Economics and the Good Life

Essays on Political Economy

Bertrand de Jouvenel
Edited and with an Introduction by
Dennis Hale and Marc Landy

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Preface

Edouard Bertrand de Jouvenel des Ursins was born in 1903, and raised in a household that was deeply involved in the political and intellectual currents sweeping through France and Europe. His father, Henri, was the son of a baron, Raoul de Jouvenel, from Corrèze. Bertrand's mother, Sarah Claire Boas, was the daughter of a wealthy industrialist. Henri and Sarah met while both were working to defend Alfred Dreyfus. And although de Jouvenel's parents divorced when he was young, he remained close to both his parents, and participated in their active political, social, and literary circles. Henri was France's representative to the League of Nations, was elected to the French Senate, and was married to the novelist Colette—giving Bertrand access, simultaneously, to the worlds of diplomacy, party politics, and letters. Sarah presided over a salon of great prestige and importance, and was instrumental in getting the French government to support the cause of an independent Czechoslovakia—as a result of which the young Bertrand was able to work as a private secretary to Eduard Benes, Czechoslovakia's first prime minister.

After his service to Benes, de Jouvenel took up a journalistic career which he was to follow until the Second World War. He was a widely read correspondent for a variety of newspapers and magazines identified, generally, with the French Left. He called himself a progressive and ran (unsuccessfully) as a Radical Socialist candidate for the National Assembly. His interests in those days included international reconciliation, especially between Germany and France, and economic reform aimed at curing the "evil of unemployment." His was one of the few voices on the French Left urging international support for schemes to improve the German economy, on the prophetic grounds that economic dislocation would lead to the collapse of Germany's democratic government.

Breaking first with the Radical Socialists and then with the Parti Populaire Francaise over their refusal to oppose German militarism, de Jouvenel withdrew from political activism into reflection on the esca-

lating disasters of totalitarianism and war. Late in 1943, fearing imminent arrest, de Jouvenel fled, with his wife, to Switzerland, where he remained for the duration of the war. It was there that he composed the book that first brought him to the attention of an American audience: *On Power: Its Nature and the History of its Growth*, published in French in 1945 and in English in 1948.

De Jouvenel is therefore known in the United States—to the extent that he is known at all—primarily as a political scientist. His best-known works—*On Power*; *Sovereignty*; and *The Pure Theory of Politics*—all make distinctive contributions to our understanding of the modern state, and to the crafting of a political science whose aim is to civilize that state. De Jouvenel was also invited, during the 1950s and 1960s, to lecture at American universities (Yale, the University of Chicago, and the University of California at Berkeley) where he developed close friendships with several American intellectuals and left a lasting impression on some of their students.[1]

But in France, de Jouvenel was known primarily as an economist—especially in the last three decades of his life. He founded and directed the Society for Economic, Industrial, and Social Research, and the Futuribles Institute, devoted to forecasting. He edited and contributed to the journals published by the institutes—*Bulletin SEDEIS*, *Analyse et Prévision,* and *Futuribles*—which earned him a wide reputation as a public intellectual with broad interests in social, political, and economic problems and developments. This reputation earned him appointments to several commissions organized to give advice to the French government, and one of his last public appointments was to a commission organized to study France's national forests. Up to the final years of his life (he died in 1987), de Jouvenel was still travelling to international conferences to deliver papers on a wide range of topics, including forecasting, environmental regulation, marine economics, and democratic reform.

While de Jouvenel's work in economics is relatively unknown in the United States, it is an important companion to his work as a political scientist. But unlike so many writers in the contemporary field of political economy, de Jouvenel was not interested in expanding the claims of the economy at the expense of the polity. On the contrary; his economic writing was governed in the first instance by the oldest and most fundamental of political concerns, namely, the definition of the good life.

This was among the earliest concerns of thinkers, such as Aristotle, who sought to distinguish between the private and the public house-

holds, and to understand how the economy of the public household shaped, or interfered with, the creation of the good life—the chief and noblest aim of the City. The study of politics, and the study of the public household, are properly one study and not two.

The good life, however, is not a product of the marketplace, but of deliberate and collective decision. It is a task for thoughtful citizens and statesmen, and not simply the sum of millions of separate and amoral "consumer preferences." De Jouvenel was well-known for his opposition to the distended State; but he was no anarchist. His eloquent warnings to keep the State in its proper sphere were accompanied by a richly sophisticated discussion of what that proper sphere is—an aspect of his work that comes through very clearly in the pages of these essays.

That discussion is informed by de Jouvenel's own generous and humane understanding of the good life, and in the pages of this book the reader will encounter an intelligence that is gracious, wise, and hopeful—remarkably catholic in its concerns, and a happy contrast to the austere minimalism of more widely read political economists. The essays—which appeared between 1952 and 1980, in journals both obscure and well-known—range from a discussion of technology to reflections on such fundamental economic concepts as "amenity" and "welfare." They include the deeply theoretical as well as the practical and the concrete, all informed by de Jouvenel's insistence that a science which seeks to understand the production and distribution of "goods" must be concerned in the first place with the Good itself.

* * *

We would like to take this opportunity to thank Irving Louis Horowitz, Mary Curtis, and Transaction Books for their willingness to republish de Jouvenel's essays. The preservation of the best intellectual labors is sometimes a financially thankless task, but a publisher can do no more important service.

Dennis Hale
Marc Landy

Note

1. See, for example, Wilson Carey McWilliams' discussion of de Jouvenel as a teacher in his preface to *The Nature of Politics: Selected Essays of Bertrand de Jouvenel*, edited by Dennis Hale and Marc Landy (Transaction Publishers, 1992).

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Introduction

"Intellectuals resemble Rabelais's Panurge more than one would like to admit, and while many intellects combine to make a well-known problem with rapidly decreasing yields their quarry, another problem which is important for society remains unexplored. Thus the attention given to problems of productivity certainly exceeds the golden mean, while the problem of 'the good life' suffers from neglect."
—*"A Better Life in an Affluent Society,"* 1961.

I

The writings collected in this volume represent a small selection–the principle of selection being their availability in English–of the essays on political economy of Bertrand de Jouvenel (1903–1987), a man who practiced many professions in his richly productive life: reporter, soldier, diplomatic correspondent, novelist, historian, political scientist, economist, and public servant.

Unfortunately, few American scholars are familiar with de Jouvenel's work, and these few are largely political scientists; he is virtually unknown to American economists.[1] But de Jouvenel was an avid "reader" (to use his term) of economic literature, and in addition to teaching law and politics at the Faculty of Law and the Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques in Paris, he gave lectures on both economics and political science at Manchester, Oxford, Cambridge, Berkeley, Yale, and the Sorbonne. The research institute that he founded and directed—SEDEIS[2]—took the study of economic problems as one of its chief missions, and de Jouvenel was a member of several national commissions organized to give economic advice to the French government, including the French Commission of National Accounts and the Commission for Planning. One of his last public services was to direct a government study of his country's forestry resources.[3] And much of de Jouvenel's writing,

from the beginning to the end of his professional career, was concerned with "political economy," in the old sense of the term—the coordination of political and economic arrangements toward a common end.[4]

The subjects and titles of de Jouvenel's books and essays in the field of political economy give an immediate indication of the direction of his thinking, or at least of the particular part of the field in which he preferred to roam. Nominally, he was concerned with natural resources, national accounting, planning, and employment: all matters with obvious, and sometimes not so obvious, political implications; he also did much work on the history of the "controlled economy" and its role in the evolution of modern states.

Yet it must be acknowledged that most economists, even if they were acquainted with his work, would be loathe to accept de Jouvenel as a brother in the craft—and not only because he was an autodidact, in economics as in political science. What truly makes de Jouvenel a stranger to the economics profession is his insistence on the natural alliance between economics and political science—even, in some sense, the natural *subordination* of economics to political science.

"The term 'political' all but disappeared from many economic treatises a long time ago," he writes, "even though governments around the world have been steadily assuming an increasingly important role in the economic realm."[5] But there is a more important reason for insisting upon the affinity of economics and political science, and it reveals de Jouvenel's debt to classical political science, and especially to Aristotle: the private economy has a profound effect on the public order—and vice versa; economic arrangements can either supplement and support political arrangements, or they can undermine them and bring down the regime, in the process destroying the private household along with the public. Another way of putting this is to say that there are *goods*—the collection of services and products supplied by the private economy—and there is the Good—that arrangement of laws and institutions that is most productive of human happiness in a particular place at a particular time. De Jouvenel believed that it was important for economists to broaden their horizons so that their science could include in a single glance not just the "goods" of conventional analysis but the Good itself.

De Jouvenel adopted a similar strategy with political scientists, who were only slightly more willing than economists to accept him into their guild. While embracing the methods and the spirit of "empirical" political science, de Jouvenel tried to turn especially American political scientists to a more classical understanding of the ends of political

life: as Wilson Carey McWilliams has put it, de Jouvenel, "like Theseus who slew the Minotaur,… would bring the old gods to a new city."[6]

To attempt in one lifetime the turning of two professions—especially one as rightly prideful as modern economics—is surely a hurculean effort, and it would be folly to pretend that de Jouvenel made significant progress with either group of pupils. Still, as long as we have libraries, no wisdom is permanently out of reach; and it is in that spirit that we collect these essays in book form, to be planted where they will someday, we hope, bear fruit.

II

It was catastrophe that led de Jouvenel to the study of *both* economics and political science. No public event was more important to his political education than the economic dislocations of the 1920s and 1930s and their fatal consequences in Europe: the collapse of liberal democracy, the rise of totalitarianism, the apocalypse of World War II. From that experience came the reflections that grew into de Jouvenel's first major work of political science, *Du pouvoir* (1945), published in English as *On Power: Its Nature and the History of its Growth* (1948).[7]

In the rise of fascism, it was impossible to ignore the impact of two tragic and puzzling economic developments: hyperinflation and mass unemployment. In addition to the phenomenal waste of resources such problems caused, they undermined confidence in democratic institutions and drove citizens into the arms of tyrants. They would do so again, if given the chance. The postwar project was therefore as obvious as it was daunting: to civilize the nation-state and to rationalize the economy, simultaneously, so that limited government and steady economic growth could together prevent a recurrence of the nightmares of the Depression and the Second World War.

Such thinking naturally led de Jouvenel to a consideration of the United States.[8] In America, fascism had failed to take root; American institutions had proved durable enough to weather the storms that had overwhelmed European democracies, without losing completely their liberal and constitutional spirit. And America was, above all, the great exemplar of economic growth. What America had managed, what Great Britain had managed earlier—this is what the whole world would now attempt to achieve.

While universal economic growth on the American pattern was unlikely, because of the unequal distribution of natural resources among

the nations of the world, no nation would be completely immune to the growing prosperity of the world economy. Growth would bring challenges, but it had already brought about, in Europe, North America, and a few other parts of the world, a profound and unprecedented social transformation.

> The great new idea is that it is possible to enrich all the members of society, collectively and individually, by gradual progress in the organization of labor, its methods and its implements; that this enrichment provides the means for a greater development of the individual; and that this development can be rapid and unlimited. This idea is an enormous innovation.[9]

The transformation is both political and economic. The possibility of abundance transforms the regime by making what was once impossible (widespread wealth) seem not just a *good* but a *right.* That expectation, in turn, inspires greater individual effort and increased economic growth. On the political side, the growth of an economy of abundance creates tasks that can only be performed by governments that are relatively centralized and integrated compared to previous regimes (in part because society must sustain much larger populations). The market might be free, but its freedom is supported by an elaborate structure of rules, regulations, and public institutions. And governments must also be strong enough to prevent the kind of turmoil that destroyed liberal regimes in the 1930s. The modern state, for all its dangers, cannot be abolished, therefore, but only *tamed*.

Given these facts of life, it is essential that citizens, and especially intellectuals, learn to appreciate—to value properly—the moral and constitutional restraints on the power of government, a lesson they had not fully learned even after the experience of fascism and totalitarianism in Europe.[10] Similarly, those intellectuals devoted to the science of economics must learn to appreciate the full nature of their task as advisors and counsellors to statesmen: how to make economic institutions serve the end of promoting the Good Life under the supremely difficult conditions imposed by modernity.

III

As de Jouvenel was well aware, mention of the Good Life provokes in most of our contemporaries an immediate retreat into relativism. Do not social and moral "goods" merely reveal *preferences* that are every bit as subjective as our preferences for material goods?

How can we claim to know what the Good Life is, and then impose our subjective preferences on millions of others whose preferences might differ? "If every man be the only judge of his own interest, if we can ascertain what makes him better off *solely* by observations of the *preferences* his actions *reveal*, then however Society develops under free choices, we must assume that whatever is, is the best possible world at the moment."[11]

But moral relativism with regard to public choice is only the first obstacle.

The "happy city" has always been thought of as a small place. The selection from *Sovereignty* which we have chosen for our prologue sets the problem very nicely: the "common good" cannot be sought "in methods which the model of a small, closed society inspires"—and yet these are virtually the only models that our tradition can supply us. The scale of modern life—a scale made possible by economic progress, first in agriculture and then in manufacturing—has permanently and profoundly changed the context of politics. As Pierre Manent has recently observed, human beings have invented only three essential political frameworks beyond the tribe: the city, the nation, and the empire.[12] Empires are still possible, but we do not want them; autonomous city-states are no longer an option; and so the nation is where the Political Good will have to be realized. We must try to imagine the Good Life on a scale that encompasses tens and hundreds of millions, when the whole tradition of political inquiry has held it possible only for the tens of thousands—and possibly not even for that many.

Furthermore, the modern economy changes more than the scale of *politics*. It also transforms *social* life, which is at all times the foundation on which the state is built. The family, the neighborhood, the workplace, the town—all these are changed in obedience to the requirements of economic life. These requirements, de Jouvenel reminds us, are "draconian"; they overturn much of the ancient moral teaching and unsettle all established social relationships. Where morality once urged the moderation of desires, the modern economy must continually awaken new desires so that they can be satisfied by new *goods*. The love of money, instead of being the root of evil, must be seen instead as the spur to all social and economic progress. The old and respected must be replaced by what is new and efficient, whether in matters of morality or in matters of technique. Rootedness and routine—long valued for the stability they bring to human relationships—must give way to mobility, flexibility, even opportunism.

The "payoff" is that modern society can support vastly greater populations, at unprecedented levels of physical comfort, while requiring fewer hours of less physically arduous labor. More of us live longer, and better, in material terms; and since we live longer and retire earlier than previous generations of workers, we work for a smaller fraction of our adult lives, giving more of us than ever before significant amounts of leisure time.

A useful question now makes its awkward appearance upon the stage: Is it not the case that this improvement in the material conditions of life for increasing numbers of people is, *itself*, the Good Life; what else, after all, do we need? And if economists can tell us how to drive this process to ever higher levels, can they not abandon political science altogether and strike off on their own?

IV

To put the answer in classical terms, what the modern economy supplies is *mere* life, while what we require is the *good* life. To achieve the latter it is necessary that citizens *desire* what is good—that is, something to be acquired "because it improves us" (as de Jouvenel puts it), and not simply because it has been made available to us by the market. For that to happen it is necessary that our desires be *educated*. This is not a new idea; both classical and modern authors acknowledge that the desires can be educated, but both make an important qualification: education will succeed only with the few; or it will succeed only under conditions radically different from those that exist in modern times: in a small city, with a homogeneous citizenry, preferably under the influence of common (and powerful) religious institutions.

De Jouvenel acknowledges the force of these arguments, and accepts the general conclusion that the finest things will never be desired by the many. But he insists that *better* things can be desired by *more* and possibly by *most* citizens—an important enough departure from the classical doctrine to be considered radical. But it is a departure imposed by a grim necessity: "We live in majority societies where beautiful things will be wiped out unless the majority appreciates them."[13] Despite our great economic achievements, modern life is, in the main, ugly, dreary, and dispiriting: there is an enormous gap between what our resources make it possible for us to have, on the one hand, and what we have chosen to have, on the other. This would be a matter of merely

aristocratic regret, were it not for the reality that a dispirited and demoralized civilization is incapable, first, of excellence, then of self-awareness, and finally of self-government.

V

The essays in part one of this collection—"The Elements of Political Economy"—provide a masterful exploration of the problem of conceptualizing the Good under modern conditions, in a language that borrows from both economics and political science. Beginning with the traditional conceptions of welfare economics, de Jouvenel raises immediately the political problem. Can welfare economics supply criteria for political choice?

The traditional answer is that governments should choose policies that maximize welfare, defined, first, as increasing national income and second, as distributing that income in whatever way leads to a "greater sum of satisfactions than dissatisfactions." This framework is much clearer, firmer, more objective than anything supplied by contemporary political science, and for this reason economists have moved into the first ranks of the advisors of the modern state. But in fact, de Jouvenel argues, the framework has significant limitations. The first limitation is that the "ontology" of welfare economics is itself political; that is, it is borrowed from Hobbes (although few economists are aware of their debt): human nature is the seat of unending desires, and the objects of these desires are goods, "worth precisely what the desirer is willing to give for them. Therefore various goods can be compared and added up, however different in nature, because they have this in common that they are desired, and can be compared because they are more or less desired."[14]

What all the consumers together desire is, perforce, the *collective,* or common good. But it is obvious that what all consumers together desire might *not* be all there is to the social good; consumers might not want schools, or national defense, or breathable air—things which are nevertheless necessary to the survival of the society or the regime. The sum of individual choices might be different from the best *collective* choice. Furthermore, consumer/citizens cannot be asked to offer a price for items that are not actually for sale, such as social order itself—without which there could not be other satisfactions.

That the sum of individual preferences does not necessarily add up to the common good is a phenomenon that American political scien-

tists have not been eager to puzzle over. One reason for this perhaps is that in the United States, the relationship between the "general will" and the "will of all" has been, for the most part, tolerably close: the various goods that consumers, in their private capacities, have desired have not, usually, been inconsistent with the requirements of social order and republican self-government. Furthermore, civic education, at least in the past, placed a very high value upon constitutional government, civility, disinterested public service, and other requirements of a healthy democratic state. But it is precisely the tendency of welfare economics and political science to take such *conditions* as *givens* that proves so dangerous, because it encourages us to forget that they are not givens at all, but the products of statemanship and political art of a very high order. The farther away we are from the origins of this art the more likely we are to take it for granted.

To the extent, therefore, that both political science and economics lack an adequate framework for *public choice* (to use a contemporary phrase with a controversial meaning), to that extent we are in danger of creating governments that can give people what they *want* but not what they *need*[15]—and that "first things therefore may come to be lost in the pursuit of last things."[16]

VI

But the Good, whatever we decide that it is, or whatever it requires us to choose, cannot simply be imposed from above; it is not a *government program*. In *Sovereignty*, de Jouvenel provides a powerful discussion of why all efforts to conceive and then institute intricately contrived schemes for public happiness have disastrous consequences. Having done that much, de Jouvenel might have stopped where so many others have stopped, and simply embraced the "market" as the source of all that we can identify as good.[17] This he does not do; de Jouvenel is a liberal but not a libertarian. The problem of the public good cannot be *solved* by the state; but the state has a role to play in its solution, nonetheless.

It is the responsibility of the public authorities (although not theirs exclusively) to foster the *conditions* under which the common good can emerge. (In a democratic state, this is also the responsibility of citizens in both their private and public capacities.) One of those conditions, for example—in some ways the centerpiece of his argument in *Sovereignty*—is "reciprocal trustfulness". Citizens must be able to trust one another before they can engage in *any* meaningful social activity,

including, most importantly, *economic* activity. (We have seen, in the former Soviet Union, what the absence of trust does to economic progress.)

The concept of *amenity* is the core of de Jouvenel's discussion of the good. An "amenity" is a condition which makes life pleasant. Human beings are "sensitive" creatures; we are powerfully effected by what we see, hear, smell—by our surroundings, both physical, social, and moral. The improvement of those surroundings is properly, therefore, part of the study of political economy. Economists (and the statesmen they advise) must learn how to incorporate amenities into a system of national accounting, so that we will be aware of their increase and decrease over time. Furthermore, to the extent that a normal marketplace fails to supply such amenities, or actually contributes to their disappearance (through such externalities as environmental pollution, or the excessive mobility imposed by national labor markets)—to that extent public authority must intervene to supply what is missing. And that, of course, brings us back to the original problem: to supply what is missing we must be able to *name* it; we must have a theory of public amenity, or at least a general picture of the circumstances in which *Homo Felix* lives and works.

De Jouvenel's theory of amenity begins where the ancients began: human happiness is the fulfillment of a potential; it consists of growth *toward*, rather than possession *of*. The greatest boon of the modern economy is not, therefore, the "things" it gives us—the movies and bicycles and electronic gadgets—but the leisure and comfort that it makes possible, for the first time, for the majority. What a revolution the forty-hour week is! And what a revolution also is the application of machinery to labor, and the extraordinary reduction in the physical effort involved even in such occupations as mining and agriculture. The shortening of the workweek and the reduction in the physical rigors of labor have provided humankind with an extraordinary opportunity. How have we used it?

> Imagine that an eighteenth century philanthropist, say the Marquis de Mirabeau or Thomas Jefferson, were resurrected and briefed as to the increase in labor productivity and wealth which has occurred since his day. He would certainly imagine a world where beauty and culture prevailed, where the setting of life would immediately manifest the social wealth.[18]

Who could doubt the disappointment of our ancestors at the dreariness and coarseness of modern life, despite such enormous wealth and op-

portunity? "I would deem myself fortunate indeed," de Jouvenel concludes, "if I had found it possible to contribute towards the [induction of] our increasing wealth in the service of a greater amenity of life."[19]

If happiness is the fulfillment of potential, then education, as well as work, must enter the welfare calculus. De Jouvenel believed that the emphasis economists placed on education for the workplace and for increased productivity (what would nowdays be called "preparation for the global economy of the 21st century") was too narrow, and he made a straightforward case for liberal education as "an education for those who may look forward to a life free from pressing cares."[20] Because modern workers will have more leisure than their ancestors, the aims of a liberal education are now relevant for a much wider section of the population than ever before in our history.[21]

> The case for developing the average man's skill as a laborer is unaswerable, since among the benefits procured, despite the loss of work time, is the progressive enlargement of that share of time during which he is a freeman, a "gentleman." [B]ut the greater the share thus liberated, the more pressing it becomes to educate man for the fruitful use of this free time.… In short, future generations, which can look forward to an increasingly lighter burden of work, and to an increasing share of free time, require a liberal education.… Education then has a dual purpose: to make man's labor more productive, and his leisure more fruitful. And the greater the gains in one direction, the more necessary is progress in the other."[22]

Necessary—because the market can only supply goods which citizens desire, or can be induced to desire. Advertising can persuade consumers to want the new goods that the economy is capable of producing; but only education can teach citizens to place a high value on the *conditions* which make public happiness possible, and which are not the products of the market but of statesmanship.

VII

The selections in part two—"Problems of Post-War Reconstruction"—concern a variety of problems for which political economy supplies useful insights: international monetary reform; democracy in former colonies; Soviet economic planning; and others. Even though some of these essays deal with controversies long settled, their qualities are worth savoring, nonetheless. There has never been a clearer indictment of rent control and its consequences than de Jouvenel's discussion of "dollar-a-month rents" in Paris in the late 1940s.[23] And while Algeria is no longer a "pluri-communal" state, what de Jouvenel has to

say about the problem of "two nations in one" is relevant to more than one country in the modern world—and is far more sobering than much contemorary analysis of communal conflict.[24]

Two essays in this section, however, are of direct and prophetic relevance to contemporary problems. The first is "Money in the Market," which was written in 1955, before the relaxation of exchange controls in Western Europe; it anticipates a time when national currencies will be freely traded against one another, and outlines the challenge of interdependence that such trading will impose on all countries who seek to join the international economy. "The Political Consequences of the Rise of Science" offers a dissent from the widespread view among intellectuals that science and democracy are natural allies. ("Unwittingly and indirectly, the scientist undermines the juristic order.… science, far from providing automatic support to democracy, constitutes a challenge to it, which we must find ways of meeting.") The picture de Jouvenel paints of an increasingly befuddled citizenry, looking to science as the source of ever greater boons while growing increasingly doubtful about its own capacity to make judgments, is painfully close to our contemporary reality.

The selections in part three—"The Political Economy of Natural Resources"—display an aspect of de Jouvenel's work already present in the 1950s, and that grew more important during the last two decades of his life. The conventional word for this theme is "environmentalism," but de Jouvenel's approach to the environment borrows from an older tradition—"conservation"—to which he has added the economist's interest in "amenity." The result is something very different, in interesting and instructive ways, from the dominant modes of contemporary environmental writing.

First, de Jouvenel acknowledges that the environment is a *resource*—it is there to be used, but not wasted. The economic problem is to find a method of forcing human users to pay an accurate price for what they take from nature; otherwise, our uses will be profligate rather than prudent. Taking care of what has been given us is called "stewardship"; the virtue of the steward is "husbandry," a word which encourages us to think of the earth as a garden, rather than as a wilderness (where we do not belong) or a mine (from which we can simply extract without limit). "We esteem ourselves masters of the Earth. But should not an owner be the husbandman of his land? Must he not tend it as he uses it? Shall he not indeed delight in its beauty as well as enjoy its fruit?"[25] The value of this approach is that all who use a garden can be required

to bear their share of responsibility for it, a process to which economists could make greater contributions if they paid more attention to natural resources.[26]

But while the environment is a resource, it is also our *home*; the efficient use of resources need not prevent us from making our immediate surroundings more pleasant. Here de Jouvenel's work is reminiscent of an older American tradition exemplified by Frederick Law Olmsted, and other architects and designers who hoped to merge Nature and City into one felicitous human environment. What a refreshing surprise it is to encounter a paragraph such as this (from "Efficiency and Amenity"):

> In writing and image, many glimpses of the Golden Age have been vouchsafed to us; they concur quite remarkably. *Homo Felix* moves against a background of beauty, delights in his workmanship, is benefited by the company he keeps, and his song of joy praises his Creator. Most often he is shown in a landscape mellowed by the human hand, with a nice balance of trees, meadows and stream; a graceful temple however testifies to urbanity. Contrariwise, if *Homo Felix* happens to be painted in a public place, then the greenery of the surroundings shows through the monuments of the town. The latter is no more than a meeting place for worship and conviviality. *Homo Felix* is not idle, but the enjoyment of doing things so overcomes the awareness that they must be done as to exclude any sense of drudgery. His associates move his heart and quicken his wit; expecting the best of him, they help him to achieve it. He opens his eyes at dawn, eager for the activities of the day, and closes them at dusk; free from worry he exerts no pressure on any other man nor does he endure any.

A "background of beauty," good work and good company: this is no elaborate Utopian fantasy, or the beginning of a complex national administrative program; it is only a picture meant to entice us by its charm and its simplicity, and to suggest the *conditions* under which the good life might be pursued. We cannot, after all, find what we are seeking unless we have a picture, however sketchy, of what it looks like. The great virtue of de Jouvenel's vision of the Good Life is that it embraces nature, economy, and polity in a single frame; and if we can agree with his qualification ("maybe the picture drawn thereof was a fanciful one") we must also agree with his conclusion: "But surely there is some way of life which would be an improvement upon that which we find."[27]

A second aspect of de Jouvenel's discussion of natural resources is his awareness that economic interdependence and the increased ease and speed of transportation and communication, all make the world an *apparently* smaller place—without making it more peaceful or easier to manage. We are not yet, he says, "one World"; but we are increas-

ingly conscious of the earth as "one place." The famous photograph of the earth in space (which "I can now hang upon my wall, just as easily as a picture of my own house") should not fool us into thinking that the world has become a small town (or worse, a "spaceship"), easily governed (or "operated") if only we "mingle" and get to know one another. International interdependence will, for one thing, expose the radical *inequality* of nations: some have more natural resources than others, a fact of geography about which policy can do very little.[28] Because some nations have much and others little, the conservation of natural resources will soon run up against an increased competition for their more vigorous exploitation, more chaotic because it will involve many more players than ever before.[29] And for a long time to come, the ease of transportation will mean simply that refugees can move more readily across borders, spreading political instability and other forms of disturbance.

Finally, de Jouvenel's interest in conservation is folded within his larger aim, which is to focus our attention on the Good Life as the guide to public choice. There has long been a tendency among environmentalists to segregate a concern for (say) habitat preservation or clean air from other concerns, on the grounds, perhaps, that distraction will dilute the energies of a "movement" that considers itself embattled. But political economy tries to connect the pieces: to link economic growth with a more prudent use of natural resources, or the preservation of "natural" beauty with the better design of urban spaces. There is great wisdom, we are convinced, in de Jouvenel's clarity about the importance of such balancing.

There is great wisdom also in his sense of historical perspective. The last decades of the twentieth century have been a fertile breeding ground for multiple forms of hysteria, and it is often hard not to get the sense from our current intellectual debates that the End is Near. By contrast, de Jouvenel is aware of how much has improved—even apparently small things to which most citizens give little thought, such as the disappearance of class distinctions in dress, which has been made possible by the growth of mass-produced clothing. When we become more conscious of how difficult life was for most of our ancestors, even as recently as two generations back—longer hours, harder work, less food, and shorter lifespans—we become more conscious of the opportunities the modern economy presents, and less preoccupied with what seem like catastrophic problems. But at the same time we should be equally conscious of how we have wasted our opportunities by letting what is last take precedence over what is first. It is de Jouvenel's

ability to expose the pettiness of our public ambitions that is among his greatest strengths as a teacher.

—Dennis Hale and Marc Landy
Department of Political Science
Boston College
Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts
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Notes

1. For a discussion of de Jouvenel's contribution to political science, see our earlier collection, *The Nature of Politics: Selected Essays of Bertrand de Jouvenel* (Transaction Books, 1992).
2. The Society for Economic, Industrial, and Social Research.
3. Published as *Vers la forêt du XXIe siècle* (1978).
4. See, for example, *L'économie dirigée* (1928); *La crise du capitalisme américain* (1933); *Napoleon et l'économie dirigeée* (1942); *L'économie mondiale au XXe siècle* (1944); *Problems of Socialist England* (1946); *L'Amérique en Europe: le plan Marshall et la coopération intercontinentale* (1948); *The Ethics of Redistribution* (1951); *Problèmes économique de notre temps* (1966); and *Arcadie, essais sur le mieux-vivre* (1968).
5. "Back to Basics: The Concrete Economy," in this volume.
6. Wilson C. McWilliams, "Foreword" to *The Nature of Politics*, p. 38.
7. See also *La décomposition de l'Europe libérale: Oct. 24–Jan. 1932* (1941). *On Power* was followed in 1955 by *Sovereignty: An Inquiry into the Political Good* and *The Pure Theory of Politics* (1963). *On Power* was first published by Viking Press, in 1948, in a translation by J. F. Huntington. The Viking edition was reissued in 1995 by the Liberty Fund, which published a new edition of *Sovereignty* in 1998, with an introduction by Daniel Mahoney.
8. De Jouvenel visited the United States for the first time in the 1930s, as a correspondent for French newspapers. His private aim was to study the Roosevelt administration's approach to economic reform.
9. "A Better Life in an Affluent Society," this volume.
10. It is a recurring observation in de Jouvenel's work on America that the most progressive intellectuals failed to appreciate the stubborn independence of the United States Congress, and were constantly embracing schemes to "discipline" the legislature to the will of the executive. Americans, de Jouvenel believed, should learn to cherish the independent legislature as they cherish the independent university.
11. "Efficiency and Amenity," this volume.
12. Pierre Manent, "Democracy without Nations?" *Journal of Democracy* 8 (April, 1997): 92–102.
13. "Toward a Political Theory of Education," this volume.
14. "The Idea of Welfare," this volume.
15. That many citizens–and many scholars as well–will find this distinction paradoxical is a sign that the phenomenon is already well advanced.
16. "The Idea of Welfare."

17. De Jouvenel had a great admiration for both F. A. Hayek and Ludwig von Mises; yet his understanding of political economy differs from theirs in significant ways.
18. "Efficiency and Amenity," this volume.
19. Ibid.
20. "Toward a Political Theory of Education," op. cit.
21. Liberal education is not suited to everyone, however, which raises the difficult question of what those who do not learn better uses of their leisure will do in their spare time.
22. Ibid.
23. "No Vacancies," this volume.
24. "Reflections on Colonialism," this volume.
25. "The Stewardship of the Earth," this volume.
26. Another virtue of this approach is its acceptance of human beings as rightful proprietors of the garden. Much of contemporary environmentalism is frankly antihuman in its implications—the school known as "deep ecology", for example, which asserts without apology that man is an intruder in the wilderness. It is not irrelevant in this context that de Jouvenel saw a Christian imperative to conservation.
27. "Effiency and Amenity."
28. See "From Political Economy to Political Ecology," this volume.
29. See, for example, the discussion in "An Economic View of Marine Problems," this volume, which anticipates some of the problems of enforcing an "international regime of the oceans"—including the possibible exhaustion of fish stocks through harshly competitive over-fishing.

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Prologue

"The very varied benefits which men can in course of time confer on one another by mutual intercourse do not resemble.... a convergent series of which the formula can be found, but a divergent series which cannot be totaled. And the common good has seemed to us to consist in conditions which make possible the development of this indefinite series. Trustfulness between partners struck us as the most obvious of these conditions.... What we have met with is a contradiction between, on the one hand, the growth of this state of trustfulness and, on the other, the indefinite development of the relations between men, the enlargement of the area which they cover and the diversification of their content. The contradiction is one, clearly, between the effects sought and the condition necessary to their achievement. This contradiction has become steadily clearer; the quest for the climate of trustfulness raises in the mind the picture of a closed, narrow circle of neighbors who are very much alike, who value highly a type which each strives to realize and who are very proud of a common denominator which all wish to maintain. This picture.... strikes our minds with extraordinary vividness.... [A]lmost everyone subconsciously wishes to recover the warmth of the...small, closely-knit society which was the school of the species. This unavowed regret is the root of nearly all utopias, both revolutionary and reactionary, and every political heresy, left or right...[T]he small society, as the milieu in which man is first bound, retains for him an infinite attraction; but...any attempt to graft the same features on a large society is Utopian and leads to tyranny. With that admitted, it is clear that as social relations become wider and more various, the common good conceived as reciprocal trustfulness cannot be sought in methods which the model of a small, closed society inspires; such a model is, on the contrary, entirely misleading."

—Bertrand de Jouvenel,
Sovereignty: An Inquiry Into the Political Good

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Part One:

The Elements of Political Economy

"So it seems that individuals as such are quite incapable of weighing rightly or meaningfully the value of government activities. And if the public authority seeks to rest its own appreciation of its service as against others which might be provided out of the same resources, or its appreciation of some of its services as against others, on some form of subjective appreciation by consumers as such*, it must go terribly astray. In other words it seems that public policies cannot be made to rest upon what people desire* in their private capacities*."*

—"The Idea of Welfare," 1952

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The Idea of Welfare

I

Last winter I was in America attending "The Great Debate" [on U.S. troop commitments in Europe—Eds.]. During the extended hearings held by the four assembled committees on Armed Services and Foreign Affairs of the two Houses, two different points were dealt with: there was the constitutional or formal issue: did the President have the right to commit troops to Europe on his own, without the consent of Congress? And there was the substantial issue: should troops be sent?

In short *who* was to decide and *what* was to be done? All of political theory can, in my view, be ranged under these two headings of *who* and *what*.

Who is the legitimate authority? To whom does Imperium *sive* Sovereignty belong, and by whom is it to be exercised? How is this exercise conferred? How is it partitioned out into *potestates*? What is the legitimate province of the several *potestates*? All this, and much more, constitutes the realm of *who*: a major sector of political science.

But surely not a more important one than the realm of *what*. *What* is the proper decision? By what standards appraised? Based on what assumptions as to man's nature and *summum bonum*, as to the final cause of society and the proper purposes of government?

My interest lies with the second sector. This can be designated as the theory of political choice or the theory of the best decision. We may indeed name it at will, as explorers do of uncharted lands, for, to my limited knowledge, very little work has been done in that field for a very long time. The problem of *who* has held sway. Why this predominance of the problem of *who*?

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