THE NATURE OF POLITICS

SELECTED ESSAYS OF
BERTRAND DE JOUVENEL

EDITED BY DENNIS HALE
AND MARC LANDY

WITH A NEW INTRODUCTION BY THE
EDITORS AND A FOREWORD BY
WILSON CAREY McWILLIAMS

ROUTLEDGE

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Introduction to the Transaction Edition

The Voyager

Bertrand de Jouvenel (1903-1987) is the least famous of the great political thinkers of the twentieth century. He has few disciples; his books are seldom read and only infrequently cited; and his prolific output of essays has received even less attention than his books.[1] The essays published in this volume comprise a mere fraction of his total output. We have selected them because they serve to clarify, elaborate, and expand upon the themes of his three masterworks: *On Power* (1945), *Sovereignty* (1957), and *The Pure Theory of Politics* (1963).

What is the reason for de Jouvenel's obscurity? Partly it is a matter of nationality; de Jouvenel stands outside the main branches of twentieth-century political philosophy, the Anglo-American and the German. He is not a liberal (in the current sense of that word), a Marxist, or a Hegelian. The writer to whom he bears the greatest resemblance is Alexis de Tocqueville, and the modern philosopher from whom he has learned the most is Jean-Jacques Rousseau. But it is also a matter of political ideology: de Jouvenel's voice belongs neither to the left nor to the right (a fact that gives his writing the freshness and simplicity of the best teaching); but in a world of warring doctrines, de Jouvenel's work has become, in a sense, a refugee—as, indeed, he himself was at one time.

De Jouvenel does, of course, share some common ground with many of his contemporaries. He shares with the left a deep concern for reducing human misery and ecological depredation, and he shares the left's belief in the need for government-directed economic planning. On the other hand, he shares the right's abiding suspicion of state power and its belief in the superiority of the

market as the *presumptive* method for economic decision making. He is neither a romantic reactionary nor a celebrator of progress. He deplores the weakening of community solidarity that has accompanied the rise of industrialism, and yet refuses to ignore or discount the extraordinary improvements in human health and well-being that industrialism has brought about. His freedom from ideological blinders makes him worthy of comparison to Orwell, but his ambition stretches beyond Orwell in that he attempts to develop a theory of the good state resting upon a clear-sighted understanding of the true nature of political behavior.

De Jouvenel's political journey also mirrors Orwell's; it began in optimism and plummeted very quickly to something like despair, discrediting the wisdom of his youth and leaving him free of illusions. In his memoir, *Un Voyageur dans Le Siecle*,[2] he describes his strong sense of identification with all those who came to political maturity during the 1920s and who shared a passion for international reconciliation and a commitment to the institutional embodiment of that goal, the League of Nations. The rise of Hitler, the outbreak of war, and the capitulation of France were more than just tragedies for him. These events represented the failure of everything that he and his political brothers had most treasured, and forced him to consider that the basic conception of politics that they shared was fundamentally wrong.

By the 1940s, de Jouvenel had come to see the disasters of the twentieth century in a wider context, as the culmination of many generations of delusion regarding the nature of politics. *On Power*, the first fruit of these speculations, was written in the midst of war and published in 1945. The political writing de Jouvenel completed after the war continued that first great effort to rethink the problem of the state by reexamining the fundamental nature of politics itself.

The Journalist

Edouard Bertrand de Jouvenel des Ursins was born in 1903. His parents epitomized the two faces of turn-of-the-century France. His father, Henri, was the son of a baron, Raoul de Jouvenel, from the southern region of Corrèze. Raoul identified strongly with the central elements of the French right: Catholicism, royalism, and nationalism. Bertrand's mother, Sarah Claire Boas, was the

daughter of a wealthy industrialist, Alfred Boas, whose own cosmopolitanism was reflected in his calling himself an Israelite, not a Jew, and belonging to the Freemasons. The Dreyfus affair, which had so torn French society, was the very event responsible for bringing Bertrand's parents together. Henri had become an active supporter of the *Dreyfusards* and had become acquainted with the Boas family as a result.

Henri and Sarah divorced when Bertrand was still a child (the divorce was almost as shocking to Raoul as the marriage had been). Both parents became influential political figures during the 1920s, and both provided Bertrand with introductions to important political and literary circles. Henri served as France's representative to the League of Nations and was a prime mover behind the League's adoption of a mutual security agreement binding members to come to the aid of victims of aggression. He was also elected to the French Senate. Sarah made use of her wealth and social graces to preside over a salon of great prestige and importance.[3] She worked tirelessly to convince the French government to champion the cause of an independent Czechoslovakia, the plans for which were largely hatched in her living room. In recognition of her service, Edward Beneš, the first prime minister of Czechoslovakia, gave the twenty-one-year-old Bertrand his first job, as his personal secretary.

After working for Beneš for a year, de Jouvenel began the journalistic career which he was to follow until the Second World War. Throughout the 1920s and well into the 1930s he wrote for a variety of newspapers and magazines identified with the French left. He considered himself to be a progressive and stood for the National Assembly as a candidate of the Radical Socialists, the most moderate of the parties composing the Popular Front. His allegiance to the left arose in part from his concern for international reconciliation (a strong theme of French left politics between the wars)—a theme that came to obsess him during the years of the Great Depression. Even during the prosperous twenties he detected a strong link between poverty and international conflict as he watched the effect that the impoverishment of the Germans, resulting from the Treaty of Versailles, had upon the popularity of extreme nationalist movements. He tried to convince the French left of the need to assist Germany in restoring prosperity, but to no avail.[4]

De Jouvenel's years as a journalist are of the utmost importance for understanding his later work. To a degree unparalleled by any other chronicler of the rise of totalitarianism in the 1930s, even Orwell, de Jouvenel witnessed the key events and came to know the key individuals firsthand. He conducted long interviews with Benito Mussolini, Pierre Laval, Winston Churchill, Neville Chamberlain, and Adolf Hitler. He was in Germany in 1932, Spain in 1936, Austria during the Anschluss, Poland during the Blitzkrieg, and most sadly for him personally, Czechoslovakia during the Nazi invasion. This firsthand experience gave him a respect for the stuff of politics as opposed to the abstraction of it. In *On Power* he would write approvingly of the gift that good politicians have for the "touch and feel" of politics, for the development of a tangible understanding which is not reducible to analytic categories. He also came to recognize the key role of timing in determining great events. The French chose to be severe toward Germany during the twenties and accommodating in the thirties. Had the sequence been reversed Hitler would have been stopped. Likewise, the British chose to appease Hitler (in Czechoslovakia) at a time when they might have been able to crush him, and to stand up to him (in Poland) when they had no chance of winning.

De Jouvenel's travels also taught him that possibilities existed for improving man's condition that had not occurred to the French. His trips to the United States (which included a stint as an extra in Hollywood, playing stereotypical Frenchmen) convinced him that the energy and experimentalism of the New Deal offered more hope for ameliorating poverty than the timidity of the French Popular Front governments.[5] While in the United States he interviewed figures as diverse as Huey Long and Rexford Tugwell in an effort to understand why the Depression had reached such depths, and how a government with as little ideological underpinning as FDR's could mount such a vigorous attack upon it.

Such active involvement in the events of his times left another indelible mark on de Jouvenel-an appreciation of the danger and difficulty inherent in political action. His statement, "trouble is [the political scientist's] business"[6] contains more than a hint of personal chagrin, for he had ample cause in his own life to discover that all political choices are risky and that the appearance of misconduct is extremely hard to distinguish from actuality. Several

of his actions, or at least the appearance that they created, caused him to be reviled by former friends and fellow journalists, to be castigated as a friend of fascism, and even to be accused of being a German collaborator, a charge that shadowed him for the rest of his life.[7] This peculiar history requires some explanation.

Like many other members of his generation, de Jouvenel had been active in efforts during the twenties and early thirties to improve relationships not only between the French and German governments but between their respective peoples as well. In this context he made friends with Otto Abetz, a young nationalist and francophile who would later serve as Hitler's ambassador to France at the time of the Occupation. In part, it was through the intervention of Abetz that de Jouvenel was granted the opportunity to interview Hitler in February of 1936.

That interview is once source of the calumny that de Jouvenel was a collaborator or that he had an active sympathy for fascism as a political doctrine. Hitler appears in that interview as a forceful if somewhat eccentric politician whose abiding passion is the reconstruction of Germany, and whose plans contain nothing to alarm the French. (This image of Hitler, it should be said, was quite widespread in the mid-1930s, and owes a great deal to the simple fact that Hitler lied extravagantly to everyone who interviewed him—including de Jouvenel.) De Jouvenel quotes Hitler's assurance that bellicose statements in *Mein Kampf* are the excesses of a "first edition," written at a time when French troops were still on German soil, occupying the Ruhr.[8] Hitler goes on to say that he is not a writer preparing a new edition but rather a politician who will rectify those early mistakes through a policy of friendship with France. Nowhere in the interview does de Jouvenel suggest any sympathy for Hitler. He simply allows Hitler to put the best face on German foreign policy. He was, after all, a journalist, not an editor or a well-known commentator on international affairs.[9]

The interview caused a furor. Apparently through the machinations of Joachim von Ribbentrop and Otto Abetz, its publication was delayed until February 28—one day after the French Chamber of Deputies voted to approve the Franco-Soviet Pact, a treaty Germany had opposed in a vigorous propaganda campaign. After the vote, and after the interview had finally appeared in print, the Germans pointed to its "delay" as evidence that the French "elite"

was trying to mislead the masses by suppressing evidence of Germany's friendly intentions toward France. De Jouvenel came to believe that he had been used by Abetz in an elaborate propaganda scheme.

On 7 March 1936, one week after the interview appeared in print, Germany moved to reoccupy the Rhineland. Despite his long association with the Franco-German friendship movement, de Jouvenel called for a military response to this provocation.

The failure of France and Britain to move against Hitler at a time when Germany could have been easily defeated was a bitter disappointment to de Jouvenel, and it led to his break with the Radical Socialists. Looking about for new comrades, he found Francois Doriot and the Parti Populaire Francais (PPF). Doriot had been a leader of the French Communist Party and mayor of the working-class city of Saint-Denis. He was purged by the Communists for defying Moscow and advocating an alliance with the Socialists, a line that Moscow would itself later endorse. De Jouvenel admired the working-class character of the PPF and hoped that it would develop into a popular democratic movement transcending the doctrinaire squabbles of the left. But, much to his dismay, the party drifted inexorably rightward as Doriot came more and more to view Bolshevism as the sole evil facing Europe. Having just quit one party, de Jouvenel was reluctant to abandon another, especially when Doriot came under increasingly heavy personal attack. He finally left the party in response to its failure to condemn the West's appeasement of Hitler at Munich.

Munich was the final turning point for de Jouvenel. His strong family commitment to Czech independence, combined with his contempt for the cowardice of both the British and French leadership, provoked him into personally undertaking the fight against Nazism. He secretly volunteered for service in the Intelligence Branch of the French Army. His journalistic talents and his wide circle of friends abroad gave him the opportunity to function as an overseas journalist, relaying to French Intelligence whatever information he could garner of military and/or strategic importance. In that guise he made trips to East Prussia and Poland and reported back on the status of German troop strength.

When France declared war on Germany, de Jouvenel volunteered for the infantry as an enlisted man and joined a regiment from

his native Corrèze. He spent the next year training with the peasants and villagers who comprised his unit. His description of this period in his memoirs reveals a strong sense of camaraderie with these young men. Having spent his life in the drawing rooms of the literati and in the corridors of power, de Jouvenel found the decency, simplicity, and moral vigor of these amateur soldiers refreshing and enlightening. He counts it as one of the gravest disappointments of his life that a severe training injury forced him to leave his unit and recuperate at Corrèze. By the time he recovered, the French had capitulated and his unit had been disbanded.

After the armistice was signed, de Jouvenel was recalled to service in army intelligence. He was asked to make use of his close friendship with Otto Abetz, now the German ambassador, to learn as much about Nazi intentions for France as possible. The task was onerous because it required that he conduct himself as a friend of the Germans. This was distasteful in itself, but it also meant that he would be viewed by his fellow Frenchmen as a collaborator; nonetheless he agreed. Since real journalism had ceased as a result of the Nazi takeover, de Jouvenel decided to continue his historical studies at the National Archives in Paris and to let that work serve as his excuse for taking up residence close to Abetz.[10]

Abetz (who was married to a French woman, and who openly admired French culture) was only too happy to see and talk with such a witty and charming French friend. For the next two years de Jouvenel continued to spend as much time as possible with Abetz and other officials and to report on those meetings to his army superiors. After the invasion of Russia, however, the intentions of Germany toward France no longer remained in doubt. In addition, de Jouvenel had come to believe that his information was of little value, especially since it was not clear that Abetz continued to enjoy the confidence of the Führer. In the summer of 1942 de Jouvenel decided to return to Corrèze and join the resistance.

De Jouvenel became an active member of the Corrèzean resistance, working to help downed Allied fliers evade capture. On 21 September, 1943, sensing that the Germans were aware of his resistance work, and that he was being followed in order that his superiors might be exposed, de Jouvenel and his wife crossed the border to Switzerland, where they remained for the duration of the war.

Thus did de Jouvenel's personal travails mirror those of the world around him. His decision to devote the rest of his life to scholarship was an effort to understand the roots of the naiveté that he had shared with his friends and of the evil perpetrated by their enemies. It was not long before this effort produced substantial results.

On Power

Even while he worked for army intelligence and for the resistance, de Jouvenel pondered the cause of the calamity into which the world had been thrown. In January 1943, "Of Political Rivalry" was published in the review *Suisse Contemporaine*. In this essay de Jouvenel asked what must seem, in retrospect, an odd question: "Is war alien to modern times?" What a question to ask in the middle of the most destructive war in history!

But de Jouvenel's generation had hoped that war *was* an alien spirit in modern times, and that the First World War, an aberration, would be the last. To the best minds of the twenties and thirties the true spirit of modern times was summed up by two ideas: progress and popular sovereignty. The real story of history was not to be found in military engagements, but "in the integrated exploitation of the world's resources for the benefit of man in association with his fellows."[11] The best minds believed that "the spirit of conquest pertains, never to peoples, but only to their rulers."[12] As the sovereignty of the people spread across the globe, therefore, war could only recede to the remaining backwaters where superstition and absolute monarchy would fight their final battle with enlightenment.

This was the great dream of the twentieth century, shattered now for the second time. Why is it, de Jouvenel asked, "that we are retreating from civilization instead of advancing toward it?"[13]

One answer is political rivalry. Whenever any one state becomes powerful, other states are driven to imitate it in self-defense. In the past, states increased their power by adding territory—at first through adjoining provinces or nations, and later by taking over territory far away, in the form of colonies.

But in modern times a more ominous method of increasing power has been found:

> [That is] the advance made by any one power in exploiting the natural resources of its own national domain. If it increases the draft which it makes on the strength and wealth of its people and contrives to get this increase accepted, it then changes the relationships between its own sinews of war and those of its neighbors; it becomes, if its capital is small, the equal of great powers, and if is large it rings hegemony within its reach.[14]

This technique—extended to its farthest reaches by Hitler but in no way invented by him—made World War II possible, a war in which

> [e]veryone—workmen, peasants, and women alike—is in the fight, and in consequence everything, the factory, the harvest, even the dwelling-house, had turned target. As a result the enemy to be fought has been all flesh that is and all soil, and the bombing plane has striven to consummate the utter destruction of them all.[15]

Although Hitler was its indirect cause, the unparalleled scale of the destructive force unleashed by World War II could not be explained as a consequence of Nazi barbarism. All Allied governments contributed to it, and what is more significant, they did so easily. All Allied governments competed enthusiastically in drawing deeply on the resources of society. Mass conscription, the commandeering of private property, the suspension of civil liberties, the relocation of entire populations, state direction of national economies—all of these practices were quickly adopted in the democracies with hardly a ripple of protest. They were, after all, necessary: "The most surprising feature of the spectacle which we now present to ourselves is that we feel so little surprise at it." Could it be that we are witnessing, de Jouvenel asked, a phenomenon more general, and more basic than the rise of a madman to authority in a great state? To answer this question it was necessary to study the natural history of the one human institution without which modern life would be unimaginably different: the apparatus of the state—or, as de Jouvenel called it, *pouvoir*.

The title of de Jouvenel's first great work of social theory is misleading to the English-speaking reader. In French the term *pouvoir* can have the specific meaning of governmental authority rather than the more general English meaning of "the ability to do something."[16] De Jouvenel's purpose in *On Power*[17] is not to discuss political power as an abstraction but rather to trace the evolution of governmental authority from its roots in primitive societies to modern times. By undertaking such a "natural history" of the beast he hoped to discover where we had acquired the demonic impulse and the herculean energy that enabled us to commit the horrors of both world wars and the Holocaust.

De Jouvenel's depiction of totalitarianism is similar to that found in the works of its other great students, Orwell and Hannah Arendt. His great contribution is to give totalitarianism a genealogy. In doing so, however, he has demonstrated the embarrassing fact that the totalitarian state, black sheep though it may be, is a legitimate member of the modern family of nations: not only does it have the same ancestors, it has many of the same family characteristics, even if in a distorted or exaggerated form. Totalitarianism is the last step in a long journey that began when kinship ceased to be the exclusive source of group identification. The engine driving this evolution is "mobilization," a phenomenon found in many democratic states, as well. Unlike any earlier form of government, including the badly misunderstood "absolute monarchy," modern states have the capacity to achieve a total mobilization of the spiritual and material resources of their peoples. Perhaps the most telling image in the entire work is the contrast between the medieval king and the modern prime minister. The former, despite the grandiloquence of his title, had to go hat in hand to the castles of the barons to beg for funds and men with which to mount military campaigns. The latter, while a mere commoner, has access to the enormous tax revenues of the state as well as the right to conscript soldiers from among the populace at large.

The medieval king was constrained by the level of existing technology—collecting taxes is difficult without post offices, roads, or computers. But the more important constraint was the limited nature of his claim to authority. Ruling in God's name, he was also God's servant and he was pledged to maintain the order that God had created. In that order he was but the first among nobles,

each of whom had clear title to lands and vassals. The expansion of Power could come only from the expansion of the monarch's claim. He needed to set himself above the other nobles—but to do so he required the help of the people. He had to convince the masses that their own emancipation depended upon him. Thus was born the alliance between monarch and commoner, in joint opposition to the intermediate authorities who served to obstruct the well-being of both. This alliance is the key to understanding the origin of the modern state.

The essence of this argument is borrowed from de Tocqueville's description of the ancien regime: the king seduces the aristocracy into forsaking its responsibilities and then turns the people against the now useless nobility in the name of progress and justice. De Jouvenel agrees with de Tocqueville that once the people have accomplished this task they recognize that they have no further need of a king. They choose to run the centralized state apparatus, which he has created, in their own name. Deposing the king is therefore the last, not the first step in the process of centralization and disintermediation that creates a modern government. Popular sovereignty thus replaces monarchic absolutism as the basis for the claim to govern. De Jouvenel improves upon de Tocqueville by describing just how much is gained for state power in this shift of claim. As long as the people believe that the government belongs to the king they feel limited in their obligation to obey and serve it. Those limits relax and later disappear once the people believe they are governing themselves.

Borrowing from Rousseau, de Jouvenel points out the absurdity of a literal interpretation of popular sovereignty. Once the size of the *polis* expands beyond that which is governable by the direct participation of all citizens, people stop governing themselves. Whether or not they are able to exercise effective control over their government depends on the effectiveness of the specific institutions they develop for controlling the behavior of those who do govern. As the modern state becomes increasingly bureaucratized and therefore hierarchical and remote, it becomes difficult for the citizen to exercise such control. From the standpoint of Power what matters is not the truth of popular sovereignty, but its credibility. As long as it remains credible, the government can obtain credit. The populace will obey edicts, pay taxes, and allow its young men

to be conscripted. In de Jouvenel's terms, the populace will be *mobilized.*

The extent of mobilization depends upon the depth of credit the people extend. Such credit is not obtainable simply through verbal trickery. For the people to believe that they are self-governing, they must see that their well-being is enhanced as a result of state action. The modern welfare state was created, therefore, so that the government could enhance its credit by providing economic stability and security for the populace.

For de Jouvenel, the importance of this bargain cannot be overstated. It is the determining event of modern history. Not only does this bargain make the modern state possible by vastly increasing the state's credit, it also makes modern life possible. By elevating the mass, Power allows the creation of an enormous middle class—literate, energetic, and politically powerful—made up of descendants of subjects once doomed to penury and servitude. Economic security and improved living conditions also enable populations to grow to unheard-of dimensions, permanently altering the scale of modern life. In tandem with this growth is the emergence of industrial and commercial enterprises that Power nurtures for their tax revenues and their military potential. In this way, the modern industrial economy is born—an economy that has made its own enormous contribution to the standard of living of the great majority of modern citizens. There is no turning back from this step.[18] It is precisely this awareness that separates de Jouvenel from conservatives who in other ways share his alarm at the direction of modern life.

De Jouvenel, however, does not consider men to be mere economic creatures. They cannot be simply bribed into acquiescing to any and all forms of state power. To be effective, the government must persuade the people that it is advancing the cause of liberty as well. To establish its monopoly of authority, the Minotaur (as de Jouvenel calls the modern state) must eradicate the modern equivalent of the nobility; that is, all those intermediate institutions that exercise power over citizens, exert some claim on their loyalties, and therefore serve as competitors for the people's credit.[19] The Minotaur, therefore, seeks to devour labor unions, churches, fraternal organizations, and all other such intermediate bodies. The specific tactics change, but the strategy is essentially the same as

that devised by Renaissance kings. The people must be convinced that these intermediate bodies obstruct their liberty—that they are parochial, hidebound, and self-seeking. All too often these charges are easy to substantiate. One would have a difficult time rallying contemporary American citizens to save the American Medical Association, the Teamsters, or Union Carbide from government suppression. The lack of public spirit expressed by these "baronies" seals their doom as surely as it was sealed for the French aristocracy by their tax privileges and their decadent life-style.

By tracing the genealogy of power, de Jouvenel succeeds in putting the twentieth century back into the story of human history, from which it had been expelled by many of its students. De Jouvenel discovered that what is exceptional about the twentieth century is not the nature of Power—which never changes—but its scale, which is subject to constant expansion. It expands because of its vitality—without which Power sickens and dies and is replaced by a more vigorous Power—and also because of its *usefulness*. Power grows because it accomplishes great tasks and it can therefore make use of the most elemental human instinct: the desire to live a better life. Knowing that this analysis would lead to the charge that he was a reactionary, de Jouvenel wrote,

> I am not setting up as an enemy of the growth of Power and of the distension of the state. I know well the hopes that men have of it, and how their trust in the Power which shall be warms itself at the fire of the sufferings which the Power that was inflicted on them. The desire of their hearts is social security. Their rulers, or those who hope to become their rulers, feel no doubt that science now enables them to condition the minds and the bodies of men, to fit each single person into his proper niche in society, and to ensure the happiness of all by the interlocking function of each. This undertaking, which is not lacking in a certain grandeur, marks the culmination of the history of the West. If it seems to some of us that there is in this design rather too much confidence here, and rather too much presumption there . . . what is the good of being Jeremiahs? In my view, none.[20]

Political Economy

De Jouvenel recognized that to understand the modern condition one had to examine its economic as well as its political underpinnings. The central reality of modern economic life parallels that of political life—viz., the harnessing of vast new forms of energy.

To describe the economic version of this phenomenon, he uses the term *puissance*, which, like his term for modern government, *pouvoir*, would normally be translated into English as "power." In government, power is amassed by the state's expanded ability to tax, to conscript, and to serve social needs. In the economic realm, it accumulates as a result of the transition from biological to mechanical means for performing work, and of the market system's capacity to free up physical and human resources for the purpose of generating wealth.

As we have discussed, the modern Leviathan required a new basis for political authority, the sovereignty of the people. Likewise, the modern economy required a new philosophical foundation. In *La Civilization de Puissance*,[21] de Jouvenel describes how the new economic order has come to rest upon the concept of limitless opulence, the pursuit of material expansion for its own sake. The riddle of human existence acquires a simple solution: "More!"

The Leviathan requires the doctrine of popular sovereignty (even though it is mostly a fiction in large states) in order to provide people with a reason for enduring what would otherwise be unendurable—conscription and taxes. One accepts the pain because, in theory, one has chosen it. What de Jouvenel terms the "ideology of growth" performs a similar function in the economic realm. It provides a plausible rationale for the voluntary infliction of pain (hard work, risk-taking, dislocation, bankruptcy) on the grounds that one is doing it on one's own behalf, in order to get rich.

This attitude toward the modern economy reveals the same ambivalence de Jouvenel displayed towards the modern state. He appreciates its extraordinary accomplishments, disdains those critics who would wish to return to an earlier time, but abhors the modern understanding of the human condition. His most important economic writing wrestles with this ambivalence as he seeks to preserve what is good about the modern economy while identifying

and moderating its excesses. This project has two components. The first is to enrich economic debate by clarifying key confusions that have developed over time. The second is to create principles upon which to reconcile the pursuit of wealth with the achievement of the good life.

De Jouvenel believed that economic discussion suffers from two crucial misunderstandings, the first involving the comparison between capitalism and socialism, and the second the relationships between social welfare and the distribution of wealth.

Intellectuals misunderstand socialism because they equate its earlier with its more recent incarnations. Although early socialist experiments came in many guises—Christian, transcendentalist, and so on—they were united by a common contempt for materialism. Their success, to the extent that they were successful, was due to their asceticism. The classic example is the monastery. The monks could cope with the unsettling implications of prosperity because their minds were on God.

Modern socialism is unabashedly materialistic. It does not provide an alternative to the capitalist vision of the good life, but simply promises to outperform it. This it cannot do. It cannot match either the market's ability to generate information or the latter's ability to foster risk taking. The extraordinary disparity in the wealth-producing capacity of capitalism and socialism was already evident to de Jouvenel in 1949, when he wrote his classic defense of free enterprise, *The Ethics of Redistribution*.[22]

Intellectuals also fail to understand capitalism. What they take to be its worst characteristics are in fact attributable to the hedonistic quality which the "ideology of growth" has enfused into all forms of modern economic organization:

> To the intellectual the social device of capitalism offers a displeasing picture. Why? In his own terms, here are self-seeking men in quest of personal aggrandizement. How? By providing consumers with things they want or can be induced to want. The same intellectual, puzzlingly, is not shocked by the workings of hedonist democracy; here also self-seeking men accomplish their aggrandizement by promising to other men things they want or are induced to demand. The dif-

ference seems to lie mainly in that the capitalist delivers the goods.[23]

The intellectuals blind themselves to the evils intrinsic in modern economic life by attributing all its good qualities—technological innovation, increased comfort—to "Progress," while its negative aspects—selfishness, competition, coercion—they ascribe to "Capitalism." De Jouvenel's own doubts about capitalism arise not from its perceived failures but from its very success. He cannot reconcile the increasing and uncritical pursuit of wealth—"More!"—with his own understanding of what it is that makes life worth living.

The other key confusion involves the modern political impulse towards redistribution of income as reflected both in the progressive income tax and the expansion of government entitlements and social services. However attractive this impulse may be, it has had dire consequences.

De Jouvenel understands and empathizes with the source of the redistributionist impulse, the shock that people experience at the sight of both extreme want and the ostentatious display of extreme wealth. In de Jouvenel's words, this outrageous situation brings forth an urge to transform "caviar into bread." But there is not enough caviar to increase in any significant way the amount of bread available to those who are not rich. The surplus of overconsumption is not sufficient to rectify the evil of underconsumption. A substantial improvement in the lot of the impoverished requires either a vastly expanded production, or a substantial increase in the tax burden of all the nonpoor.[24] The result of the latter is to equalize income, but at a low level.

When the upper and upper-middle classes are stripped of their discretionary income, they are no longer capable of sustaining those unconventional forms of consumption which, in the form of polo ponies (or cocaine), elicit a justifiable disdain for the rich—but which, in the form of patronage of the arts and the humanities, serve as a vital stimulus for human excellence. De Jouvenel remarks that even (or, one might say, especially) the advocates of redistribution are unwilling to accept the anticultural consequences that would flow from reducing incomes to lower-middle class levels. Their solution, however, is to make the state the new source of cultural

patronage. A portion of the wealth taken away from the people is dedicated to cultural expenditure. Commissars replace the wealthy as the arbiters of excellence. Here the argument of *The Ethics of Redistribution* joins that of *On Power*. In the name of the people, the state is granted a major new source of authority and control.

The state benefits from the redistributionist impulse in another crucial respect:

> The state sets up as trustee for the lower-income group and doles out services and benefits. In order to avoid the creation of a "protected class," a discrimination fatal to political equality, the tendency has been to extend the benefits and services upward to all members of society, to cheapen food and rents for the rich as well as the poor, to assist the well-to-do as well as the needy.[25]

Thus the chief impact of redistribution is not to shift income from the rich to the poor, but to shift power from the individual to the state (and in the process, as American experience testifies, push the national government to the verge of bankruptcy).

Although the redistributionist impulse was born from the shock of poverty, the alleviation of poverty has not caused the impulse to subside. It persists because of the public's contempt for the main holders of wealth, the bourgeoisie. De Jouvenel contrasts the public's attitude towards non-bourgeois holders of wealth, like pop singers and film stars, with its enmity toward businessmen.

> The film star or the crooner is not grudged the income that is grudged to the oil magnate, because the people appreciate the entertainer's accomplishment and not the entrepreneur's, and because the former's personality is liked and the latter's is not. They feel the entertainer's income is itself an entertainment ... and that what the entertainer enjoys is deliberately given by them while the capitalist's income is somehow filched from them.[26]

The bourgeoisie contributes to its own undoing by persisting in the idea that it has become wealthy solely through its own effort, and that it has the right to enjoy the fruits of its labors privately and

secretly. It could sustain itself far more successfully were it to acknowledge its debt to the public and to invite the public to witness and enjoy spectacular displays of that wealth.

Thus de Jouvenel provides a qualified endorsement of capitalism combined with a searching critique of capitalists. To save capitalism from the capitalists, he sought to reconcile its extraordinary dynamism with the predictability and stability which republican politics require and to reconcile its materialist obsession with other attributes of the good life.

De Jouvenel was painfully aware of the fragility of republics and of the great amount of art and skill required to keep them intact.[27] He recognized that the competitiveness and acquisitiveness of capitalism posed a constant threat to the mannerliness, formality, and forbearance that republics require. The only hope of reconciliation between the two lay in what he termed "conjecture"—the capacity of the political system to foresee the threats to its stability and integrity coming from the economy and elsewhere. Only if such threats could be recognized while they were still nascent, before they became "burning," would there be sufficient time for the creaky and stodgy mechanisms of republics to cope with them.

The major task of his later life was the Futuribles project, an attempt to galvanize the efforts of social scientists worldwide for the purpose of engaging in such conjectures.[28] The central duty of conjecture is to "combat the general feeling of uncertainty which the rapidity of change sheds indistinctly over all institutions." It preserves the essential character of the political system by charting those fixed points which remain in a sea of social and economic flux, navigating a course "between the unachievable and the unchanging."[29]

De Jouvenel does not provide us with an "inquiry into the economic good" comparative to the disquisition on the political good in *Sovereignty*. But in *The Ethics of Redistribution* and in two volumes of later essays (not yet translated into English), *Arcadie: essais sure le meiux vivre* and *La Civilization de Puissance*, he develops a set of themes which indicate the direction of his thoughts about the matter. He rejects consumer satisfaction as the proper measure of the success of the economy. Consumer satisfaction for what, he asks? Such satisfaction is only estimable if it fosters some important social purpose. Pushpin does not equal poetry. He con-

demns current measures of aggregate wealth because they take no account of socially valuable consumption—the professor's open table, the bounties performed by unpaid volunteers.

Two forms of social consumption are particularly valuable—family life and citizenship. Why does the government offer tax breaks to commercial dog breeders when such assistance is unavailable to parents seeking to provide a stable and rich homelife for their children? The family is the institution most responsible for perpetuating and improving civilization and yet it is stripped of resources because it is not a commercial enterprise. Those activities that foster citizenship and enhance the quality of civic and associational life suffer in a like fashion. Although in America charitable contributions are tax deductible, the volunteer is not allowed to claim any deduction for the labors that he or she expends.

Although de Jouvenel would probably favor changing the tax code to give better treatment to families and civic associations, he does not want the state to serve as the arbiter of what constitutes social as opposed to asocial consumption. He trusts that as long as sufficient resources remain in private hands, educative and political institutions can foster an evolution in favor of the former at the expense of the latter. The key is to check the redistributionist tendencies of modern public policy so that citizens retain the discretion to make such choices—and to teach citizens the importance of such choices, for themselves and for their posterity.

The materialist preoccupation of the "ideology of growth" harms nature as well as society. De Jouvenel used the word "ecology" long ago to describe the need for economic activity to avoid depleting the natural resources upon which humans rely for their sustenance. He was dismayed by the impact that modern industrialism was having on the quality of the environment.[30] He criticized conventional economic theory for its failure to take into account those harms to the air, water, and land that were not readily monetizable. But his greatest concern was for the spiritual impact of such physical devastation. Not only was it ugly and ultimately self-destructive, but it reflected the terrible philosophical temptations to which modern man is prone. If nature is totally malleable, then men can do anything. The drive to conquer nature to feed unquenchable material desires reflects a rejection of limits and an impulse towards mastery analogous to that which fueled the rise of Power.

Unchecked, the dominant economic and political forces of our times both work towards the same catastrophic ends.

The Political Good

On Power is a study in pathology. In describing the rise of the modern state and its increased capacity to mobilize, de Jouvenel does not establish the inevitability of totalitarianism. He can point out the similarity between FDR's use of the radio and his manipulation of symbols like the Blue Eagle, and Hitler's use of the tools of mass communication, without at all implying that Nazism and the New Deal are the same. They are merely part of the same human story. The large state, the rise of popular sovereignty, and the advent of techniques of mass communication and control make totalitarianism possible but do not render it inevitable. In *Sovereignty*[31] de Jouvenel explicitly examines what the other alternatives might be.

Sovereignty's subtitle, "An Inquiry into the Political Good," is significant for what it reveals about the orientation of de Jouvenel's thought. It demonstrates his roots in a classical as opposed to a modern understanding of politics. He assumes that there is in fact such a thing as the political good which is a thing unto itself and not simply the sum of individual goods achieved through collective means, and that it is possible to arrive at a definition of the political good through argument. He accepts Aristotle's definition of man as a political animal. The legitimate purpose of state action, therefore, is not just the promotion of the material, or even psychic, well-being of individuals. Because he is concerned with the well-being of the polity itself, he believes that policies must be shaped to produce good politics; that is, a set of conditions in which the citizenry thrives and improves its political understanding.

Because politics is natural to man it is also irremovable. Any society will have politics. In this sense de Jouvenel puts himself at odds with both liberals and Marxists. Man is neither so base as to be incapable of governing his own affairs, nor so perfect that he can create an order in which politics would be unnecessary. The dynamism inherent in political life is ineradicable. This acceptance of continual political change places de Jouvenel at odds with all modern views of politics, be they conservative, liberal, or radical.

Conservatives conceive of society as being static. Radicals seek to overthrow the status quo and create a new order which, given its perfection, would also be static. Liberals accept change, but only that created by the perfect machine, the market. If politics cannot be removed, then the cure for the pathology of modern states lies in improving the quality of politics itself.

To understand what constitutes good politics, de Jouvenel begins by trying to understand the essence of all politics, authority. Again he begins by rejecting modern understandings. As the foundation of politics, authority is, perforce, natural. One need not invent the elaborate myth of the social contract to explain why men agree to obey other men. Such an inclination is as natural as a son obeying his father or a ballplayer heeding his coach.

The omnipresence of authority does not serve to eliminate disobedience, which results from the conflict of competing authorities. The son disobeys his father to please his peers. The ballplayer goes against the coach's orders because a prestigious sportswriter favors another approach. These conflicts are the stuff of human misery because they undermine the invaluable service that authority performs. Authority is the basis of all organizing activity and, thus, of all human achievement. Even the life of the marketplace is subsequent to a prior authoritative act of organizing the market and providing for the security and stability which it needs in order to operate.

The key step to understanding politics is to recognize that authority performs two vital but distinct functions. It builds and preserves, stirs and calms, aggregates and stabilizes. It is the root of all innovation and of all stasis. De Jouvenel provides names for these two often inimical functions: the authority figure who innovates he labels *dux*; the authority figure who stabilizes he calls *rex*. A leader may well come to symbolize one or the other of these qualities: David is *dux*, Solomon is *rex*. More typically a leader will embody both qualities, emphasizing one or the other as circumstances require. (Contrast the FDR who proposed "bold and persistent experimentation" with the FDR who told Americans "we have nothing to fear but fear itself.")

Politics is animated by the paradox that *rex* and *dux* are both complementary and contradictory. No society can endure change that is all encompassing or stasis that is absolute. The very fact that

most aspects of life will remain unchanged in the short run allows us to embark upon new ventures. An unfamiliarity with change renders us unable to adapt to new circumstances (when they inevitably occur) or to improve our lot.

While *rex* and *dux* represent essential qualities of our life in common, they also frame the principle lines of cleavage in any society. The interests of some—the poor, the young, the outcast—are best served by change. The interests of their opposite numbers are best served by adherence to the status quo. Somehow these paradoxical elements must be kept in a dynamic equilibrium, which is the task de Jouvenel assigns to the most all-encompassing form of authority, the sovereign:

> Public authority . . . acts as a more or less discriminating filter to innovation in behavior and diversions from the norm. Necessarily, it is on guard to remedy the resulting uncertainty. It is in this process of filtering and remedying, in this unceasing work of repair to an equilibrium, that the question of the Political Good is most often posed.[32]

Thus the political good is different from other forms of good. It stands behind them. It reconciles the fruits of change with the deep need which men feel for certitude, coherence, and continuity. The basic mission of the political good is to strengthen the social tie itself: to reinforce "the friendship felt by one citizen for another and the assurance that each has of the predictability in another's conduct—all of them conditions of the happiness which men can create for each other by life in society."[33]

Once again de Jouvenel aligns himself with the classical understanding of politics. The purpose of politics is to perpetuate the good city, the city of mutual respect, trust, and affection. De Jouvenel, however, recognizes that the preconditions which have traditionally been relied upon for this task no longer exist.[34] He cites four such corollaries for the sustenance of social friendship: small size, cultural homogeneity, resistance to innovation, and the banning of foreign ideas. These corollaries are both irretrievable and inimical to other valued human goals. His aim is therefore to liberate the political good, conceived of as the maintenance of the social tie, from "the prison of the corollaries."

The gravest error of modern politics has been to ignore the vast differences between modern and ancient society and to try to govern the former as if it were the latter. Any effort to build walls around the city—to close it off from a world of change—is doomed to failure, and can only be attempted by using the most hideously coercive means. De Jouvenel's approach to escaping the "prison of the corollaries" is to adopt—and then adapt—the modern liberal conception of government as umpire rather than animator. The proper function of the modern state is to regulate, not to control or direct, the nongovernmental institutions and activities which provide the life force of modern society. But unlike the classical liberal state, which enforces a neutral set of rules or protects the market from monopolists and thieves, the state in de Jouvenel's view must be (and can be) guided by a vision of the political good. What does this vision consist of?

Government should not try to create social friendship because it does not know how. It is too blunt and clumsy an instrument to perform such a delicate and creative task. This view reflects not only de Jouvenel's skepticism about governmental capacity, it also reflects his appreciation for the subtle nature of social friendship. In the modern context, social friendship is not reducible to mere similarity of background or outlook nor to the sort of idolatry embodied in modern nationalism. It is rather a framework of loyalties nurtured and sustained by common experience.

> It [social friendship] . . . must grow of itself by way of men's ordinary intercourse, always provided that the intercourse is so regulated that noxious activities are as far as possible restrained. By means of this regulation, which is the essential feature of the art of politics, mutual trustfulness grows apace among men.[35]

De Jouvenel's notion of "noxious activities" that the state must restrain is far more expansive than that contained in the liberal notion of regulation. The latter is limited to the enforcement of promises and the redress of market failure. The protection of social friendship requires a good deal more. The state must be able to break up social logjams. As de Tocquevile recognized, sustaining social friendship requires preventing any particular social group

from exercising outrageous privileges and/or blocking the advancement of other meritorious groups. (Whatever its practical failings, antitrust legislation is consistent with these principles.) The state must also facilitate the practice of group solidarity.

One imagines that de Jouvenel would have been a vigorous supporter of the Wagner Act and similar efforts to promote free collective bargaining. For him the advantages inherent in enabling laboring men to join together in the fraternal pursuit of common improvement would far outweigh whatever limits on their liberty are imposed by compulsory membership and dues paying.

While the task ascribed to the sovereign is limited, it is extremely difficult to achieve. This is due in large measure to the dissatisfaction which people express toward all those institutions, especially government, which comprise "society."

> [People] have a tendency to classify as personal relations those which please them and convey an emotional warmth, and as "social relations" any which they dislike and find a burden. It is often said nowadays: "I cannot dine with friends. I have a social engagement." Thus social relations means for us the unpleasing remnant of the complex of relations from which the pleasing ones have been extracted. For this reason society affects us as a burden even when it is in reality carrying us.[36]

> Nothing is less natural than a concentration of authority which keeps it far away and out of sight . . . the natural thing is an immediate authority which is present bodily and asserts itself spontaneously in every human grouping.[37]

The facelessness of modern society and the abstract nature of governance is at odds with deeply rooted human desires for tangibility and communion. Human imagination delights in devising remedies for these defects. Given the diversity of human intellect, these remedies differ markedly. Hare Krishna and the Ayatollah are two of the many contemporary examples of this impulse at work, but so are labor unions, consciousness-raising groups, and neighborhood associations. The danger to the political good arises from the well-nigh irresistible impulse to make use of the vast resources

of the modern state to implement a particular vision of a perfect social order whose very perfection requires that it be imposed on others. The mayhem and discord that results from competitive efforts to make use of government to promote justice is itself the greatest cause for the unraveling of the social tie.

De Jouvenel accepts the quest for justice as an inevitable, and on the whole laudable, attribute of the human soul. To ensure that the search for justice does not destroy liberty is the greatest of all of government's regulatory challenges. It must parry all the thrusts aimed at using government to install a perfect social order. Not only are such efforts destructive but the process of resisting them is itself educational. It can help the citizenry to learn that justice is an attribute of human character, not a feature of any particular social organization. No institutional blueprint can ensure that men will relate to each other justly. Instead each must develop those qualities of mind and soul that encourage and permit him to work out just solutions to the multitude of specific problems that confront him each day. The greatness of politics lies in its mundane applications, and the challenge is to make the state an asset rather than a liability in this endeavor.

Political Science and Political Philosophy

If the taming of the state is the great task of modern politics, what should be the contribution to this endeavor of the "science of politics"? And what is the relationships between this "new" science of politics and the older tradition of political philosophy? Precisely what kind of political science did Bertrand de Jouvenel try to create?

Because of his nationality, it is tempting to place de Jouvenel in the context of French politics and French political science. But if our reading of his work is correct, de Jouvenel's *age* is more important than his nationality: that is, the most important forces shaping his political understanding were not French, per se, but European, and they had an especially profound impact, of course, on the men and women of de Jouvenel's generation. The world wars, the rise of totalitarianism—these were not simply tragic events; they were *not supposed to happen*. They were anomalies that shattered the confident liberal politics of the world into which