

Another interesting paper in this collection is a previously unpublished and undated manuscript of lecture notes in which Anscombe examines the issue of whether one ought to obey a false conscience. It is a formidable corrective to those, Christian or non-Christian, who imagine that a false conscience somehow automatically excuses a person from culpability for his evil actions.

Throughout much of this volume, Anscombe demonstrates a refreshing willingness to go to the heart of the philosophical issues underlying some of the most hotly disputed moral questions of our time. To this extent, readers will find that the volume provides a valuable introduction to, if not quick immersion in, deeper philosophical matters rarely discussed in the public square and yet that predetermine the stance of many (sometimes without their knowing it) toward subjects that presently fracture much of Western society. That alone is a good reason to read this book and to await with much anticipation the promised future volumes of Elizabeth Anscombe's writings.

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## Morals and Politics

**Vittorio Hösle**

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Vittorio Hösle is a man of many parts and considerable intellectual ambitions. His multiple positions at the University of Notre Dame indicate as much. He is Paul Kimball Professor of Arts and Letters in the Department of German and Russian Languages and Literature, with concurrent appointments in philosophy and in political science. He has published or edited twenty-eight books and four times as many articles. His systematic treatment of ethics and politics and their union in “political ethics” and “the just state,” takes no fewer than 931 pages.

Hösle self-consciously represents the better intellectual traditions of his native Germany. While a very systematic thinker, he admires and profits from the dramatists and novelists of modern times, as well as the ancient tragedians and historians. He rightly insists that they provide timeless portraits of human character, as well as essential insights into human nature and the ethical conundra of living in political community. However, his greatest intellectual debts are to his philosophically minded countrymen: Kant, Hegel, and Jonas occupy the first rank, with Weber, Scheler, Gehlen, and others in a second tier.

Kant is “the most important moral philosopher of the modern age.” His thought, however, needs to be supplemented with a “material ethics” that recognizes objective goods and values, as well as the real-world need for “higher and lower principles” to help us navigate the difference between normal situations and extreme ones. His thought

also needs Hegel, whose “*Elements of the Philosophy of Right* is ... the greatest work in modern political philosophy—a synthesis of ancient and modern thought regarding the state whose depth and breadth can hardly be surpassed.”

Yet, Hegel, appealing to the final reasonableness of history in his day, could not see and account for history’s subsequent important developments: the rise of the welfare state, of democracy, of total war, and of twentieth-century ideological totalitarianisms. Subsequent thinkers, such as Tocqueville and Lorenz von Stein have made contributions in these particular areas. Tocqueville, for example, still provides the most insightful political sociology of democracy.

However, Hans Jonas’s contribution rises above theirs. His Heidegger-inspired philosophy of organism is key to comprehending that distinctive form of being and withal a key to understanding the historical adventure inherent in Nature’s qualitative leap into living being. His reflections on technology, as well as on our ethical duties to future generations and to the globe, are essential contributions to any plausible response to the ecological crisis generated by modern man’s self-centered technological hubris and shortsighted consumerist indulgence.

These varied debts and criticisms bespeak a man who engages in respectful dialogue with, in Matthew Arnold’s famous phrase, “the best that has been said and thought in the world.” It also shows that disciplinary distinctions among philosophy, the social sciences, and the humanities can be overcome by the mind that truly desires to know. This is necessary if one has systematic ambitions, as Höhle does.

His initial object is daunting enough: a credible intellectual comprehension and a judicious moral assessment of “the situation in which humanity finds itself today.” Höhle concludes that the widespread realization of “the project of modernity” reveals its deeply ambiguous nature. Early modern thinkers such as Hobbes and Locke promised peace and prosperity for free and equal individuals through the institutions of capitalism and the sovereign state. In words that could have been penned by Rousseau, Höhle writes,

[I]n many respects the promise with which modernity ... began its triumphal conquest of the planet has turned into a threat. The peace the modern state has produced through its monopoly on force gives it ... a power that has resulted in an unprecedented explosion of violence in those cases in which international conflicts are settled by wars. The enormous wealth of one part of the world ... has caused ... needs to rise even faster than the means of supplying them; thus it has not made people in wealthy countries happier than they were before; on the contrary, if poverty is measured by the difference between desire and fulfillment, it has made them even poorer.

Then, in words Tocqueville could have written:

The fraternal solidarity that was supposed to result from the tearing down of social barriers increasingly amounts to no more than general indifference and an inability to perceive differences in value in any terms other than monetary.

Thus, in Höhle's view, we live at "the moment in world history in which the project of the modern has encountered its immanent limits and exhausted itself or even, in a certain sense, collapsed." This does not mean that the baby should be tossed out with the bath water: "In general, the task ... is this: to separate everything in the modern state that is in fact an expression of a deeply impressive reason from what the modern state—and modernity in general—contains that is destructive, and even self-destructive." Precise intellectual surgery and dramatic real-world changes are required.

Among the latter is, eventually, the creation of a world state, albeit of a "multi-leveled federal" character. (He has the Federal Republic of Germany and the United States in mind as exemplars.) Höhle argues that the universal recognition of human dignity and the provision of humanity's basic social rights call for such a state, as does the moral imperative of making even just wars impossible to wage. Above both is the imperative of averting a looming ecological crisis caused by modern man's technological hubris and his consumerist insouciance.

It is here that common sense may raise a dubious eyebrow, concerned about a certain moral utopianism, while the philosophic reader more dispassionately will be interested in the concept of philosophy that leads to these provocative claims. Practical philosophy combines individual ethics with a philosophy of the state. Ethics requires the latter because the issue of *morally legitimate coercion* rationally leads to the positing of an *impersonal* arbiter, the state, acting according to *legal norms*. However, the philosophy of law—whose chief glory is the theory of the constitutional state—does not fully capture the reality, much less the moral status and tasks, of the state. Philosophy of law must be incorporated into political philosophy.

Political philosophy's chief task is to consider the essential institutions and subsystems of any political organization, especially the state. The state is a self-reproducing social order with a distinctive identity. Höhle correlates the state's essential functions with those of organic life: reproduction (the family), nourishment (the economy), and defense (the military), to which it adds adjudication and legitimation. However, because the state has assumed various historical forms and because mankind's internal and external conditions have dramatically altered during the course of history, political philosophy must regularly be updated by philosophy of history.

With the end of the Cold War contemporary humanity entered a new historical condition. Political philosophy must set new goals for it, starting with an articulation of the state that will best secure humanity's moral achievements and ward off impending catastrophe. We thus return to the world state and *mutandis mutatis* to the advanced states of the Western world. They already have a culture of respect for human dignity and rights, are familiar with the mixed social market economy and social welfare state, and are conversant in the intricacies of government structured according to the principles of the separation of powers and federalism. They are primed to taking leading roles in the advancement of humanity, and both duty and interest would have them perfect their own gardens and reach out to the many peoples whose dignity is inadequately recognized and whose states are underdeveloped. The philosopher can sketch the goal, and

he can articulate the desirable and permissible paths to it, but it remains to his fellow citizens and their leaders to act.

Each element and juncture of this construction is worth consideration, and any radical dissent to the striking conclusions sketched above would require a comparable effort. In lieu of that, permit a suggestive dissent. I find that Höfle's emphasis on morally grounded universalism impairs his appreciation of what the contemporary French political philosopher Pierre Manent calls "the political nature of man" and "the political condition of mankind." There is a deep human desire for self-rule, which Plato and Aristotle spoke of under the rubric of "spiritedness." Similarly, there is a natural human need "to put things in common" (an Aristotelian formulation)—to institute and participate in a common, public world of shared values and ideas. Put the two together and one understands politics as the activities by which, and the realm in which, particular portions of humanity have knit themselves together and prosecuted a common destiny. So understood, the political has real concrete content—and limitations—rooted in nature and history that neither modern moral universalism nor modern communications can overcome. Nor should they, if political activities, virtues, and ties are part of man's universal nature, along with moral autonomy.

Moreover, I am far from convinced by Höfle's appeal to the Federal Republic of Germany and the United States as plausible models for his multileveled federal state on a global scale. I am inclined to agree with Kant that any world state must necessarily end up being "a soulless despotism."

Höfle and I, however, can agree on who should arbitrate between us. Socrates was the original *moral* philosopher and the founder of *political* philosophy. According to Höfle, "Socrates is the ideal paradigm of the philosopher." My concluding suggestion is that the reader take up and read this very thoughtful consideration of just about everything under the sun in the open-minded, yet critical spirit of Socrates. Because he antedates the majority of the history and thinking that both Höfle and I presuppose and seek to comprehend, his searching questions can keep both of us honest. As a vital root of European culture, he is a figure who continues to link Germans and Americans even today.

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