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Democracy: the voice of God or the madness of the mob?

by Rebecca Bratten

Why is it that today it is so hard for us to endure distinctions of any kind? To the American sensibility any assertion that there exist fundamental inequalities among persons smells suspiciously of feudalism and bigotry—things primitive and unenlightened. We associate distinctness with inequality and inequality with injustice, adjusting our belief to the rhetoric of our egalitarian age. We have become so intoxicated with the wine of democracy that it is hard for us to see things clearly anymore.

As Catholics, it is our duty to treat all with charity and justice and to shun pride in all its forms. But we must not confuse charity or justice with their counterfeits, nor dismiss as prideful something which may in fact be legitimate.

Although I might like to do so, I do not here intend to instigate an "aristocratic revolution." However, I do want to put forward several criticisms of the democratic ideal—or at least of certain ideologies which are closely associated with that ideal. By "democratic ideal" I mean that set of notions underlying much of our talk about equality, justice and "government by the people."

The first of these notions which I wish to challenge is that of the absolute equality of all men. I am neither alone nor revolutionary in this position; it was put forward by Aristotle more than 2,000 years ago: "Democracy," he said, "arose in the strength of opinion that those who were equal in any one respect were equal absolutely, and in all respects. Men are prone to think that the fact of their all being equally free-born means that they are all absolutely equal." This could very well be a description of contemporary America, in which it is assumed that because all men have certain equal rights, and because all men have a fundamental personal dignity, they are therefore on all levels equal—in ability, intelligence, personal development, moral virtue and even in that ineffable, indefinable, Hellenic thing called nobility.

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While we are right to affirm the equal rights of all men when the fundamental rights of some (because they are unborn, because they are weak and sick, because of their race) are being denied, we must not get carried away and say that all rights belong to all men. Certainly government leaders have certain rights which others do not; parents have rights which their children are not capable of dealing with; as Catholics we must admit that in the church hierarchy there are certain rights reserved only for the few.

Moreover, we must remember that there are different kinds of value, and while there is a basic personal value common to all men, it does not from this follow that we possess an equal amount of all values. Moral values may be found in some which are not present in others—this is not only because of upbringing or environment, but is also due to inherent strengths and weaknesses in different

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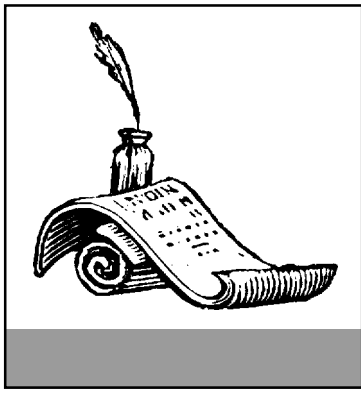

EDITOR'S PAGE

Getting personal

In the weeks since the *Concourse* first appeared, the editors have received numerous comments to the effect of the following: "You should stick to the issues and not let the articles get personal." These have come to us with such frequency lately (particularly apropos of the "rock" exchange between Andy Minto and Mark Fischer in the March 12 issue) that we feel the need to make our editorial principles and policies more explicit.

In one sense, we agree entirely that articles should not get personal. In general, attention should be directed to the issue under consideration, not to the characters of those involved. (Had Minto replied to Fischer's article by saying,"This sort of idiocy is typical of Fischer, who is an arrogant jerk in every way," we would not have printed it.) Neither should a writer impute motives or psycho-analyze his "opponent." (Had Fischer surmised publicly that "Minto obviously must have had some bad experience as a child that makes it impossible for him to view the music issue rationally," we would not have printed it.) Avoiding such personal jabs and imputations is clearly a basic requirement of courtesy in discourse.

But very often when people say "you should not allow the articles to get personal" they mean something more than this. They mean that opinions should remain very generalized in expression, and should above all avoid "naming names"—as if that were the litmus test of courtesy. And with this we simply do not agree. We think articles are most helpful and most respectful when they are most direct and concrete. Likewise, those which neglect to be specific are typically both unfruitful and discourteous.

Recall how President Clinton blamed "right-wing extremist radio talk show hosts" for the Oklahoma City bombing. When Rush-fans protested the obvious slur, Clinton side-stepped by saying he had not meant to implicate Limbaugh, but rather *other* (nameless) radio hosts. But at the same time practically every news agency followed up the report of the speech with a "we all know who he meant" story featuring Rush Limbaugh as the Big Daddy of right-wing extremism. The public were inflamed and polarized—those already disposed against Rush had fresh occasion to vilify him and his fans; those who admired him swelled with indignation and resentment; those unfamiliar with him were unfairly prejudiced against him. He was very effectively smeared. If he tried to defend himself he was accused of megalomania and paranoia. And meanwhile, Clinton's vagueness exempted him from the responsibility to back up his claims with solid evidence.The president would have been much more considerate (both to Limbaugh and to the public) had he spelled out his meaning more plainly. As it was, his veiled charges served only to spread discord and dissatisfaction.

The same is true on a local level.

We have more than once had someone advise us that "there are ways of writing about people so that everyone knows whom you mean, without your having to mention names"—as if this were kinder and "more Christian" than a direct, face-to-face challenge! We could hardly agree less. As we see it, nothing spreads tension and misunderstanding like unspecified *insinuations*. Conversely, nothing advances a good discussion like forthright avowal of a particular point of view, backed up by concrete examples.

Furthermore, if someone has taken a public stand on a controversial issue, we think he is best respected when it is assumed that he meant what he said, and that, if challenged, he is prepared either to defend, amend or retract his view. On the other hand, tip-toeing around his feelings, and refusing to engage him in open dialogue, would seem to suggest that his ideas are not respectable, that he couldn't mean what he says, and that he would be too crushed by criticism to handle it like a man. Such attitudes represent the sort of un-university-like intellectual effeminacy the *Concourse* is in part designed to combat.

We admit that in the concrete it is not easy to draw a firm line between frankness and rudeness; between vagueness and discretion. We promise to do our best, and in the meantime would count it a great gain to have the principle generally allowed that getting personal is not necessarily a bad thing.

The editors
(excepting Richard Gordon, who is out of town
and might not care to lend his name to this.)

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Editorial Policy

The University Concourse is a bi-weekly, independent journal of opinion, put together by alumni and students of Franciscan University of Steubenville, and designed to encourage fruitful discourse among members of the University community. The views expressed in this journal do not necessarily reflect those of the editors, nor those of the Franciscan TORs or other University officials.

We welcome submissions from faculty, students, administrators, staff, alumni, parents, trustees, benefactors and friends of the University, on any topic of interest to a general university readership, provided they are courteously expressed and framed with a view to advancing the welfare of the University and/or Catholic culture at large.

We recommend opinions be kept to fewer than 1,500 words. Articles must be in no later than Tuesday noon, one week prior to publication.

Contributions should be submitted on a 3.5" disk, either to the faculty office of Jules van Schaijik in Egan Hall, or to the van Schaijik home at 915 Belleview Blvd.; Steubenville, OH 43952, or sent to e-mail address: "UConcourse@aol.com"

Please include your full name, phone-number and relation to the University.

We will consider printing submissions anonymously or under a pen-name, however, in general we wish to encourage open, "face to face" discussion. In either case, the editors require the full name and phone-number of the author of each opinion.

Keeping Caesar under God:

Social doctrines provide the true measure of economic systems

by Julio Demasi

IN HIS DISCUSSION OF NORMATIVE ECONOMICS, MICHAEL WELKER STATES THAT QUESTIONS OF WHAT OUGHT TO BE "ARE BASED ON JUDGEMENTS THAT APPEAL TO CULTURAL NORMS AND STANDARDS."

THERE IS,HOWEVER, A MORE fundamental and certain basis for making such judgments, namely, the rich treasury of Catholic moral teaching,&_ften called "Catholic social doctrine." With reference to these teachings, I would like to examine two central issues raised in Mr. Welker's article: evaluation of economic systems and, perhaps more importantly, conversion.

In its social doctrine, the Church sets forth "principles for reflection, criteria for judgement, and directives for action" which promote "correct definition of the problems being faced and the best solutions for them." [1] The Church does not propose any specific actions, but only defines the moral realities which any genuine solution will respect. Each society, aided by economists and others with pertinent knowledge, must then apply these truths concretely to their given socio-economic situation. For example, America can choose how best to ensure a just wage, but the Church has authoritatively developed the criteria of a just or *living* wage, established that it is a human right due to all workers, and proclaimed, in the words of Pope John Paul II, that it is perhaps "the key concrete means for verifying the justice of the whole socio-economic system."[2]

Respecting the legitimate realms of the sciences, the Church neither "proposes economic and political systems, nor shows preference for one or the other," provided they promote and respect human dignity, and allow the Church due freedom.[3] The quote cited by Mr. Welker from *Centesimus Annus*—"It would appear that on the level of individual nations and of international relations, the free market is the most efficient instrument for utilizing resources and effectively responding to needs...But there are many human needs which find no place on the market"—is not so much an endorsement of capitalism as an acknowledgement of the market's strengths and a critique of its shortcomings. The market is effective, the Pope says, only with respect to needs "endowed with purchasing power." Therefore, fundamental human material needs (never mind our deeper spiritual needs) which, by "the strict duty of justice and truth... are not allowed to remain unsatisfied," find no place in the market.[4]

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Some, while admitting that these human needs must be met, may contend that this is not the role of the market; that these needs should be met by other means, so as to keep the market unfettered to do what capitalism does best. But is this consonant with Catholic social teaching? Pope Paul IV acknowledges concepts of "profits as the chief spur of economic progress, free competition as the guiding norm of economics, and private ownership of the means of production as an absolute right" without the limits of social obligations, as having become part of the fabric of human society. These concepts appear to be prevalent in our day as well. The Pope then states that this "unbridled capitalism" (or *liberalism*, as it is also known) "paves the way for a particular type of tyranny, rightly condemned by...Pius XI, for it results in the 'international imperialism of money'. Far from being a true functioning of economics, the Pope call this an 'improper manipulation of economic forces [that] can not be condemned enough'."[5] Although, as Mr. Welker pointed out, most capitalist economies today are mixed economies, involving various limits and interventions, many conservatives still hold up the idea of "pure capitalism" as the ideal.

When Pope John Paul II addresses the question: "Should capitalism be introduced into countries searching for the path for true economic and civil progress?" his answer is both positive and negative. "Yes" if by capitalism is meant "the recognition of the positive role of business, the market, private property ....the resulting responsi-

bility for the means of production as well as free human creativity." However, if "freedom in the economic sector is not circumscribed within a strong juridical framework which places it at the service of human freedom in its totality" and which see ethics and religion, not economics, as the core of human freedom , "the answer is certainly negative."[6]

The Pope does desire, without reservation, "a fresh enthusiasm for the study, spreading and applying" of Catholic social teaching, particularly in those countries lacking direction after the collapse of "real socialism."[7]

There is a tremendous need for these truths—the universal destiny of goods, the primacy of labor over capital, the living wage, the social obligation of private ownership, the obligation of rich nations, to name a few—which are often not heard in other segments of society. Thus the need for conversion of which Mr. Welker spoke, beginning with the individual, in particular with one's self. Conversion is not to be *only* on the individual level, however. As all who work to promote respect for human life know, structural injustice must be confronted on a practical and social level, even as hearts are being changed. The cooperation of all, from the individual through the international, is needed to bring about the culture of love. This "new evangelism" which is so urgently needed, and to which the Holy Father unceasingly calls us, must, in his words, "include among its essential elements a proclamation of the Church's social doctrine."[8]

The encyclicals urge that this be spread by every means at our disposal, not the least of which is education. "It is therefore our urgent desire that this [social] doctrine be studied more and more. First of all, it should be taught as part of the daily curriculum in Catholics schools of every kind."[9] The Pope goes on to say that Christian education is incomplete without it and that to be effective, formal teaching must be accompanied by experiential knowledge gained from positive voluntary actions on the part of the students. Regrettably, apart from the commendable emphasis on human life issues and some aspects of family, I have heard social justice issues spoken of ambivalently at the University, or even dismissed, rather than embraced in the fervent spirit so evident in the encyclicals.

Pope John Paul II speaks of an interdisciplinary dimension of the social doctrine: the Church assimilating contributions of the social disciplines and, in return, helping them to open their horizons in the service of humanity. Through this dialogue, Catholics (and all people of good will) who have vocations in the various fields of economics, political science, teaching and catechetics, communications, etc., are called to incarnate the truth about the human person. Commonly, though, our "positions" seem molded more by ideologies or popular commentary than a critical reflection on the whole of Catholic social doctrine. It has been lamented that students can graduate from this University with little understanding of Catholic culture, and I agree; yet, how much greater the loss to the Church and society should they graduate without a sound understanding of these essential moral teachings! All of us, with rare exception, will be involved with economic, social and political affairs; therefore, we all need to correctly "form our conscience on the moral dimensions of economic decision making and be able to articulate moral perspectives in the general societal debate surrounding these questions."[10]

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Catholic social teaching has often been called "the Church's best kept secret." May Franciscan University be a place where it is both well known and heartily embraced in all its dimensions. ■

Mr. Demasi is a non-traditional, Senior Theology major, who spent several years in various Christian ministry programs, including six years with LAMP Ministries in New York, before coming to Steubenville.

[1] Pope John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis # 41*
[2] Pope John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens # 19*
[3] Pope John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis # 41*
[4] Pope John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus # 34*
[5] Pope Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio # 26*
[6] Pope John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus # 42*
[7] Ibid. # 56
[8] Ibid. # 5
[9] Pope John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra # 223-28*
[10] National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Economic Justice for All: Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy # 360*

CONTINUING CONVERSATIONS

Commendations and comments

***Many* thanks for the back issues** of the *Concourse.* All I can say is *brava, bravissima*. It is a truly impressive journal. I am greatly impressed, not only with the substance of the topics addressed, but also with the quality of the prose. Either you've got first-rate writers or first-rate editors. My guess is that it's both!

Thomas Howard
Professor of Literature
St. John's Seminary
College of Liberal Arts

Dr. Howard, Catholic author and speaker, served as a trustee of FUS from 1989-1995.

I was so excited to receive the first issues of the *Concourse*—I plunged right in up to my eyeballs! How reminiscent of so many fabulous discussions at FUS! It is such refreshing joy not only to get the intellect humming again, but also to jump right back into campus life, in a way. We and a few other alums (plus a brother and sister-in-law) are anxious to get together and discuss some of these issues—hopefully on a regular basis.

Some of my favorites have been the on-going music debate, the core curriculum controversy (I say "Amen!" to modifying things toward stronger unity and coherence!), the excellent piece on Opus Dei, and my absolute favorite (and almost constant topic of discussion and debate), the Natural Family Planning "conversation."

My husband and I are certified teachers of NFP, and in our experience by far the greatest amount of discussion is generated by concerns over "grave reasons" to postpone or limit family size, and the whole "providentialist" issue. It is easy to give flip answers to serious questions in front of a class who just want to learn the method. But more often than not the questions resurface—especially upon realization of the startling 99% effectiveness statistic! What a powerful, powerful knowledge we have! What weighty matters we must prayerfully consider!

I am grateful for all this dialogue in the *Concourse*. It provides much food for thought to bring to those I wish to serve. Keep it up!

Becky Faraj
Class of '90

Becky (Lennon) Faraj is married to Albert Faraj, brother of Fouad ('89) and George ('92) Faraj-Musleh. They live in Dearborn Michigan with their two children.

Thank you for sending the most recent issues of the *Concourse.* My husband and I are thoroughly enjoying them, and discussing the various articles at length. I can't tell you how wonderful an idea I think the "Concourse concept" is. In the first three brief issues so much has been tackled that greatly needed the attention of the University community. Bravo!

Elizabeth (Olsen) Brown
MA Class of '91

Elizabeth is married to Aryae Brown ('90). They (with their daughter) are living in The Netherlands, where Aryae has an engineering position. They plan to return to the States this summer.

Rock music

We are among those who agree with Mark Fischer's arguments against a total rejection of rock music on the basis of its cultural antecedents.

Mr. Minto has argued that rock music is essentially and destructively escapist. We disagree. It seems to us (1) that the range of personal experiences in rock music is not limited to the "negative" or the escapist; (2) that the themes Minto considers so destructive are also present in many other genres; (3) that escapes need not be bad.

According to Minto, rock music offers false "patchwork" solutions to our deep inner needs, enticing us into its aimless sexual beats, which gratify emotional cravings by an elusive, temporary "fix," leaving us, in the end, worse off than we were—like the drug addict. We agree that this is often the case, but we question whether it is *always* true of the rock genre. Are there not numerous examples of rock artists and songs whose basic thrust is entirely different? Consider the song "All Good People" by Yes or "Gloria" by U2 and "Kyrie Eleison" by Mr. Mister.

Secondly, we believe many musical genres (besides rock) reveal instances of particular pieces which are escapist in the sense just described. Witness the Marcia Funebre of Beethoven's Eroica Symphony, the Scriabin Etude op. 42, no. 5, the third movement of Brahms's Third Symphony, Mozart's Adagio and Fugue in C Minor, K. 546, and the opening of Mahler's Second Symphony. These works evoke intense grief, unrequited passion, sobbing melancholy, tragic resolve and angry despair. The listener "escapes" into these beautiful works of art, subjecting himself to sometimes violent emotional upheavals. Should this music also be rejected as antithetical to Christianity?

Or think of the tradition of tragedy in the dramatic arts. Here we witness ostensibly painful emotions and poignant human acts, and often cannot help entering into the world presented on the stage. We notice that persons often appreciate, seek out and relish such musical and dramatic experiences. Why? Is it due only to a sense of alienation and loss rooted in existential despair? Or is not some authentic human value

realized through such experiences?

Among many observations made on the issue of human responses to art, Aristotle's notion of "catharsis" is relevant to our discussion. The virtue of a cathartic response to music (or other fine art) is its controlled purging of certain real griefs, despairs, and other negative feelings. This "positive" use of "negative" emotions has been acknowledged through centuries of human experience. Is it not conceivable that at least *some* rock music serves this legitimate cathartic function?

Lastly, it seems to us that some forms of escape can be perfectly healthy. Fischer's interesting example near the end of his response to Minto, wherein we are invited to put on our slickers and sing in the rain with Gene Kelly, is a case in point. Someone who has a "playful" or "happy" response in this context need not fear this escape or exuberant behavior represents a persisting pattern. Likewise, feelings of loss and despair, as well as joy, may be thought of in the music-context as emotional samplings—somewhat like wine samplings. They are limited in duration, isolated and often without real-life background. They are perhaps artificial, but they are not necessarily addictive and destructive escapes.

Cynthia and Michael Welker, SFO

Cynthia (Menk) Welker is an alumna of the class of '91. Michael Welker ('89) is an Assistant Professor of economics at FUS.

Core curriculum and critical thinking

Dr. Crosby's article on the core curriculum at FUS (in the February 13 issue) has given me much "food for thought" on a related subject: the fostering of what I will call critical thinking skills or the ability to analyze new knowledge and integrate it into one's life. A dictionary definition of the terms "analyze" and "integrate" indicates that these basic cognitive functions are essential for a liberal arts education which seeks to examine closely and critically new ideas, and then bring these ideas together and assimilate them for the individual. This process would involve the study of the new information or ideas in an effort to understand and to judge the merits for later integration and use.

However, these very critical thinking skills must proceed from a base of knowledge upon which to judge the relative merits of the new subject being studied. I believe this is what Dr. Crosby refers to as the "knowledge of first things" in the various disciplines or the courses that make up a genuine liberal arts education. Without such a base of information, how can the student apply the skills of analysis and integration of material into his or her life? The process of integrating new ideas involves examination of the material, linking it to previously learned material, and evaluating it in the light of truth and one's beliefs—all of which presumes a knowledge base broad enough to compare this new information. Without this knowledge base one might either reject the new material upon a casual review or embrace it without adequate analysis and reflection.

It is easy for a student to select courses based on a pragmatic determination of a future career goal and miss out on the richness of a truly liberal arts education, which serves to inform and mold the mind and the person. I remember several courses required in the core curriculum at my alma mater, which seemed useless at the time, but which, in the end, not only formed the means of expanding my overall education, but also led me to question and eventually change my career choice. I don't know if this would have been possible without the broad exposure my undergraduate education provided through the core curriculum.

There is another issue related to this discussion of fostering critical thinking skills. I wonder at times if our commitment to orthodoxy in teaching doesn't blunt students' ability to question, analyze and integrate knowledge, including even essential elements of our Catholic Faith and traditions. I believe such a commitment is essential, but how does a young adult at Franciscan University have the courage to question, analyze and hopefully integrate and "own" these matters of faith and belief? The attitude among some students I have known over the years here is expressed as judging anyone who questions or analyzes matters of faith and belief as being, at best, misguided or somehow not authentically Catholic, if not outright pagan. I exaggerate a bit in order to emphasize the point that the fostering of critical thinking skills is important in ways which go far beyond providing a well rounded education leading to one's career choice. This type of analysis and integration is essential in the development of a healthy life of faith.

In a recent article entitled "Getting the Most Out of College," William J. Bennett, former US Secretary of Education, argues that college students have different ideas about where they want a college degree to take them—law school, journalism, public service, etc. He acknowledges the validity of such pragmatic concerns, but he also believes every student should "take the time to tread the ground outside of his or her major, and to spend time in the company of the great travelers who have come before." In other words, students should be exposed to a core curriculum which truly prepares them to think critically. Bennett goes on to say that if we take the time to study how men and women of the past dealt with life's enduring problems, we will be better prepared when those same problems come our way.

In our consideration of the core curriculum we need to recognize that students who seek to learn how the enduring problems of life were handled by the great thinkers of the past will be better prepared to succeed in any endeavor they undertake, in all aspects of their personal lives and careers.

Joseph A. Loizzo
Director of Campus Counseling

Mr. Loizzo also teaches part time in the MA Counseling Program

Thomism and intellectual freedom

Mr. Morel de la Prada graciously invites us "to prefer what the Church prefers" in our philosophizing—that is, Thomism. He and others seem troubled by the continued resistance to this invitation. Why will we not accept it with joy? He has not proposed that we cease studying everyone else; he has not proposed that we treat St. Thomas' every word as infallible; he does not propose a *closed* system for our uncritcal acceptance. He simply asks us to acknowledge (and submit ourselves to) the unambiguous recommendation of the Church with respect to philosophy. Why would any loyal Catholic decline such an uncontroversial invitation?

Allow me to explain. The invitation is not so uncontroversial as it may at first appear. When Mr. de la Prada (or anyone else) amasses Magisterial quotations and urges us to "prefer what the Church prefers," intended or not, here is what comes across: "Every individual Catholic thinker, student and faculty has a religious duty to be Thomistic in his or their philosophy." And by this is usually meant *not only* that we ought to immitate Thomas' realism and universalism, but also that we should *adopt his philosophical framework*; that we should hold, for instance, that being and good are convertible, that evil is a privation, and that all men necessarily will the good.

But, (as Richard Gordon so ably showed in his March 12 article) this is just what the Church does *not* say, and *would* not say, because of her profound respect for the integrity and legitimate automony of philosophy. Or, if she *has* said it (in the person of individual popes) she has violated her own divinely-ordained boundaries, and in so doing has threatened not only the intellectual life of her sons, but (consequently) her own well-being. It follows from this that philosophers who love her truly will resist her self-defeating tendency to encroach on their domain.

Consider an analogy in the political realm. During most of the nineteenth century, when republicanism was on the rise in Europe, the Church displayed a strong preference for monarchy. She had had a long and fruitful relationship with monarchy; it seemed much more conducive to faith than did republicanism, which (at least historically) went hand-in-hand with irreligion and rebellion. Many in the Church considered the new form of government to be essentially hostile to the Faith, and sought to have it condemned as a virtual heresy. With all the social upheaval and religious confusion prevailing at the time, it is easy to imagine what a temptation this must have been! And how frustrated and baffled many of the faithful must have felt when some who called themselves Catholics openly defended republicanism and resisted the reinstatement of the monarchies! You can picture how earnestly they might have urged all Catholics to simply "prefer what the Church prefers" in their politics. But what a catastrophy it would have been for both the world and the Church had not some of her members insisted on their right to their own political views, and pressed the Church to recognize that republicanism, too, might be a worthy ally in the world!

I do not at all mean to suggest with this analogy that St. Thomas' thought is as obsolete and passé as are the European monarchies; nor do I argue that the time has come to replace him with Phenomenology. I only want to try to show that it is not always in the best interests of the Church to submit to her recommendations outside the area of Faith and morals. This seems to me to be partiucularly true in philosophical matters, where unles we are willing to think things through for ourselves—the intellectual life of the Church will suffer drastically in health and rigor.

The Church may point to Thomas as a proven and extraordinarily rich source of insight and understanding, and say we are sure to do well if we begin by studying him, but because she (as a whole) understands what philosophy is, she does not compel us to simply *adopt* his system (be it ever so open), because she knows that to do this would be profoundly unphilosophical, and thus antithetical to the authentic pursuit of truth.

I think what the Church (when she is most herself) *really* prefers, is that her philosophers and university students *feel free to pursue whatever avenues of truth (given a few very broad boundaries) strike them as being most promising and fruitful*, to delve into whatever great ideas resonate most with our own minds. Naturally, aware of the serious dangers involved in such an enterprise, she cautions us against the risks of striking out on our own, of blazing new trails in the realm of philosophy; she prudently reminds us that Thomas has been for centuries a safe and sound route to truth; but she does *not* say that we must avoid taking intellectual risks! On the contrary, every time she canonizes a martyr or rewards a hero, or exalts an original thinker, she repeats the maxim that no great end is achieved without great hazards.[1]

Catholics (as such) have a religious obligation to *revere* Thomas—as both a great master and a saint. Philosophers and university students (as such) have a vocational obligation to examine each of his claims and principles *critically*, just as he did with Augustine's and Aristotle's; to approve those they recognize as true; modify those they think faulty or incomplete; and reject those they find to be false. Unless they do this, they act in a way unworthy of their calling.

To interpret the Church's preference for Thomas, then, as meaning that all Catholic philosophers *ought* to be Thomistic (in the main lines of their thought) would be not just a dogmatical exaggeration, but an intellectual disaster—a disaster which would ultimately undermine our Faith.

Kathleen van Schaijik
Class of '88

[1]See Newman's Oxford University Sermon, XI: 23.

Democracy

Continued from page 1

persons. Is claiming this the equivalent to claiming that God is unfair? Perhaps. Fairness is not the same as justice, and it has not yet been proven that egalitarianism is one of the attributes of God.

We can hold such a position as this and still believe that among the saints are numbered not only the great scholar Aquinas and the great king Louis, but also the humble shepherdess Germaine and the poor farmer Isidore. We can admire a Beethoven for his genius and a Goethe for his wealth of character without giving them thrones higher than those of the saints. It is a matter of giving each value its due.

Fairness is not the same as justice, and it has not yet been proven that egalitarianism is one of the attributes of God.

I have heard arguments to the effect that differences in ability are due only to differences in opportunity. This is clearly false. Give the majority of the population the best of education and upbringing: how many of them will ever be able to write poetry like that of the young Keats, or compose operas as did the boy Mozart? I know very well that even if I spent all my days conversing with the muse of tragedy I would not even begin to rival Shakespeare or Sophocles.

Even if Democracy is inevitably the most practicable structure for a particular time and people, it must always be weakened by a flaw inherent to its form: the notion that "*vox populi, vox Dei*." This idea rests upon the fallacy that a vast accumulation of zeros will eventually yield a positive number. As Alcuin wrote to Charlemagne, "the turbulence of the mob is always close to insanity." This has been demonstrated in the past few decades, during which the all-sovereign American people have done a good job of choosing mediocrity over excellence, and even vice over virtue.

Of course an evil ruler who inherits his power can do as much—and generally more—harm than can an evil ruler who is given his power by the people. But, contrariwise, a just king can do more good than can a just president. We can not, unless we be denizens of heaven or Utopia, dispense with rulers all together. But consider this: in a society which accepted certain objective and absolute standards for its rulers, rather than merely accepting the standards in vogue, there would at least be some final determining factor regarding who did and did not deserve the throne. Who is to decide upon these standards? Why not the philosopher, whose business it is to search for truth? This would not be very different from what our founding fathers did. Unfortunately, not all of their foundational tenets were perfectly true and complete—but it remains with those who are as educated and far-sighted as they to correct these errors, not with the common man.

By "common man" I do not necessarily mean the poor or uneducated. The term is used to refer to the sort of person who, though he may possess a beautiful character and even heroic virtue, remains forever within the bounds of his own environment. His horizon is small; his perception is crude. Educate him if you like, but he will always be a peasant in spirit. He may get to heaven before many of the kings and wise men, but while on earth it is not within his capacity to rule well. To make him king would be to make him miserable, and would possibly mar the sweet simplicity of his soul. Likewise, there exist among the poor and the lowbrow some who are aristocrats in spirit; their vision is vast and coherent, and, if given even the smallest opportunity, they will develop into the leaders, artists and geniuses of the age. If I am arguing for an aristocracy, it is an aristocracy of spirit, not of blood.

Why is it that this seems so repugnant? Perhaps the answer lies in the most unlikely of places: with the atheist philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche who, for all his failings, still saw some things more clearly than did those more reverent but less radical. He it was who first diagnosed the sickness of society and gave it a name: *ressentiment*, the "slave revolt in morality." *Ressentiment* arises out of the envy of the weak towards the strong; it disguises revenge as justice and fear as meekness. It is the desire to make all things level, so that the failures of some may not appear too glaring beside the accomplishments of others. It is the antithesis of all generosity of heart, all love and respect for value, all true virtue. "Together with the fear of man," says Nietzsche, "we have also lost the love of man, reverence for man...what is nihilism today if not that?"

It is agreed among most perceptive Catholics that we live in a sick society. One of the diseases of spirit from which we suffer is *ressentiment*, and this disease is at the root of much that we revere under the name of democracy. While reactionism will do us no good, and we cannot turn back the clock, at least we can see things as they are and do our best to choose wisely for the future. We must not confuse values with their counterfeits, and we must not confuse the voice of the people with the voice of God. ■

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