance were the wasteful ones. We judge more severely the habits of waste in those later generations which, owing to great numbers, firmer establishment, more advanced techniques, and many other forms of increased power, have choices that the early settlers did not have. A nation with no navy, a very small army, no financial stature, and declining population, if offered the alliance of a powerful neighbor, has to accept it albeit at the cost of heavy sacrifices and historical resentments; but given great bargaining power, a nation can choose its allies. In all conceivable circumstances, power increases choice. The proper effect of enlightenment, accordingly, is twofold: improved knowledge rules out illusory means and, insofar as it entails greater power, multiplies the genuine ones. To destroy the illusion of a means is not to cut the amplitude of choice, for, insofar as it extends to illusory means, choice itself is but an illusion. In an ideally enlightened community, authority would be spared the unhappy task of directing the common effort, in the darkness of illusion, along a possibly disastrous line. But, inasmuch as an excellent condition of knowledge implies greatly increased power, social science at its perfection would multiply genuine means and broaden real choice. *It would, consequently, increase the need for authority as a factor of united action in the cases where the plurality of the genuine means renders unanimity fortuitous.*

Strikingly, it is a better understanding of freedom which first discloses the essential character of the need for authority in com-

mon action. But why is it that whenever we think of diverse ways leading to the common good we are so strongly tempted to attribute their diversity, and the corresponding variety of preferences, to our ignorance of some relevant features or circumstances? A stubborn objection holds that if men were omniscient, unanimous adherence to the end would necessarily entail unanimity regarding the means. Let us briefly inquire into the cause of this belief.

In all domains of understanding and interpretation, whether trivial or lofty and subtle, we are inclined to transfer the properties of the better known subjects to subjects that are not so well known. This is why Aristotle—or some follower of his—says that it is unreasonable to seek at the same time the science of a subject and the method of this science:⁹ unless the method is known in advance—albeit in the most rudimentary fashion—we shall inevitably force upon the new study dispositions acquired in previous studies, for example, apply to medicine dispositions which proved excellent in mechanics, or consider ethics with the bias of a mind trained in theoretical science.

Notice, at this point, that the things pertaining to cognition are better known than the things pertaining to appetite and volition. Every time we turn to some aspect of appetitive and volitional life, we carry with us frames of mind and schemes of interpretation developed in our endeavor to understand cognitive life. We are inclined to reconstruct appetite after the pattern of cognition. But cognition is not free from deficiency unless it is strictly determinate. If the problem is to know what the things are, nothing is worse than perfect indifference, the state in which a proposition appears just as plausible as its contradictory. Things are somewhat better if one part of the alternative is more probable than the other, but so long as one of the two is not excluded by unqualified necessity, cognition remains defective. With regard to facts and to essences as well, the faculty of choosing, at will, between assent and dissent is not an asset but expresses an entirely negative state of affairs. Accordingly, the understanding of cognition results in a pattern where perfection strictly coincides with uniqueness. But appetite is, in a way, the opposite of cognition, for, whereas the known is attracted into the knower, the lover is attracted toward the beloved, and whereas the true exists in the

⁹ *Met.* 2. 3.995a13. That the treatise classified as Bk. 2, (a) of *Metaphysics* was written by Aristotle himself is questioned by some.

mind, the good exists in the things.¹⁰ This basic contrast reverses the meaning of uniqueness, plurality and indifference, when inquiry moves from cognition to appetite. A plurality of possible assents with regard to one and the same subject evidences failure to attain truth with certainty; the indifference of the uncertain mind is made of inachievement, indetermination, potentiality, passivity. On the contrary, a plurality of means with regard to one and the same end evidences mastery, domination, actuality, activity, superdetermination. The myth of a perfect knowledge which would eliminate authority and liberty rests upon a crude confusion of two kinds of indifference: the passive one, which results from potency and inachievement, and the dominating one, which results from excellence.

An Essential Function of Authority

The existence of a plurality of genuine means in the pursuit of the common good excludes unanimity as a *sufficient* method of steadily procuring unity of action. To achieve indispensable unity in common action, one method is left, which can be described as follows: whether we prefer to live in Washington or in New York, whether we prefer to drive on the right or on the left side of the road, whether we prefer sales tax, gross income tax, or their combination, whether we prefer a richer or a more austere orchestration of Bach, everyone of us, insofar as he is engaged in the common action, will accept and follow, as rule of his own action, one judgment thus constituted into rule for all. This rule of common action may coincide with my own preference, but this is of no significance, for the common rule might just as well be at variance with my liking, and I would be equally bound to follow it out of dedication to the common good, which cannot be attained except through united action. *The power in charge of unifying common action through rules binding for all is what everyone calls authority.*¹¹ It may be a distinct person designated by nature, as in

¹⁰ *Met.* 6. 4. 1027b25.

¹¹ Between the concept of authority and that of law there exist enlightening relations. It is, indeed, perfectly proper to speak of the authority of the legislator, and nothing would warrant the identification of authority with executive power. Many acts of authority assume the form of laws passed by assemblies. However, authority and law evidence opposite intelligible tendencies inasmuch as the more a proposition is expressive of necessity, the more it participates—other things being equal—in the character of law, whereas there is nothing, in the concept of authority, that expresses aversion to contingency. A law rules

the couple and in the family. It may be a distinct person designated by God, as in the cases of Saul and Peter. It may be a distinct person designated by the people, as in the case of David. It may be a distinct person designated by birth and accepted by the people. It may be a distinct group of persons designated by heredity or by election or by lot. And it may be no distinct person or group of persons, but the community itself proceeding by majority vote. The problem of the need for authority and the problem of the need for a distinct governing personnel have often been confused: at this point, it is already clear that they are distinct and that the argumentation which establishes the need for authority, even in a society made of ideally enlightened and well-intentioned persons, leaves open the question of whether some communities may be provided with all the authority they need without there being among them any distinct group of governing persons.

Thus, authority does not have only substitutional functions; in other words, it is not made necessary by deficiencies alone. We know, by now, that in one case at least the need for authority derives not from any lack or privation but from the sound nature

human acts in the capacity of premise, not of conclusion; now, the more a premise is independent of contingency, the more of a premise it is. The first or absolute premises regulating human actions express the absolute necessities intelligibly following upon the rational nature. But authority is perfectly at home in the management of contingency and in the uttering of practical conclusions. A decree which applies a law to a particular and unique situation is no less an act of authority than a law passed by an assembly to establish a principle that can be applied to indefinitely many particular situations. No doubt, this law is already so particularized, and so engaged in contingency as not to be a sheer expression of natural necessity. Yet it retains the character of premise, and calls for further determination in terms of adjustment to contingencies that an assembly cannot deal with. Common usage contrasts government by law and authoritarian government. Both of these expressions are objectionable, and their meaning has to be carefully specified. In a way every government is authoritarian. On the other hand, "government by law" conveys the suggestion that propositions retaining the character of premises may suffice to guide a community in entirely concrete and perhaps unique situations, and this involves the nonsense of a premise which is also an ultimate conclusion. Provided these abusive interpretations are definitely ruled out, it is perfectly correct to use the expression "government by law" when a political system depends as much as possible on premises established by the wisdom of the legislator, and to call "authoritarian" the system of government which gives the few men in the executive power the greatest possible liberty to manage the concrete circumstances by connecting the conclusions of their choice with premises that have no other source than their pleasure, since no positive enactment ever gave these premises any juridical existence.

of things. Given a community on its way to its common good, and given, on the part of this community, the degree of excellence which entails the possibility of attaining the good in a diversity of ways, authority has an indispensable role to play, and this role originates entirely in plenitude and accomplishment. The deficiency theory of authority is given the lie. An ideally enlightened and virtuous community needs authority to unify its action. By accident, it may need it less than a community which, as a result of ignorance, is often confronted by illusory means. But by essence it is more powerful than any community afflicted with vice and ignorance, and as a result of its greater power it controls choices involving new problems of unity which cannot be solved by way of unanimity but only by way of authority.

3

THE FORM AND THE MATTER OF THE COMMON GOOD

Engaged in the pursuit of a common end, we deliberate about ways of insuring the unity of our action. These may be the steady ways of authority or, should it prove impossible to embody the principle of authority in an appropriate agency, the precarious ways of unanimity. But the problem would not arise if we were not already intending in common a certain end. Underlying any problem relative to the unity of common action, there exist problems relative to the end of the action to be united. The next step in the theory of authority concerns the end willed in common, as presupposed by the question of the way to unify action toward this end. Let this problem be posed as follows: granted that authority has an essential part to play in the unifying of action toward the common end, does it have any essential part to play with regard to the common end itself?

The precise vocabulary worked out by Aristotle (*Ethics*. 3.) and improved by Aquinas (i-ii. 6ff.) can supply much valuable clarity. In perfect accord with the best usage of common language, philosophers describe "volition" as the act by which the will adheres to its end. If the end is considered, not absolutely as a thing good to attain, but more precisely as term of a means or series of means, the act of the will is called "intention." "Choice" deals with a diversity of means relative to the thing

intended and willed. Thus, after having established that authority has an essential function in the order of choice and means, we are asking whether it has, by reason of the nature of things and not merely by accident, anything to do with the volition and the intention of the common good explicitly considered as an end.

To say the least, appearances strongly suggest that any function of authority concerned with the end is merely substitutinal. It looks very much as if, in a community made exclusively of enlightened and virtuous persons, the volition and intention of the common good should be fully insured by the qualities of the persons. Whoever disregards the common good is not virtuous but selfish, and whoever is dedicated to genuine virtue is, by the very efficacy of his virtue, ready for any sacrifice that the common good demands. It seems that ideally enlightened and virtuous persons would be adequately related to the good of their community by their enlightened virtue. In societies such as the cities and states of our experience, where selfishness and ignorance prevail, persons have to be constantly directed and often coerced toward the common good. Men of ill will seek their own advantage and ignore the good of all, and many whose will is honest and even generous happen to place the character of common good where it does not belong. But suppose that both ill will and error are removed: the need for authority, insofar as the common good itself is concerned, seems to disappear. Authority, in an ideal community, would have no essential function, except with regard to the unity of common action when there exists a plurality of genuine means.

It sometimes happens that a very simple analysis suffices to bring into focus difficulties hidden by familiar appearances. In a discussion of authority with regard to the *end* of common action, it is decisively important to bear in mind the meaning of the polar opposition between form and content within the object of volition and intention. Consider this object, the end willed (as a thing absolutely good) and intended (as a term of means). It can be willed and intended in two ways. I may will and intend what is good without knowing *what the thing is* that is good. The daily life of a man of good will is made of problems of content stated on the basis of a satisfactory answer to a problem of form. The man of good will, by definition and hypothesis, wills that which is good, and firmly adheres to the form of goodness. If only he knew *what the thing is* in which the form of goodness resides, he would

do the good thing and all would be perfect. There is an evil harmony in the sinful will which adheres to evil things known to be evil — known to bear the form of evil¹² — and there is a blessed harmony in the good will which, for the sake of goodness, adheres to things that are actually good. And between these two harmonies there is the daily problem of the man of good will who indeed adheres to the form of the good but feels uncertain about the thing in which this form resides, in other words, the matter or content of this form.

So far as community life is concerned, the problem of matter and form within the end can be posed as follows: Is it desirable that the common good be willed and intended, both with regard to matter and with regard to form, by private persons acting in a private capacity? In order to be sure that we reach the root of the issue, let us consider the case of a society with no distinct governing personnel. Here are a few hundred farmers who gather periodically into a people's assembly, and this assembly is the only government of their community. Assuming that the order of virtuous intentions obtains, I recognize in each farmer a dual capacity. Between the sessions of the assembly, he is Philip or Bartholomew, a private person, the husband of Ruth or Patricia, the father of these children, and the owner of this particular land unmistakably distinguished by a fence from the rest of the world. His duties are unique. A good neighbor and companion, he wants all fields to bear abundantly; yet he is responsible, in a unique way, for the plowing of the field described as his. A good-hearted man, he is ready to help any child that God places in his path, yet there would be dire subversion of order if he did not show special dedication to the children who are his, and prefer them, in intention and in action, to other children who, though equally lovely, are not in equal degree entrusted to his love.¹³

¹² Evil is a privation, not a form, but this privation is understood after the pattern of a form and cannot be understood otherwise.

¹³ According to a well-known remark of Aristotle, the natural order of excellence may be reversed by a condition of emergency. To philosophize is, absolutely speaking, better than to make money; but for the fellow who is in dire poverty, to get money is better than to philosophize. Likewise, the order of love which requires that, under ordinary circumstances, I should provide my own children with advantages that many other children do not have, also requires that in an emergency — flood, epidemic, war, revolution — I should deprive my own people of goods that are not needed for their survival in order to insure the survival of children who are not mine.

In the relation of man and wife, a dedication unique in all respects is the essence of indissoluble marriage.

When the assembly meets, every citizen is expected to assume a new capacity. A man who yesterday was admired for his industry on his family farm would today be blamed if his devotion did not belong entirely to the community. Between the private and the common welfare, the relation is often one of harmony. But conflicts may arise at any time and a public person, say, a member of the people's assembly, is bound to uphold the public welfare, regardless of how his private interest is affected. For instance, a certain method of taxation, plainly beneficial to the community as a whole, may cause serious difficulty to the kind of enterprise that he is managing. If a member of a popular assembly is known to have opposed a taxation law for no other reason than the threat of increased difficulty for his own enterprise, we consider him, according to the seriousness of the circumstances, either a weak person or a despicably bad citizen. At any rate, this accident of private interest interfering with public service in the discharge of a public function is inconceivable in the community of virtuous and enlightened persons which remains the principal subject of our inquiry. Considering, thus, the citizen of a direct democracy who, by the very fact that there is no distinct governing personnel, is the bearer of two capacities — the public and the private, according as the people's assembly is or is not in session — and assuming, further, that this person acts blamelessly in each capacity, I recognize in him two relations to the common good, and I wonder precisely what difference there is between these two relations.

The problem would certainly be overlooked if we were satisfied with the contrast between the private and the common. Again, this virtuous citizen is dedicated to the common good at all times, whether or not the assembly is in session, and, unmistakably, the difference that we are trying to express concerns, not the common good and its opposite, but two relations to the common good. The private person, inasmuch as he is morally excellent, wills and intends the common good, and subordinates his private wishes to it. He may not know what action the common good demands, but he adheres to the common good formally understood, to the form of the common good, whatever may be the matter in which this form resides; as far as content or matter is concerned, it is his business to will and intend private goods.

But the public person is defined by the duty of willing and intending the common good considered both in its form and in its matter. And because the service of the common good normally involves an arrangement of things private, and sometimes requires the sacrifice of private interests, the subject of the public capacity exercises authority over the private person, whose business it is to look after particular matters.

In spite of appearances, the essence of authority and that of obedience are integrally preserved in a community practicing government by majority vote without any distinct governing personnel. The decisive question is not whether the content or matter of the common good is entrusted to distinct persons; it rather is whether, by reason of the common good's primacy, the volition and intention of *that in which* the common good resides must be expressed by a rule of action binding on all. The citizens of a direct democracy are inclined to boast of having no other masters than themselves.¹⁴ This attitude may mean merely that they like to do without a distinct governing personnel. But the same boastful words may express the will to eliminate, through constitutional contrivance, the essence of authority and that of obedience. The soul of the system is revealed by the interpretation of majority, minority, and opposition. A citizen who, whenever the assembly meets, finds himself in the majority, may believe that he obeys only himself. But how is he going to feel when the majority votes against his preference? If he considers that the law he voted against is just as obligatory, and for the same reasons, as any law that he voted for, he is a law-abiding and obedient citizen for whom personal preference is altogether accidental. But if a person considers himself free from obligation to a law which he opposed, we understand that he has always been a rebel. True,

¹⁴ There are, in the history of mankind, only a few communities governed exclusively by the methods of direct democracy. But every democracy, no matter how important the part that a distinct personnel plays in its operation, embodies direct democracy in some of its political processes. These processes may either pertain to the written constitution, for example, a plebiscite, or to the unwritten one — the influence of public opinion. In all cases the citizens of a democracy are tempted to boast of having no masters except themselves, for they truly exercise much political power besides the electing of their leaders. The United States Constitution mentions two assemblies: the House and the Senate. There is a third one which does not need to be mentioned because its existence is obvious and which could hardly be mentioned in a written document, because of the indefiniteness of its role and power: it is the People of the United States.

he gave no signs of rebellion so long as the law was to his liking; but his later attitude discloses that having his own way has always been for him the thing essential, and obedience to the law a mere appearance.

The Most Essential Function of Authority

Thus, bringing about unity in common action is not, among the functions of authority, the only one which should be described as essential. Again, the problem of how to unify action — whether by unanimity or by authority — arises only on the ground of an already determinate volition and intention of the common good. Such volition and intention involve an antecedent function of authority, and this function, inasmuch as it is relative to the very end of common action, is more essential than anything pertaining to means. *The most essential function of authority is the issuance and carrying out of rules expressing the requirements of the common good considered materially.*

This theory implies that two capacities are normally and desirably distinguished in every community. With reference to the best known case, that is, that of the body politic versus its components — individuals, families, and the like — these capacities have been called public and private. But in the present inquiry they should rather, by the rule of strict appropriateness, be designated as common and particular. Indeed, the capacity thus far called public exists in all communities, whether actually public, like a township, a county, and a state, or private, like a family. On the other hand, we shall soon see that the basic opposition is not between the common and the private but, more precisely, between the common and the particular: for privateness is but one mode of particularity. *The common capacity is defined by a relation to the common good considered not only in its form but also in its matter or content.* As to the particular capacity, it involves a relation to the form of the common good but not to its matter. Clearly, if the particular capacity were related to both the form and the matter of the common good, it would cease to be particular; the problem of authority would disappear, as far at least as the volition and intention of the common good are concerned. The whole theory truly stands or falls upon the answer to this simple question: Is it desirable that there should exist, in every community, persons whose business it is, within the order of material consider-

ation, to look after goods particular rather than after the common good?¹⁵ It almost irresistibly seems that a disposition concerned with the form of the common good but not with its matter is just about half of a virtue. A person determined to serve the common good but unconcerned with the matter of its requirements seems to stop half way, and it looks very much as if a "full measure of devotion" would extend to the matter of the common good as well as to its form.

Let us refer, once more, to a community governed by a majority vote. According to a project under deliberation, a certain road, so far a very quiet one, would be paved and opened to fast-moving traffic. Large families live on this road, and the parents are worried about increased danger to their children. But, in spite of the risk involved, the good of the community demands that the road should be paved, and worried fathers, acting as members of the people's assembly, support the project. By the terms of the preceding description, these good citizens, exercising the capacity of particular persons between the sessions of the assembly, should oppose the project as dangerous to their children, with a firm determination, however, to abide by the decision of the majority. Here, the twofold capacity described in the foregoing seems irrelevant. These citizens, though lovingly concerned with danger to their children, will and intend the form of the common good. Consequently, they refrain from any rebellious act against the decision to pave the road, although they do their best under all circumstances to reduce the danger. *If these good people can do so much, why should they not do a little more* and, without waiting for the emergence of a new capacity at the assembly's session, confess that the road should be paved? The construct of a community made of ideally enlightened and virtuous persons seems to imply, over and above adherence to the common good formally considered, the determinate volition of the things that the common good actually requires or contains. But then, the volition and intention of the common good, both with regard to form and with regard to matter, are adequately guaranteed by

¹⁵ Once more, we are not asking whether society necessarily ought to be divided into a distinct governing personnel, and the governed. When we speak of "persons whose business it is . . . to look after particular goods . . ." we do not exclude the possibility that all these persons should, in another capacity, constitute the agency in charge of looking after the common good.

enlightened virtue. As far, at least, as the volition and intention of the common good are concerned, an ideally perfect community seems able to do without authority.

Thus, according to a plausible hypothesis, the perfection of virtue causes the capacity described as particular to disappear into the common capacity. A single capacity is left, which is altogether relative to the common good. *The particular capacity, by taking in hand the matter of the common good, has indeed become common.* Such transmutation is precisely what was suggested when we voiced the conjecture that excellent citizens, fully prepared to make all sacrifices required by the common good, should take one more step and, without assuming any new capacity, should will and intend the common good materially considered. *It remains to be decided how the common good itself is affected by the disappearance or impairment of the particular capacity.*

The Function and the Subject

But let us first analyze particularity into its main types. Every community exercises several functions — in the case of the state, justice, defense, diplomacy, public works, and the like — and in relation to the whole life of the community each function obviously has the character of a part. But in what specific sense does the notion of particularity apply here? Take, for instance, national defense. It is aimed at protecting all the national territory, all its wealth, all its counties, townships, families, and citizens. This function is altogether relative to the common good, yet it retains the character of a part inasmuch as its object is not the total good of the community but only one aspect of it. The object of a function is a certain aspect of a whole, and this is what defines particularity in the case of the function. The subject whose good is sought may be an individual organism — indeed the concept of function is basic in biology; it may be a person, and it may just as well be a community of any rank and description. Whether the subject considered is an organism, a person or a community, the successful exercise of one function is only an aspect and a part of its good condition; if other functions are defective, disaster is not ruled out. A function may be public in an unqualified sense, as in the case of the functions pertaining exclusively to the body politic, without ceasing to be particular, inasmuch as its object is but one aspect of a complex good.

In sharp contrast to the particularity of the function, a good

may be particular by reason of its subject. Consider the activities involved in the upbringing of a child: taken together, they intend the whole good of the child, not one aspect of it. But because the child is part of the community, his is a particular good. Private communities, as the family, and such public communities as the township, the county, and the units of a federal organization are also related to the larger communities of which they are members as particular subjects. The state is the community which is so complete and self-sufficient that its good is not that of a particular subject—individual, family, township, and the like—but, unqualifiedly, the common good of men assembled for the sake of noble life.

Let us now examine the question of the excellence of the particular in the two ways of particularity just defined. Familiar experiences suffice to show how desirable it is that functions should be clearly distinguished, and that each of them should be exercised with a special eagerness for what is unique about it. It is good for the community that military men be devoted with a passion to national defense, bridge builders to the building of bridges, foresters to the preservation of forests, physicians to public health, and classicists to the study of the classics. The particularity of the function removes confusion and opens the way to the advantages of specialization. It is hardly possible that both the task of building bridges and that of conserving forests should be successfully fulfilled by the same persons; but even if a team happened to be expert both in bridge building and in forestry, a division of social labor would still be necessary with regard to place and time. One reason why we keep re-reading the *Republic* of Plato is that it expresses better than any other book the ideal of a community from which confusion is removed, and in which justice is achieved, through wise division of labor and dedication to specific tasks. A most enjoyable clarity pertains to the distinctness of the function, for every function is relative to an object, and, in human affairs at least, every object is definable. When the object of a social function no longer can be defined, the function itself becomes meaningless: this is when reformers step in. The administration of justice, the conduct of foreign relations, the management of public finances, and the like, are so many functions defined by perfectly intelligible objects.

Since functions are concerned with distinct aspects of the common good, functional diversity causes a need for an agency

relative to the common good as a whole. Bringing about order among functions is the job of this central agency. What ratio of public funds can be allocated to agricultural projects without jeopardizing national defense or public health? This is an issue on which the function of promoting agriculture, the function of defending the national territory and the function of procuring good health conditions have nothing to say, except in purely preparatory and indecisive fashion. Decision pertains to a power which, inasmuch as it is responsible for order among the functions, necessarily controls all of them and commands all the functionaries.

The particularity of the function, as ground of authority, has a negative feature of major significance: it does not, in any essential manner, set limits to the authority that it grounds. In fact, authority is commonly restricted, and often crippled, by the resistance of its functionaries: but this is an entirely accidental occurrence. Such resistance is foreign and opposed to the concept of function. True, it may be held desirable that functionaries be possessed of some autonomy, and it may be a matter of fact that they always are. But their autonomy is caused by a particularity which is not that of the function. This simple remark sums up many products of political theory as well as many facts pertaining to the history of government. Because the functionary, as such, is an instrument, the particularity of the function is a thing that despots do not dread. They know that, all other things being equal, the clear division of social labor into functions increases the efficacy of their power.

Let us now ask whether the particularity of the subject possesses an excellence of its own. No doubt, it helps to remove confusion. A good way to make sure that every farmer knows what piece of land he is supposed to till is to divide the land into homesteads. This is indeed a result of considerable value, and it may constitute an everlasting argument in favor of private ownership. However, the power of removing confusion does not belong to the particularity of the subject in strict appropriateness, since it also belongs to the particularity of the function. A factory where rigorous discipline obtains and whose workers, for the most part, can be easily replaced, has but minimum recourse to the particularity of the subject. The feats of order accomplished by the modern organization of industry have given a new appeal to the old ideal of a state which would keep free from confusion without releasing

the suspicious energies of such powers as privately owned land, privately conducted schools, strongly organized families, and citizens protected by inalienable rights.

The decisive fact is that the particularity of the subject, in all its forms and degrees, involves autonomy. To use a simple example, let us imagine that all the parts of a vast plain, by reason of homogeneity in all relevant respects, produce the same crops. Within such functional unity, farming can be administered according to the diversity of the tasks (plowing, fertilizing, sowing); then it is a public affair, entrusted, say, to a branch of the Department of Agriculture. But the cultivation of this plain can also be entrusted to a multiplicity of farms each of which is governed by its individual proprietor. For the comparison to be meaningful, we must, of course, assume that other things are equal. Under definite circumstances, one system of management may insure a much higher yield than the other. On the assumption that the production is about the same in either system, let us ask whether it is better that the job be done by a multitude of self-ruling agents or by mere instruments of a central agency.

To ask this question is like asking whether there is more perfection in life than in lifelessness, in activity than in mere instrumentality, in plenitude than in emptiness. Clearly, a whole is better off if its parts are full of initiative than if they are merely traversed by an energy which never becomes their own. Much can be learned from the fact that social thinkers and metaphysicians conduct, on the subject of plenitude versus vacuum, parallel dialogues. The book of William James, *A Pluralistic Universe*, forcefully expresses the metaphysical sentiment that genuine plurality, in the world of our experience, is the condition of meaning and plenitude. A totality which does not admit of autonomous parts disappears into the vacuum caused by its imperialistic arrogance. But the particularity of the subject, in the social as well as in the metaphysical world, harbors mysteries that are extremely uncongenial to the rationalistic mind. Whenever it has its own way in social affairs, rationalism exalts the clarity of the function and crushes the particularity of the subject.

To be sure, contingency often makes it impossible to vindicate in an entirely rational fashion the distinction between communities of the same functional type. What reasons could we bring forth if we had to explain why two states or nations remain separated by a borderline instead of merging into one unit? The notion of

natural boundary is not absurd, and sometimes a fence built by nature serves quite reasonably to distinguish one community from another. Spain is south of the Pyrenees Range and France north of it. But in many other cases, the most famous of which is the great East European plain, nations remain stubbornly distinct although they cannot claim any natural boundary. Sometimes language supplies reasonable principles of unity and diversity, but it also happens that people refuse to merge in spite of linguistic unity (the French-speaking Swiss and Belgians do not want to be one nation with the French) and it also happens that the unity of a nation (Switzerland) is in no way jeopardized by diversity of language. After having probed all such causes of unity and diversity let us yield to the accidents of history: for theirs is the final power of decision. Whatever is accidental is, as such, unexplainable, but in the world of action a thing can be significant, worthy, treasurable, without having any character of essentiality or intelligibility: it just is, it has been, it tends to keep being, and this is why it is significant, without any further explanation. The precise location of the borderline between Canada and the United States is, in a number of places, entirely conventional, but, by the decision of history the community centered about Ottawa is something else than the community centered about Washington, D.C. Again, there may be no good reason why the borderline between Colorado and New Mexico should be where it is rather than a few miles farther north or south. Yet it is hardly questionable that the community whose main centers are Colorado Springs and Denver is, by the decisions of history, different from the community whose main centers are Santa Fe and Albuquerque. Any rationalist, if in the position of philosopher-king, would erase the borderline between Colorado and New Mexico and reduce the fifty States to a smaller number of more rational units. Such operations, which would sweep away a great deal of mystery, would also destroy much historical substance and, in a number of cases, leave only deceptive clarity where there used to be historical plenitude. No doubt, existent particularities may be dead remnants and their suppression may prove beneficial. But it also happens that the works of the past, no matter how contingent, are so full of life that their disappearance would involve great destruction. In a profound sense a "survival" is a thing which maintains in the present some of the life which was that of the past. Such life is

not clearly intelligible, for an important part of it results from the successful management of contingent occurrences over a long time.

The Person

It is in the individual subject of human existence that we can best observe the relation between the mysteries of contingency and those of free choice. As a member of a species, distinguished within the species by the material components of his being, a human subject is more properly designated as an individual. Considered as a complete substance which owes to its rationality a unique way of being a whole and of facing the rest of the universe, he is more properly designated as a person. The fortune of "personalism" in the ideologies of our time is clearly traceable to the promises held by the notion of person, as distinct from that of individual, in the working out of difficulties which, though of all times, have assumed extraordinary significance in the last generations. Indeed, the word personalism often stood for doctrines and attitudes that "individualism" would designate with equal or greater accuracy. Such a confusing change in expression bears witness to the power that the idea of person came to possess in minds confronted by problems which, some time before, were not held so obvious and momentous. Many, who would have been satisfied with the language of individualism half a century ago, were necessitated by the spirit of the age to speak a personalistic language. But what is it that caused, in such a large variety of doctrinal contexts, the decline of individualistic rhetoric, and a new attention to the meaning of the person? With due allowance for profound diversities among the so-called personalistic schools of thought, it can be said that the displacement of "individualism" by "personalism" generally expressed the following insights:

(1) As recalled in the foregoing, the philosophy of individualism implies that whatever is called common good is merely useful, that things common are but means, and that the character of end belongs exclusively to the individual. "Means" and "end" must be understood here rigorously: a mere means is a thing which has no desirability of its own and which would not be desired at all if it did not lead to a thing desirable in its own right. The mere means, in other words, the thing that is merely useful, is just traversed by the goodness of the end. To treat the common

good as a thing merely useful becomes the *critical* periods, but as soon as the possibility of a new *organic* period¹⁶ is strongly felt, to represent the common good as sheer utility without any dignity of its own is unbearably paradoxical. Only the pressures and appeals of a critical period can make men blind to the character of the common good as autonomous good, *bonum honestum*, and to the primacy that it enjoys as long as the common and the particular are contained within the same order. When such pressures and appeals have become things of the past, the sense for the eternal worth of the human individual is not necessarily weakened, but why should we keep the language and the ways of a philosophy committed to treating the common good as a thing with no excellence of its own?

(2) Another aspect of classical individualism concerns the role of material causality in human affairs. The features involved belong both to economic and political theory. The individualism of the economists proceeds, in part, from the stubborn belief that the best state of affairs is brought about by the independent operation of ultimate units, the independent money-maker, the individual supplier of labor-force, the individual consumer, the individual organizer, and the like, all moved by the power of individual well-being. Likewise, some democratic polities embody the postulate that what is best for the state is steadily brought about by the solitary determination of its individual components. These polities, famously associated with the teaching of Rousseau and with Jacobinism, strive to maintain the isolation of the citizen. The best state would emerge from the sheer multitude of its citizens and be confronted by nothing but such a multitude.¹⁷

¹⁶ These Saint-Simonian expressions (*Exposition de la doctrine de Saint-Simon*, ed., by Elie Halévy and C. Bouglé [Paris, 1924], p. 127) are used here without the connotations implied by the Saint-Simonian philosophy of historical causality. For the Saint-Simonists, the great facts of change as well as the great facts of permanence in human history are determined by ideas, and especially by religious beliefs. Accordingly an organic period is defined as one "in which all the facts of human activity are classified, foreseen, and set in order by a general theory, and in which the goal of social action is clearly defined." A critical period is one "in which all communion of thought, all common action, all coordination have ceased to exist, and in which society has become nothing else than an aggregation of isolated individuals fighting against each other." The distinction between organic and critical periods remains meaningful without deciding whether the organic and the critical characters are due to beliefs or to factors of another kind, or to a diversity of factors including beliefs.

¹⁷ Proudhon was a firm opponent of democracy so understood. (He called it "democracy" with no further specification.) In his 1848 pamphlet *Solution*

Again, we are dealing here with a disposition marked by the characteristics of the critical periods.

The use of the word *organic*, as in "organic period," suffices to conjure up the danger of attributing to society a unity of *primary* character. Likening society to an organism may be useful as long as we remain in control of our analogies and understand that society is not one after the fashion of an organic body. Its individual members are not organs or cells but primary subjects of human existence. What we need is a concept expressive of the unique way in which an individual exercises membership in a set when the set is a community of intelligent beings. This concept is that of person rather than that of individual. True, the person is sociable by essence and it is capable of playing the role of part (the persons who make up the Senate are parts of the Senate), and the individual, inasmuch as it is a thing "undivided in itself and divided from all the rest,"¹⁸ implies a character of wholeness

of the Social Problem, a subtitle attracts the attention of the philosophers: *Democracy is materialistic and atheistic*. In Jacobin democracy he recognized the traditional picture of the Epicurean universe where all things result from the encounters of particles, without patterns of wholes, without plans and without final causes: "Universal suffrage is a kind of atomism by which the legislator, being unable to make the people speak in the unity of its essence, invites the citizens to express their opinion by heads, *viritim*, just as the Epicurean philosopher explains thought, will, understanding, by arrangements of atoms. This is political atheism in the worst sense of this expression. How could a general thought ever result from the addition of any number of votes?" (A. Lacroix, ed., pp. 62-63.)

A brief elaboration on the concept of materialism will help to understand these confused, but challenging remarks. Let it be said, in general terms, that a materialistic explanation is one which forcibly traces to material causes effects belonging to causes of another description. This is the case whenever the material cause needs to assume the character of a thing in act. What is material is, as such, potential; if, in order to play the explanatory role that it is expected to play, it has to be credited with actuality, explanation is materialistic in a proper sense. Since the parts are the matter of the whole, explanation forcibly follows the line of the material cause whenever effects belonging to the power of the whole are traced to the part. What the words of Proudhon mean is that individualistic democracy, as well as Epicurean physics, credits things considered in the capacity of parts with the ability to bring about the perfections of the whole. Individualism, in its use of material causality as well as in its interpretation of means and ends, pertains to the spirit of the critical periods: when the question is to dispose of the old order, to dissolve traditional setups, to destroy crippling structures, the theory that the greatest good results from the nonintegrated operation of the parts looks congenial enough. But as soon as the possibility of a new organic period is perceived, minds no longer expect so confidently that the perfection of the whole will steadily proceed from the sheer operation of the parts.

¹⁸ *Sum. Theolo.*, i.29.4.

and separation. But when the being which is an individual and a person is considered *as member of a set* (and this is the relevant way of considering it in the theory of society, for the unity of society is that of an ordered set), the concept of person restricts the character of part whereas the concept of individual expresses no such restriction. *As member of a set* the individual is purely and simply a part. But because personality, in every possible connection, expresses a universe of reason and freedom, emphasis on the person implies emphasis on the privileges of this universe. In its most intelligent forms at least, personalism, with all its ambiguities, had the merit of tracing to the unique kind of totality which results from rationality and liberty effects that the individualism of the critical period used to trace to the spontaneity of the part. If atoms were persons, their arrangements would account for many wonders that Epicurean imagination leaves unaccounted for.

(3) Above all, the autonomy of the individual man, as fact of nature and as moral requirement, is incomparably better expressed by the notion of person than by that of individual.¹⁹ Just as it is desirable, in all respects and most precisely in relation to the common good, that the affairs of the state be not managed by the federal power but by the state itself, and the affairs of the county by the county, and the affairs of the township by the township, and the affairs of the family by the family, so it is ultimately desirable that the affairs of the individual man, as long as he is free from important deficiency, be managed by himself. But when the individual man is precisely considered as a being possessed of integrity and rationality, when he is considered as an agent in control of his destiny, when he is considered as an agent which contains its own law not merely by way of natural constitution,

¹⁹ When individuation originates in matter, as it does in all composite substances, man included, to speak of the "autonomy of the individual" involves a degree of inappropriateness. To be sure, individuals are possessed of autonomy, but the principle of their autonomy is not the same as the principle of their individuality. Matter is that which has no law of its own. In a composite substance all that has the character of a law comes from the form. But the form is specific and consequently all the law of the material individual is the law of its species. In order to reach the principle of a norm concerned with what is unique in the individual substance, we have to turn to the concept which results from the union of *completeness* in substantial constitution and *rationality* in specific nature: this is, by the celebrated definition of Boethius, the concept of person. Among the many writings of Professor Maritain on the person, see, in particular, *The Person and the Common Good* (New York, Scribner's, 1947).

but also and principally by way of understanding, voluntariness and freedom, the aspect brought forth is that of personality. On the level of individual existence, autonomy belongs to the person more properly than to the individual. Such greater propriety makes much difference both in terms of explanation and in terms of appeal. The most valuable contribution of personalism is the general theory that the particularity of the human individual, in ultimate contradistinction to that of the function, is a privilege of personality.

Indeed, it is historically absurd to speak of personalism in the singular, as if the various personalistic movements were possessed of doctrinal unity. Endless variety is found in the positive content of their programs, and, whereas each of them is marked by sharp opposition to some general feature of the modern world, the objects of their oppositions may not coincide and may even contrast with each other. Yet there is more unity in the aversions of the personalists than in their assertions, and of all their aversions the most steady concerns the predominance of function in the order of society. If the use of one word to designate such a variety of doctrines, attitudes, inspirations and moods can be justified at all, it should be justified by the central significance, in all personalistic movements, of the conflict between person and function.

The Subject and the Person

Thus, in terms of most essential necessity authority is needed because it is desirable that particular goods should be taken care of by particular agencies. Some of these agencies are defined by their functions, others are constituted by subjects of various kinds. Along the line which goes from the broader to the more narrow, a particular subject may be a state in a federal union, a county in a state, a township in a county, a family in a township. The ultimateness of the individual is accompanied by the emergence of significant features: this whole, the individual man, is possessed of substantial unity, whereas the other subjects, state, township, family, are not. And by reason of its rational nature, this whole, the individual man, is, in a way, all things, adheres to the absoluteness of the good, and thereby achieves mastery over its own acts. Extreme amplitude arises just when the most narrow unit is attained, for it is not in a merely metaphorical sense that a complete substance of rational nature is said to be a universe. As soon as this is understood, a new light

is shed on the particularity of the antecedent subjects. A family, for instance, is not just a smaller group within a township: each of its members is, all things; a family is a whole made of universes, each of which is in control of its own operations — a perfection that no solar system can achieve. Owing to the unique character of totality which belongs to the individual substance of rational nature, the whole system of the subjects is transfigured: a family, a township, a county are particular subjects, they are particular after the fashion of the subject, they are parts indeed, but of these parts the ultimate components are wholes which in a way comprehend all things. At all levels of human association the presence of the person causes the energies of totality, rationality, and liberty to be present.

Looking again at the series of the particular subjects, but from the opposite standpoint, let us now remark that the most particular of them, the person, comes to exist, by virtue of its own sociability, in subjects that are less and less particular, up to the level of a community describable as complete.²⁰ With regard to the social character of the person, much confusion would be spared if some attention were given to the difference between (1) sociability as such and (2) the tendency to exist in a society as a part in a whole. To be sure, the notion of person expresses wholeness and opposes the character of part, just as the notion of freedom expresses dominating indifference and opposes contingency, and just as the notion of being expresses actuality and opposes potency. But just as finite being cannot exist without an admixture of potency, and just as our freedom cannot exist without harboring a passive indifference, so the person of man, by reason of all the limitations which place it at an infinite distance from absolute personality, demands to exist in a community as a part in a whole. Yet, certain features of sociability belong to the human person *qua* person, and in all the system of human relations, nothing is more determining, more decisive, more distinguishing and more final than the acts traceable to the sociability of the person considered as such. In the small area of concentrated energy where these acts take place, the disinterestedness of tendencies and the other-centeredness of needs are more than facts of nature:

²⁰ It is obvious that no human community is unqualifiedly complete, but insofar as the most comprehensive of our communities remains incomplete, we keep struggling toward something beyond the least incomplete of the existent communities.

they involve a commitment of the self in its distinct existence. No doubt, disinterested tendencies and other-centered needs are present in animals, but so long as the reason is not at work the individual agent contributes only a tendency toward its own satisfaction. Disinterestedness and other-centeredness are contributed by nature; in other words, they are caused by a dynamism antecedent to individual activity. The experience of human disorder shows that a tendency which, by nature, is disinterested and which, in fact, serves another subject, may involve no generosity on the part of the agent. Thus, some mothers love their children in a selfish way; out of selfish love they would do many things beneficial to the child, expose themselves to great dangers and inflict upon themselves great sacrifices. Here, other-centered needs are satisfied and some acts demanded by disinterested tendencies are elicited. But the way of acting remains interested and self-centered. Effects of generous love are brought into existence without generosity. Much is given, and yet action does not *proceed by way of gift*. When the devotion of a mother to her child bears these characteristics, it is commonly interpreted as an animal passion, and thereby we mean that it is nature — that is, a dynamism antecedent to reason and voluntariness — which places the effect of love in another rather than in the acting self. It is only where reason, voluntariness, and free choice are at work that the subject takes care of transcending its subjectivity: then actions that are gifts also *proceed by way of gift*. Such disinterestedness, which concerns both the content and the ways of action, originates in rationality, but inasmuch as it implies the actual transcending of the self by itself, it is traceable, in strict appropriateness, to the way of subsisting and to the way of acting which belong to a complete substance of rational nature. In short, it is traceable to personality. Qualities are transcended and the relation of friendship is established on its true basis. As long as it is directed to qualities, friendship remains uncertain: it achieves complete genuineness only when it exists between person and person, regardless of what happens to the qualities of the beloved. Then, the question *why* one loves is best answered — if this can be called an answer — by pointing to what is unique and unutterable about a person. This state of affairs is powerfully described in a celebrated essay of Montaigne. “If I am entreated to say why I loved him, I feel that this cannot be expressed except by answering ‘Because it was he, because it was I.’ Beyond all my discourse

and whatever I can say distinctly about it, I do not know what unexplainable and overwhelming force is instrumental in such a union."²¹ In all likelihood Pascal was commenting on Montaigne when he wrote these words:

But if one loves another one because of his beauty, does he love him? No: for smallpox, which kills the beauty without killing the person, will put an end to love. And if one loves me for my judgment, for my memory, does one love me? No, for I can lose these qualities without losing myself. But where is this self, if it is neither in the body, nor in the soul? and how would it be possible to love the body and the soul, except for these qualities, which do not constitute the self, since they are perishable? should one love the substance of the soul of a person abstractly, and regardless of the qualities in it? that cannot be, and that would be unfair. Thus, one never loves any person, but only qualities.²²

The last sentence will be misunderstood unless it is held to express the sorrowful perplexity of a man who does not see the answer to a question that he has stated with extreme keenness. Pascal knows that the object of genuine love cannot be anything else than the self. Then, perhaps with some bitterness, he turns to the fact that people are liked and loved because of their qualities, which seems to imply that they never are loved genuinely and that they are bound to remain unhappy. Both in terms of natural possibility and in terms of justice, he sees no way out of this fateful state of affairs. Apparently, he is not unaware of the difference between "being an object of love," and "being a ground of love"; on the one hand, he speaks of loving a person *because of* his beauty, *for* his judgment, *for* his memory; on the other hand, he speaks of loving qualities, not persons. To get more out of the distinction between ground and object of love, let us see in what sense friendship can make itself independent of its own grounds. Indeed, the only thing that human love cannot do is to create out of nothing the goodness, the desirability of its object. Divine love alone causes the beloved to be good, independently of any goodness antecedent to love. In order to be an object for the love of a creature, a thing must already be good: in that sense it is true that no one is loved or liked by his fellow man except for his qualities. But, although many of these qualities are subject to destruction — the

²¹ *Essays*, Bk. I, ch. 27.

²² *Pensées*, frag. 323, Modern Library (New York, 1941), p. 109.

first example of Pascal is beauty — a human being will never be totally devoid of qualities. There will always be in him a ground, or a multiplicity of grounds, for disinterested love. Even though a lady has been loved for her beauty, smallpox does not necessarily cause her to be neglected. Under the worst of circumstances, the excellence of human nature, considered in actual existence and in relation to its end, would still be a perfect ground for loving a person without measure. And this excellence of man becomes an infinitely more powerful ground of love when man is considered in the mystery of his supernatural relation to God. Pascal seems to have missed, at least in the present fragment, this ability of love to transcend qualities and be concerned with persons. But without such ability, the other-centered needs which bind men together would be sheer facts of nature and in no way pertain to reason and freedom. Friendship would be impossible. And civic virtue would be impossible.

To sum all up, let us imagine, again, that the members of a community, in a supreme act of boundless dedication, resolve to will and intend, under all circumstances, the matter of the common good as well as its form. By this resolution the particular capacity is abolished: from now on, it will be up to the common capacity to take care of the most particular business.

As far as the function is concerned, the disappearance of the particular capacity results in a loss of order, and among the forms which make up order those are more directly and seriously damaged which are rational in character. As far as the subject is concerned, the disappearance of the particular capacity entails also a loss of order, and this damage is greater where order is mostly made of historical settlement. If the particularity of the subject alone were impaired, and its ordering power transferred to the function, as in the *Republic* of Plato, whatever is historical in the arrangement of the state would be replaced by a rational disposition, and this would make a great deal of difference, for any impairment of particularity, in the case of the subject, entails a loss of autonomy.

It is the excellence of autonomy which vindicates the particularity of the subject and whatever forms of authority are needed for the preservation of this particularity. Familiar contrasts are transcended, authority and autonomy do not conflict with each other and do not restrict each other. They cause and guarantee one another. But no rebel perceives the great unity, the great peace

which obtains at this very deep level. Autonomy implies the interiority of the law, a condition which, for human agents at least, is not native, but has to be achieved through arduous progress. Rebels hate the sacrifices that the interiorization of the law requires. It is bad enough for them that the law should exist outside man, and hover around after the fashion of a threat. Autonomy will never lead them to the understanding of authority, for their notion of autonomy is itself a counterfeit.