

Bertrand de Jouvenel and Contemporary Liberalism

Bertrand de Jouvenel was one of the most important French liberal thinkers of the last century. His most important work, *Du Pouvoir* (Jouvenel, 1945), was a history of political power from the Middle Ages to the contemporary age. He wanted to show that the state, during this period, tended to grow constantly and to jeopardize individual freedoms. The nature of Jouvenel's liberal thought has been analyzed by authors such as Daniel Mahoney (1995) and Olivier Dard (1998). If we look at the critical literature on Jouvenel, we can realize that this thinker is commonly regarded only as a liberal political philosopher. Mahoney has written:

In the years between 1945 and 1968, Jouvenel produced an impressive body of work belonging to the tradition known as conservative liberalism. These writings explored the growth of state power in modern times, the difficult but necessary task of articulating a conception of the common good appropriate to a dynamic, 'progressive' society, and the challenge of formulating a political science that could reconcile tradition and change while preserving the freedom and dignity of the individual (Mahoney, 2005, p. 5).

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This view has certainly a base of truth, since in his major works, *Du pouvoir* and *De la souveraineté*, he displays his conception of history saying that it is part of the anti-statist tradition. Jouvenel, all along his various works includes many elements belonging to the philosophy developed by Alexis de Tocqueville.

Jouvenel intends to illustrate the historical genesis by which the Power of State (capital P is used to distinguish State power from other powers found in any human society) gradually acquires more and more importance: the author has described the road traveled by Power from the Middle Ages to the present, trying to demonstrate how in feudal times it was kept under control by intermediate bodies, represented by the aristocracy.

Jouvenel says that Power is structurally characterized by a tendency to acquire an increasing number of prerogatives. In this way, the totalitarian systems of the 20th century do not represent "mishaps", but a foreseeable pattern of progressive growth of government in modern societies. This growth began centuries ago, during the period in which the sovereigns began to fight against the privileges of the aristocracy which threatened to control the central Power.

For Jouvenel, society should be characterized by the presence of intermediate

bodies that put an end to State Power. With the French Revolution, everything changed. Its staunchest defenders, the Jacobins, called for the direct intervention of the People in political life. After the French Revolution, as followers of Robespierre, they were not only willing to respect the popular will, but to punish those who did not comply with the government's decisions, supporting the purge of Terror. Their goal was the complete realization of the democratic ideal. According to this view, the People was seen as the source of political sovereignty, as the holder of a non-debatable opinion. For Jouvenel, this conception legitimates an abnormal extension of Power.

In order to illustrate the similarities between Jouvenel and the Austrian school of economics, it is important to speak about some elements of the political philosophy of Friedrich August von Hayek, the most important Austrian liberal theorist. Jouvenel and Hayek were members of the Mont Pelerin Society from its foundation in 1947 onwards. In addition, the second half of the 20th century saw the birth of many institutes of liberal political culture, which organized activities, seminars and conferences, at which Jouvenel was often present. For example, shortly after the end of the Second World War the *Fédération économique européenne* and the Liberal International Exchange were established.¹

In order to analyze Hayek's vision, it is necessary to note that the basis of his thought is constituted by the observation that all human knowledge is in itself limited. Above all, he wants to demonstrate that man's actions inherently lead him into error. For this reason it is dangerous to insert human action into a larger design

¹Moreover, Jouvenel published an article in a book edited by Hayek (Jouvenel, 1954).

handed down from above in order to shape society according to criteria that are seemingly objective. Who decides, for example, what is the common good? How can one find, in a complex society like that which characterizes contemporary nation-states, the lowest common denominator of interests and expectations that concern all citizens?

The criticism that Hayek makes of socialism, statism, and all those theories that presume to impose a specific type of society without regard to the individual will, is radical:

There are two ways of looking at the pattern of human activities which lead to very different conclusions concerning both its explanation and the possibilities of deliberately altering it The first view holds that human institutions will serve human purposes only if they have been deliberately designed for these purposes, often also that the fact that an institution exists is evidence of its having been created for a purpose, and always that we should so re-design society and its institutions that all our actions will be wholly guided by known purposes The other view, which has slowly and gradually advanced since antiquity but for a time was almost entirely overwhelmed by the more glamorous constructivist view, was that that orderliness of society which greatly increased the effectiveness of individual action was not due solely to institutions and practices which had been invented or designed for that purpose, but was largely due to a process described at first as "growth" and later as "evolution"²

The two ways of thinking about the development of a society consisted, on the one hand, in the teleological conception (socialism, statism and collectivism), which wanted to point the human com-

²Hayek (1973-1979), I, p. 8-9.

munity toward a predetermined end; the other, in the nomocratic conception, typical of liberal regimes. Hayek, defending the latter vision, asserts that individual interactions are able to produce a “spontaneous order” that has no need of external impositions.

The will to build an artificial political order regardless of the actual will of individuals has the aim of creating greater social justice by pursuing policies aimed at income redistribution.

By comparing the political theory of Jouvenel laid out in the previous chapter with the philosophy of Hayek, we can see several similarities. Hayek’s epistemological thought (concerning the impossibility of knowing the subjective expectations of the individual) is the basis of his interpretation of totalitarianism. Totalitarianism is associated with a teleocratic and finalistic vision of human society, whose final stage of development is a kind of “heaven on earth”. In reality, no political regime can be constituted by a pervasive control of every aspect, but is always the result of spontaneous interaction between individuals. We can therefore begin our analysis of the connection between Hayek and Jouvenel, focusing on the criticism of planning developed in *Law, Legislation and Liberty*.

It is necessary to clarify that for Hayek ideologies like socialism, collectivism and statism have the same epistemological basis regarding the approach to social problems. They have the mentality behind constructivism, namely the belief that it is possible to model the human community from above. The main issue regarding Hayek is not, therefore, an ethical one. He is not interested in what socialism aims to achieve (greater social equality), but questions whether that pur-

pose is actually reachable.

Jouvenel also criticized the socialists and all those calling for a stronger role of the state in alleviating social tensions, without taking into account the limited possibilities of human knowledge. Socialists do not consider the subjective expectations of each individual regarding the future. But in the view of Hayek and Jouvenel, all members of society will tend to organize their lives according to their own expectations, thus any attempt to organize society according to criteria which ignore individual desires is utopian. Any attempt in this direction will lead, in the Hayekian perspective, to a reduction of individual freedom. It is obvious that no civil servant or political class may have a knowledge of the will of every member of society.

If the members of the ruling class try to organize society in order to realize the “common good”, they demonstrate that they have a collectivist vision. They see the community they want to administer within a statist vision, without regard to the legitimate desire for individual freedom. The weak point in the autonomy of the individual is in the fact that the “common good” ends up coinciding with the particular conception that those who govern the state have of it.

The parallel here with Jouvenel is clear. In Jouvenel’s view, any such endeavour could not but lead to a lessening of individual freedom. It was clear that no ruling class would ever fully know the desires of its citizenry. Ideally, political oligarchies strived to organize society in such a way as to further the “common good”. However, they had a collectivist, “statist” vision of the society they wished to rule, with little, if any, consideration of legitimate aspirations for individual free-

dom. The modern conception of common good would end up coinciding with the particular beliefs shared by the oligarchy governing the state at any given time. All societies are characterized by a governing élite, and a mass of citizens who, wholly or partially, are deprived of their freedom and power of choice.

As known, Hayek's philosophy was not representative of the élites' theory. However, starting from this "elitist" interpretation, it is possible to analyze the common positions between this author and Jouvenel: the common good coincides with a particular vision shared by the oligarchy governing the State at a given time. Hayek in fact affirms:

There are many kinds of services which men desire but which, because if they are provided they cannot be confined to those prepared to pay for them, can be supplied only if the means are raised by compulsion. Once an apparatus for coercion exists, and particularly if this apparatus is given the monopoly of coercion, it is obvious that it will also be entrusted with supplying the means for the provision of such "collective goods", as the economists call those services which can be rendered only to all the members of various groups.

But though the existence of an apparatus capable of providing for such collective needs is clearly in the general interest, this does not mean that it is in the interest of society as a whole that all collective interests should be satisfied. A collective interest will become a general interest only in so far as all find that the satisfaction of collective interests of particular groups on the basis of some principle of reciprocity will mean for them a gain in excess of the burden they will have to bear. Though the desire for a particular collective good will be a common desire of those who benefit from it, it will rarely be general for the whole of the society

which determines the law, and it becomes a general interest only in so far as the mutual and reciprocal advantages of the individuals balance. But as soon as government is expected to satisfy such particular collective, though not truly general, interests, the danger arises that this method will be used in the service of particular interests. It is often erroneously suggested that all collective interests are general interests of the society; but in many instances the satisfaction of collective interests of certain groups may be decidedly contrary to the general interests of society.³

Hayek affirms, like Jouvenel, that redistributive policies imply a turn in the direction of a totalitarian state, where the state takes the place of free individual initiative in determining the future of the people.

The crux of the Hayekian critique of socialism is epistemological, not moral or political. The human community is not reducible to a set of abstract norms valid only for those who hold power temporarily. Society is a conglomeration of complex human beings precisely because there is a predetermined order.

The peculiar character of the problem of a rational economic order is determined precisely by the fact that the knowledge of the circumstances of which we must make use never exists in concentrated or integrated form but solely as the dispersed bits of incomplete and frequently contradictory knowledge which all the separate individuals possess. The economic problem of society is thus not merely a problem of how to allocate "given" resources—if "given" is taken to mean given to a single mind which deliberately solves the problem set by these "data". It is rather a problem of how to

³Hayek (1973-1979), II, p. 6.

secure the best use of resources known to any of the members of society, for ends whose relative importance only these individuals know. Or, to put it briefly, it is a problem of the utilization of knowledge which is not given to anyone in its totality.⁴

This epistemological critique to the concept of socialism and constructivism has influenced the political theory of Bertrand de Jouvenel, who affirms:

We are enamored of order; this passion runs through all of mankind, from the housewife to Einstein. True enough, but what is "Order"? So platonic an approach is to be shunned. It is a more sensible and modest course to note that some arrangements evoke an immediate pleasure and approval, while others do not. We can call the first "seemly" and the second "unseemly", hoping to emphasize that we start with subjective appreciations. We do not then have to answer the question, "what is Order?" Our concern is merely to detect when the feeling of seemliness is experienced.⁵

Jouvenel begins his essay by saying that people always tend to consider the things they do not understand as obscure. In other words, it is relatively uncommon for people to try to demonstrate rationally a phenomenon that is unknown to them, preferring to classify, at least unconsciously, the phenomena deemed to conform to their way of analyzing reality, and phenomena considered conversely obscure and indecipherable.

Our desire to find things "obedient" to some principle is the mainspring of intellectual inquiry. We seek 'hidden' principles of organization whose discovery re-

veals the orderliness of phenomena that seem disorder to us.⁶

This approach to the phenomena of reality is typical, for Jouvenel, of a planning mentality. In fact, people consider all those phenomena they can understand immediately as "rational":

The root of the word "rationality" is ratio, i.e. proportion, considering a given arrangement of factors, we may call it "rational" because the proportions obtaining between parts are such as to spring immediately to the eye, or to be immediately (or readily) understood by the mind. Our pleasure is then bound up with the assent we grant to existing proportions. But an arrangement may be "rational" in quite another sense: if the proportions between factors are suitable to produce the result at which the arrangement is aimed. We thus find two distinct meanings of "rationality": subjective enjoyment of proportions, and objective adequacy of proportions to the purpose of the arrangement. To be more precise, in the first case the arrangement is judged as "a sight"; in the second case, as "an organization for results".⁷

Jouvenel argues that a spontaneous order, an effect of free interaction between individuals, is preferable to centralized and planned organization. The reason is that a society based on the spontaneous order respects, sometimes in a partial way, individual expectations and the individual will. Here the influence of Hayek is obvious. Jouvenel's thesis is that if no actor in the game demands to have the right to organize any aspect of society, he will have to accept the fact that some organizational methods appear bizarre and do not conform to his way of

⁴Hayek (1945), pp. 519-520.

⁵Jouvenel (1956), p. 42.

⁶Jouvenel (1956), p. 43.

⁷Jouvenel (1956), pp. 44-45.

thinking. The problem is that there is no single criterion for determining the exact way to organize society. To explain his thinking, Jouvanel uses two concepts: *operator-judgement* (O-judgement) and *sightsteer-judgement* (S-judgement). The first denotes the common mentality, the one that can lead individuals not to settle for an organization that is the fruit of criteria that they do not understand and which modify the existing ones on the basis of values that they erroneously consider objectively preferable to others; the second one shows the mentality of the “visitor”, or “guest”, i.e. that approach characterized by the awareness that the way we see the surrounding reality is not the only one.

Jouvanel takes the example of a library organized in a way that is totally consistent with that of the owner. Volumes are sorted according to the affinity of the topic. It matters little whether the policy is right or not. It meets the needs of the owner. One day, however, his daughter, moved by the best intentions, decides to change the order of the books in a manner more congenial to her, or in alphabetical order. Again, according to Jouvanel the important thing is not to analyze the policy itself. What is relevant is that a stranger decides improperly to make a change to a predetermined order. The daughter sees the thing from the point of view of the operator-Judgement.

The problem is that, despite the presence in every modern society of multiple moral and cultural orientations and diverse organizational preferences, individuals tend to prefer simplicity over complexity, as if it were an ancestral requirement:

All that is known of man’s past is testimony to the fact that he has ever associated the idea of perfection with simple figures, which he therefore uses to denote

Divinity. Basic to every ritual is the circle in which the eye finds no lack and which thus represents (or indeed suggests) the concept of Wholeness. The circular crown seems to have been invented independently by all human societies; the operations of magic have involved everywhere the tracing of figures within a circle. We are told that primitive places of worship and assemblies of worshippers are circular. Movement forming simple geometric patterns was a form of homage to Divinity. Military parades have also been derived from this, as well as our world “theory,” which in barrack language still meant quite recently “training in geometric marching.”⁸

The vision expressed by Hayek in *Law, Legislation and Liberty* is very similar. It is not possible to impose a reason that is outside the rules that everyone, individually, can be given, since every external law is the result of a presumption of knowledge.

This thesis can be seen as a development of what Hayek had already expounded in *Collectivist Economic Planning* (Hayek, 1935). Hayek’s intention was to put forward an epistemological critique that was valid for socialism, without any moral judgment.

To go more deeply into the connection between Jouvanel and Hayek, it is necessary to analyze the second part of *Law, Legislation and Liberty*, entitled *The Mirage of Social Justice*. But first it is important to mention Hayek’s intentions. For the development of his theory, he had to deal with the whole political-philosophical tradition. In particular, he had to think about the concepts of “democracy” and “justice”:

Criticism of the premises and outcome of democratic theory induced Hayek to ex-

⁸Jouvanel (1956), p. 48.

amine the relationship that had come to obtain between *democracy* and *justice*. This relationship did not simply arise from considering democracy as ‘value’, but indeed stood as its one and only justification. Yet the result was that the identification of political philosophy with democracy ultimately reduced the former to the status of ideology (i.e. to an attempt to justify a model of political regime). Furthermore, the fact of imagining the democratic system to be the only political system capable of resolving the problem of social justice also means that it has to be examined from the point of view of its empirical results. Such an enquiry is bound to lead to the question of whether democracy is truly the ‘best political order’, and one will wish to inspect its actual achievements in order to assess its claim to be a third solution to the dichotomy of *order vs organization*.⁹

Again the concept of spontaneous order emerges, which obviously leads Hayek to prefer an evolutionary conception to a teleological conception. Having reached this point, Hayek wonders why a teleocratic or nomocratic society is preferable. Only then is it possible to analyze democracy itself, and see democracy as a political system capable of achieving a just society.

Hayek goes so far as to highlight how a society based on direction from individual activities (especially economic), results in the birth of totalitarianism. In other words, in *Law, Legislation and Liberty* Hayek states that ruling from above the various aspects of society in accordance with pre-determined but arbitrary ends leads to despotism.

Here again there is the problem of the presumption of knowledge, by those who hold the levers of power. Individual de-

sires and expectations vary from individual to individual. The problem of social justice and the common good resides precisely here. It consists in the claim to know what should unite all members of society and rule on this basis. Hayek states that in a complex society like ours,

... the general welfare at which a government ought to aim cannot consist of the sum of particular satisfactions of the several individuals for the simple reason that neither those nor all the circumstances determining them can be known to government or anybody else. Even in the modern welfare societies the great majority and the most important of the daily needs of the great masses are met as a result of processes whose particulars government does not and cannot know. The most important of the public goods for which government is required is thus not the direct satisfaction of any particular needs, but the securing of conditions in which the individuals and smaller groups will have favourable opportunities of mutually providing for their respective needs.¹⁰

Modern society, characterized by different cultural and ethical orientations, cannot afford a state which coordinates the actual particular ends in view of a higher purpose. It is increasingly difficult to reconcile the various individual expectations.

But then, what is the common good in Hayek’s thought? A well-ordered society consists in respect for the various specific wills. Hayek, by referring to the political model of classical liberalism, focuses on general rules of conduct that constitute the foundation of coexistence. The common good cannot coincide with a particular concrete purpose. It must have an abstract nature and not a prescriptive one:

⁹Cubeddu (1993), p. 187.

¹⁰Hayek (1973-1979), II, p. 2.

What makes agreement and peace in such a society possible is that the individuals are not required to agree on ends but only on means which are capable of serving a great variety of purposes and which each hopes will assist him in the pursuit of his own purposes.¹¹

It is possible to see the undeniable points of contact with Jouvanel, who criticized the concept of common good, seen as a means to coercively subjugate citizens. In the work *The Ethics of Redistribution*, Jouvanel states that:

Rulers, of course, tend to believe that the greater fraction of private incomes they can draw into the Treasury, the better for the community as a whole; for are they not the best judges of the common interest, which the individual, sunk in his selfish pursuits, cannot perceive? Taxpayers, however, have shown through the centuries little understanding of the superior capacity of their rulers to spend the citizen's earnings and have obdurately maintained their right to spend their incomes in their own manner.¹²

In this book the concepts of socialism, redistribution and the common good are criticized. Jouvanel poses the same question posed by Hayek: how is it possible to redistribute in the name of the common good without taking account of the will of individuals? In this essay, he attempts to prove that it is impossible for the state to know the objective level of satisfaction of individuals, both before and after the implementation of redistributive policies.

In order to justify income tax, it is often possible to use this argument: "The richer would feel their loss less than the

poorer would appreciate their gain."¹³ At this point:

Here a comparison of satisfactions is made. Can such a comparison be rendered effective? Can we with any precision come to weigh losses of satisfaction to some and gains of satisfaction to others? If so, we may know how to achieve the maximum sum of individual satisfactions capable of being drawn from a given flow of production, which must always be assumed to be unaffected.¹⁴

Here the critique of the presumption of knowledge re-emerges. Furthermore, while Jouvanel never speaks of spontaneous order, this concept is present in the expression "general equilibrium." Individual competition and the free market do not give rise to predetermined harmony between supply and demand, which would ruin any policy to mitigate inequalities from above. In every society there will always be a certain degree of inequality. Jouvanel does not mean that the free market implies a perfect society. However, in his perspective it is the most reasonable for creating an ordered society:

Postulating that economic behaviour is ruled by the effort to maximize individual satisfactions, deducing that any equilibrium in exchange is the happiest compromise between the satisfactions of the parties and thus somehow maximizes the sum of their satisfactions, they were led to regard general equilibrium as the best the individual can do for himself as against all others, and, from a bird's eye view, as the best possible combination of individual results.¹⁵

¹¹Hayek (1973-1979), I, p. 3.

¹²Jouvanel (1952), p. 74.

¹³ Jouvanel (1952), p. 30.

¹⁴ Jouvanel (1952), p. 30.

¹⁵Jouvanel (1952), p. 31.

To return to Hayek, his criticism of redistribution continues when he states that the common good is nothing more than a rhetorical device used by some dominant minority, perhaps legitimized by democratic vote, to impose special rights: “The myth of equality thus concealed within it the danger of the total submission of vast masses to an élite that directed the public economy and controlled private economies.”¹⁶ This thesis is expressed in several parts of *Law, Legislation and Liberty*. For example, Hayek affirms:

It is one of the axioms of the tradition of freedom that coercion of individuals is permissible only where it is necessary in the service of the general welfare or the public good. Yet though it is clear that the stress on the general or common or public character of the legitimate objects of governmental power is directed against its use in the service of particular interests, the vagueness of the different terms which have been employed has made it possible to declare almost any interest a general interest and to make large numbers serve purposes in which they are not in the least interested. The common welfare or the public good has to the present time remained a concept most recalcitrant to any precise definition and therefore capable of being given almost any content suggested by the interests of the ruling group.¹⁷

At the beginning of this article, we affirmed that Jouvanel thought, although it has some points in common with Hayek’s, cannot be reduced to a vision entirely coincident with that of the Austrian School. The author’s thought of *Du Pouvoir* can be considered closer to Ordoliberalism, a political-economic doctrine

that believes that the free market can develop (as the physiocrats and the representatives of the School of Manchester believed), only in presence of an appropriate “constitutional framework.”

The exponents of this cultural movement proposed to correct the failures of the free market. As stated by Bonefeld (2012), they were convinced that the free market needed a state capable of curbing the power of the great economic agglomerations, which risk consolidating in oligopolies. Alexander Rüstow, for example, mentioned the ability of lobbyists to influence the majority of society in order to achieve political and economic benefits. Indeed, Rüstow believed that lobbyists were private economic institutions capable of influencing the decision-making process of the state. For this reason, the state had to be strong enough to resist pressure from the private sector.¹⁸

Wilhelm Röpke supported similar theses. Samuel Gregg indeed states that in the Ordoliberal tradition, the state must be strong enough to resist interest-group capture.

[According to Röpke] the state must be strong enough to resist interest-group capture. It is possible that Röpke’s proposed fragmentation of state power might actually make such resistance harder. Possibly anticipating this criticism, Röpke stressed that his decentralization policies were not designed to unduly weaken the state. A degree of differentiation in the state’s responsibilities was, he held, inevitable in any political arrangement. The question was whether these separations were harmonious with the preservation of liberty. Freedom, political decentralization and a strong state were not,

¹⁶Cubeddu (1993), p. 189.

¹⁷Hayek (1973-1979), II, p. 1.

¹⁸Rüstow (1932).

Röpke believed, necessarily incompatible.¹⁹

In works such as *The Social Crisis of Our Time* (1942), *Civitas Humana* (1948) and *A Humane Economy* (1960), Röpke states that a society should be composed of a variety of political and economic actors; however, he realizes that economic and social pluralism may suffer some degeneration. Indeed, contemporary democracy is often characterized by lobbying by pressure groups that risk putting the transparency of the decision-making process at risk:

The Capitol is besieged by pressure groups, lobbyists, and veto groups, to use the American political jargon. The structure of the modern state is the result of this interplay of constitutional institutions and para constitutional economic and social power. It is obvious that the discrepancy between democratic idea and constitutional law on the one hand and the hard facts of reality on the other puts a heavy strain on the modern democratic state. The idea itself appears compromised, and any responsible government must examine carefully all the possible means of resisting this pluralistic disintegration of the state.²⁰

Returning to Jouvenel, and starting from his theory of political pluralism influenced by Tocqueville, it is possible to find several similarities between Jouvenel and the Social Market Economy. To do this, I am going to start with a letter sent to Milton Friedman dating back to July 30, 1960,²¹ in which the French philoso-

pher justifies his decision to leave the Mont Pelerin Society, an association of liberal culture of which he himself was, in 1947, one of the founding members. This document represents an opportunity to demonstrate the liberalism theorized by Jouvenel, given that the letter contains many elements that in his works are analyzed in more detail.

The letter to Friedman is not, however, the only document in which it is possible to trace the Catholic roots of Jouvenelian liberalism. This matrix is present in *Du Pouvoir*, and *De la Souveraineté*. Here I aim to shed light on a lesser-known aspect of this author's thought, which places it within the fold of Christian political philosophy.

Jouvenel, especially with *Du Pouvoir*, showed a history of political power from medieval to contemporary times. His goal was to show that the state, during this extensive period of time, tends to grow steadily at the expense of individual liberties. This aspect concerns the problem of the relationship between individual freedom and collective consciousness. In fact, even though the biography of Jouvenel is characterized by an intellectual relationship that is quite close to that of Hayek, it must be said that Jouvenel's positions cannot be considered similar to those advocated by members of the contemporary liberalism-inspired Austrian School. His political liberalism does not necessarily coincide with that expression of it. Certainly economic freedom has, in a society eager for growth and prosperity, an important role. However, it must not jeopardize social cohesion and environmental protection.

In *De la Souveraineté* the author reflects on the relationship between individual moral conscience and political

¹⁹Gregg (2010), p. 136.

²⁰Röpke (1960), p. 143.

²¹Jouvenel, Letter to Milton Friedman, Milton Friedman Papers, Box n° 86-2, Hoover Institution Archives.

consciousness, focusing on the particular individual-community relationship. In the letter sent to Friedman, Jouvenel criticizes the fact that the Mont Pelerin Society has moved from defense of individual freedom to an uncritical defense of the unregulated market. In the initial part of the letter, Jouvenel says that this association was to be called the “Acton-Tocqueville Society”, after two thinkers who had written extensively on the relationship between individual freedom and the coercive apparatus of the state:

You will remember that when it came to naming the Society it was suggested, – unless my memory betrays me, the suggestion came from Hayek, – to call it the Acton-Tocqueville Society. Such a choice would have stressed the value which was stressed in Hayek’s recent book, the freedom of the person. With such a title the Society would have concerned itself mainly with the ensuring of the person against coercion by others: against rough treatment by the police, against inequitable sentences by the judiciary, against the passing of laws of circumstance, inspired by passions, ideologies or lobbies, against the pressures exerted upon the individual by non-governmental demands for conformity (join my church) for solidarity (obey my union) or for dovetailing into an organization (the organization man). The Society would of course have concerned itself with economic organization and processes, which have become so important in social life, but from the angle of personal liberty.

Now as against this wide mandate of defence and promotion of freedom, it seems to me that the Society has turned increasingly to a Manicheism according to which the State can do no good and private enterprise can do no wrong.²²

Jouvenel does not deny that the state can trample over individual freedom. It had done so many times in the course of history, and *Du Pouvoir* was written with the intent of documenting the history of this development. However, Jouvenel claims to be forced to admit that the state can also, if well managed, contribute to achieving the general interest. For Jouvenel, it is not possible, in a complex society like the contemporary one, to do without the state by relying exclusively on the free voluntary exchange of goods and services.

According to Jouvenel’s liberalism, the market left to itself could limit individual freedom, at least in economic terms, almost like a despotic state. Jouvenel says that the best economic structure for a prosperous society is mixed. He cites the example of France: not only does the state supervise private companies to prevent the creation of monopolies, but there is effective cooperation between public authorities and the private sector in order to reach an agreement between the various social partners. The state must then work with the various social actors in order to find shared solutions:

I do believe that the Public Authorities have an avocation to pursue the General Welfare, and that their functions must inevitably increase with the complexity of social organization; through I also feel that the men who embody public authority are fallible, should be sharply aware that they are apt to go wrong, and should use methods which make it advantageous rather than mandatory to do what they deem useful to the public.²³

In this paper I tried to offer an overview of Jouvenel’s thought, comparing his economic views some contemporary

²²Letter to Milton Friedman, p. 2.

²³Letter to Milton Friedman, p. 2.

political and economic theories. The political thought of Jouvenel can be considered as a sort of synthesis between three currents. In *Du Pouvoir* and in *De Souveranieté* Jouvenel is influenced by some classical European political thinkers such as Alexis de Toqueville and Jean Bodin. If we analyze some minor writings he demonstrates to be close to some contemporary political theories like the Austrian School, Public Choice and Ordoliberalism.

In “Order versus Organization,” Jouvenel, influenced by Hayek, offers a theory of spontaneous order. In *The Ethics of Redistribution* he states that the political class implements redistributive policies in order to increase their power within society: it is perhaps a simplistic vision, but Jouvenel here sketches a rent-seeking theory, which is a key concept of Public Choice theory.

However, he does not necessarily see the State as an obstacle to the economic development of society. He is also very close to the social market economy and to Ordoliberalism, recognizing the necessary role of public institutions in order to find a compromise between the various instances present in society.

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