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Cicero and The Politics of The Public Orthodoxy

OUR immediate topic: the meaning of what we shall call "public orthodoxy" in the political philosophy of Marcus Tullius Cicero. Our objective: to throw light on the meaning of public orthodoxy in political philosophy in general. We shall investigate Cicero's position on the issue, that is to say, with an eye primarily to its possible usefulness in the resurrection and reconstruction of politics as *scientia*, which is rendered necessary today by the theoretical decay into which that science has fallen under insistent pressures from positivism.

Positivism denies to the concept of public orthodoxy, in effect, any theoretical meaning at all. It reduces public orthodoxy to a factual *datum*; one, moreover, which cannot be penetrated scientifically because it is based upon an irrational *charisma*—the study of which, we are told, belongs properly to the sociology of religion or to the psychology of the collective unconscious.

Clarification and defense of the concept of public orthodoxy as a concept pertaining integrally to politics as science, we shall

contend, is crucial both to an understanding of Cicero's teaching and to an understanding of the very meaning of political science.

Let us provisionally define the public orthodoxy as that tissue of judgments, defining the good life and indicating the meaning of human existence, which is held commonly by the members of any given society, who see in it the charter of their way of life and the ultimate justification of their society.

This provisional definition, it might be objected, raises more problems than it solves. Our reply must be that this is the classical role of a provisional definition within Western logic: to *name* a reality simply by pointing at it, in order that that reality may be brought within the scope of the human intelligence for the sake of scrutiny and ultimate clarification. By pointing at a thing, we make that thing a *subject* of a future judgment, a judgment potentially scientific in nature. And the present essay proposes, *inter alia*, to give to the subject "public orthodoxy" a predicate—a predicate distilled by the Roman experience as understood and thought through by Cicero. That predicate will by no means exhaust the issue at hand; but it will, we think, make it more intelligible to the student of political philosophy.

LET us notice, to begin with, that there can be a purely *legal* "orthodoxy," in terms of which the members of a community merely agree upon the political instruments that are to govern them—for example, the formal orthodoxy that unites most members of the Conservative and Labour parties in Great Britain today, which is a set of common convictions concerning the "goodness" of a bicameral parliamentary system under a ceremonial and symbolic monarch. Such a legal

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"orthodoxy" is certainly a constituent part of the "way of life" of most societies; but it cannot be simply *identified* with that way of life, and it is, therefore, a more restricted topic than ours. As Professor Leo Strauss puts it, "way of life" is a rough translation of the Greek *politeia*, which means the "character" or tone of a community, and is itself dependent upon "what the society regards as most respectable or most worthy of admiration."¹ In classical political philosophy an aristocratic republic, tempered by monarchical and democratic elements, was considered the best form of government because the urban *gentleman*, whose wealth rested on the land, was considered, for purposes of government, the highest type of human being. The excellence of the urban gentleman, in turn, was both measured and created by his allegiance to the institutions of the City, the highest of which were the religious rites that propitiated the gods and thus guaranteed their continued providence over the *politeia*. The aristocratic values enshrined in this class were regarded, accordingly, as the ideals of the *politeia* at large, and acceptance of these "values," and the commitments they involved, constituted the public orthodoxy of the classical society.

Hilaire Belloc detailed a similar public orthodoxy for the England that emerged from the Whig triumph over the Stuart kings and that endured well into the present century—that is, the public acceptance of the *gentleman* as the standard of excellence and as the embodiment of what Britain stood for.² As Belloc argued, with his characteristic irony, a cad might in the long run stand a better chance for salvation than a gentleman, but to suggest that this theological consideration ought to alter the fabric of English society would be unthinkable. Writing far earlier than Belloc, in a vein that might shock those who find "Machiavellianism" in every blunt statement of political ends, Lord Bolingbroke in his famous letter to Sir William Wyndham justifying his political role in the months preceding and following the death of Queen Anne—candidly stated that he and his men, representing as they did the "landed party" of the country gentry, the still powerful yeomanry, the older aris-

toocracy, and the Church of England, considered it only "natural" that they should seize power and exercise it for their own ends against the new financial and commercial aristocracy represented by the Bank of England.³ When Bolingbroke wrote, the English *politeia* was still rural and aristocratic, rather than urban and aristocratic; still agrarian and Christian, rather than commercial and latitudinarian; and the defense of the existent *politeia* seemed to Bolingbroke as absolute and unavoidable a duty as the defense of England itself: England and its *politeia* or way of life, were, for him, one and the same thing. That Bolingbroke himself was neither Christian nor "rural" illuminates rather than obscures his grasp of the meaning of the public orthodoxy as defined here, of a standard of values maintained publicly as ideals even if often sinned against in practice.

THE *politeia*, then, is something more fundamental than "the Laws." Cicero locates the study of "the Laws" in a hierarchy of science which *first* answers the question as to the best regime—as Cicero does by identifying it concretely with the Roman Republic. The Laws must fit the *politeia*, not the *politeia* the Laws: what is just in the best society might be highly unjust in a less perfect society; what is just for a free man might well be crying injustice if done to a slave. Because it is the source of all Laws, though capable of being articulated in law and governmental institutions, the *politeia* raises issues that are prior to those of law and governmental institutions. To what we, following Professor Strauss,⁴ call "regime," T.S. Eliot applies the term "culture"—as when he writes that if bishops and darts do not belong equally to British culture, they nonetheless equally belong!⁵ What we "point" to, in a word, is that matrix of convictions, usually enshrined in custom and "folkways," often articulated formally and solemnly in charter and constitution, occasionally summed up in the creed of a church or the testament of a philosopher, that makes a society The Thing it is and that divides it from other societies as, in

1. Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago, 1953) p. 137.

2. Hilaire Belloc, *The Nature of Contemporary England* (London and New York, 1936), *passim*.

3. *The Works of the Late Right Honourable Henry St. John, Lord Viscount Bolingbroke* (London, 1809), vol. 1, pp. 8-11.

4. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, pp. 136-137.

5. T. S. Eliot, *Notes towards a Definition of Culture* (New York, 1949), p. 30.

human thought, one thing is divided always from another.

That is why we may (and do) speak intelligibly of a Greek, a Roman, or an American "way of life." The nominalism that would deny meaning to these phrases might conceivably be defensible, to be sure, if it restricted itself to borderline cases, such as, say, the Bavarian and the Austrian way of life. But it renders itself absurd when it attempts to deny any essential distinction between, for example, societies like the Chinese and the British, because the denial then becomes a denial of what is *evidently* true. The serious political philosopher simply cannot converse with the nominalist on this primitive level; all the less because there is no way in which we can prove the evident, no way in which we can demonstrate strictly that what is evident is evident. What replaces argument on this level is the ability, pure and simple, to see what is *there* to be seen. We must, therefore, draw a distinction between the scientific elaboration of the social disciplines and that intuitive grasp of a cultural complexity which itself precedes all science and, in truth, makes science possible. In fine, the denial of meaning, of intelligibility, to the terms *regime*, *politeia*, "way of life," culture, cannot be refuted rationally because the source of the denial is an intelligence and a sensibility blunted to the historically and socially given; and if the principle of contradiction is the unquestioned point of departure for metaphysics, then the existence of the *politeia* is the unquestioned point of departure for political philosophy.

Should it be objected here that we are labouring the obvious, our reply must be that labouring the obvious is necessary because the *denial* of the obvious regarding these points has been and is laboured constantly elsewhere, in the political literature inspired by positivism, which refuses to touch the question of the *politeia* because the *politeia* enshrines an orthodoxy, and because an orthodoxy is composed of what the positivists call "value judgments," which are precisely what the positivists tell us that political science is *not* about.

The issue may be elucidated further as follows: the *politeia*, in the terminology of Eric Voegelin, is a "cosmion" of meaning illuminated from within by and for the members of a society. Enshrining as it does convictions concerning the existence of God or of the gods, the good life, and the destiny of man and of society, the *politeia* can ultimately be defined only in ontological terms, be they strictly religious,

strictly metaphysical, or a combination of the two. These convictions can be understood, therefore, only on their own terms, terms that are by definition theological and metaphysical. Thus positivism's refusal to admit within the temple of political science judgments of a philosophical and theological nature prevents it from coming to grips with any *politeia* whatsoever. In order to understand a *politeia*, we must think through its ultimate philosophical presuppositions; and the thinking must be *thinking*, not mere reporting. If, therefore, we are denied the right to exercise our philosophical and theological intelligence when functioning as political scientists, the unavoidable result is that while we can understand a *politeia* in our capacity as philosophers or theologians, we can never do so in our capacity as political scientists. In short, a *polis* can never be understood by the *science* of politics!



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THE positivist tries to escape from the horns of this dilemma, but his maneuver only succeeds in going him the more. I can, he insists, understand a public orthodoxy as "fact," but I cannot criticize it as "value"; to attempt the latter would be to fall into "subjectivism." What he fails to see is that if the phenomenon in question be a judgment of value, a judgment that bears integrally upon the meaning and destiny of human life, then the understanding (for every critique presupposes understanding of the criticized) of that judgment *as it objectively is* involves understanding it *as value*. And the so-called refusal to fall into "subjectivism" is itself subjectivism because it converts what is in fact value into disemboweled "fact," and

so blocks on principle that which it originally sets out to do—namely, to understand the judgment as objectively *there*, as “fact.” There is something radically wrong with the use currently being made of the distinction between judgments of “fact” and judgments of “value,” an epistemological blunder which has prevented contemporary political science from coming to terms with the first indisputable principle of its own discipline—that is, the existence of the *politia* as a cosmos of meaning ultimately metaphysical and theological in structure—the existence, in short, of the public orthodoxy. If, then, Cicero can help us understand the meaning of a public orthodoxy, he can do so only if we are prepared to *philosophize* with him. Which we can do only if we exorcize the notion that “value judgments” are never “scientific.”

In classical and medieval philosophy, the *subject* is nothing more than—merely—the thing presented to the intelligence; the *object* is the intelligible light under which the subject is understood—that is, the subject as “objectified” in this or that fashion. There is, in other words, no “split” between subject and object: what we have, rather, is an intelligible relation between (in Aristotelian terms) a *potency* and its *act*: the subject is *potentially* “objectifiable” in any given number of ways; it is *actually* “objectified” in single judgments, in each of which the intellect predicates meaning or intelligibility of the subject—that is, asserts that what it understands of the subject actually *exists* in the subject.⁶ The contemporary use of the terms “subject” and “object” is, in consequence, far removed from the classical usage and the doctrine that underlies it—so far, that we can fairly speak of the meanings as having been reversed. The objective, in the classical and medieval sense, is not only “subjective” in the modern sense, but *more* subjective in the modern sense than the “subjective” itself in the classical and medieval sense. The “objective” belongs properly to the *mind*; it is the subject as *thought* in this or that way. Similarly, the “subject” in the classical and medieval sense is more “objective” in the modern sense than is the objective in the classical and medieval sense. For the “subject” is the *thing* “extramentally existing,”—that is, in independence of the mind.

6. For further treatment of this point, see Frederick D. Wilhelmsen, *Man's Knowledge of Reality* (New York, 1956), pp. 101-157.

Now, the separation of subject and object, which begins as early as the fourteenth century, reaches its apotheosis in German idealism. For it, the human spirit is the sole *subject* in a world of *objects*, and brings out of its own depths *values*, proper to itself, that are duly imprinted upon the world like seals upon wax. But the decay of idealism did not restore the *status quo ante*; rather, it left intact the subject-object dichotomy, and so prepared the way for what we know today as the positivist banishment of values to an interior and irrational world, the Freudian cave of the psyche, a reservoir of demonic and charismatic forces that has nothing to do with the daylight world of “facts”—a world that belongs properly to “science,” which enumerates the facts and classifies them.

In classical and medieval philosophy, the political depends on the metaphysical, as we may see most clearly in Aquinas. For Aquinas, the “ought” is consubstantial with the fullness of the “is”; it is the Good *proper* to man. The Good, viewed most broadly, is that which can *perfect*; that which can perfect, however, can do so only to the degree to which it is perfect in itself; things are perfect in themselves to the degree to which they are in act, and things are in act to the degree to which they are, because existence (*esse*) is the act of all acts and the perfection of all perfections.⁷ It follows that the Good is rooted in being itself, and is, in truth, the fullness of being, of existence. Thus, Aquinas can go on and say that the *ratio boni* belongs to the *ratio esse*: not only is there no discrepancy between the Good and the Is; the Good is, we repeat, the *fullness* of the Is, its flowering into perfection—into an actuality fully perfective and desirable, lovable. Obligation, be it personal or social, is not the command of a *deus ex machina*, but is the in-built dynamic push towards perfection which is man's act of existing and within which is inscribed his humanity. And his humanity is itself the structural limit and therefore the determination of his existential act.

We recapitulate: the root of all intelligibility is being; the act of being is existence; the Good is the fullness of existence. Therefore, the Good is eminently knowable, and from knowledge of the Good there can flow, given a will rectified in the

7. St. Thomas' most celebrated passages dealing with existence are to be found in *De Potentia Dei*, Q. 7, a. 2, ad. 9. The *hoc quod dico esse* clearly shows the importance that he attaches to it.

good proper to a man, the life of virtue itself.⁸ That is the beginning of wisdom in the order of politics, and it has been lost to positivism because the latter has not given itself the pains to master the inheritance that it presumes, out of its ignorance, to supplant.

WE have, up to now, fixed attention on the positivist objection to scientific penetration of the public orthodoxy. We could equally well have discussed the issue, however, from the standpoint of either historicism or existentialism. With respect to the public orthodoxy the three doctrines coincide materially, for all that they move from distinct theoretical positions. The denial of a properly theoretical dimension to the public orthodoxy—this is the point towards which we have been moving—reduces itself, on the one hand, to a positivism that must accept any old orthodoxy on the grounds that it is politically viable, that it is simply given. But that denial may reduce itself, similarly, to a system that identifies transcendent meaning with *historical* factuality, even if this factuality be only an irrational charisma. And it may reduce itself, finally, to a position that justifies the public orthodoxy on the grounds of its *brute* factuality. Theoretically speaking, positivism, historicism, and existentialism come here to one and the same thing, and if we tend to ignore this it is because the three are the existential representatives of three distinct dynamisms within history: positivism, today the ally of liberal democracy in America and yesterday, through the pen of Maurras, the ally of absolutism; historicism, the ally of the marriage of idealism and nationalism within the Germanies and of its progeny; and existentialism, the ally of the counter-revolution against the bankruptcy of nineteenth-century rationalism and liberalism in all its forms.

In sum, the denial that propositions concerning the good life and the end of man have a trans-immanent validity leads to the identification of the content of those propositions with a factual *datum*, a given, whose meaning and justification does *not* transcend its factuality. And this is equally true whether the factuality be termed "the useful" (as in pragmatism),

8. Etienne Gilson, *Le realisme methodique* (Paris, 1935). This, Gilson's *vade mecum* for any youth aspiring to philosophical realism, lays down the following as a cardinal principle: Never speak of "values," speak always of "goods" or of "the Good."

"the historic" (as in historicism), or "the national inheritance" (as in German existentialism's flirtation with National Socialism); in each case justice and law are conjured away in the name of the relevant factuality, and the ontological must be subordinated, theoretically, to the political—with, in all three cases, the same existential consequences: subordination of both church and intellectual freedom to the State; reduction of transcendent truth to existential truth; the pressing of God into the service of man.

Now, this three-headed refusal to face the issue of a public orthodoxy on properly theoretical grounds, however interesting historically, would lack a properly philosophical interest but for this: the three positions—positions that dominate in varying degrees the academic world within the West—do possess a theoretical dimension, do represent an attempt to come to grips philosophically with a genuine political problem. The no-longer-tacit assertion that the public orthodoxy is the central *fact* around which a society's greatness and even existence must be organized, be that "fact" the American myth of democracy (which is capable of being exploited rationally and scientifically, as in Dewey) or be it the French myth of the *ancien regime* (which can be exploited rationally and scientifically by a Maurras), points to a profound truth, as disturbing as it is unavoidable: *the public orthodoxy* is, after all, *useful*. Not only can society not avoid having a public orthodoxy; even when it rejects an old orthodoxy in the name of "enlightenment," "progress," "the pluralist society," "the open society," and the like, it invents, however subtly, a new orthodoxy with which to replace the old one. As Aristotle is always at hand to remind us, only gods and beasts can live alone—man, by nature, is a political animal—whose very political life demands a *politeia* that involves an at least implicit code of manners and a tacit agreement on the meaning of the good life and, therefore, on the meaning of man within the total economy of existence. Without this political orthodoxy—*itself* involving both a metaphysics (and we must never forget that the denial of the metaphysical is itself a metaphysical proposition) and a theology sketched at least in broad outline—respect for the state withers; contracts lose their efficacy; the moral bond between citizens is loosened; the State opens itself to enemies from abroad; and the *politeia* sheds the sacral character without which it cannot long endure. The public orthodoxy

implies, that is to say, a commitment to metaphysical propositions whose claim to acceptance cannot be mere political utility or historical sanction, but the very structure of things as they are in themselves. And this poses a genuine problem: to accept those propositions on existentially political grounds is not really to accept them at all; while if they are not accepted, the political order decays. And we run up hard against the paradox: the political order can be served politically only if its ultimate foundations are *not* accepted on political grounds! Is this perhaps the apparently insoluble dilemma between whose horns man has always been trying to escape?

Such a dilemma certainly faces any man who is aware both of the demands of the transcendent and of society, any man whose soul is turned out towards the truth of things as they are (that is, apart from political considerations), but also faces his responsibilities as a member within a society that incarnates a way of life involving a certain (at least apparent) commitment to the Absolute. Such a man, unable or unwilling to reduce ultimate meaning to utility or to historical factuality, must either find ultimate meaning within his society's orthodoxy, or face up to two alternatives: to seek meaning *beyond* that orthodoxy, and preach this New Truth to the citizenry — thus corrupting the bonds that have hitherto kept his society in being; or to seek meaning beyond the public orthodoxy but keep the New Truth to himself, thus living a public lie. He must choose between rebelling against his society and sinning against the light. His dilemma is terrible, since *either* choice is evil: to destroy an essentially decent society is wrong, even if that society repose upon theoretically erroneous foundations; but to fail to speak the truth when the truth demands that it be spoken is wrong, too. Whatever our hypothetical citizen-philosopher does or fails to do is, on the face of it, evil — at least within the context we have proposed, within the circle we have drawn. If political theory can break this circle it can do so only by exploring it carefully, for the circle captures the insights alike of positivism, historicism, and existentialism, along with those of the classical tradition that modernity in all its forms would jettison.

II

NOW, the citizen-philosopher we have sketched above is one of the giants of the Western tradition, Cicero; and we be-

lieve that after following him as he walks around the circle we have drawn we may be able to do what we have proposed, namely: to give a predicate, a meaning, an intelligibility, to the subject of the public orthodoxy, a light that may lead us beyond the hideous dilemma with which we are confronted: betrayal of the light or betrayal of the community.

Let us speak first of the setting in which Cicero places the opening passages of his *De Legibus*:⁹ a long summer day in Cicero's estate at Arpinum, that Arpinum which he considered his "second fatherland," where grew the Marian Oak, planted not by the hand of man but by the voice of poetry. The reader will remember the grave and eloquent discourse in which Cicero sets forth the doctrine that the whole universe is "one commonwealth of



which both gods and men are members."¹⁰ That which binds men to the gods, especially to the "supreme god," is reason itself, the most divine attribute "in all heaven and earth."¹¹ And reason, Cicero goes on, implies *right* reason: "Since right reason is Law, we must believe that men have Law also in common with the gods." Further, "those who share Law must also share Justice; and those who share these are to be regarded as members of the same commonwealth."¹² For Cicero the commonwealth is not a cosmological but an ontological reflection of the universe. The universe itself is an order of reason and law and therefore a commonwealth in its own right.¹³ Seeking the roots of law and jus-

9. *Laws*, I, i (beginning).

10. I, vii (end).

11. I, vii (middle).

12. I, vii (middle).

13. I, vii (end).

tice deep within virtue itself,¹⁴ Cicero asserts that virtue "is nothing else than Nature perfected and developed to its highest point."¹⁵ Penetrating further, he lays it down as a first principle that although penalties in fact often do keep men from injustice, that which ought to make them just should be nature itself. He thus attempts to disengage the concept of justice from brute factuality and to root it in the structure of nature.¹⁶ He comes to grips, so to speak, with positivist and historicist contentions (as we know them) when he affirms that "the most foolish notion of all is the belief that everything is just which is found in the customs or law of nations."¹⁷ That is, he separates the concept of justice from its historical incarnations, and holds that "Justice is one; it binds all human society, and is based on one Law, which is right reason applied to command and prohibition. Whoever knows not this Law, whether it has been recorded in writing or not, is without Justice."¹⁸

Let us be quite clear as to what Cicero is doing here: he is defending the *naturalness* of justice against the historicists and utilitarians and positivists of his own day. According to Cicero, the doctrines that he is attacking coincide in insisting that the sanction of history gives to the law its usefulness; that history has tested the Laws and found them good, and good because useful to the preservation of the State. He is even willing to use the argument from utility *against* the utilitarians, and, by extension, against the historicists:

But if Justice is conformity to written laws and national customs, and if, as the same persons claim, everything is to be tested by the standards of utility, then anyone who thinks it will be profitable to him will, if he is able, disregard and violate the Laws. It follows that Justice does not exist at all, if it does not exist in Nature, and if that form of it which is based on utility can be overthrown by that very utility itself.

As far as Cicero is concerned, we see clearly, the historicists and the pragmatists are one and the same crowd, at least as regards the central issue. If the former

14. I, viii (middle).

15. I, viii (middle).

16. I, xiv (beginning).

17. I, xv (beginning).

18. I, xv (middle).

maintain that written and national custom gives the law its sanction and imposes upon us the obligation to observe the law, the latter maintain that the very existence of the law, linked with my existence under the law, makes it expedient that I obey the law. The unexpressed premise is obvious: to disobey the law would be useless to me since, willy-nilly, I find myself subject to the law. Exposing the fallacy of this argument, Cicero points to the clear and cynical truth that a man can disobey a law not profitable to him if he thinks that disobeying would be "useful" to him. Were utility itself the very ground of law, it would follow that laws not useful (read: useful to him) could be overthrown by the very principle that establishes them. And Cicero's conclusion is lucidly expressed: "Justice does not exist at all, if it does not exist in Nature."¹⁹

Now, on the surface, this argument against utilitarianism itself does seem to be utilitarian and pragmatic in structure. Justice will go down if justice is based on utility alone. Why not, then, accept the conclusion and *let justice go down*? Why *not* accept a political jungle? Cicero apparently considers the answer self-evident, though he never tells us, in so many words, why he does. But however that may be, his apparently utilitarian treatment of the issue indicates sufficiently the ontological springs of his thought. Without justice, "where will there be a place for generosity, or love of country, or loyalty, or the inclination to be of service to others or to show gratitude for favours received? For these virtues originate in our natural inclination to love our fellow-men, and this is the foundation of Justice."²⁰ The key word, of course, is "natural." The ground of justice is the ultimate character of nature, and a challenge to nature is a challenge to the very structure of reality. The Ciceronian call to virtue, though fundamentally Platonic, is one with the Stoic insistence that virtue is nothing other than nature itself perfected through right reason.²¹

19. I, xv (middle).

20. I, xv (end).

21. Paul Tillich has brilliantly demonstrated the Stoic identification of the ontological and the ethical in *The Courage to Be* (New Haven, 1952), especially pp. 9-20, 23-26. In Stoicism, he argues, the ethical imperative is one with being itself. To neglect or deny such imperative would be to fall into non-being, into Nothing, the ultimate enemy both of the human spirit and of reality itself.

But these same philosophical considerations, on which Cicero bases the natural foundations of justice, catch up also the religious foundations of the State. If Justice is not founded in nature, "not merely considerations of men but also rites and pious observances in honour of the gods are done away with." And he hastens to state the reason: "For I think that these ought to be maintained, not through fear, but on account of the close relationship which exists between man and God [sic]."22 The reasoning, in other words, harks back to Cicero's opening observations on the grand community of nature, which links man and the gods together in a commonweal as broad as the universe itself. Were justice not one with that nature in which both man and the gods share, then the Laws and the customs of society would not join man to the divine in the intimate bond that is suggested by the very word "religion."

THE argument thus advanced is simply a corollary of Cicero's main discourse, but this corollary leads us into the heart of the problem: it is not only that the Laws receive their sanction from nature; the religious rites of the State receive *their* sanction from nature as well. The theoretical issue could not be drawn more clearly: the religious rites, as also the public orthodoxy they enshrine, are sanctioned by the naturalness of justice; justice is necessary for the preservation of the State; whence it follows that the public orthodoxy *can* be maintained on utilitarian grounds: the law of nature demands the maintenance of the religious rites and observances *for the good of the State*. Cicero, we perceive, refuses to use the argument from utility to establish the naturalness of justice, but does not hesitate to use it to establish the naturalness of the rites. The philosophical precedence of nature and its law over religious convictions and the observances demanded by them forces us to base the latter on the former.

But why, we might and indeed must ask, are the rites of Rome so necessary to the well-being of the State? Here we reach one of those absolutes in evidence upon which all political philosophy is based. We reach here the meaning of the Roman *politeia*. The answer is one with the whole Roman tradition: belief in the gods and pious observance of the rites dedicated to them have bred in the Roman people that

austerity and rectitude, that *gravitas*,23 which has made Rome possible and which alone can assure her continued existence. But the Roman forefathers "believed" in the gods in the sense that they were convinced that the gods really exist, really guide the destiny of the City of Rome. Their belief was not a matter of calculated policy, seeking to instrumentalize a religion for the sake of the greatness or even the continued existence of a State based on justice. Rather, the gods dispense justice and providence to those who tend their rites. It is indeed useful to propitiate the gods; but the belief in their existence, which created the public cult of propitiation, is just that: a belief *not* a policy. Cicero, in deducing the utility of the rites from the harmony of nature, indicates a philosophical sophistication within Roman thought that has moved far beyond the simplicity of belief that marked the attitude of the old Republic.

When Cicero speaks directly to the State in relation to the public orthodoxy, he does not hesitate, then, to give precedence to the political rather than the metaphysical or religious. In "the very beginning," he argues, we must "persuade our citizens that the gods are the lords and rulers of all things"; "what is done, is done by their will and authority."24 The gods are "great benefactors of men" and, make no mistake about it, they "take account of the pious and the impious." (They watch each individual: the wrongs he does, the intentions and the degree of piety with which he fulfills his religious duties.)25 If we *do* persuade the citizens' minds in this sense, they "will not fail to form true and useful opinions"; and let no one be so "foolishly proud" as to suppose that "reason and intellect exist in himself, [but] . . . do not exist in the heavens and the universe."26 This would be tantamount to saying that *no* reason guides "those things which can hardly be reached by the highest reasoning powers of the human intellect," and that a man can remain a man and "not [be] driven to gratitude by the orderly courses of the stars, the regular alteration of day and night, the gentle progress of the seasons, and the produce of the earth

23. On the role of *gravitas* in Cicero's thought, see Antonio Fontan, *Artes ad Humanitatem* (Pamplona, 1957), *passim*.

24. Cicero, *Laws*, II, vi (beginning).

25. II, vi (beginning).

26. II, vi (middle).

22. Cicero, *Laws*, I, xv (end).

brought forth for our sustenance."²⁷ The truth is that "all things that possess reason stand above those things which are without reason," and that "reason is inherent in nature"²⁸ — so that to say that anything stands above nature is "sacrilege."²⁹ Then the utilitarian note again: "Who will deny that such beliefs are useful when he remembers how often oaths are used to confirm agreements, how important to our well-being is the sanctity of treaties, how many persons are deterred from crime by the fear of divine punishment, and how sacred an association of citizens becomes when the immortal gods are made members of it, either as judges or as witnesses."³⁰

CICERO'S reasoning here is more subtle than a cursory reading of the text would suggest. The context is a discussion concerning Plato's contention that the Laws ought not merely to coerce, but should win some measure of consent on the part of the citizenry.³¹ Cicero attempts to locate the ground of such consent in a belief in the existence of the gods, and to this end asserts the following things: We must persuade the citizenry that the gods are the lords and guardians of all things and that they exercise a benevolent providence over all who propitiate them, because, to repeat, "minds which are imbued with such ideas will not fail to form true and useful opinions." A belief in the existence of the gods, therefore, is good because it is conducive to the formation of true and useful opinions. Cicero then discusses, one by one, the true and the useful opinions that grow from such a belief, above all this one: He who piously fulfills his duties to the gods will be moved to consider the very structure of the universe in all its orderliness and thus come to assent to the proposition that reason exists, not alone in man, but in the universe as well. In short, Cicero puts religious piety to work for the sake of philosophy, "true opinions": a religious attitude in a man, itself bred by a pious observance of the rites and by a belief in the existence of the gods, is good because it will move him to meditate carefully upon the reasoned course of the universe. True opinions here serve the common good of the polity and true philoso-

27. II, vi (middle).

28. II, vi (beginning).

29. II, vi (middle).

30. II, vi (middle).

31. II, vi (end). Cf. Plato, *Laws*, 718 B - 723 D.

phy serves virtue. Although Cicero formally divides his argument into reasons for the forming of both "true" and "useful" opinions, his "true" opinions are themselves at bottom based on political utility. It is not merely that he argues openly that belief in the gods is useful because it casts a sacred character over all society, which in turn deters evil-doers, sanctifies treaties, and guarantees oaths; his *previous* argument is equally utilitarian: faith breeds sound philosophy and sound philosophy breeds the virtue needed to consent to the Laws and consent to the Laws breeds a sound *politeia*. And what we want, at least as political philosophers, is a sound polity!



Willmoore Kendall

The political expediency of the public orthodoxy, of belief in the gods, is even more nakedly expressed further on in the *Laws*, when Cicero comments on the ancient Twelve Tables and Sacred Laws, those *sacrae leges* which were thought to have been formulated in the earliest days of the Republic and which gave inviolability to the plebeian tribunes.³² They read: "No one shall have gods to himself, either new gods or alien gods, unless recognized by the State. Privately they shall worship those gods whose worship they have duly received from their ancestors. In cities they shall have shrines; they shall have groves in the country."³³ And Cicero takes up the contention — astonishingly "modern" it must seem to us — that the divine can be worshipped not merely in temples and in shrines at designated times, but in any old place and at any old time that suits the whim of the worshipper, as witness his

32. II, vi (end).

33. II, viii (beginning).

reference to the "Persian Magi, in accordance with whose advice Xerxes is said to have burned the temples of Greece on the ground that the Greeks shut up the gods within walls, seeing that this whole universe is their temple and home."³⁴ Cicero's reply is a precious text, not only because it reveals magnificently the piety and reverence of that Roman spirit of which we are all the heirs,³⁵ but also because it introduces us further into the heart of Roman religion and of Cicero's teaching concerning the public orthodoxy:

*The Greeks and Romans have done a better thing: for it has been our wish, to the end that we may promote piety towards the gods, that they should dwell in the cities with us. For this idea encourages a religious attitude that is useful to States, if there is truth in the saying of Pythagoras, a most learned man, that piety and religion are most prominent in our minds when we are performing religious rites, and in the saying of Thales, the wisest of the Seven, that men ought to believe that everything they see is filled with the gods, for all would then be purer, just as they feel the power of religion most deeply when they are in temples.*³⁶

The psychological argument is evident: a sense of piety and reverence is more easily invoked in the atmosphere of a shrine, a place set aside for worship and for worship alone, than in the open air. Even the very conviction that the divine is everywhere is better bred in a man who meditates the divine in some predilect spot that bears in upon him the meaning of divinity in an especial manner. The religious argument is evident: Romans and Greeks set aside shrines and groves in order to produce a greater devotion to the gods. But the political argument is also evident and is, once again, evidently utilitarian down to its very wording: "For this idea encourages a religious attitude that is useful to States." (*Adfert enim haec opinio religionem utilem civitatibus.*)

34. II, x (end).

35. For a profound and beautiful meditation on the Roman sense of *place* and its economy in the religious life of Western man, see Hilaire Belloc, *Hills and the Sea* (New York, 1906), the essay entitled "The Men of the Desert."

36. Cicero, *Laws*, II, xi (beginning; italics ours).

THE text would merely support our earlier conclusions did it not also, as indicated, finger the very meaning of the Roman religious experience, and thereby lead us to the centre of Cicero's dilemma concerning the politics of the public orthodoxy. "It has been our wish . . . that [the gods] should dwell in our cities with us." A Christian must read this text twice in order to believe what is before his eyes, which he can do only when he understands that what we confront here is the difference between transcendence and immanence. The gods come to dwell in the City — at the wish of Rome! Which is to say: the gods can be commanded by man to dwell where man would have them. To the Christian, who believes in a God who commands and is in no sense commanded, the very notion is shocking; but not so in a society that has not yet broken through to transcendence: there, nothing could seem more natural. For the Roman world would have looked, and in fact did look upon the Christian claim to a God beyond the cosmos as blasphemy. As Cicero puts it: the contention that "anything stands above universal nature" is "sacrilege";³⁷ and this "sacrilege" is precisely the Christian claim, the claim to know a God who forms no part of the world but who infinitely transcends it. The classical universe was a closed universe and the gods dwelt within it as ultimate principles of order, themselves immanent to the order they established.³⁸ There is hence a certain equality between gods and men, an equality that emerges at its clearest in Cicero because of the Stoic overtones in his thought: gods and men themselves share a reason more fundamental than either of them. Although man must propitiate the gods, man can in a sense call upon them to dwell in the City in order that he may the better worship them — and we must add, in order that the gods can better assure the common good of the commonwealth (which itself participates in a universal harmony that includes gods and men alike).

We can turn for assistance here to Eric Voegelin: St. Augustine, he notes, could not understand Varro when he argued that "as the painter is prior to the painting, and the architect prior to the building, so are the cities prior to the institutions of the

37. II, vi (beginning).

38. Cf. Romano Guardini, *The End of the Modern World* (New York and London, 1956); Etienne Gilson, *God and Philosophy* (New Haven, 1939).

cities."³⁹ And Voegelin comments: "What St. Augustine could not understand was the compactness of Roman experience, the inseparable community of gods and men in the historically concrete *civitas*, the simultaneousness of human and divine institutions of a social order."⁴⁰ Cicero, when he argues that the Twelve Tables are in accord with the law of nature, would seem to avoid the blunt and more clearly formulated Varronic conception of the Roman experience. But if we examine Cicero's text we find that "Nature" is made to justify divination, the ritual games, and the institution of soothsayers;⁴¹ and to the objection that the House of Augurs was "invented to be of practical use to the State," Cicero can only answer vaguely that "there is no doubt that this art and science of the augurs has by now faded out of existence on account of the passage of time and men's neglect."⁴² Moreover, after discussing the religious functions of the pontiffs in connection with the laws of burial and the consecration of land, Cicero tips his hand, and we see his real interest in the Roman religious observances, in the candid assertion that "we make so much of these matters" in order that "these rites shall be preserved and continuously handed down in families, and, as I said in my Law, that they must be continued forever (*perpetua sint sacra*)."⁴³ Here again we are in the presence of the panegyrist of the Roman State. The *Civitas* demands the rites for its preservation and grandeur. For this reason, regardless of the religious truth that the rites may or may not contain, they must be perpetuated and observed down to the last flourish of ritual so long as time shall be.

ERIC Voegelin points up sharply the significance of the *De Natura Deorum* in the Ciceronian corpus.⁴⁴ The work of a man profoundly affected by Greek philosophy, especially in its Platonic and Stoic forms, the *De Natura Deorum* remains the exercise of a Roman who cannot really

39. Saint Augustine, *The City of God*, vi. 4.

40. Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics* (Chicago, 1952), p. 88.

41. Cicero, *Laws*, II, xiii.

42. II, xiii-xiv.

43. II, xix (italics ours).

44. Voegelin, *New Science*, pp. 87-91. In the following paragraphs of our text we have drawn heavily upon Professor Voegelin's analysis.

take philosophy seriously, who cannot permit philosophical conclusions concerning the meaning of things as they are and the structure of the soul to alter his inherited commitments to the Roman Order. The key figures in the drama are Cotta and Balbus. The latter represents the claims of philosophy — claims that transcend the rites of the city and the institutions of the State; the former, a *pontifex maximus*, stands for the civil sacredness of the old Roman orthodoxy. He insists throughout the discourse on the differing sources of authority in any discussion concerning the gods.

There are, he says, those who rest their claims upon authority, an authority inherited from the State. He, Cotta, as a pontiff, is bound by his very office to accept the authority of the State concerning the existence and nature of the gods and the rites required for their propitiation. Cotta admits the authority of Balbus ("the authority of reason, of philosophy"), as also, however, the justice of Balbus' plea that he (Cotta) remember that he is a pontiff:

This no doubt meant that I ought to uphold the beliefs about the immortal gods which have come down to us from our ancestors and the rites and ceremonies and duties of religion. For my part I shall always uphold them and always have done so, and no eloquence of anybody, learned or unlearned, shall ever dislodge me from the belief as to the worship of the immortal gods which I have inherited from our forefathers. But on any questions of religion I am guided by the high pontiffs, Titus Coruncanius, Publius Scipio and Publius Scaevola, not by Zeno or Cleanthus or Chrysippus; and I have Gaius Laelius, who was both an augur and a philosopher, to whose discourse upon religion, in his famous oration, I would rather listen than to any leader of the Stoics. The religion of the Roman people comprises ritual, auspices, and the third additional division consisting of all such prophetic warnings as the interpreters of the Sybil or the soothsayers have derived from portents and prodigies. Well, I have always thought that none of these departments of religion was to be despised, and I have held the conviction that Romulus by his auspices and Numa by his establishment of our ritual laid the foundations of our state, which assuredly could never have been as great as it is had not the fullest measure of divine

favour been obtained for it. There, Balbus, is the opinion of a Cotta and of a pontiff; now oblige me by letting me know yours. You are a philosopher, and I ought to receive from you a proof of your religion, whereas I must believe the word of our ancestors even without proof.⁴⁵

Cotta represents the Cicero, if not always of the Platonic and Stoic meditations, at least the Cicero of *The Laws*, who lays it down as a first principle that the public orthodoxy must be preserved forever in order that Rome remain the Eternal City. Confronting the philosopher Balbus, Cotta is content to say that a "single argument would have sufficed" to convince him of the existence and nature of the gods, namely: "that it has been handed down to us by our ancestors." "But," he goes on, "you despise authority, and fight your battles with the weapon of reason."⁴⁶ On the surface, the issue seems to be quite simple: a Roman priest, representing the full authority of the civic theology of the Fathers of Rome, confronts a representative of that Greek philosophy that would meddle with matters long ago settled and agreed upon, who would meddle in the name of reason, of some authority superior to that of the *politeia*. Did not the Assembly so stand up to Socrates? And did not the eventual victory of Socrates, a victory achieved beyond his grave, mark the dissolution of the archaic Greek city state in the name of speculation and the impieties that spawn therefrom?

THE issue, however, is not simple, though the critic is forced to read twice in order to understand what has *really* been said. Balbus, representing philosophy and her claims — claims that transcend allegiance to the State and to the public orthodoxy that supports it — takes his stand with the Stoics, throughout the *De Natura Deorum*, in favour of the whole pantheon of the gods, insisting that our very dreams are sent to us by Jupiter.⁴⁷ Balbus rejects authority as a safe ground for believing in the gods, asserting that their reality can be established by reason itself. Cotta, the Roman priest and avowed representative of the gods, however, advances every argument in the arsenal of the classical world *against* the existence of the

gods. He heaps scorn upon the philosophical arguments marshalled by Balbus. He stoutly maintains that a meditation on the heavens can lead to disbelief as readily as to belief;⁴⁸ that awe before nature can lead to atheism;⁴⁹ that divination even if it occurs, is beside the point;⁵⁰ that the arguments of Zeno would force us to accept such absurdities as that "the world will also be an orator, and even a mathematician, a musician, and in fact an expert in every branch of learning, in fine a philosopher";⁵¹ that the Stoic contention that a universal reason gave birth to all the arts in which man is skilled would necessitate our holding that the world was itself "a harper and a fluteplayer."⁵² Admitting the irrationality of the pantheon of the gods, Cotta insists that when he reflects "upon the utterance of the Stoics," he "cannot despise the stupidity of the vulgar and the ignorant."⁵³ If the Stoic arguments hold that the world is god, "then why do we add a number of other gods as well? And what a crowd of them there are!" Admitting that intelligence is forced to combat superstition, the pontiff renews his attack by damning Stoicism for absorbing every god dreamed by the fevered mind of man within its system, which is itself little more than the personification of allegorized virtue.⁵⁴ Moving to the core of the classical religion, Cotta points to the belief in providence and in a reward for the just and a punishment for the wicked: our experience, he maintains, simply fails to show us this hoped for providence because the evil are exalted and the good are often despised and trod upon by the powers of this supposedly rational and benevolent world.⁵⁵

Balbus, shocked by this defense of atheism, appeals to Cotta's character as a pontiff, declaring that the "habit of arguing in support of atheism, whether from conviction or in pretense, is wicked and impious."⁵⁶ Cotta replies modestly, perhaps coyly, that he only "desires to be refuted," and assures his philosopher opponent that

48. iii-iv.

49. v-vi.

50. vi-vii.

51. viii-ix.

52. viii-ix

53. xv-xvi.

54. xxiii-xxiv.

55. xxx-xxxvi.

56. xxvii.

45. Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods*. III, ii-iii.

46. iii-iv.

47. xi.

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he is "confident" that he can "easily refute" him.⁵⁷ "No doubt," sarcastically answers Velleius, the partisan of Cotta, "why, he [Balbus] thinks that even our dreams are sent to us by Jupiter — though dreams themselves are not so unsubstantial as a Stoic disquisition on the nature of the gods."⁵⁸ The book ends with Cicero's doubtful affirmation that Balbus "approximated more nearly to a semblance of the truth" than Cotta.⁵⁹

We can marshal Cotta's arguments under five points, which follow one another in logical sequence:

1) He distinguishes between Stoicism, as such, and the *authority* advanced by Stoicism for the doctrines it maintains: an authority transcending that of society and of the State — that is, the authority of reason. Against this authority for belief in the gods Cotta — as a Roman pontiff — pits the authority of the fathers, of society, of the State. His attack must not, there-

57. xxxiv-xl.

58. xl.

59. xl.

fore, be read as though it were a philosopher's controversy with another philosopher. Representing as he does the authority of the State, Cotta sets himself squarely against the supposed authority of a reason that pretends to by-pass the exigencies and demands of society. Cotta is the Assembly against Socrates.

2) Cotta grants that reason might lead us to belief in, and adherence to, the gods, to the public orthodoxy; however, reason might equally *fail* to lead us to such belief and adherence. Reason might lead us into impiety and unbelief. *A priori*, before I begin to philosophize, I confront two possibilities: a confirmation of, or a destruction of, the public orthodoxy. Philosophy is a risk, and nobody knows where its siren call may lead him.

3) In fact, philosophy might well take a man into atheism (Cotta's whole discourse is an exercise in metaphysics aimed at revealing that very possibility).

4) Should reason lead a man into atheism — and we must remember that Cotta never says that it *must* lead a man in that direction — belief in the gods will collapse

and will bring with it the eventual ruin of the State. Religion is not only eminently useful to the State; it is the very cornerstone of the *politeia*.

5) The conclusion is inexorable: the authority of the *politeia* and the public orthodoxy it enshrines must have precedence over that of reason. Should a man engage in the business of philosophizing about the origins of the universe and the ultimate truth of things, he must not do so seriously but only as though he were playing a game. And his conclusions, should they violate the public beliefs of society, must be set aside like toys.

Up until this point, Cicero speaks through Cotta, the high priest. But we must remember that Cicero is more than Cotta, that Cicero is not only a Roman statesman but a philosopher in his own right, a philosopher deeply grounded in Plato, and by no means the popularizer and rhetorician of Stoic doctrine that some commentators have made him out to be. Underneath the doctrines of Cotta, and forming a dimension of Cicero's thought, there are three Ciceronian positions, already adverted to, that buttress Cotta on philosophical grounds:

1) If the State collapses, justice collapses; and justice is rooted in the very fabric of universal nature. This is the central meaning of *The Laws*, which has as its heart — as we have seen earlier — the demonstration of the naturalness of justice.

2) It follows that reason itself, philosophy, dictates that we give precedence to the authority of society, to the authority of the public orthodoxy over that of private philosophical speculation. Philosophy must doff its cap to the public faith; it must even humble itself before the claims of religion, even to the extent of declaring irrational its own rationality, should that ultimate sacrifice be demanded. There is a fragment from the lost passages of the third book of the *De Natura Deorum* in which Cicero, stating the case for the Censor, makes the point in the most naked manner possible: Lactanius, filling in the lost text, writes of it: "Cicero was aware that the objects of man's worship were false. For after saying a number of things tending to subvert religion, he adds nevertheless that" — and now we are given Cicero's own words — "these matters ought not to be discussed in public, lest much discussion destroy the established religion of the nation." (*Non esse illa vulgo disputanda, ne susceptas publice religiones disputatio*)⁶⁰

60. xi.

CICERO was, clearly, confronted with a frightening contradiction between his natural law doctrine and his public worship of the gods — a worship that his own philosophical convictions rejected on theoretical grounds, but that he freely accepted in the name of his Roman citizenship. As a philosopher committed to justice and to the naturalness of justice, as a philosopher aware of the impossibility of maintaining the State (and therefore justice) without a public adherence to a commonly accepted religious orthodoxy, Cicero was forced into what we may fairly call a public lie for the sake of a properly philosophical truth. The Ciceronian position absorbs within itself the insights of positivism and pragmatism, of historicism, and of existentialism of the political order; but the Ciceronian position transcends them all in that Cicero was philosopher enough to know that all three positions are theoretically fallacious.

The positivist and pragmatist epistemology, as indicated, reduces truth to empirical factuality and usefulness. We find the doctrine in its most articulate form in John Dewey, who held that the predicate of every judgment is nothing other than a cerebral instrument for the solution of a problem presented by the subject. Predicates belong in subjects, are "true" only when they resolve the problem of the subject, only when they are useful; and Dewey tries to resolve the problem of American society in terms of the highly elaborated predicate, "the democratic society and adjustment thereto." This predicate, when applied in government, in education, and in life, "works." Democracy is the ideal solution to the complexities of the American experience. The predicate "adjustment to a democratic society" (the myth has been expressed in any number of ways) becomes therefore the sole content of the American public orthodoxy, and this orthodoxy is justified exclusively in terms of its utility. John Dewey is an admirable Cotta, a high priest of an orthodoxy, of a public faith. What Dewey and his disciples call "Absolutism" could not be made to "work" in America, and — asserts Dewey — given the American experience and temperament, *ought* not to be made to "work." It follows that the utility of the democratic *process* (whether it be expressed mythologically or conceptually is irrelevant in this context) is its own justification to the title of public orthodoxy within twentieth-century America. From this American Maurrasianism have come forth "adjustment to the community,"

"education for life," "the open society," "the pluralist society," and many similar myths. Nor does it matter here that pragmatists, failing to distinguish between the existential and theoretical meanings of the term, avoid the word "orthodoxy." Existentially, the "orthodoxy" they reject is the Western Christian experience as permeated by the classical inheritance. Existentially the term "orthodoxy" attaches in letters and in history to that doctrine; in rejecting that doctrine, positivism and pragmatism indeed reject "orthodoxy." But theoretically orthodoxy refers to any public doctrine accepted unconditionally by a community, even if the orthodoxy in question is somebody else's heresy; and the emotional reaction of positivists to the word "orthodoxy" is only one aspect of their orthodoxy. From a theoretical point of view the positivist and liberal myth, that is to say, is as much an orthodoxy as any other that ever has existed on this globe: an *ultimate* frame of reference, a court of doctrine and dogma before which all other doctrines and opinions must present themselves for judgment. The fact that many Christians (Catholics and Protestants alike) in America feel obliged, at least publicly and academically, if not in their hearts, to justify their Christianity in terms of its supposed affinities with democracy and liberal myths indicates, moreover, that positivism and liberalism are well on the road, in certain quarters at least, to establishing their orthodoxy as the public one. The main point, however, is that the positivist insight is englobed within the Ciceronian experience: the utility of the existent (or nascent) orthodoxy justifies its preservation and commands for it the assent of the citizenry. In Cicero's time that orthodoxy was the public Roman cult of the gods. Without that cult, the State would collapse. Therefore its very utility was its *laissez-passer* to the theatre of existence and meaning.

The notion (associated with the name of Dilthey) that man is his history, Cicero rejected when he spoke as a philosopher. But when he spoke as a Roman, when he spoke through the mouth of Cotta the high priest, he spoke good Dilthey. The House of Augurs may not be much good at divination nowadays, but the House of Augurs is the product of history, and history justifies its own products. The City of Rome is given us as a concrete cosmion, incarnating its own meaning in terms of its own historical experience. It stands up against nature as it stands against the forests and the mute skies above: every

ultimate source of meaning must be found within the walls of the City itself. The City establishes its institutions, its own gods, insisted Varro; the City calls upon the gods to live within shrines and groves that they may better be seen and thus may better fill the hearts of the people with piety and awe, insisted Cicero. This is but a blunt way of stating the historicist thesis, of identifying meaning with its generation.

THE existentialist contention that meaning is one with the brute existent, that theoretical formulation cannot look out towards a possible actualization that transcends the existent in this given moment of time, is due to the existentialist identification of existence and possibility, of actuality and potentiality. If man is nothing other than his own possibility, then possibility cannot look beyond man but is man, in the terrible drama of perpetual crisis. It follows that every theoretical formulation must be justified in terms of man as we find him here and now. There can be no appeal to a possibility beyond the present, itself promising a future and better actuality. All meaning is reducible to what is given because the annoying Aristotelian distinction between the possible and the actual has been rubbed away, thus leaving man a naked existence thrown into the world, an existence identical with its own possibility and therefore not the standard for a politics that transcends the immanence of the historical moment. In the political order the given is the State as we find it, society as we encounter it. Theory must be validated in terms of this given, and politics becomes a justification for a nationalist charisma or a gnostic dream simply because these happen to be the historical given. Thus with one hand Cicero rejects the existentialist thesis, but with the other accepts it. "In the debate about the best political order (*Status civitatis*) . . . Scipio takes his stand against Socrates. Scipio refuses to discuss the best order in the name of the Platonic Socrates; he will not build up a 'fictitious' order before his audience, but will rather give an account of the origins of Rome."⁶¹ What we here find thrown up against a problematic universe is Rome Herself: splendid; erect; the City Eternal. Let all political and philosophical meaning square itself with this Thing, the *res publica*. The gods have this advantage over their enemies, that they exist as instituted by our fathers. This institutional

61. Voegelin, *New Science*, p.90: Cicero, *The Republic*, ii, 3.

existence of the gods is the ground of their theoretical reality, and let every theory — says Cicero through Cotta — be squared with the fact that these gods, our own, live with us, and that if we carried the household deities from burning Troy, they in turn blessed the enterprise that is Rome.

Cicero, we repeat, truly gathers the positivist, historicist, and existentialist insights into his philosophy. But unlike the proponents of these theories, Cicero — as philosopher — cannot *really* reduce meaning either to utility, or to history, or to factuality. He is forced, as we have pointed out, to invent two truths, two orders of meaning that cross and clash and that therefore find themselves related one to another: the meaning of theoretical truth, of philosophy, is not that of society; but the former demands that the latter be upheld, no matter how false it may be theoretically. Centuries later Thomas Aquinas, a philosopher who had absorbed the experience of the Christian West, met a similar doctrine,⁶² that of Siger de Brabant and the Parisian Averroists, according to which one and the same thing can be true *theologically* and false *philosophically*, can be and ought to be believed on faith while rejected by reason, and pronounced it damnable. (We do not suggest that the Ciceronian and Brabantian positions coincide, but rather that the same theoretical principle is involved in the two cases.)

In order to live such a doctrine, a man needs an heroic cynicism that can face intellectual suicide in the name of the intelligence and the will at the service of society — an attitude that can be maintained only by a few, and by them not for long. Psychologically, man's drive towards unity pushes him to seek a third doctrine, a higher truth, that somehow reconciles the theoretical and existential contradiction. Cicero, writing in an age when ancient Roman patriotism was disintegrating but had not yet disintegrated under the impact of the Greek philosophical breakthrough to the truths of the soul, invented a strategy that soon collapsed in the tolerant theology of the late Empire, itself destined to give way soon enough to the Christian Empire of Constantine that incarnated a new orthodoxy (what we have since named "Orthodoxy"), a faith that could be and was believed by Western society at large.

WE have come close to fulfilling the purpose of this essay, the giving of a theoretical predicate to the subject: "public

orthodoxy." The public orthodoxy, let us recall, involves propositions assent to which must be made not on political, but on ontological and religious grounds. It asserts something, let us recall, too, about the structure of things as they are, about man's relation to the divine and about the destiny of the human soul; and assent to that something on purely political grounds is not really assent at all, since — let us emphasize, even at the risk of laboring the point — the assent required is theoretical, ontological. Cicero teaches, let us recall finally, that the public orthodoxy is necessary for the preservation of the State: that although philosophical inquiry into the public orthodoxy might well support it, it also might well destroy it; and that the destruction of the public orthodoxy is the destruction of the State and therefore of justice, itself an imperative of nature. Now, as we confront this circle of meanings and this vicious contradiction we might well conclude that there is no way out. There may, however, be a way *in*. Should transcendence cross over into immanence, should God speak to man and thus reveal His Truth and His Will, the public orthodoxy — enshrining that Truth and Will — would have a guarantee beyond itself, beyond the immanent demands and requirements of society: the will of God. Were this so, man could reverently and intelligently probe the rationality of this orthodoxy, knowing in advance that whatsoever he might discover would conform itself with what has been taught, since what has been taught, has as its Teacher God Himself, whose grace guarantees the faith with which we receive His Word. Such a man might well ask himself whether he has an immortal soul, whether justice is more than a word, and whether God exists. These questions would be the *videtur quod non* of the Middle Ages — not a doubt exercised on the origins of a civilized and Christian polity, but a weighing of possible objections to these origins, objections whose resolution man would confidently expect to discover by his own reason because God Himself had guaranteed their resolution.

OUR conclusion, our predicate, belongs properly to political theory, but to a political theory dependent on a metaphysics open to Revelation. Where the public orthodoxy is not guaranteed by transcendence, it is always open to the charge that it is opposed to philosophical truth and is the enemy of the soul.

62. Saint Thomas Aquinas, *De unitate intellectu contra Aver.*

Conversely, the friend of the soul (a soul well-ordered in accord with the structure of reality as it is) might well find himself the enemy of the State, a State not necessarily completely evil in itself; he might find himself, therefore, the enemy of justice itself. His choice will be awful: the guaranteed well-being of society *versus* the demands that wisdom may lay upon him, even if these demands mean the end of society as he has known it. Should he choose to philosophize, and should society then silence him or even kill him for his pains, let him know that society is acting in its own self-defense, a self-defense de-

manded on philosophical grounds. Let him, therefore, rejoice at the moment of his execution that society has fulfilled *its* duty, a duty that he as philosopher is sworn to uphold in the name of philosophy itself.

But where the public orthodoxy is guaranteed by transcendence, by the Word of God, then the truths of the soul and of society, the first principles of the *politeia* and of metaphysics (that is, the very being of both), are theoretically guaranteed. Beyond this guarantee, which can be had only as a gift and as a blessing, there is no other for any human society born upon this earth.

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