

## THE ROOTS OF SOCIAL ORDER

WHILE "Newton's methodology for physics," as Whitehead pointed out, "was an overwhelming success," the "natural forces" on which it was based left Nature "without meaning or value." The World Machine was a *dead* Nature, and a dead Nature "can give no reasons." It aims at nothing. It fulfills no purpose. This is the Nature that the modern world inherited from the great founders of physical science, who gradually became arbiters of all subsequent thought, the source of the premises of all the branches of science. The full implications of this view of the natural world have been long in reaching into every aspect of modern belief, but today the penetration can be said to be practically complete.

Various men have busied themselves in recent years with exposing the consequences of these assumptions. Philosophical essayists were perhaps the first to anticipate the resulting mutilations, starting early in the nineteenth century, but today the critical analysis is proceeding in every major field of inquiry. In the area of law and politics, for example, there is the paper by John H. Schaar, published in No. 8 of the *New American Review*. Mr. Schaar finds that the very foundations of "law and order" have been dug away by a science and science-guided scholarship which proceeded on the assumption of a Nature which has no reasons. While the Founding Fathers of the United States believed they were bringing into being a nation that would be guided by a Constitution embodying, at least partially, an order derived from the Laws of Nature and Nature's God, this conception has been meaningless to learned men for several generations. It has been disregarded by practical men for perhaps a longer period. Mr. Schaar does not suggest, of course, that the sagacious statesmen who shaped the Constitution felt that they "knew" beyond debate the dictates of

"Nature's Laws," but only that they believed that natural moral truth existed, that it could and should be sought, and might sometimes be known. He shows that once this conception of a pre-existing moral authority had been abandoned as an ideal, substitutes had to be devised as the basis of social order. His paper is largely concerned with the inadequacy of these substitutes. As he puts it:

When the secret that nature is no guide is finally known to all—the secret exposed by the Sophists and in our age by Nietzsche—the whole question of legitimacy will have to be reopened. Order will be seen as artificial, the result of will and choice alone, as vulnerable to change and challenge as will itself is. Structures of authority will not be able to invoke the once ubiquitous idea that each thing under the sun has its own right nature and place in the constitution of the whole. For centuries this sense of fitness and rightness of things set boundaries to men's pretensions to control, and shaped their moral ideas concerning the limits within which they might legitimately impose their desires on the world around them. This basic piety toward the world and toward the processes that sustain it will disappear, and all things including politics and men themselves, will come to appear artificial and malleable. Whole new sets of arguments and images will have to be found. And until they are found, the idea and the very experience of legitimate authority cannot have anything like the bedrock importance they have heretofore had in political life.

The far-reaching application of this analysis should be evident. What, it asks, is *meant* by "law and order," today, beyond simple consensus of the propertied and powerful, or beyond the necessities of "progress" and "efficiency"? To what shall a man refer when he wonders what he *ought* to do? If he is a "modern thinker" he has only empirical resources. An authority is to be respected and obeyed because it will help him to secure his ends. There is only this pragmatic rule, developed on a social scale. The idea that justice should rule, though the heavens fall, will not occur to a

modern man. Legitimacy in authority derives from no transcendent principle, but from the engineering of consent. If enough people say you are right and ought to prevail, you are right and should prevail. Summing up the modern view, both in practice and in the view of contemporary social scientists, Mr. Schaar writes:

Followers believe in a regime, or have faith in it, and that is what legitimacy is. The faith may be the product of conditioning, or it may be the fruit of symbolic bedazzlement, but in neither case is it in any significant degree the work of reason, judgment, or active participation in the processes of rule.

Then, speaking of the sources allowed for legitimacy in modern social thought, as given in Seymour Lipset's *Political Man*, Mr. Schaar says:

In a most confusing way, an analysis of something called "legitimacy" first equates it with opinion, then goes on to a restatement of the standard Liberal-Pluralist description of the structure of power in the United States, turns next to a discussion of stability, and finally resolves stability into passivity or acquiescence caused by cognitive confusion, conflict of interest, and inability to translate one's desires into political decisions due to certain institutional arrangements. Obviously, we are no longer talking about faith or belief at all, but about confusion, indifference, stability and efficiency. This is where the contemporary social science treatment of legitimate power rests.

With nothing more than "interest" to support the claims of authority, the dignity of office was bound to wear away almost to nothing. "Morality," as Henry Adams predicted more than sixty years ago, has "become police." A moral principle can stand against numbers, but the rights of an "interest" group have only the authority of its strength, and, in this climate of opinion, the manifest errors and partisanship of pressure groups will make it only a matter of time until an individual's guess will seem to have as much validity or importance as the marshalled contentions of a group. No over-arching values are involved. How one "feels" tends to become the canon of decision and behavior:

Modern prophets rise to pronounce sublimation and self-mutilation the same. We, especially the

young among us, presume that an individual can live fully and freely, with no counsel or authority other than his desires, engaged completely in the development of all his capacities save the capacity for memory and the capacity for faith.

Mr. Schaar pertinently quotes Philip Rieff: "The question is no longer as Dostoevski put it: 'Can civilized men believe?' Rather: Can unbelieving men be civilized?"

But believe what? Everyone knows a handful of people who are "believers" in the best sense of the word—persons who carry around with them credos of intuitive verity which give their lives harmony and distinction—but these rare individuals cannot give their faith to others. On the other hand, externally imposed or indoctrinated beliefs are no solution. One notable meaning of "modern" is its indication of a mentality with built-in resistance to uncritical acceptance of anything. Science was supposed to fill the vacuum left by the loss of faith in traditional religion, but accumulating evidence that this is entirely outside its competence seems to be at the root of the present crisis.

Mr. Schaar regards America as a kind of test tube in which the reaction of men in the mass to the loss of a transcendent source of moral authority has gradually worked out to devastating completion. The institutional brakes of the old hierarchical order, which were weakening but still existed in Europe, had no place in the American outlook. Here, indeed, men set out to make a brave, new world, one where—"Each man becomes his own author and oracle, his own boundary setter and truth maker," where "The ego recognizes no source of truth and morality external to itself." This "individualism" was made into the philosophy and even the identity of the nation:

Our founding took place at an advanced stage of the progress toward epistemological and moral individualism. . . . At the time of the founding, the doctrine and sentiment were already widespread that each individual comes into this world morally complete and self-sufficient, clothed with natural

rights which are his by birth, and not in need of fellowship for moral growth and fulfillment. The human material of this new republic consisted of a gathering of men each of whom sought self-sufficiency and the satisfaction of his own desires. Wave after wave of immigrants replenished those urges, for to the immigrant, America largely meant freedom from inherited authorities and freedom to get rich. Community and society meant little more than the ground upon which each man challenged or used others for his own gain. Others were accepted insofar as they were useful to one in his search for self-sufficiency. But once that goal is reached, the less one has to put up with others the better. Millions upon millions of Americans strive for that goal, and, what is more important, base their political views upon it. The state is a convenience in a private search; and when that search seems to succeed, it is no wonder that men tend to deny the desirability of political bonds, of acting together with others for the life that is just for all. We have no mainstream political or moral teaching that tells men they must remain bound to each other even one step beyond the point where those bonds are a drag and a burden on one's personal desires.

The sudden development of technology, together with a vast expansion of bureaucracy in government during the past fifty years, needs to be considered against the background of the decline of belief in old ideas of authority, in "moral law," or in any philosophic foundation for the conception of law and order. Mr. Schaar shows how rational-legal administration gradually took the place of the older forms of authority, reaching into the lives of everyone as the demands of complex social organization increase, and establishing, through habits of conformity, the authority of the process of control. The moral authority behind the techniques of control was now only a memory, no longer an operative conviction:

The system works not because recognizable human authority is in charge, but because its basic ends and its procedural assumptions are taken for granted and programmed into men and machines. Given the basic assumption of growth as the main goal and efficiency as the criterion of performance, human intervention is largely limited to making incremental adjustments, fundamentally of an equilibrating kind. The system is glacially resistant

to genuine innovation, for it proceeds by its own momentum, imposes its own demands, and systematically screens out information of all kinds but one. The basic law of the whole is: because we already have machines and processes and things of certain kinds, we shall get more machines and processes and things of closely related kinds, and this by the most efficient means. Ortega was profoundly right when a generation ago he described this situation as one of drift, though at that time men still thought they were in command. That delusion is no longer so widespread. This development of control processes is not, of course, limited to the nongovernmental sector. In 1908, Henry Adams wrote: "The assimilation of our forms of government to the form of an industrial corporation . . . seems to me steady though slow." By now, any distinction between public and private in both process and substance would be very hard to draw in the United States.

The best of Mr. Schaar is in the last part of his paper, which he devotes to the kind of leadership which is needed to restore dignity and moral legitimacy to the ordering of human affairs. All this, of course, has little to do with what we ordinarily think of as politics. There is for example this passage on the use of language:

The language in which humanly significant leadership is expressed is also very different from the language of rational and objective discourse. It is a language profuse in illustration and anecdote, and rich in metaphor whose sources are the human body and the dramas of action and responsibility. This language is suggestive and alluring, pregnant, evocative—in all ways the opposite of the linear, constricted, jargonized discourse which is the ideal of objective communication. Decisions and recommendations are often expressed in parables but translucent to those who have eyes to see. Teaching in this language is done mainly by story, example, and metaphor—modes of discourse which can probe depths of personal being inaccessible to objective and meaningful discourse. Compare the Sermon on the Mount with the latest communiqué from the Office of Economic Opportunity in the War on Poverty, or Lincoln's Second Inaugural with Nixon's first . . . . Most of what modern information theory calls noise is of the essence of human authorities and their followers.

What Mr. Schaar is really urging upon us, in these "Reflections on Authority," is a return to the world-view Robert Redfield called the idea of Immanent Justice in his book, *The Primitive World and its Transformations*. He is arguing that without an appeal to the spontaneous moral sense in human beings, there can be no authentically legitimate authority, no "law and order" that men will respect. Today's crisis in legitimacy—for which the evidence is all about—is to be explained, he proposes, by saying "that the basic features and tendencies of modernity have produced a situation in which the established processes and formal structures of control are at war with the conditions necessary for authority." It is a battle in which "legitimacy is destroyed."

It should be noted that in the desperate struggle to regain what we are losing, or have already lost, our feeling of vast sophistication becomes our worst enemy. What is diminishing is simplicity of conviction, our sense of human worth and elementary moral identity. And the means for the recovery of these qualities cannot be put into the technical language we use so well, for this language shuts them out.

There is also a sense in which such simplicities are not simple at all. That is, the idea of a moral order behind material existence, once we leave the realm of ideal postulates, becomes difficult to apply. It is difficult, that is, without elevated vision, and elevated vision seems to be something that has to be earned—grown, achieved, striven after, sacrificed for. Getting it involves transactions which have no relation to the acquisitive principle. Elevated vision cannot be bought and no one can give it to us. Nor does it come spontaneously except on rare occasions, and then to those who respond in awe and with delight.

It seems evident that intuitive gropings get much closer than the existing rational approaches to what Mr. Schaar is trying to articulate, even though he succeeds better than most. As he says:

The radical distinction between subjective and objective is unknown in this kind of knowledge, for everything is personal and comes from within the prepared consciousness of the knower, who is simultaneously believer and actor. When it is about men, this kind of knowledge is again personal. It strives to see within the self and along with other selves. It is knowledge of character and destiny. Most of the facts which social scientists collect about men are in this epistemology superficial: information about man's external attributes, rather than knowledge of who he is and what his possibilities are.

One who possesses and values this kind of knowledge bases his claim to its validity on grounds which are quicksand to the objective and rational man. One of the foundations is strength of conviction.

Has such knowledge a "discipline," a "grammar," and are there rules for obtaining it? To ask these questions is to encounter a wilderness of claims. But whatever answer one selects, the learner will probably find that he makes no progress without being willing to become "as a little child." That may seem easy enough at the start, but he can't *stay* a little child. Notice that when Mr. Schaar was looking around for examples of truly human communication, he chose Jesus Christ and Abraham Lincoln. Perhaps we could say that these were men who grew into extraordinary adults without losing their childlike simplicity.

Even so, particular examples are probably misleading, if only because they seem inaccessible or have been ritualized into personified abstractions. To add intellectual underpinning to the intuitive longing, one might turn to the transcendentalist thinkers of the mid-nineteenth century, especially Emerson and Thoreau. They would be a good antidote to the tendency of intuitive feelings to weaken or short-circuit into little more than emotional barbarism. "Confronted with the structures of bureaucratic and technological coordination, the young," Mr. Schaar says, "fear all authority and flee into the unreason of drugs, astrology, and the *Book of Changes*, justifying the flight by the doctrine of 'do your own thing'—something that has never

appeared on a large scale among any populace outside Bedlam and the nursery, where it can be indulged because there is a keeper who holds ultimate power over the inmates."

Judging by the few examples we have of "ideal men," the right sort of growing up will be at least as difficult as the technological mastery of "things" which has led us so far astray. In fact, the identification of worthy human ends probably involves a self-mastery more demanding than the mastery of things and the forces of nature. Meanwhile, it ought to be admitted that very few of us are masters of the technical skills which are so grandly claimed for our entire civilization. Mr. Schaar accurately remarks:

For the masses, science is largely a matter of miracle, mystery, and authority. Translated into educational terms, the slogan that through science man has gained increasing knowledge of nature really means that a few men now know a great deal about how nature "works," while the rest of us are about as ignorant as we always have been. Translated into political terms, the slogan that through knowledge man has gained power really means that a few men have gained the means of unprecedented power over a great many other men. On the other hand, there are good reasons for thinking that the scientists and experts may not be able to perform the priestly role with enduring success.

This may define the first step in regaining a sense of fitness concerning what we ought to do next. We cannot possibly acquire an authentic moral sense, a feeling for the order that should govern the human community, without first admitting that we are "about as ignorant as we always have been." The borrowed and hired knowledge of technique is useless in relation to the tasks which lie ahead.