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"Virtue: Between Anarchy and Tyranny"  
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Societies neither form nor develop as mere accidents of history. Beyond the initial organizing force of common interests lies a sense of purpose or destiny intrinsic to the organization and reality of a society. "It is of the essence of culture to feel its own imperative and to believe in the uniqueness of its worth" (Weaver, 11). Points of common interest may provide sufficient cause for the initial formation, but are insufficient as an ordering principle for the continuance and stability of a society. The cultural cohesiveness and perpetuity of a society requires something stronger than the common natural interests of the group. In fact, what is needed is a moral code grounded in that which transcends the individual or a group of individuals within the society. As Durant observes, "Morality is the cooperation of the part with the whole, and of each group with some larger whole. Civilization, of course, would be impossible without it" (Durant, 36). While some have maintained that a moral self-sufficiency exists grounded only in natural law apart from any notion of the transcendent, history demonstrates that such optimism in human nature is ill-founded.

Furthermore, economic and sociological interests are insufficient grounds on which to base a moral code. Historian-philosopher Will Durant writes, "Few societies have been content to rest their moral codes upon so frankly rational a basis as economic and political utility. For the individual is not endowed by nature with any disposition to subordinate his personal interest to those of the group, or to obey irksome regulations for which there is no visible means of enforcement. To provide, so to speak, an invisible watchman, to strengthen the social impulses against the individualistic by powerful hopes and fears, societies have not invented but made use of religion" (Durant, 55). In other words, any moral code sufficiently strong enough to withstand the destructive natural forces of human selfishness must be grounded in that which stands above man. Otherwise, there will only be an arbitrary morality aimed at serving the interests of a few while discounting or denying the rights and interests of the many. A case in point would be the Roman Empire. As Palmer writes, "It must be added that Roman law favored the State, or the public interest as seen by government, rather than the interests of liberties of individual persons" (Palmer & Colton, 10). In the end, however, the Empire collapsed on itself due to moral decay and social disarray. It simply did not have a center strong enough to hold against the counterforce of the selfish impulses of humanity. While no society of this world's order is perfect, those that promote social justice, political stability and economic success require a moral code which serves as its metaphysical center. This moral code is the basis by which society teaches, encourages, and supports in the individual members of society a sense of personal responsibility and social justice. This is what is known as virtue.

Virtue is the display of moral goodness and justice flowing from a personal commitment in a moral code which raises the individual's behavior above self-interest and culture above arbitrary law. It is each individual acting on transcendent principles which require justice for all and right behavior of oneself. Traditionally, virtue has been defined as, ". . . temperance, justice,

courage and (practical) wisdom, but in the Middle Ages Christian philosophers tended to add three theological virtues: faith, hope, and charity or love, to the list of major virtues" (Honderich, 901). Virtue is the individual practice of goodness and justice as the individual interacts with the larger community. The definition of goodness and justice, however, must not come from the individual or a group of individuals within society, but only from a moral code which issues from a transcendent, perfect moral being.

The source of the moral code must be transcendent in nature, that is, ontologically superior to man in order for the moral code to be necessarily binding on all men. That is to say, there must be some sense of transcendent moral authority attached to the moral code, or it would not be necessarily binding upon all. Furthermore, the source of the moral code must be morally perfect or the moral code would only result an arbitrary or relative morality. The concept of morality also necessarily implies the idea of person, so the perfect moral transcendent must be a person. In other words, the source of the moral code must be a virtuous being who is so by nature. Only in this way can society have a universal code for justice and morality, thus avoiding an arbitrary standard of conduct.

Arbitrary morality does not encourage personal virtue because the standard of what is virtuous is always subject to change. What is virtuous today may not be virtuous tomorrow, or what is virtuous for one group is not necessarily binding on another group. Hence, there would be a practical blurring of the line between virtue and vice which ultimately destroys the meaning of virtue leaving no practical reason for being virtuous. Without a transcendent moral personal being from whom issues an objective, universal moral code and to whom individual man is accountable, virtue has neither definition nor foundation. Consequently, it is reasonably demonstrated why the moral code must be grounded in a transcendent morally perfect being, or morality becomes relative which in time removes the defining line between virtue and vice.

It has been recognized, almost universally, that a society cannot survive for long where vice operates as the governing principle of politics, economics and daily social intercourse. Not all societies, however, have agreed on how society should be guarded from vice. Some societies have majored on suppressing vice by external means only, which works in eliminating the vice that destroys society, but does nothing to encourage virtue which strengthens society. Absence of vice does not necessarily mean the presence of virtue. Other societies, especially where Christianity has flourished, have promoted virtue in the individual man by teaching that God (the transcendent, perfect, moral being) is the moral Law Giver to whom all men are accountable and explaining that the moral law is both the basis for and definition of virtuous behavior. Each member of the society is accountable to God directly and God's absolute moral law provides the moral definition on which all human behavior is predicated. Whereas the standard of virtue is the universal moral law of God, all members of society are equally and necessarily responsible, both the rulers and the people. So it has been that with the increasing influence of Christianity, ". . . the idea that no ruler, no government, and no institution is too mighty to rise above moral criticism has opened the way to a dynamic and progressive way of living in the West" (Palmer & Colton, 12-13). This does not imply, however, that there is no need for civil law as a deterrent to non-virtuous behavior (vice), but only that the true strength of the good society is found in the virtue of the individuals at all levels within society. Freedom without virtue, however, soon becomes chaos and corruption. As one Russian has observed, "And yet, if we do not learn to

limit firmly our desires and demands, to subordinate our interests to moral criteria----we, humankind, will simply be torn apart, as the worst aspects of human nature bare their teeth. It has been pointed out by various thinkers many times (and I quote here the words of the twentieth century Russian philosopher Nikolai Lossky): if a personality is not directed at values higher than the self, corruption and decay inevitably take hold" (Solzhenistyn, 127).

It is true that in this fallen world not all members of a society will desire to live virtuous lives. Therefore, some external law is always needed to restrain those whose tendency it is to live against the moral code. In part, civil law is to administer penalty on those who choose to live contrary to the moral code, but to do so with justice as defined by the moral code. According to the teaching of Christianity, civil law exists to deter vice and to promote obedience to moral law to the end that it encourages virtue. As the Bible says of the civil ruler, "For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same" (Romans 13:7 - New King James). The Christian view is that civil law is predicated upon the moral code of God which in turn invests civil law with moral authority. Hence, the authority of civil law is not rooted in the king, but in the moral law which is above the king. The danger is that because evil is so prevalent and destructive, deterring vice is often seen as the sufficient goal of society. Culture, however, must promote virtue as well as punish vice. Only deterring vice without promoting virtue will result in a society of order but devoid of humanness. Furthermore, unless the society understands the imperative of intentionally promoting virtue, deterring vice will become the only goal of society, in which case individual liberties will be sacrificed in the interest of the good of society. In this case, good only refers to order and not the quality of life within that society.

Each culture must struggle with the ever-present tension that exists between the good of society and the freedom of the individual, between the cohesive well-being of society and the liberties of the individual. As Weaver observes, "There is at the heart of every culture a center of authority from which there proceed subtle and pervasive pressures upon us to conform and to repel the unlike as disruptive. So culture too is faced with the metaphysical problem of freedom and organization, which rules out the possibility of uncircumscribed liberty" (Weaver, 11). There must be individual freedom to choose the virtuous life while at the same time there must be law to deter people from using their freedom to act without regard for the good of others. Without some boundaries, freedom turns into irresponsible gross selfishness which tears at the fabric of society and turns society against itself. On the other hand, when restrictions of individual freedom approach the oppressive level, people either revolt or lose their sense of worth and dignity. In either case society loses. The good society requires a balance of form and freedom.

Balance is best achieved by observing God's moral law in that His law serves a dual purpose. It informs culture regarding the just ordering of society and it also requires of the individual a pattern of life that is lived in a morally responsible way. Christianity teaches that the same moral code that defines virtue for the individual also provides the basis for the culture's just ordering of society as a whole. This can be seen in Paul Robert's 1905 mural in the old Supreme Court Building in Lausanne, Switzerland entitled, *Justice Lifts the Nations*. "Robert pictured many types of legal cases in the foreground and the judges in their black robes standing behind the judges' bench. The problem is neatly posed: How shall the judges judge? On what basis shall they proceed so that their judgment will not be arbitrary? Above them Robert painted Justice

standing unblindfolded, with her sword pointed not vertically upward but downward toward a book, and on the book is written, 'The Law of God'" (Schaeffer, 106). So at points where virtue fails on the individual level, virtue is upheld in society by the administration of justice which is also based on the moral law of God. So order within society is maintained without abrogating the freedoms of the virtuous citizens. Where justice rules, vice is not only punished, but virtue is encouraged. Conversely, where injustice prevails, virtue is discouraged, for justice is the core of virtue. It is virtue that stands between tyranny and anarchy.

The importance of virtue to society when practiced at the individual level cannot be overstated. Virtue makes for a responsible citizen who both contributes to society and benefits from society. Virtue encourages the best in humanity, while expecting the worst in humanity to be dealt with justly. Yet, it must be remembered that virtue is not first an action, but an attitude. Therefore, virtue is not something that can be demanded or forced from the top down politically, rather it must be encouraged as society yields to the higher principles as found in God's moral law.

Consequently, the good society recognizes and submits in a public as well as in a private way to the existence of God and His moral law. It is this moral law that gives the individual a principle higher than himself by which to live and provides society with a moral code that does not originate with society. In this way, both the individual and society have the same ordering principles which calls for moral responsibility in the individual and justice in society. Justice in turn encourages individuals to be virtuous by the good being rewarded and vice punished. Virtue calls men to live in a morally responsible fashion guided internally by a strong sense of justice, character and temperance. That is, to live responsibly to God and to society. To live responsibly requires one to have character, to be guided by principles higher than oneself. These same principles are those to which society as a whole must also commit. In this way, there is something greater than government, greater than society and greater than individual rights influencing society as a whole. At each level in society and in all areas of society God's transcendent principles provide the center for the life of society. Nothing else can provide a center sufficiently strong enough to order society at every level so that individual rights are protected, moral responsibility is encouraged and justice extended to all. While some may think man has outgrown his need for God, the current disintegration of many societies around the world testify to the contrary. It seems beyond contradiction to say that we cannot be good without God, for without God there is no responsible self and without the responsible self, society will succumb to either anarchy or tyranny.

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