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Plato's Legacy of Social Control

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Plato's Legacy of Social Control

JOHN C. MERRILL

MARQUETTE BOOKS LLC
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This book is dedicated to all the brave souls who have suffered, and even died, in fighting against any Order or authority that attempts to degrade the individual and stifle freedom of expression.

The greatest principle of all is that nobody should be without a leader. Nor should the mind of anybody be habituated to letting him do anything at all on his own initiative But in war and in the midst of peace—to his leader he shall direct his eye and follow him faithfully. And even in the smallest matter he should stand under leadership. For example, he should get up, or move, or wash, or take his meals ... only if he has been told to do so. In a word, he should teach his soul, by long habit, never to dream of acting independently, and to become utterly incapable of it ...

[The leader] will restore us to our original nature and heal us, and make us happy and blessed. —PLATO

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FOREWORDS

ECHOES OF PLATO

Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned.

William Butler Yeats

Each of us puts his person and all his power in common under the
supreme direction of the general will, and in our corporate capacity,
we receive each member as an indivisible part of the whole ...
whoever refuses to obey the general will shall be
compelled to do so by the whole body.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau

[History's final phase is one] in which the social aim absorbs all
individual aims ... , one in which the individual perishes and realizes
his own private object only in that general aimFree individuals
are sacrificed in the severe demands of the national ends,
to which they must surrender themselves in this service

Georg W. F. Hegel

[The press] must be accountable to society for meeting
the public need and for maintaining the rights of citizens
It must know that its faults and errors have ceased to be
private vagaries and have become public dangers
Freedom of the press for the coming period can
only continue as an accountable freedom.

Commission on Freedom of the Press (1947)

I cannot help thinking that the concern for community, its values, properties, and means of access, is the major intellectual fact of the present age. Whatever evidence remains of the individualist conscience and the rationalist faith, it is hard to miss the fact that individualism and secularism are on the defensive.

New Imperatives are the order of the day.

Robert Nisbet

As the [20th] century draws to a close the totalitarian challenge persists and the threat from a kind of corporate plutocracy stands as an additional danger to the survival of democracy as we know it. In the new century [the 21st] America and the world must decide nothing less than whether the noble experiment will survive as a legacy to future generations or as the memory of a failed dream.

M. DiNunzio

In a disorderly social climate, the green and shallow roots of democratic culture needed to sustain democratic political institutions may shrivel and the new ... ideologies, probably with a strongly populist and pseudo-democratic rhetoric will surely arise ... [and] public disorder may even make the discredited alternative of military rule seem more appealing.

Robert A. Dahl

The media [of communication] serve the interests of state and corporate power ... [and] not only allow the agendas of news to be bent in accordance with state demands and criteria of utility, they also accept the presuppositions of the state without question.

Noam Chomsky

[All governments have the function] to regiment men by force, to make them as much alike as possible and as dependent upon one another as possible, to search out and combat originality among them ... The most dangerous man to any government is the man who is able to think things out for himself, without regard to the prevailing superstitions and taboos.

H. L. Mencken

Freedom and liberty must be recognized as tangential ideals ...
projections of an individualistic and transitional philosophy silhouetted
against a background of events moving in an opposite direction ... The
process [of social cooperation and conformity] is irreversible and
implicit: history moves in only one direction—
inert and unerring, she flows toward her goal.

Roderick Seidenberg

To say that freedom simply means that the individual can escape the
power of the state and decide for himself on the sense of his life and his
works seems in our day a simplistic, ridiculous, and adolescent reaction
... . [And likewise with “justice”] It’s up to the state to make justice
prevail: there is only collective justice....People under the spell of
politics seek less and less to control the state; they consider it normal
that the state should constantly expand its area of action and use ever
more instruments of power.

Jacques Ellul

We act rightly ‘When the time comes’ not out of strength of will but
out of a quality of our usual attachments and with the kind of energy
and discernment which we have available, and to this the
whole activity of our consciousness is relevant.

Iris Murdoch

[The “anti-individual”] is moved solely by the opportunity of complete
escape from the anxiety of not being an individual, the opportunity of
removing from the world all that convicted him of his own inadequacy.

His situation [has] provoked him to seek release in separatist
communities, insulated from the moral pressure of individuality
[I]n the recognition of his numerical superiority the ‘anti-individual’ at
once recognized himself as the ‘mass man’ and discovered the way of
escape from his predicament ... [by having] a disposition ...
to impose on all a uniformity of belief.

Michael Oakeshott

I must say that the argument for decentralization [of government] which has recently become somewhat fashionable, will not go very far in our times, when people have begun to question not only the distribution of power, but its very exercise, not only the structure of government, but its very nature.

John A. Lukacs

There is a danger that commercial media simply reflect the interests of those who own them and who are unaccountable either to government or public....There is always a genuine conflict of interest between government, the public, and those who own or control the media.

Mel Thompson

ABOUT PLATO

(427 – 347 BC)

Plato was the most famous pupil of Socrates but did not share his respect for democracy. He was influenced by the pre-Socratic Greek philosopher Heraclitus, who believed that societies were in constant flux and move in the direction of decay. For Plato, this suggested that his ideal type of government (described in *The Republic*) was needed to delay or stop this social entropy.

This highly regimented society has been a potent idea ever since, and Plato can rightfully be called the father of authoritarianism and perhaps the earliest voice to call for a society of order.

It is with this legacy of social control that this book deals.

After a time in Syracuse where Plato advised the ruler, he returned to Athens and started his own school, the Academy. His best known student was Aristotle. The fundamental part of his philosophy is his theory of “forms” or “ideas.” These were perfect transcendental originals of actual phenomena here on earth. They were ideals, not actual representations. So when it came to Plato’s “republic” or “polis,” it would be one that would approximate as much as possible the true “form,” which was a hierarchical, class-structured, controlled society.

The rulers would be the wise philosopher kings (guardians). A middle class of soldiers and police (auxiliaries) would keep order, and a large working class (producers) would see that the routine work got done. Each class was loyal to the state and happy with its lot.

Loyalty to the leadership and cooperative service to the society: This was Plato’s concept. Influential in various forms down through the ages, it is a legacy of social control that is dealt with in this book.

INTRODUCTION

Some powerful, multi-faceted, basically unseen magnet pulls societies and cultures toward a unitary center, seemingly countering the contrary social disposition toward anarchy and entropy. Order has an appeal for society, and always some authority stands in the wings, if not in center stage, to control and direct. Often this authority is invited, often not. But it is always there, everywhere, fulfilling the prophesies of the pre-Socratic Heraclitus and his follower, Plato. Replacing the ideal, happy, secure authority-led tribes that roamed the Dorian hills of ancient Greece, a tendency toward anarchy has developed, and can only be stopped by, an Ordered Society, a forceful, tightly structured leadership that can put the disorder to rest.

Hobbes, Rousseau, Hegel, and others later took up this historicist view of society heading toward decay, envisioned by Plato. It appeared in science again in the 20th century, with the 2nd Law of Thermodynamics and Norbert Wiener (1950) who prescribed “islands of decreasing entropy” (largely through better communication) to at least slow the tendency of a society to lose energy, move toward disorder, and ultimately disintegrate.

So to postpone or stop this creeping social disorder, Order is needed. This concept, at least in the area of sociology, is the legacy of Plato. With more predictability and stability that accompany Order, there is a sacrifice of personal freedom—including freedom of expression. A suspicion of freedom has always existed. Authoritarianism of one kind or another has sought to perpetuate the status quo, or the *status quo ante*, where the society, if it moves at all, moves very slowly under the careful eye of a Controller. This enforcer of Order must be wary of the Word—of the communication received by the populace, and it is this information

control, along with military support, that is essential for the maintenance of social order.

Order, depending on an authority of some kind, does not develop spontaneously; it must be engineered. Disorder is natural; order is unnatural. Individual freedom must be curtailed or guided for an ordered society. Everywhere, Order is attempting (but generally failing) to retard the dissolution of society caught in the process of entropy. Plato, at least in the West, was perhaps the earliest to see a need for a well-structured authoritarian State (see his *Republic*) as a force against social decay. His political legacy: individuals must be cooperative cogs in the governmental machine led by wise and strong leaders—always respectful of authority, keeping their place in the structure, and sublimating their personal desires to the concept of social Order.

Too much freedom results in demagoguery, mob rule, selfishness, and tends to undermine legal and religious authority—a constant worry among the ancient Greeks and Romans. Plato's authoritarian barrier against such decadence was an autocracy in which a wise and beneficent leader, aided by an educated elite, governed a compliant population. Down through the years, this concept has provided a rationale for a variety of autocrats to regulate their societies. It is Plato's political legacy to the world.

As one writer sees it (Wrong, p. 37), "order" means "regularity, predictability, and system as opposed to randomness, chance, and chaos." Most societies throughout history have enthroned Order in relative degrees. Only occasionally, and for relatively short terms, have societies veered away into more populist or individualist social structures. In these the tendency to anarchy increases, and the appeal for Order returns with its paternalism, security and stability. For most of history it seems that sacrificing personal freedom has been a small price to pay for Order. And always some authority—autocratic or collectivist—is ready to furnish, not always successfully, the leadership and direction called for.

Of course, an ordered society can get so inflexible and inhumane that it becomes dysfunctional and the order begins to fall apart—becoming unruly and even anarchistic. Then, in cyclic fashion, personal freedom gets out of hand, expression gets extreme and dangerous and social control mechanisms must kick in again to regain stability. For a society, then, if

one accepts Plato's sociology, Order is the last hope and the best possible solution to runaway individualism.

Order implies an authority; a holder of everything together, the keeper of cohesion, the force behind a stable society. Speech and actions must support the Order, and those that speak and act against the ordered society cannot be tolerated. When Order breaks down, people lose their sense of place and purpose and social decay is near.

There are many meanings for "order," and any meaning you might give it is relative and must be used in a specific context. But all contextual meanings have some commonalities, such as stability, predictability, structure, cohesiveness, cooperation, security, and control. Order, of course, can be "hard," based on force and inhuman treatment of some kind, or it can be "soft," based on the people voluntarily giving up freedom for the social whole. Both types will be considered on the following pages.

The ancient Chinese philosophers, especially those of the 5th to the 3rd centuries, saw the necessity of social order where in many cases there was little. Confucius, departing somewhat from the earlier "Sage Kings," proposed a kind of communitarian order based on principles of familial loyalty and development of individual virtue through a routine of right action and ritual. At about the same time, another philosopher, Mo Tzu, preached a universal love and a more hierarchical control structure, stressing the need for a strong and wise ruler and meritocracy. This in many ways was similar to Plato's emphases.

Mo Tzu believed that, by and large, rulers fail to honor the worthy and employ the capable; thus, a certain drift to disorder. The leaders must be men of wisdom, Mo Tzu believed. According to Mo, "When the eminent and wise rule over the stupid and humble, then there will be order, but when the stupid and humble rule over the eminent and wise there will be chaos." These are rather harsh words, but they are reflective of the sentiments of Plato in the Western World. Disorder, according to Mo (Mo Tzu, 1963, p. 94), is not solely the fault of the leaders, however. Listen to these criticisms of the people, the ruled:

The people give themselves up to evil, violence, thievery, and rebellion, using weapons, knives, poison, fire, and water to assault innocent persons on the roads and byways and seize their carriages and horses, robes and furs, for their benefit. And all these conditions come about for the same reason, *and as a result the world is in disorder.* (Italics mine)

The Taoist philosophical school, coming along in China mainly in the 3rd century, was not so concerned about social order, believing that the individual could overcome disorder by retiring into a mystical, internal world of peaceful meditation, serenity, and passivity. For such prominent Taoist thinkers as Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu, finding “the Way” would adapt a kind of Buddhism to earlier Chinese philosophy which would migrate into Japan and elsewhere as Zen. For the Taoists (Merton 1965), disorder in society was natural and, although “the Way” may not overcome it, at least it can isolate it from their daily lives.

What the reader will find in this book relates to the theory and reality of social Order and the various authoritarianisms that accompany it, while in the process impacting free expression and individualism. So different is this subject from my lifetime dedication to libertarianism that it has depressed me to deal with it. But the lure of order and authority is a fact of life and cannot be ignored. I perhaps thought (maybe naively) in 1974 when I wrote *The Imperative of Freedom* that my words would steer at least some students and journalists away from the encroaching Platonism in its many forms (e.g., groupism, community, theocracy, and autocracy). But what we have seen is that authority is still with us, probably increasing, under new names.

Many books since the 1970s, such as Hans Jonas’ *The Imperative of Responsibility* (1984), have rejected my legal minimalist theory and insist on norms that will guide us to responsible action. Such norms, (collective and utilitarian though they may be) are, in my belief, still bent on establishing “the proper” deontology for the individual, intruding on personal freedom. The arbiters of proper communication refuse to be silenced.

My heroes are the great libertarians who stem not from Plato but from Aristotle's more open and individualistic political sociology. This book is not about them, however, but about their opponents. Therefore, my heroes such as Mill, Godwin, Constant, Voltaire, Kierkegaard, Camus, Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, Jaspers, Humboldt, Emerson and Thoreau, get little attention on the following pages. Nor do spokesmen of Romanticism who extol individualism. The advocates of Existentialism with their dedication to personal freedom (exceptions: Sartre flirted with Marxism, and Heidegger became a Nazi) I have dealt with elsewhere (in *Existential Journalism*).

Plato (427-347 BC) is the key player in this book, my anti-hero who starts the authoritarian ball rolling down the corridors of history. His later disciples are Hegel (on one side) and Hobbes (on the other). Other thinkers like Fichte, Helvetius, Carlyle, and especially Maistre, have added their powerful voices to the importance of Order and authority. For some of them (especially the neo-Marxists of the late 20th century and today), Platonism has been injected with considerable humanism, but it still deprecates individual freedom and strengthens the intellectual lure of the closed and stable society.

Media systems throughout the world tend to cluster in their philosophies—tending either toward monolithic, state-controlled entities on one hand or toward more pluralistic, open ones on the other. Underdeveloped countries normally fall in the first category and well-developed ones in the second. So we can come up with a global generalization as to media: they are mainly economically sound and free or they are largely poor and controlled. Freedom, then, is closely correlated to economic health, but certainly not in every case. There are countries like Saudi Arabia, Singapore and the People's Republic of China where wealth has not brought freedom. But this generalization, like all stereotypes, carries some truth and is helpful in simplifying our overall worldview.

It is safe to say that North America, Western Europe, and some of the Pacific Rim nations and Australia have the most prosperous—and the freest—media systems. Struggling in the shadow of authoritarianism are the African countries. The same is true for most of Asia. Latin America

has a muddled and largely controlled press, although in spots it is prosperous, reflecting the general political instability that characterizes that region. The Middle East and North Africa are mired in a religious philosophy or strong-man leaders that discourage press freedom and initiative. The media systems of Sub-Saharan Africa, with one or two exceptions, show little inclination toward progress and quality, and along with Central Asia are providing their audiences little substantive and credible information.

So we can see that political authoritarian Order does little for a qualitative media system. We should be careful to note, however, that freedom of expression does not necessarily result in message quality and may, in fact, lead to a hellish communication society where the authority is not the government but a system of profit and vulgarism that deforms the people and turns them into unthinking and immoral zombies (note the gutter press and the pornographic websites in the U.S.).

In this book, I have tried to trace the main intellectual springs from which authoritarianism has emerged. I have also tried to describe, and perhaps explain, its lure. Controlling tendencies are not always obvious, or overt; many are subtle and come from our own institutions, including, prominently, the public media. It is easy to look askance at Cuba and Venezuela, or Vietnam and Saudi Arabia, and console ourselves that we, unlike them, have free expression. But authoritarianism lures us, too. Its expressions may be different, but they are here with us now, tempering or silencing our speech, directing our actions, and keeping us in line.

In the U.S. a few book titles of recent years give evidence of the media's will to power: *Agents of Power*, *The Artillery of the Press*, *Media Power*, *The Media Elite*, *Networks of Power*, *The Elite Press*, *The Princely Press*, *Democracy's Oxygen*, and *The Fourth Branch of Government*. The lure of authority and the de-emphasis of individual persons has been noted in numerous articles, a prominent one being James Carey's "The Decline of Democratic Journalism" appearing in *Columbia Journalism Review* in 1998.

Some 21st century writers, on the other hand, see the media losing power. A media sociologist David Demers (2007), for example, believes media are reaching more people but having less ability to control

information. In 1990, he, like Ralph Lowenstein (*Macromedia*), posits a growth in specialized media to satisfy the public's increasingly varied tastes. This trend, of course, splinters the Big Media, causing them to lose much of their former power. Some would see this as positive, but it causes one to wonder if Plato's theory of social decay also applies to the media system of the free world.

Order, safety, paternalism, community: these and other traditional factors entice societies toward authority. Anti-liberal philosophies, spinoffs from Plato and Hegel, saw social change as dangerous and thought it should be arrested. These newer philosophies have in common their idea that freedom is shallow and harmful, the individual is irresponsible, and community order is what is needed for a flourishing and happy society. People have always desired to be secure, rather than to be free.

Hegel believed this, and he gave such people strong words of comfort. He was probably the most intellectually serious anti-liberal political thinker of modern times, championing an organic society—not the individual—as all-important. A fellow German, Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1763-1814) also championed authority and believed we all need a leader (called an *Oberherr*), someone with great rational insights. And there was Claude-Adrien Helvetius (born 1715 in Paris), bucking the age of Enlightenment and proposing a Brave New World kind of society where we are trained to seek only what is useful to us. This is the concept of a happy society, complacent in its stability and passivity, that fosters obedience to Order and love of group utility that had some influence on early British utilitarians like Jeremy Bentham.

This is the lure of authoritarianism that emphasizes order, harmony, and collective collegiality. It not only reflects Platonist ideas, but merges them with the pragmatic, success-oriented philosophy of Machiavelli. Order and structure are combined with social viability. It is subtle. It often feigns a respect for personal freedom (e.g. Rousseau) while constantly taking it away and centralizing it. It beguiles us, even in the so-called First World, into believing that we are free when actually we are not.

Authoritarianism is seen by some as the opiate of the people, drugging them into a happy, passive, state of uncritical and unthinking

solidarity. It promises to free them from the trauma of freedom, to instill in them a love for the community and authority, and to lead them into submerging their selves and their loyalties into the group. They not only see freedom as harmful, but some even deny its existence or validity. For example, Baruch Spinoza believed men are deceived “if they think themselves free” (Magee, p. 94). This influential thinker of the 17th century, in spite of his doubts about the reality of freedom, was a strong advocate of free expression, writing from liberal Holland and presaging the efforts of England’s John Locke.

In the next century, the great French Encyclopaedist Denis Diderot said (Ibid., p. 124) that “the word freedom has no meaning.” This philosophical skepticism about freedom still plagues us today as we try to read meaning into the “free press” clause of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Careful thinking might well convince us that Rousseau was right when he said that people, although born free, are everywhere in chains. Bonds of some kind, psychological or physical, bind us all and tend to pull us together into regimented, cooperative societies. Perhaps Plato’s dream of a freedomless, collectivist world is coming to pass, a world that will give Order to society and at least slow down its decay.

But Plato would say that Order without wise leadership is not enough. In the modern world, largely in the 1930s, authorities arose in Germany, Italy and the Soviet Union, and in many African, Latin American and Asian nations. Principally through military efforts, this authoritarianism was all but eliminated at mid-century. It was, however, still there, and we have seen it reappear in Russia, the Balkans, the Middle East, Latin America, and Southeast Asia. Even in the United States, executive orders, political allegiances, court decisions, lobbying groups, security laws, and political correctness and minority sensitivity have put freedom of expression at risk.

It is hoped that this book will highlight the current danger and renew the freedom-lover’s zeal to fight encroaching authority everywhere it impinges on our freedom of expression. It is not easy to fight authority and it is especially difficult not to go too far and lapse into anarchism. Some people, of course, may try to isolate themselves from controls, but this is not fighting authority, only fleeing from it.

The fight against authoritarianism is far from lost, although the future is not bright. Freedom, here and there, is still alive and well and varied voices of freedom are being heard. But through intellectual inertia and technological determinism, the well-known words of McLuhan (*Understanding Media*, 1965) might be enlarged somewhat to say that “the media and the values of their controllers are the message.”

John C. Merrill
Columbia, Missouri

CHAPTER 1

THE CASE AGAINST FREEDOM AND DISORDER

Out of the mists of the earliest history comes the pessimistic idea that societies decay and need strong authoritarian social structure to delay this Heraclitan and Platonic tendency.

In the dawning years of European history there were many voices (kings, emperors, warrior chiefs, church leaders and the like) who spoke out against any kind of democratic society and feared the free expression of opinion. Following in the footsteps of the entropic historicism of Plato (usually without realizing it), these establishers of Order and social conformity began to give way to more individualism in the Renaissance of the 16th century.

THE HISTORICISM OF SOCIAL DECAY

Plato (meaning “Broad Shoulders”), whose real name was Aristocles, had put forward a theory of social decay (Popper, pp. 19-20) and suggested a strong authoritarian and well-structured government to arrest it (pp. 20-21). Plato had one ultimate standard: *the interest of the state*. What is good and virtuous is what furthers the state; what is bad is what harms it and confuses it (p. 107). His historicism was that as societies “progressed” from what he called the “heroic age of tribalism” to more complexity and individualism, they would decay and disintegrate. For Plato, the wise should lead and the ignorant should follow (Popper, p. 120).

Leaders (the guardians), according to Plato in “On Philosophy in Rulers” (*The Republic*), should be philosophers; men who are “trained up by the pursuit of all kinds of knowledge” and have the capacity for pursuit of “the highest”—higher than justice and wisdom—“the idea of the good.” According to Plato (*Ibid.*):

The good is to the intellectual faculty what the sun is to that of vision: it is the source and cause of truth, which is the light whereby we perceive ideas; it is not truth nor the ideas, but above them; their cause, as the sun is the source of light and the cause of growth.

Plato was no democrat. He saw it as absurd for every person to have equal say. For him (Book VIII of the *Republic*), the “democratic” type is lacking in discipline, seeking pleasure of the moment, and indulging in unnecessary desires. More interested in the harmony and stability of the entire society than with the individuals within it, Plato had no compunction about censorship, and would not tolerate anything that appealed to the non-rational parts of our nature.

Friedrich Nietzsche in the last half of the 19th century certainly followed in Plato’s footsteps. In his *Beyond Good and Evil* especially he endorsed the idea of inequality and the need for hierarchy. It takes a certain nobility, writes Nietzsche, to recognize the “need for radically different grades of ranks ... that separate man from man.”

Two late 20th century writers (Stevenson and Haberman, 1998, p. 107) maintain that Plato “would surely be horrified at the pervasive influence of what we now call ‘the media’ on everyone from early childhood on.” A lack of social order, for Plato, would be manifest by the disorder of the media, where permissiveness spreads, and moral authority disappears. Lack of authority that fails to validate an orderly and progressive society can be found in the media as well as the government; in fact, disorder and lack of strong authority on the part of either will be reflected in the thinking and action of the other.

Opposing temporarily this main line of thinking were the more open 17th and 18th centuries of European rationalism and libertarianism, followed by romanticism of the 19th century and the existentialism and

transcendentalism of the 20th century. But Platonic Order had retained its basic appeal. It was not about to go away.

Reflecting the libertarianism of the 18th and 19th centuries and warning against the growing monolithic Order was Roderick Seidenberg, born in Germany in 1889. Coming to America in 1939 as an architect, he had a deep interest in ideas and wrote for magazines like *Mercury*, *Nation*, and *New Republic*. Seidenberg had many intellectual friends, two of whom (rather strangely) were H. L. Mencken and Sigmund Freud, both of whom were suspicious of democracy and equality.

In Seidenberg's most influential book, *Posthistoric Man*, he maintains that the "testimony of history supports the suspicion that man seeks "to escape from freedom" (p. 230) and that the "communal impulse in man ... was the norm of primitive social life ... " (p. 232). This urge to order and group-commitment was then instinctive, whereas Seidenberg tells us that "the collectivism of today is born of the conscious organization of society."

ORDER AND THE FADING INDIVIDUAL

The noted sociologist Emile Durkheim (1951, *Suicide*) seemed to desire such strict organization of society. He felt we needed more Order and saw its negation as leading to what he called "anomie"—few, if any, social norms. He went so far as to say that this general tendency toward anomie causes people to commit suicide for they feel lost without order and a strong authority. The same might be said of societies. Durkheim was a cultural relativist, thinking that one's culture was the Order that should be followed. Collective rules should be followed, according to Durkheim, because society is more intelligent than an individual person. So, for Durkheim, social Order comes from a particular culture's determining duties and obligations of the citizens (Hall, 1987, p. 183). Just how a particular society does this is, of course, a problem each one must answer.

Such conscious or centralized planning with its unified controls is the kind of Order against which Friedrich Hayek warns in *The Road to Serfdom* (p. 170). He writes, "The impending, inevitable, conscious

collectivization of men, under a universal system of organization will constitute...a basic change of direction for humanity—a new phase.”

With the dominance of authority, Hayek (pp. 112-13) believes there will be “the gradual conversion of the individual into a frictionless and depersonalized community ... [that is] irreversible and implicit.” But Hayek is far from convinced that such an authoritarian society will halt the march to social decay predicted by Plato in the fourth century B.C. However, he seems hopeful rather than certain.

There is, and always has been, a call for order in a society. A social concept implies order. Even a populist or democratic (horizontal social structure) requires a certain ordering and predictability that promises continuity. As important as Order can be to a society, there is an inherent danger to it. It may fall into the wrong hands and be used by immoral persons or parties to serve their egocentric interests. Plato, of course, did not consider this as possible or probable because he saw the leaders as wise and moral philosophers. And he saw his vertical social structure as socially beneficial and accepted voluntarily by the various classes.

In today’s world there are many kinds of authoritarianisms, each one advocating its own Order or social discipline. For Plato democracy was not the best system for a wise and ordered society. It was too complex and put too much power into the hands of the mass population that was not qualified to handle it. There have been some governmental systems in history that have embraced, and benefited by (at least temporarily), this Platonic society. But for the most part such vertical systems have begun or have been transformed into harsh-order societies ruled over by dictatorial autocrats.

Order, of course, can be injected into a society by civil authorities or by religious authorities. These authorities can work together or in tandem to bring about social order. We can see this clearly in Islamic countries today; but other civic-religious configurations in the world manifest this same proclivity, one we cannot ignore.

CHAPTER 2

RELIGION AS AN INSTRUMENT OF ORDER

It seems that the earliest source of Order was a transcendental force at the center of it all that provided a religious social cohesion for people disposed to competition and conflict.

Religion is, and always has been, concerned with Order. Rules and traditions are of utmost importance. God — through religious leaders on earth — is the source of this Order. Helping to bring this disciplined society are authoritative teachers with their interpretation of holy scriptures, religious traditions, and the following of rules. Shared values in the religious communities are most important. These values and moral imperatives give cohesion and solidarity to the communities. Behind it all is a quest for Order.

During the Middle Ages, or Europe's medieval period, the Roman Catholic Church (its intellectual leaders being mainly neo-Platonists) accepted and exemplified the concept of an ordered society that provided definite norms for collectivistic living. Of course, to some degree the Church shared power with the various states, but it was the overarching glue that held European society together. Both the kings and the theocrats treasured this authority over the people. Two authors (Trager and Dickerson, 1999, p. 37) recently put it this way:

The king was God's divine counterpart on earth and was due absolute obedience. For the monarch, absolute obedience was an administrative convenience that guaranteed political control, and economic stability. For the religious, this blind obedience was

absolutely necessary if one wanted to enter the glory and honor of God's kingdom and be freed from the power of sin.

By the mid-16th century, the Church was consumed with heretics, reformers (like Luther and Calvin), and dangerous books. Attempting to keep Order and its authority intact, the Church established the Inquisition to punish heretical thinkers and also began banning books through the Index of Prohibited Books. After Gutenberg's printing press made books available throughout Europe, many of which were critical of the Church, book burning became a routine Church tactic. In the late 1500s, the Inquisition netted a variety of victims—heretics, nonbelievers, and Jews. In Spain alone (Ibid., p. 39) more than 2,000 Jews and heretics were killed and thousands more were imprisoned and tortured. It was not a good period for an institution protecting Order and the Christian faith.

In spite of reformist and other challenges to its authority, the Church has retained its power. It is arguably the oldest institution of Order in world history, having existed for nearly two millennia. Its call to order is loud and constant. Church authority was imposed and maintained, not by compulsion, but by an appeal to people's desire for a belief system that would carry over to a world beyond the grave. Especially in the fifteen centuries following the first pope (Peter), the Papacy and its bishops exercised control over millions of people seeking leadership. And today more than a billion Roman Catholics look to the Vatican for guidance, not only for their belief system, but for their everyday activities.

The futurist Fukuyama notes that religion (especially hierarchical) has been significant in building order through the years (1999, p. 235). Just as Confucianism in China and Shintoism in Japan promoted emperor worship, Christianity in Europe justified the divine-right rule of kings. Not only was religion in Europe an aid to regal authority, but it infused a sense of order into the society, helping to develop a sense of community—based on common belief and held together by ritual and religious practice.

Both in Europe and America this earlier impact of Christianity has moderated since the mid-20th century. Christian societies, notes Fukuyama (pp. 237-38) have become more secularized and infused with other faiths, but they still wield powerful influence in providing a basic moral order.

A pull toward religion reflects a longing to be part of a community to have fellowship with like-minded people. Fukuyama believes (p. 278) that recent surge toward religion—especially in the multi-segmented Protestant world—is less an expression of rigid belief than of a desire for order, common norms, and a fellowship. In any case, religion calls people to Order, and people are still responding.

The use of rituals, icons, and symbols of a religious nature reinforces the authority and orderly procedures of religion. This is especially evident in the Catholic Church. Priestly robes, crosses, candles, incense, rosaries, and a number of regularized bodily positions serve to standardize the communicants and provide a sense of Order and predictability.

And even in the splintered non-Catholic congregations, routinized activities—music, hymn-singing, scripture reading, sermons, baptisms, and sermonizing—serve to give a sense of community and harmony.

Centuries before the Christian era, the Jewish tradition had implanted Order at the center of its belief in Yahweh or Jehovah (God). God spoke through the prophets, and the Israelites, the progeny of Abraham, were submitted to religious commandments (brought by Moses and others) that sought a lasting Order for the Jews there and later throughout the world.

With the Israelites, as with most religions, God is the Authority, the Order, the one who gives a kind of unity and coherence to societies. This authority is not democratic. As Stanley Fish wrote in 2007, God—like Thomas Hobbes' Leviathan, “requires obedience, and those who worship him must subordinate their personal desires to his will.” His rule, according to Fish, is the “antithesis of democracy, which elevates individual choice to a position of primacy.”

The ancient Israelites kept going astray, threatening the viability of their faith and society, and God kept calling them back to Order. They realized that they were without proper leadership and through the prophet Samuel they requested “a king to judge us like all the other nations.” God spoke through Samuel and in essence said, “No.” A king would be bad. But the people insisted and created a monarchy. This story shows that the origin of the state (“the divine right of kings”) was not divinely inspired. But in the case of Israelites, God was the only king needed, and was instrumental in giving order to the society. The people of Israel believed

that their king was subordinate to a higher law. He (contrary to the kings in other civilizations) was only a man, and God's Law judged the people.

Not only ethnicity, but also common faiths in their one God play large parts in this Jewish social and religious order. Judaic Order is strong and deep-rooted and is based on a complex mixture of Jewish law and tradition, interpreted by community and rabbinical leadership. The Torah (meaning "Teaching")—the first five books of the Hebrew Bible—is the foundation of Jewish Order, providing rules for social and ethical matters. By the 7th century AD, the *Talmud* (a complex encyclopedia of rules and traditions) supplemented the Talmudic teaching on the ordering of society and religion.

In Islam as in Judaism, the concept of Order is vital. Derived principally from the holy words of the *Qur'an* and holy law—*Sharia*—order is imposed on all Muslims. It is strict, normative, authoritarian order directing the Muslim societies in their everyday lives. The *Qur'anic* scriptures are basic and inviolable; having been received by the Prophet Mohammed (ca. 570-632 A.D.) directly from Allah (God). Individual interpretation of the scriptures is important for Muslims, although the holy reciters or *mullahs* always provide authority. Pleasing God is the ultimate aim of a good life, and for the Muslims there are universal moral standards. Order, in Islam, is achieved by a kind of collective adherence to Mohammad's teaching. However, such Order falls far short in many aspects of life, illustrated by the conflicts between the Shia and Sunni Muslims.

Then there is Buddhism. In addition to millions in the East, Schopenhauer and many others from the West may have found self-realization or personal enlightenment from Buddhism, but this religion does not point society to Order; only individuals. A sense of solidarity with all living things is important to the Buddhist (one may be reborn as a dog or fig tree), and this does provide some sense of order for the society—at least a common respect for life. A subtle pressure or order is placed upon the Buddhist to do good things, for this will determine *karma*, what one's next life will be. So even though Buddhism (founded by Siddhartha Gautama in India about 550 B.C.) does not have the strict

norms of other religions, it does provide for its some 500 million adherents a basic pattern of Order.

Much older than Buddhism is Hinduism, kindred Indian religion. With a structured society very much resembling the Platonic state, Hinduism had no belief in equality. People need social structure that will provide Order. A caste system (*varna*) was created, with those at the top of social ladder considered more pure and wise than those at the bottom. At the top were the Brahmins, similar to Plato's philosopher kings—less than 10 percent of the population. Then came the warriors and administrators; next came the farmers, merchants and artisans, and then the peasants or common folk (*Shudras*). Lower than any of these were those having no caste, the untouchables (*Harijans* or *Dalits*), those who perform the Indian society's dirty work—such work as toilet cleaners, morticians, and scavengers. The sacred texts of Hinduism, the *Vedas* and the *Laws of Manu*, maintain that if Hindus perform their own special duties completely, an Order or balance would be achieved in the world that could bring about peace.

Sikhism, primarily a religion of northern India, maintains that without God's inspiration, people fall under evil impulses and live inauthentic lives. Without the direction of God, people become nothing under the impulses of greed, anger, lust, worldly attachments, and pride. To maintain an ordered and worthy society Sikhs are required to develop self-control, contentment, forgiveness, love of God, and humility.

The source for Sikh order (Thompson, p.174) is a book called the *Rehat Maryada*. It is considered the authoritative guide to Sikhism, giving the teachings of the ten Gurus as a guide for the Sikh manner of living. The Sikhs are peaceful people, but they believe firmly that violence is condoned when needed to regain order and justice, or for self-defense.

It seems that every religion has revolved around an authoritative center, that it has needed conformity and ritual and has a deity or a religious leader (or both) in that center to provide direction and stability to the society. In the spiritual or religious world there has always been a call to Order, which in some way goes against the idea of egalitarianism and populist control. It also goes against the idea of developing individual or personal virtue proposed by such thinkers as Aristotle and Confucius.

Confucianism is often considered a religion, but it is really a philosophy. For Kung Fu-tzu or Confucius (born in 551 B.C.), to obey the unenforceable and to sustain social order was to be virtuous. This was an individualist philosophy predicated on following the personal *Dao* (Way) and merging it into a collective virtuous society. But the emphasis for Confucius (China's foremost philosopher) was not a hard Order social structure but one that seeks to spread self-control and moderation from the family to the in-group, and to a broader society. The well-being of the total society was, for Confucius, the primary function of a ruler. This ruler, like Plato's guardian, must be wise and virtuous. Confucius believed that the more virtuous the ruler, the more virtuous the people would be. As he saw it, the more virtuous the general population, the more Order would be found in the society.

Throughout history the remedy for social chaos has always been one of choosing self-discipline and a self-ordered life (e.g. Kierkegaard and Emerson) versus bowing to the dictates of organizations and strong leaders (e.g.. theocracies and autocracies). Religions, in general, tend to be more magisterial in their expectations for their followers, stressing centralized discipline and hierarchical order. This is in opposition to weaker forms of self-guidance, where personal virtue and liberal individualism are important. This is why, in my opinion, the Roman Catholic Church is a vast reservoir of social order and power, drawing heavily on the hierarchical organizational structure of Plato with a meritocracy in control at many levels. Contrast that with the self-motivated varieties of subjectivism, transcendentalism, romanticism, relativism, permissivism, and existentialism that wash about in disconnected ways and you will see the inherent appeal of the Platonic legacy for social control.

CHAPTER 3

CHANGING TIMES

The stress given to freedom in the 17th and 18th centuries as the Order of the Church gave way to science and rationalism portended a new era, but the older concern for authority and hierarchical social structure remained.

By the 17th century in Europe, the Catholic Church's hold on people was changing, slowly but surely. Thomas Hobbes (1588- 1679) observed "autonomous individuals relentlessly pursuing their own interests at odds with one another" (Wrong, p. 21). He saw this as an "erosion of medieval and feudal ties" and the rise of "masterless men." Human beings are naturally evil, he thought, who need a strong authority (as the Church, he believed, had ceased to be) to protect them against themselves. So he prescribed order in the form of Leviathan (for Hobbes it was a king), a supreme monarchical controller of expression and action.

Some of these early calls to Order have been couched in a kind of spiritual vagueness that sounds liberal but insinuates a kind of authoritarianism. For example, Hegel's *historische Zeitgeist* (history's spirit of the times) somehow endowed the State with authoritarian powers. Probably the best example of a mystical Order was provided by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in the 18th century, talking of a "General Will" (a kind of large, super-personal force) that was "a unity in diversity" serving to bring order and social solidarity. The prominent British philosopher Isaiah Berlin (*Freedom and its Betrayal*, p. 49) calls Rousseau "one of the most sinister and most formidable enemies of liberty in the whole history of modern thought."

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CHAPTER 8

COMMUNITARIAN ORDER

A kind of Order, appearing in attractive democratic wrappings, is “communitarianism,” a neo-populist vision of social control rejecting the Platonic hierarchical structure. It is a horizontal control evolving out of public dialogue or social conversation. In some way, Rousseau’s General Will can emerge in this meaningful form of community and a cooperative form of leadership will achieve an ordered society.

The noted American sociologist, Robert Nisbet, has warned persistently of society’s troubled state and retreat from Order. Writing in 1975, he noted a drift toward individualism that was harmful. He saw that (xi) “something like a vacuum obtains in the moral order for large numbers of people.” He was calling people back to community and moral order.

What Nisbet says can easily be applied to the press. Listen to these incisive words as he proceeds (Ibid.):

Human loyalties, uprooted from accustomed soil, can be seen tumbling across the landscape with no scheme of larger purpose to fix them. Individualism reveals itself less as achievement and enterprise than as egoism and mere performance. Retreat from the major to the minor, from the noble to the trivial, the communal to the personal, and from the objective to the subjective is commonplace. There is a widely expressed sense of degradation of values and of corruption of culture. The sense of estrangement from community is strong.

Nisbet's words are those of a modern communitarian advocating individual submission to the community or group. It is a call for the individual to come to the group, not only for personal satisfaction, but in the interest of the whole community. It is essentially a call *from the wild*—a call for unification, for emersion in group values, for solidarity, for going along to get along, and for finding a place that is other-directed. At least in its presently inchoate theoretical stage, communitarianism is a world of happy times, just over the river of social contention, where people sit around having public conversations and deprecating eccentrics.

MOVING TOWARD FICHTE'S *GATTUNG*

Communitarianism today is trying to reestablish community and values, to put the society above egoistic individualism, and to stress social obligation rather than an obsession with personal freedom. The collectivity in a sense becomes the authority—a kind of democratic authoritarianism. Does this mean that the “community” has some sort of authority? It seems so, but its nature is amorphous. At any rate, individualism must be lost or subsumed in the community.

Back in the 18th century, Johann Fichte had stated it more bluntly: “The individual himself is nothing ... without society ... the human being hardly exists at all.” (Berlin, p. 67) Communitarians seem to be saying much the same, though in more moderate terms; they would probably agree with the German philosopher that *Gattung*, the group, is society's only reality—at least that it is more important than the individual person.

Communication theorist Clifford Christians (1993, 2002) has been a prominent voice in instilling communitarianism in journalism and public communication. Proposing “community conversation,” Christians urges greater citizen involvement in society. He contends (*Good News*, p. 16) that communitarians do not want to do away with differing world views, but only to ensure that these views “contribute constructively to universal solidarity.” A little earlier, writing in reference to the information media (Ibid., p. 14), he thought that they [the views] should engender “a like-minded world view among the public” and devote themselves to what he calls “civic transformation.”

When the group—the *Gattung*—is enthroned, the individual person, like the particular tree in the forest, tends to lose identity and significance. Inclusiveness is a popular concept with the communitarians. Make everybody a part of the group. We are all part of our government, we are told, but our leaders know best. We are basically lost in a population that is very minimally involved in government. But we are part of the *Gattung* and therefore, Fichte tells us, we have power and authority. This idea of inclusion has invaded the field of journalism also. Now we are told that everyone is a journalist.

EVERYBODY A JOURNALIST?

Communitarianism's desire to see greater citizen involvement in social information is usually seen as the genesis of what is called "public" (a.k.a. "civic") journalism, where citizens have their voices heard within, and alongside, the traditional ("old") media. It seems that journalism is to be opened to everyone.

In fact, in 2007, Scott Gant, a Washington lawyer, published a book *We're all Journalists Now*, contending that the line between institutional journalists and internet (cyberspace) journalists has become all but invisible. He points out (in his Chapter 1) that in 2005 there were nine million blogs in the U.S. "with forty thousand new ones being launched every day ... [with] some fifty million globally." According to Gant some 35% of the bloggers considered blogging a form of journalism.

Although communitarianism has met with some opposition in the West and has not permeated the far reaches of the globe (and how could it in unfree societies?), communitarianism's media offspring, *public or civic* journalism, has reared its head especially in the U.S. It has been praised widely in both academic and journalistic circles (Carey, J.W., 1987, 1998, Lambeth, 1992, Charity, 1995, Rosen, 1996, Merritt, 1998, and Glasser, 1999). Public journalism proposes to democratize journalism by involving the public in the continuing editorial decision-making of the media.

Old-time or traditional journalists—and the thousands of students filling journalism schools—should be concerned. If everybody is a

journalist, then what are these traditional journalists? And what about journalism schools? What is their purpose?

This trend toward public journalism, it would seem, is a trend *away* from authority, away from Order, away from standards, away from parameters, and away from any pretense of professionalism. Plato would probably advise against it, seeking instead a move toward higher standards, wiser leaders, and a more elite group of practitioners.

JÜRGEN HABERMAS AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE

A contributor to this belief in the importance of the group and community “conversation,” has been the German sociologist Jürgen Habermas (1998). According to one author (Christians (2002, p. 65), Habermas “understands language to be an agent of culture and social organization” and stresses that “moral consciousness must be nurtured [in spite of] conditions of technocracy and institutional power that stifle autonomous action in the public area.”

Adding to the concept of a “democratic” press, Habermas proposes (1991) a reason-based, consensus-forming public discussion forum in what he terms the “public sphere”—a space existing between the economy and the government where public opinion develops. It is from this public opinion that the people can supervise government. They, in a sense, can take the place of the self-centered public media today.

Habermas *sounds* like a democrat wishing a public conversation could take place for the edification and leadership of a community. But he *appears to be* another elitist trying to bring order to society by having a special, well-informed and articulate group coming up with answers in the “public sphere.” What public sphere is he talking about? Could he mean television, public forums, radio talk shows? We have those already, of course. Maybe he is thinking about the internet, about the public Cyberspace. It is unclear just who would moderate or supervise these public sphere discussions, or how their decisions would be implemented.

THE OPPOSITION OF FRANK MEYER

The concept of “communitarianism,” like “social responsibility,” is quite nebulous in spite of valiant attempts to explain it. Some critics don’t like it, seeing it as a kind of neo-Marxist philosophy trying to get in the back door. One commentator, Frank Meyer (1996, p. 39), calls the communitarian idea simply an “organic view of society” (which he bemoans) and a “subordination of the individual person to society and therefore a denial that the freedom of the person is the decisive criterion of a good polity.”

It is as if, for observers like Meyer, communitarianism seeks to cast men and women as servants of the society instead of the society serving them (p.51). Meyer tends to see authoritarianism in social groups and movements, and his writings reflect to a large degree my own thinking about the decline of the individual described in *The Imperative of Freedom*.

It is not hard to understand the lure of authority prevailing today—even an authority of “community”—and with it the declining importance of the individual. Freedom somehow is very often explained away through utilitarian arguments and it ends up being a soft, almost meaningless, concept. Frank Meyer (p. 69) gives this clear definition of freedom—one that should cause the authoritarian personality to sit up and take notice:

Freedom means freedom: not necessity, but choice; not responsibility, but the choice between responsibility and irresponsibility; not duty, but the choice between accepting and rejecting duty; not virtue, but the choice between virtue and vice.

PLATO SETS THE STAGE FOR ORDER

What we have seen suggests two main traditions of social relationships emanating from Plato and Aristotle. Plato stressed the unitary state—the power-center of the society with its class-oriented and non-egalitarian structure—and believed that loyalties other than to this state

were counterproductive. The best exposition of this Platonic philosophy (other than Plato's writings themselves) is Karl Popper's influential *The Open Society and its Enemies*, Vol. I on Plato (1966).

Aristotle, on the other hand, believed that the individual citizens, through thought and habitual virtue, could best assure the progress and security of the state. He still had faith in individualistic progress through a virtuous life and retained many of the nobility values of the Periclean age.

But it was Plato's thought, by and large, that prevailed throughout the Middle Ages in Europe—largely through the leadership of the Church. Aristotle, with his more humanistic, virtue-based ethics and democratic proclivities, entered later and influenced the Renaissance in 15th and 16th centuries, and the subsequent rise of rationalism and libertarianism during the Enlightenment of the 17th and 18th centuries. Since this book deals mainly with authority, not freedom, we will look more closely at Plato's influence and let Aristotle rest.

THE COMPLEXITY OF ROUSSEAU'S SOCIETY

Michael Sandel, a postmodern Harvard professor of politics and communitarian, quotes (1996, p. 319) Rousseau as saying that each person should be transformed “into a part of a larger whole from which this individual receives, in a sense, his life and being.” This is the communitarian's message for today.

Rousseau's kind of society is upon us today, or it is hanging around the door waiting to come in. Lewis Yablonsky, at the end of the last century, sees the individual disappearing, at least being over-organized and turned into what he calls a “robopath.” These robopaths are, he writes (1972, pp. p. 7, p.13), dehumanized people who have robot-like behavior, who exhibit ritualistic patterns of behavior. A similar voice is that of George W. Morgan who believes mass society is threatening to crush the individual into impotence. He writes (1968, p. 66) that “man's every activity is more and more modeled after the machine—standardized, automatic, and repeatable.” He believes that in all institutions of society

efforts are increasingly being made “to avoid, or render unnecessary, the judgments, decisions, and even the presence of the individual man.”

This robotization of the person is not what modern communitarians say they have in mind, although their negation of the individual person and the enthroning of “group think” comes close. Rousseau’s (and to a large extent Hegel’s) collectivist societies of regimented and de-emphasized individuals bear some resemblance to communitarianism, and might well presage Morgan’s machine-like societies.

Rousseau’s earlier form of “communitarianism” was to be held together by a kind of mystical General Will. Today’s communitarians would also postulate a similar Order-producing society stemming from public conversations that manifest Habermas’s “ideal speech” situation—principally stressing common interests, knowledge, and mutual respect.

This, to some, may sound a little too idealistic (or unrealistic): this assumption of widespread commonalities of knowledge, interest, and respect. And the idea that some kind of Order or leadership could develop from a series of such a dream world of 18th English century “coffee house” conversations strikes many as beyond serious consideration. Theoretically, in such a Habermasian society, Order would come about slowly—but rationally—evidencing itself, not in misused power, but in a mutual interest that transcends the politics of individual competition.

This communitarian tendency is a strong one and definitely was not eliminated with the end of the Cold War and repudiation of Marxism during the final decade of the last century. A new thrust of group decision-making, resulting from unselfish and collegial conversation, is very much alive and well. It sees itself as broadening and improving the idea of democratic rule, of providing Order without the historical element of fear and force.

A FEW WORDS OF CAUTION

Opponents of communitarianism look with suspicion on its implications, seeing the old tendencies of power developing in elite hands, and corrupting another laudable social theory. Alexis de Tocqueville in his

19th century classic *Democracy in America* raised a serious doubt about collectivist societies (I, p. 269) with this observation and question:

A majority taken collectively is only an individual, whose opinions, and frequently whose interests, are opposed to those of another individual, who is styled a minority. If it be admitted that a man possessing absolute power may misuse that power by wronging his adversaries, why should not a majority be liable to the same reproach?

It is doubtful that a journalist (at least a Western one) could work well in the kind of egalitarian and collegial society where super-democratic forces coalesce to bring forth policy from “public conversation.” But people change and it is quite possible that journalists could adapt well to collegiality and work as teams rather than as individuals. After all, news media are changing as well, becoming giant businesses with the bottom line taking the place of public service.

Quite likely journalists will have to recognize that they are in a new communitarian-tending world, not a world of individual initiative—and they must put aside their self-interests and voluntarily conform to a society of order and cooperation. According to Fukuyama (p. 189), this is a valid kind of order, this spontaneous order that Friedrich Hayek has called an “extended order of human cooperation”—a kind of self-organized, rather mystical order reminiscent of Rousseau’s General Will. But Fukuyama maintains that self-organization works in some “distinct conditions;” it is not a “universal formula for achieving coordination in human groups.”

The communitarian focus on group solidarity in itself means that Order is a prime objective. Order is the framework of community, and the assumption is that as “commonness” increases, disorder decreases. The traditional individualist must come to terms with this. But as the atomized and increasingly norm-less society results in what Fukuyama calls “the great disruption,” the retreat into a collective haven does warrant a cautionary note: *such ‘soft order’ can easily morph into a hierarchical ‘hard’ order as strong-willed individuals begin to inject their authority.* It is very easy for a society to substitute one kind of authority or order for

another. In a journalistic institution, for example, a kind of egalitarian or democratic workplace with multiple authorities can easily become unwieldy and submit to more autocratic Order.

CHAPTER 9

THE PLATONIC TRADITION AND MEDIA CULTURES

The public media of communication reflect their various cultures and are cultural captives, even where they attempt to establish and sustain Order. They ultimately serve their masters, whoever they may be.

Plato was for elitist Order, not for populist disorder. He believed that when authority is distributed throughout a state, degeneration sets in. His thought influenced many of the West's great thinkers and gave an intellectual base to the subject of authoritarianism. Men with the belief that the individual is dependent on the state and should bow to authority are sprinkled all through history.

In more recent times they have included Hegel and Treitschke, Machiavelli and Hobbes, Rousseau and Carlyle, Maistre and Heidegger, and the list could go on. Hegel had said that freedom meant only that a person was free "to know that he is not free, but that his actions are determined by history, by society, and above all by the Absolute Idea" (Siebert et al., *Four Theories* ... p.14).

The German political theorist and historian, Heinrich von Treitschke, like Hegel, was not a democrat, concluding that majority rule did not guarantee the survival of political freedom (Ibid., p. 15) And, of course, there was Karl Marx who saw the individual as only a means to the growth and success of society. Even in the 18th century, the height of libertarianism, there was the English writer Samuel Johnson who believed (Ibid., p. 36) that every society "has a right to preserve public peace and

order, and therefore has a good right to prohibit the propagation of opinions which have a dangerous tendency.”

Other voices in the 18th century, not in accord with the freedom-loving liberals, were those of Helvetius, Maistre, and Rousseau. So we can see that the Enlightenment was not monolithic in its praise of freedom. Even in this tumultuous century, following on the heels of the so-called Dark Ages of Church authority, there was still the appeal of Order and the desire for a wise authority.

MEDIA, POWER, AND ORDER

According to American sociologist Robert Nisbet (1975, p. 262), the Platonic tradition has come down through such thinkers as Hobbes and Rousseau to today’s social and political scene—and, logically, to today’s journalistic scene. Nisbet notes that today the State [and I would include Big Business] in some countries is the form of Hobbes’ Leviathan [the great tyrannical sea-monster of the Hebrew Bible] and has “become the overriding form of oppression and exploitation.” It is also quite possible that the capitalistic Press too, as a part of Big Business in its giant corporate and internationalized power, has become a kind of mental and emotional form of Leviathan that oppresses and exploits. It certainly has “the last word” in any critical debate or situation and sets the agenda for global dialog.

On the other hand, around the world there are spokesmen for journalism who see the press as basically pluralistic and generally weak and splintered, virtually powerless as an agent of change or oppression. This view is more that of Aristotle, who championed the pluralist nature of society and posited that there is a point “at which a state [or a press system] may attain such a degree of unity as to no longer be a functioning entity—like ‘harmony passing into unison, or rhythm which has been reduced to a single note’” (Nisbet, p.262). Unity versus dispersion, statism or Big Media versus individualism and pluralism: this is the fundamental question of global media systems.

One view is that, in spite of its size and development or geographical and political orientation, the world’s journalism is in the service of

accumulating and bestowing power. According to media critic Robert McChesney (2002, p. 15), journalism has proved to be “a superior propaganda organ for militarism and war.” He proceeds (p.17):

The historical record suggests we should expect an avalanche of lies and half-truths in the service of power. Journalists, the news media, should be extremely skeptical, demanding evidence for claims ... and asking the tough questions that nobody in power wants to address ... [There is] control of our major news media by a very small number of very large and powerful profit-seeking corporations ... [and] most journalists [see their] primary role as stenographers for official sources [and] do not recognize it as a problem for democracy.

The final half of the above quote, of course, deals with capitalistic press systems, but the first part applies equally (or perhaps more) to the more authoritarian, state-controlled, countries. Power, in whatever form, tends to corrupt—journalists, political leaders, parties, corporations, and individuals. Intuition tells me that most journalists (unless they love paternalism and fear personal freedom) naturally tend to oppose government power, while also realizing that media power can itself be harmful to the society.

PUBLIC COMMUNICATION: MIRROR OF CULTURE

People are creatures of their cultures and they largely go with the flow, as the cliché goes. Closed societies have closed information systems, and closed information systems result in closed minds, as Allen Bloom (1987) so forcefully reminds us. So we need to look briefly at media cultures. Throughout the world they are like a thousand or more flowers blooming (and withering). Certain soils are producing some kinds of media cultures and other soils are producing quite different ones.

One of the main determining ingredients is freedom—or lack of it. Another is national security—or lack of it. Another is economic development—or lack of it. Another is a basic individual moral

philosophy—or lack of it. And yet another is a democratic tendency—or lack of it. Alongside a small minority seeking freedom in a culture there are vast numbers, sitting on the sidelines of social participation, who are questing little more than an authority and paternalism.

A good example of how culture affects society and national progress is that of Singapore. In the 1990s the former Prime Minister, Lee Kwan Yew, justified his country's brand of social order (authoritarianism) by saying that success came from basic Asian values—education, hard work, obedience to authority, and respect for merit. At the base of such order is Confucianism, with its dominance of the patriarchal family, which provides the social cement that has helped to keep countries like Singapore, Malaysia, Taiwan, and Korea from experiencing the Great Disruption of the West that Fukuyama (1999, pp. 130-31) so well describes.

Asian societies generally, more so than Western ones, have a kind of group-consciousness built into them; they seem to be naturally cooperative, team-oriented, and authority-honoring. Therefore, they are naturally in a mood for Order. Discipline, rules, boundaries, mutual respect, and traditional values coalesce to insist that the societies have Order. This has been true under both capitalism and communism. And vast populations in often-limited space (e.g. Japan) also militate in favor of an orderly, disciplined society. This is found also in certain European countries where order, at least until after the middle of the last century, was an appealing social concept. Especially true of the Netherlands, Denmark, and Germany, the dedication to order was disrupted at mid-century by the influx of immigrants, a new generation of anti-establishment young people, and the potency of the drug culture. To perhaps a lesser extent this could also be said of Britain and the United States.

The public media of these countries reflected, and are reflecting, this Western social turmoil. In fact, many critics think that media themselves, with their emphasis on crime, sex, and anti-social activities, actually contributed to the social disruption.

In the West, especially the late 20th century, the increase in crime and its explosion in the mass media have pointed out the need for Order. It has

caused otherwise law-abiding members of society to distrust and fear others, and therefore be less cooperative with them. It is a major hindrance to the development of a meaningful communitarian Order. Crime tends to atomize society and make cooperation exceedingly difficult. Here is what James Q. Wilson (1983, p. 26) says about crime's effect on an orderly society:

Crime does not merely victimize individuals; it impedes and, in the extreme form, prevents the formation and maintenance of community. By disrupting the delicate nexus of ties, formal and informal, by which we are linked with our neighbors, crime atomizes society and makes its members more individual calculators estimating their own advantage ... Common undertakings become difficult or impossible, except for those motivated by a shared desire for protection.

THE PAUCITY OF FREEDOM CULTURES

Freedom cultures are hard to find. They are, of course, related to individualism and to a desire on the part of the people to impact their society, to lead, to progress, to express their own spirit and creativity, to converse without inhibition with their neighbors, and to accept responsibility for their actions. This is the existentialist stance in media culture as this author (Merrill, 1974 and 1996) has described in length, and it is not commonly found across the globe. Generally this kind of culture calls for a high degree of education, a tradition of anti-paternalism, a sense of competition, and a respect for diversity and personal authenticity.

People, generally, are social animals that relate to the group, to the community, to the society and to the state. They are basically timid and averse to decision-making; therefore they feel a sense of security in escaping from freedom, as Erich Fromm (1941) has reminded us. The easy and most satisfying path: retiring into the anonymity of a group, a crowd, a party, an ideology, a religion, a corporation, or a state. Existentialism is not an easy path.

For some of the older historicists (e.g. Heraclitus and Plato, and later Rousseau and Hegel), these anti-freedom tribalists represent the high point of historical development. As respect for authority diminished through the ages and democracy cautiously appeared, the forces of history pushed societies toward corruption and decay.

THE VIABILITY OF PLATO'S POLITICS

It is amazing how the tradition of Plato, however variously utilized, has persisted through the years. It can be seen today in a growing global reluctance in global media for exercising freedom. Friedrich Hayek has brilliantly described the incipient desire of people to be controlled in his *Road to Serfdom* (1944). Although famous for his views opposing statist government, Hayek believed in the necessity of order and much of his scholarship focused on finding out how a society could obtain order without a centralized authoritarian government.

Today, in the present atmosphere of terrorist activities with its accompanying uncertainty in personal and group safety, press freedom is not flourishing. Wars, military skirmishes, destructive incursions, constant threats, suicide (homicide) bombings, nuclear dangers, biological and chemical attacks, and other horrors loom up on every side. A desire for collective security is growing everywhere, and with it an increasing willingness to follow orders and give up freedom.

Why then is authoritarianism anathema to many thoughtful people today? Plato would probably insist that what's wrong with this 21st century centralized authority is that leaders are not meritocrats, and lead their people astray through ignorance, arrogance, and general incompetence. It's not Order that's the problem; it's that there is no wise leadership behind this Order.

PROFESSIONALISM AND ORDER

A profession has standards. It is non-democratic and elitist in that it does not admit everyone into its ranks. It sets up a hierarchy, has a body

of knowledge and moral standards that govern it. It bases professional status on merit—on having a certain education and passing certain exams. It has a procedure of getting rid of weak or “unprofessional” members. It is concerned with special quality and expertise. It is not, as any doctor or lawyer will tell you, open to just anybody who would like to do the job.

Journalism is not a profession. It is open to everyone. It is democratic. It is not elitist. It does not have minimum entrance requirements. It contains the well-educated and the poorly educated. It values pluralism, not unity, in its ranks. It does not want to see a profession develop, say many journalists, because that would be against the First Amendment (it wouldn't) and that it would restrict those who could be journalists (it would).

Most journalists today are against being part of a profession, although they use the term to describe themselves from time to time. Most, however, prefer to refer to their occupation as a “craft” or a “trade.” But the only Order they have today is that provided by their capitalistic owners or boards of directors. As a group they really have no common base, no code of ethics, no requirements for entry, no unified self-imposed concept (purpose), no sense of loyalty to a group larger than their own employer, no common understanding of what they are supposed to be achieving. In short, journalism is normless, leaderless, and lacking in Order. It is authoritarian, finding its rationale in the U.S. constitution, without any unified or populist authority. It pictures the world in a splintered, disordered manner, and submits the audiences to innumerable inconsistencies and contradictions. There is little check on its authority.

If journalism has any ordered discipline, it comes from the owners who are increasingly concerned with profits. If it has any desire for quality, it comes from individual concerns. If it has any sense of loyalty, it finds it in a subjective definition of news and personal ethical values. The fact that it is not a profession, that it does not have any collective or group norms, that it has no authentic core or sense of responsibility, and that it flies off blindly in many directions, is what brings about the plethora of criticism from all sides. A Platonic journalism would have a philosophical journalistic “king” (or small elite group of “guardians”) to

give Order to the enterprise. It would be meritocratic and class-structured, have a common loyalty, be willing to censor certain kinds of content.

Most journalists would hate this type of journalism, and see professionalization as a step in that direction. So, of all the institutions—at least in the West—journalism is one of the most anti-Platonist. It is still the bailiwick of the individualist, the creative person who smarts under tight authority and social control. But its practitioners must know that it is not free, that it does have responsibilities, and that it exists at the sufferance of the people.

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CHAPTER 19

SPECULATIONS ON THE FUTURE

The future is not bright if one is a libertarian. If one is an authoritarian or a “soft” Order person (e.g. a communitarian), it seems bright, or at least hopeful. Stricter ethical codes, increased non-media influence, and the possibility of some form of professionalism will impact media content, and provide a kind of conformist Order for the society. Plato’s legacy of social control will remain with us well into the 21st century as societies become more complex and dangers become more common.

If the present global media picture provides any clue to the future, that future is not to be one that inspires great respect and confidence. Of course there will still be “elite” voices reaching concerned and serious audiences. And the total volume of voices will increase far beyond its need or value. Credible information will get harder to find. High ethical standards will be the exception as the bottom line further devours authentic journalism. Television and movies will increasingly deliver entertainment, superficial news, and vulgar displays of sex and violence.

Bias in the media will be standard fare, and public interest publishing and broadcasting will be found in fewer and fewer elite journals and broadcast channels. Publishing groups will continue buying up the media, especially in the West. Advertising will continue to swallow up larger portions of space and time in the public media. Autocratic leaders, in most of the world, will continue to control information. Timidity, spawned by a growing sense of “political correctness,” will emasculate authentic journalism. Politics and journalism will further merge their interests and the people will cease to recognize credible information even when it periodically appears.

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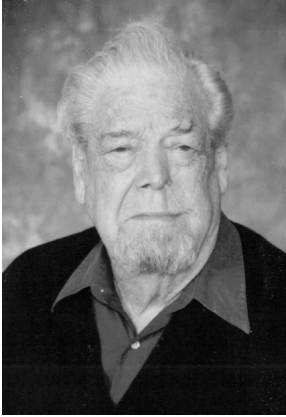
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