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Of Things Moral and Political: An Adaptation of Eric Weil's Political Philosophy*

RAMON CASTILLO REYES

I have been assigned to speak this morning on the topic of "Humanism in a Changing Society." In dealing with such a topic, it is quite easy to fall into clichés and generalities about man, spiritual values, population growth, pollution, alienation, and other effects of present-day technology. Not that such topics are of no importance to the philosopher. On the contrary. Nonetheless, philosophy would be neglectful of its task and role if it were to content itself simply by repeating such topics of the day, taking issue with them perhaps, without previously going through a critical reflection regarding their origin, their fundamental ground, their ultimate principles. I have therefore taken the liberty of transposing the topic into something perhaps a bit more restricted and hopefully a little more rigorously philosophical. Since to talk of humanism is ultimately to talk of man, and therefore of ethics, and since to talk of changing society ultimately implies that mode of human action which circumscribes all social change, namely, politics, I have decided to talk on the topic — "Of Things Moral and Political."

Every man belongs to some community or other, characterized by a system of values which form, more or less coherently, a certain vision of man, a *Weltanschauung*. Such a value system constitutes a fundamental norm for the community, providing basic rules of behavior, what to do and what to avoid, what is good and what is bad. It happens however in the course of the history of a given community, either by changes in the physical

*A lecture given at the Philosophical Association of the Philippines Lecture Forum, 6 April 1975 in Manila.

environment, or by some internal evolution within the community, or else by contact with another community, that such a value system is led to question itself regarding its proper foundations, thus giving rise to a fundamental reflexion or re-thinking in view of re-establishing the moral certitude of the community to replace the one just lost in the process of growth and change. Historically, moral philosophy, in truth philosophy in general, has arisen at such times when the prevailing moral system of a community is shaken in its very foundations. The loss of certitude in the traditional value system brings forth a fundamental questioning as to what is the truly good life, what is the real, true morality. The traditional moral life has to go through a theoretical, critical phase before it could once again live coherently and truly with itself and with its world. In brief, morality must go into theory before it could return to practice, traditional morality goes into moral philosophy before it could validly return to moral life once more.

What then is morality? What is the truly good life? Morality is formally rational or universal will, as Kant said, in other words, to will whatever is universally valid, whatever is true for all rational beings. As universal will, what a moral individual seeks is a life in conformity to reason. In this sense we could perhaps say that what the universal will wills is itself. What the moral individual seeks is a certain coincidence between him and himself. Morality is a relation between him and himself qua reason, a relation between him and other individuals rational like himself.

In this regard, it is said that man is free. Aside from needs and drives and passions, man has the capacity of choosing to live according to reason, according to what is universally valid. And in so far as he chooses to live according to universal validity, he is thus moral.

It will be noted however that it is the concrete individual within his proper individual situation who wills to be rational, who wills the universally valid. Hence we see a duality in morality between the individual, a being of needs and desires, the same individual as rational, as universal will, as the will to

satisfy his needs only in so far as what is in conformity to reason, what is universally valid. Morality then is essentially that formal claim of universal validity in relation to what is merely the material fact, the given. What constitutes an individual as moral is his will to conform to the claim of universal validity within the context of his material situation. By the same token, morality introduces into the individual the duality and opposition between the demands of reason and on the other hand the mere call of desires and needs. Hence, the moral individual understands himself properly under the aspect of *duty*, under the aspect of what should be, what ought to be, in relation to what merely is the fact. Duty is the fundamental concept of morality. In so far as I choose to live according to what is universally valid, I freely assume a fundamental duty to reason. As man, I am a being of needs and desires, nonetheless, I must, I ought to, I have a duty to live according to reason.

The will to be reasonable is the will of a definite individual, a finite individual, in other words, an individual in relation to other individuals like himself. Alone, he could not have awakened to the consciousness of himself. Through contact with others he becomes aware of himself and ultimately of the principle of morality, the principle distinguishing what is universally valid, what is reasonable, from what is merely given, *de facto*. The concept of duty then is not real and is not realized except within the context of the relations with other individuals. Thus, in the concrete, the fundamental moral duty is the duty of *justice*, in other words, the duty to treat others, other human individuals, as I treat myself. Justice is the principle of universal validity applied to the concrete life of the community of human individuals.

From the duty of justice follows the duty of *moral courage*, in other words, the duty to act, to treat others as dictated by justice, even in the face of difficulties and risks. Courage however by itself would be mere temerity without another moral duty, that of *prudence*, the duty to consider not only the principle and intention of my action, but also the concrete consequences thereof. I must know myself as well as the world. For it is as I am that I act on the world as it is.

The duty of justice combined with the duty of prudence has thus led us to the consideration of action. Any action bears concrete consequences that could possibly violate justice. No action then is to be considered as morally valid unless both in its principle and its consequences in the world, it conforms to the rule of universal validity. Accepting to consider action, the moral thinker is led to consider the concrete world around him, and subsequently he discovers that such a world is not exactly one of pure unreason or chaos. As community, his world possesses at least a certain organization, thus a certain degree of rationality, as manifested in the traditional customs, practices and positive law of the community. Eventually, the moral thinker discovers, of course, that such concrete structures and laws of the community are not entirely rational, not completely just and moral, or at least not yet. Which leads him to demand that such existing structures and laws of the community must conform to reason, to justice. Hence we see here the emergence of the notion of Natural Law, the principle which demands that there should exist within the community a system of laws, concrete, efficacious, enforced by the life of the community itself, yet in conformity to the demands of reason and justice.

Viewed within the context of history, Natural Law then may be analyzed into three elements: first, the formal requirement of universal validity — live according to reason, do good and avoid evil, be just; secondly, a traditional body of principles and values considered as evident, as natural, and thus as valid by a community at a given epoch; thirdly, a growing sentiment of righteousness or sense of injustice against certain aspects of the traditional laws and values, in other words, an element of transition, whereby, in the light of reason and formal validity, what was previously assumed by the community to be reasonable and just, is now seen as obsolete, unjust, unreasonable.

In the concrete, therefore, the moral thinker sees his community under two aspects, on one hand, as a system of established laws and values of the community, on the other hand, as a non-institutionalised, unstructured, yet unmistakable sentiment of protest against various aspects of the established laws and values.

Both aspects are real and efficacious in the community, both represent a certain degree of reason, of justice, but both need to be clarified and re-thought and brought to term by the moral thinker as the reflexive consciousness of reason.

The moral thinker thus comes to consider himself to be the educator of the community, whose role is to lead his fellow-men to the threshold of reason and morality. He assumes a role within the community, for now he has understood that his community is not one of pure violence or unreason, but one of violence becoming more and more reasonable, more and more moral. The moral thinker has come to understand that he is not transcendent to his community except perhaps in the sense of being the community's own moral consciousness and conscience, not so much imposing any rule from without, but aiding the community to find its own true valid law.

As educator of the community, the moral thinker must now seek to understand the actual forms and structures by which reason and violence co-exist in his world, he must understand the concrete form in which the Natural Law, and therefore reason and justice, is to become real and efficacious.

Within the contemporary situation, the moral thinker eventually finds that his community is one governed by a system of economic relationships formally codified in view of an efficient, productive society. The economic society in general is the human community organized in view of the struggle of man against nature. In this regard, there is a fundamental difference between the primitive, or archaic economic society, static and traditional, having been based on a certain magico-religious attitude vis-a-vis physical nature, and on the other hand, a modern economic community, which, considering nature as simple matter or material to be transformed and harnessed, is basically dynamic and progressive. A modern economic society consciously and continuously transforms its technology as well as its mode of social organization for the purpose of a more and more efficient utilization of nature's resources.

Modern economic society is essentially based on a code of law designed to be equally and automatically applicable to all.

All traditional privileges and prerogatives are abolished, in principle. Provided he has the functional qualifications required by the position, any man may accede to any social role and the concomitant share thereof in the social product and wealth, to be measured according to the social utility of the role occupied. In brief, it is a community based on law, equality, fair competition, for the purpose of drawing the maximum output from all its resources, physical and human.

Modern economic society has been quite a boon to the human individual. It has brought him the elements of material life fit for his human dignity. And yet, as member of such a society, the individual remains dissatisfied. For, if the modern economic society is in principle governed by objective norms of efficiency and productivity, in fact the mechanism does not run the way it should, owing to the intervention of remnants of traditional privileges, thus giving rise to sentiments of protest against the injustice of the system. On the other hand, the very prospect of the modern economic society being fully realized does not enthuse the individual either, for the possibility of a purely mechanical, technological society that shall have been evacuated of its original traditional values bears no ultimate meaning for the individual.

The individual is therefore torn within himself in the context of modern economic society. On the one hand, he realizes that he cannot do without the material support of modern society. On the other hand, such a society seems to him structurally unjust and ultimately absurd, devoid of human meaning. Inevitably, the individual resigns himself to a dichotomous life between a private interior existence based on his traditional moral values and on the other hand his public role in society for the purpose of maintaining himself in material existence.

In the face of such a conflicting situation, the moral thinker at first is at a complete loss. Natural Law, as we have seen, demands that a coherent and effective law should exist, respectful of the reigning moral sentiment and at the same time in conformity to the universal principle of reason and justice. However, the very structure of modern society manifests itself

to be a scandal for the moral sentiment of its members. On the other hand, the same economic society has proved itself to be the only means man has for the moment, which has the potentiality to provide the whole community and not only a privileged few with the material conditions necessary for a properly human life.

The dilemma remains irremediable unless the moral thinker ceases to consider his universal principle of morality as something a-historical and begins to understand that the traditional morality of the community, the economic organization and his universal principle of morality are aspects of one reality. After all, how was the moral thinker and his principle of universal validity born and nurtured except from the very life and substance of this traditional community. The moral thinker must place himself within the context of the community and see himself, as well as other moral thinkers like him, as the very agency through which the community reflects and universalizes and validates itself.

Subsequently, having placed himself within the context of communal thought and reflexion, the moral thinker must now also begin to consider communal action, no longer, the action of the moral individual in relation to others as individuals, but the action in effect in the historical community, as embodied in the social institutions and agencies which the community has developed in the course of its history, with a view precisely of reconciling the exigencies of traditional morality, economic organization and universal validity or reason. In brief, the moral thinker must now pass on from the consideration of the interpersonal to that of the properly social, from the consideration of commutative justice to that of legal and distributive justice. The moral thinker must now consider the reality of what is usually called the State.

The traditional community as organized in view of communal action is what is called the State. The State then is not an artificial creation. It is grounded in the very history of the community. It is the organic ensemble of institutions of the historical community through which said community, at a certain point in its

evolution, takes cognizance of itself and acts, through which the community formulates the problems it faces, deliberates and decides on them.

The modern State, as we know it today, is said to be a State of laws, not of men, in other words, wherein the acts of the citizen as well as those of the government, the agency through which the State acts, are regulated by a formalized legal code publicly promulgated as binding upon all. Materially, this legal code, usually called the Constitution, is the same formalized code that we saw from the point of view of modern economic society. In other words, the modern State of laws is anchored on a modern economic organization. It is this modern economic society, structured according to the demands of technology, organization, division of labor, specialization, which has engendered such a sovereign and universal legal code that abolished slavery as well as traditional privileges and classes in view of a society functionally ordered in accordance with the principles of efficiency, productivity, and full employment of natural and human resources.

Apart from this universal and sovereign legal code, another characteristic of the modern State is a corps of civil servants whose main function is not simply that of traditional bureaucracy, namely to implement the decisions of government, but rather to serve as a technical body that informs and advises the government as to the various technical possibilities of action and their respective costs and consequences. Due to modern technological necessity, therefore, there is no direct, immediate relation between the citizen and the modern State. The problems of the State have become so complex and so technical beyond the reach and the interest of the ordinary citizen, such that in the present structure, the citizen has to entrust to a panel of technical experts designated by the government the task of deliberating on these complex problems, retaining however at the end the right of either approving or refusing the conclusion and the proposed program of action.

Thus, the fundamental problem of the modern State, is how to reconcile the demands of the traditional community with the

requirement of modern economic society. Such a problem may be viewed either in terms of the problem of recognizing the just interests of the people, or in terms of the problem of effective authority of the State.

The internal cohesiveness of the community ultimately depends upon the satisfaction of the just interests and needs of its citizens. These interests are varied in nature; first, the material need, namely, within the limitations of the economic conditions of the community, an equitable share in the social product and wealth concomitant with the utility and functionality of the social role occupied by the individual. It is this share in the social wealth which provides the motivation for individuals and groups to take part in the communal work within the economic organization. Secondly, the political need: the citizen must in some way feel that he has a part in the policy-making process of the community. Without this sentiment, it would be difficult to win his full cooperation, which is vital in a modern society based on highly technical specialization and division of labor. Thirdly, the traditional need: the moral tradition of a given community must be respected and promoted as much as possible, for it is this which ultimately gives meaning to any communal endeavor. Ultimately, it is in view of perpetuating the ethical values embodied by the community that said community decides to enter upon a project of economic modernization, or upon any communal project in general.

These interests have to be satisfied if a modern economic society is to function properly. In practice, however, the difficulty is how to reconcile them with the long-term interests of the whole community. The moral tradition may turn out to be, at least in some of its features, incompatible with the exigencies of the modern economy. A too rapid drive toward economic modernization may fail to win the adhesion of the traditional community. A premature extension of political liberty unwarranted by the social evolution of the community risks leading only to social chaos and paralysis.

The difficulties in reconciling these interests lead us to the other problem of the State, namely, effective authority. More

important than the juridical authority as provided by the legal code, is this effective authority of the State, which ultimately rests upon the confidence the people has in its government, the agency through which the State acts. It is hardly conceivable, even in the cases of absolute monarchy of the past, that a totally absolute ruler should be able to maintain himself in power without at least the tacit consent of the community. The political powers of the past found it necessary to base themselves on some divine right of kings or on some sign of divine descent, in other words, their powers, no matter how absolute, were granted, sanctioned, and by the same token, limited by the moral tradition of the community.

In the case of modern economic society, which, as we have seen depends heavily on the competitive initiative and collaboration of its members, the State's effective authority depends heavily on its government's ability to initiate and orient public discussion in view of making intelligible and acceptable to the community the program of communal action being proposed. In this regard, there are two working types of modern state, the democratic and the authoritarian type of State. As modern, both types are based on a modern economic organization and its technological infra-structure, thus a formal code of law, and a technocratic bureaucracy. These two types differ however, in their methods of conducting public discussion in view of determining and resolving State problems.

The democratic type of modern State is one where government deliberation and action are limited by the compulsory intervention, as provided by law, of bodies and agencies other than the government. More concretely, the democratic State is characterized by the presence of a judiciary autonomous of government influence in its decision, and secondly by a congress or parliament, through which the people or their representatives participate in the policy-making process of the State.

The discussion takes place primarily in the parliament or congress, the juridical agency in which the laws being proposed by the government are discussed, rejected, amended and ap-

proved. As a body representing the people, such a parliament permits the expression and polarization of the moral sentiments and other interests of the community to take place in relation to the motions of government and its technical experts, thus, on the one hand, making possible a control of government action by the people, but on the other hand, enabling the government to explain what is in view of the long-term interest of the community and thereby to win the people's confidence and support for the government projects.

Regarding the function of the autonomous judiciary, it is clear that without such a body, to which the citizen may have recourse in case of government encroachment on his rights, that portion of the law in the democratic State which is usually called Constitutional law, setting the limits and bounds of government power and action, would in practice be meaningless. An autonomous judiciary together with certain prerogatives given to parliament, such as approval of the government budget and authorization before government can use the military in the conduct of interior affairs constitute the usual material guarantees in a democratic State to assure that the government remains of, for, and by the people. It is true, of course, that ultimately it is still the government who executes the decisions of the judiciary. For which reason, a good test of a functioning democratic State is the respect given by government to court decisions.

The authoritarian form of modern State is that wherein the government alone deliberates on State problems, with no legal provisions for obligatory intervention of any other juridical body, such as parliament, congress, or an autonomous judiciary. Historically, all present-day States, including those which have now evolved into the democratic type, began as authoritarian systems. As we have already seen, the democratic State presupposes a highly modern economy. And there has been no example in history in which this modern technological system of work and organization was established other than by means of social discipline applied with quite a degree of pressure and compulsion. The first problem of any community is that of survival. Only later, when the economic development is sufficiently

advanced, hence when the notion of functional, social roles, and a system of a formal law applicable to all are imbedded enough in the customs of the community, when the economic and social centralization has sufficiently taken root so as to engender the consciousness of self-identity of the community, when the material level of life has reached the point when the average individual attains at least a foretaste of human dignity, when the economy is sufficiently modernized by way of specialization and division of labor, thus giving the citizen an effective control on the political system, that the foundations of traditional power may finally be put into question efficaciously by the people, and that idea of a government of the people, by the people, for the people, may at last emerge not only as a moral ideal, but as a working political reality.

If we were to compare therefore the democratic and authoritarian types, we would find, first of all, a difference of degree of modernization in their economic system. The authoritarian type is less modern and tends to become more democratic in proportion as the economy develops; on the other hand, the democratic system represents the more modern type of economic organization. It is in the democratic State that public discussion is realized to its full extent. In it every citizen is considered as having the right to participate in policy deliberations, directly or indirectly. In it every citizen is considered as being a potential man of government himself. Nonetheless, to the degree that the authoritarian State is modern, it is also a State of discussion, by the force of the technical requirements of a modern economy. The only difference is that what is conducted openly as provided by law in the democratic form transpires more pragmatically and in more limited fashion in the authoritarian form by means of secret intra-party discussion, by means of contacts between government and the people through mass organizations, referenda, unions, local committees and the like, all for essentially the same function that the parliament fulfills in the democratic State, namely, to feel the pulse of the people, their demands and their interests, with a view to reconciling them with the exigencies of modern economic reality.

We may say therefore that owing to the nature of the relationships and organizational structure typical of modern economic society, the Modern State, depending upon its degree of modernization, is a State of discussion. Within it, the interests of the individual carry a certain political weight in addition to their moral significance. It is in so far as the individual is participant in the modern social structure, in so far as he takes up a role in a society based on division of labor and technical specialization, that he gains political control and leverage adequate to defend his interests effectively against possible government abuse. Especially in a functioning democratic State where the economy is sufficiently advanced, to a proportionate degree in an authoritarian State depending upon its stage of modernization, the citizen's moral right carries co-active power. Within it, the rules of political expediency dictate that government power reckon with the interests of the citizen.

It will be noted that up till now our investigation on the State has been purely on the level of *de facto* existing institutions and structures. If the democratic State has revealed itself to be superior, it is, first of all, due to the fact that it is more economically developed than the authoritarian type, and thus permits a more extended and open type of discussion and participation in the determination of communal problems and policies.

From the point of view of moral reason, however, we may now also say that, in principle, the democratic State is superior, because it is more in conformity with reason and justice. Within the democratic State, the individual is respected as a morally free being, who has the recognized right to demand that all State policies and action be justified before him, be rendered intelligible and acceptable to him. The principle and structure of the democratic State realizes most fully the moral principle of reason and justice.

In the concrete however, when we take into consideration the historical reality, particularly, the economic organization of the community, the question of which system of government is morally justified could well bring forth a different answer. The rule would seem to be that, given a functioning modernized

economic system, the only morally justified government is the democratic form; on the other hand, within an undeveloped economy, wherein a too rapid extension of political participation unwarranted by the degree of economic and social evolution would only lead to a more chaotic and perhaps a more severe form of authoritarian rule, reason and morality would demand some type of authoritarian rule, provided, of course, that such a system does not simply perpetuate itself in power and make impossible the eventual passage to a democratic rule, or put more positively, provided that such a rule continuously work out visible and concrete measures toward greater and greater modernization, and democratization.

The important question then is who will decide as to whether the social and economic conditions of a given community warrant the establishment of a democratic government, or, as the case may be, an authoritarian one. Who will decide when a legitimate authoritarian rule will have to end? Naturally, there is really only one answer. The community alone can decide. But how does the community come to a decision and act? The community acts properly as organized, through the ensemble of its various political institutions and mechanisms, in brief, ultimately, as State. It is the community organized as State that decides and acts, presides as judge on the question of survival and future existence of the community. Every community ultimately needs a last decisive authority to close discussion and initiate action, short of which the community would be paralyzed. It may be that in certain instances, the political initiative comes from somewhere other than the government, or that it is altogether absent. This could only mean that the incumbent government has failed to win the effective authority of the people and shall soon be replaced by force of circumstances. In any case, formally, by its very nature and definition, it is through the State that the community decides and acts.

We seem to have arrived at the startling conclusion that it is the State that decides what type of State a community will have. If we consider however that, formally, it is only as organized, as State, that the community may act, the conclusion is

legitimate. Nonetheless, in the concrete, how or by whom are the acts of government to be judged finally, unless of course we were to maintain cynically that they are of themselves final and self-justificatory? The practical goal of every political man is naturally to succeed, to continue in power; but to succeed politically within the context of modern economic reality, it is only prudent and expedient that the political man should take into consideration the various interests of the ordinary citizen. As we have seen, by virtue of the dynamics inherent in the modern economy, the citizens' interests represent at the same time political weights and considerations that cannot be ignored. Thus, the men of government are ultimately responsible to and are to be judged by their fellow-citizens, regarding their success at government, regarding their success at maintaining the community in existence and promoting its long-term interests. And the reason why these men of government must work for the survival and perpetuation of the community is ultimately that such a community, in its cultural content, signifies for all its members, including those in the government, a certain universal moral meaning, a certain ethical vision of man. In the last analysis, the State and the government are responsible and accountable before the tribunal of reason and justice immanent in the communal system of values continuously kept alive, clarified, purified, rendered more and more true and valid, by the members of the community, through their moral reflection and their political intervention within the process of communal existence. Hence, in the end, the adage is correct, a people gets the type of government that it deserves. Either because the people has freely chosen, or because it is still in the process of choosing more and more fully within the limitations of material conditions, or because it has not chosen when it could have, by reason of sloth and moral irresponsibility, a people ultimately determines its own form of government.

To summarize, we have seen how the moral individual having chosen to reflect on traditional morality in view of re-discovering moral certitude, passes on to moral philosophy or theory. Subsequently, he discovers duty to be the fundamental category of

morality, and finds that the concrete duties are those of justice, courage and prudence. The consideration of duties brings him to the awareness of the necessity of action and of the idea of Natural Law. Viewed within the context of historical reality, Natural Law leads him to a reflection on the actual structures governing the human community, in particular, the State, the community organized in view of communal interests and human goals. Thus, while remaining true to his original principle of universal validity or reason, the moral individual become moral thinker arrives at the understanding of himself as living in a historical community, a community which of itself constitutes a demand as well as a potentiality for action, an exigency as well as the possibility for change in view of bringing to term the ethical vision of man immanent in the community's tradition and system of values.

Politics, therefore, is not the negation of morality, but precisely the actualization of a world more and more moral. In the last analysis, politics is the human community acting, creating the social conditions that would permit all its members access to a moral, human life, gradually realizing the universal claims of justice and social peace within the modes of time and history.