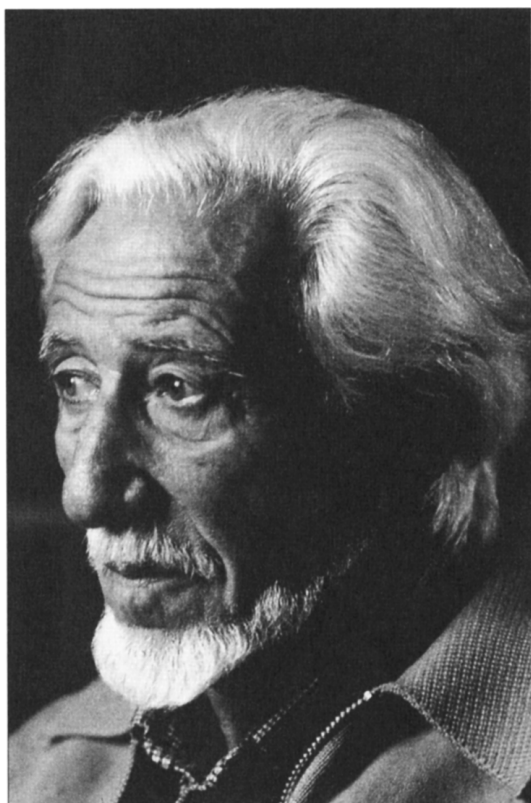


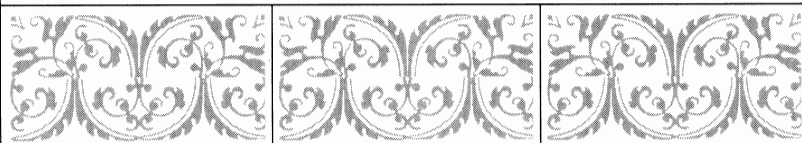
SOVEREIGNTY



Bertrand de Jouvenel

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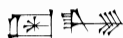
AN INQUIRY INTO THE POLITICAL GOOD



Bertrand de Jouvenel

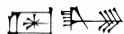
Translated by J. F. Huntington

Foreword by Daniel J. Mahoney
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To my children

ROLAND

Lux perpetua luceat ei

ANNE

HUGUES

HENRI

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FOREWORD

BERTRAND DE JOUVENEL (1903–87) is one of the great political thinkers of the twentieth century, though his work does not fit neatly into received political categories. He is undoubtedly a conservative liberal in the French tradition of Constant and Tocqueville, but in addition, his thought is both imbued with the spirit of Aristotelian political science and marked by an openness to the most fruitful currents of modern political and economic thought. Jouvenel's achievement was to present an original political science, one that responds to the circumstances and tragedies of the century and draws on the insights of the tradition while avoiding the abstract and ahistorical character of much contemporary political theory.

But Jouvenel was not always a conservative liberal in the Tocquevillean tradition. His mature political philosophy arose from the experience of modern tyranny and from reflection on his own intellectual and political misjudgments in the period leading up to World War II. This experience and reflection convinced Jouvenel of the indispensability of liberal constitutionalism as well as the need to rethink its moral foundations. Earlier, in the prewar period, he had become convinced of the essential decadence of the French Third Republic and perhaps even of liberal democracy generally. Looking for political means to revitalize France, he joined a right-wing populist party in 1936, the *Parti Populaire Français* (PPF), led by Jacques Doriot. He left it, however, in late 1938 because of his opposition to

the Munich Pact (Jouvenel had long-standing personal and political attachments to the Czechoslovakian democracy).

While never profascist in any strong ideological sense—as some critics have charged—Jouvenel during this period nonetheless exaggerated the vitality of the totalitarian regimes and despaired of renewing liberal democracy. This strain in his thought is most evident and disturbing in his 1941 tract *Après la défaite* (*After the Defeat*), published during the Occupation, in which he contrasts the youthful renewal and communal tendencies of the totalitarian regimes with the corruption and decomposition of liberal Europe.

Despite his agonizing doubts about the prospects for liberal democracy, Jouvenel was neither a collaborator nor an apologist for right-wing totalitarianism; in 1942 he joined the French Resistance in his native Corrèze and eventually fled to Switzerland, the Nazi Gestapo in pursuit. There he researched and completed *On Power* (published in French in 1945 and in English in 1948), which marks his turn to a realistic and antitotalitarian liberalism. The barbarism that was the practical effect of the totalitarian rejection of liberal democracy had cured Jouvenel of any residual antiliberal temptation. Moreover, while he had only flirted with the illiberal Right, he came nonetheless to share the spiritual disillusionment with a “god that failed” that was characteristic of such ex-communist thinkers as Ignazio Silone and Arthur Koestler. Jouvenel’s personal odyssey as well as his political science unfolded in the age of totalitarianism; each is marked, through and through, by that phenomenon.

Jouvenel’s major achievement is a trilogy of political reflection published in French between 1945 and 1963. But the character of the trilogy as a unified intellectual project is practically unknown in this country. His “Tocquevillean” analysis of the rise of the centralized state, the “Minotaur,” as he famously calls it in *On Power*, is well known, as is his lucid critique of the disastrous moral and political effects of redistributionism in *The Ethics of Redistribution*. Jouvenel’s other major works, however, particularly *Sovereignty: An In-*

quiry into the Political Good (1957) and *The Pure Theory of Politics* (1963), which together with *On Power* form the trilogy, are far less familiar to Anglo-American readers. Yet these two works are arguably his most important ones because they deal explicitly with questions of first principles. In fact, his best-known work, *On Power*, was a kind of prolegomenon both to the positive account of liberty and the common good that he provided in *Sovereignty* and to his later efforts to revitalize and modernize classical political science in *The Pure Theory of Politics*.

On Power gives an account of the erosion of intermediate associations and responsible individuality at the hands of twentieth-century totalitarian regimes and, to a much lesser extent, by the "social protectorates" established in contemporary liberal regimes. In order to discover the deeper sources of contemporary collectivism, Jouvenel presents a "natural history of Power" that reveals not only the essential "egoism" of Power but also the false ideas that give the modern state undue "credit" and feed its ubiquitous expansion. Responding to this situation, *The Pure Theory of Politics* outlines the possibility of a new political science that is genuinely "behavioral" in character and explores new ways to maintain and renew constitutional government. In this work Jouvenel demonstrates that those who are concerned with the common good must master the "game" of politics if they are to succeed. What must be learned, he elaborates, is the "behavior" of politics—how men are able to move men and how aggregates of men are maintained and transformed; only then can political science fulfill its charge to be an "effective guardian of civility," a task whose nobility and fragility are captured by the somber image of "the head and hands of the great guardian Cicero, nailed to the rostrum." *Sovereignty*, which is the central and connecting work in the trilogy, delineates a dynamic conception of the political good that does justice to the requirements of modern liberty. For this reason *Sovereignty* is Jouvenel's major work of political philosophy, in the most capacious sense of that term.

Above all, *Sovereignty* addresses the question of authority. Jouvenel explains that every notion of legitimate authority entails an implicit understanding of the common good. He suggests that the idea of a common good for a political community is not an abstract "Platonic idea" to be imposed upon a social order but, rather, is a reflection arising naturally from the social character of human beings. Every man who has the responsibility to exercise authority is "bound to form some conception of the good which he hopes to achieve by the exercise of the power which is his." Following Aristotle, Jouvenel asks whether those in positions of authority will use their authority "despotically" or whether they will "use it properly in the interest of a good which is in some way common."

The originality of *Sovereignty* lies in its effort to liberate the indispensable notion of the common good from the closed character of the classical city, from what Jouvenel calls the "prison of the corollaries" identified by such political philosophers as Plato and Rousseau. In the traditional view, modernized and radicalized by Rousseau, the maintenance of civic affections and political virtue depends upon certain corollaries: small size and population; cultural and social homogeneity; resistance to innovations and foreign ideas; and the insistence on the immutability of the community in order to maintain its fundamental "harmony." Jouvenel demonstrates that these ideas, while perhaps compatible with a certain classical form of public liberty, both inhibit individual liberty and undermine the kind of social friendship available in modern circumstances. In addition, he examines how the contemporary intellectual's disdain for the impersonality of the modern state and society—styled as "Babylon"—gives rise to a tyrannical desire to re-create community as an imagined "Icaria" freed from the emptiness of life in Babylon. In fact, however, the intellectual's utopian longings and the irresponsible politics to which they give rise undermine those communities that actually are available in modern circumstances and deny the only kind of common good appropriate to a society of free men. Therefore, Jouvenel

brilliantly reveals that there is a covert spiritual complicity between reactionaries and progressives: both are utopians who dream of a harmonious social order that is free of conflict and avoids the messy contingencies of history. Both forget that human communities can be preserved only if innovation is united with conservation and if statesmen kindle civic affections while anticipating and prudently managing political and social change.

We have seen that, while deeply suspicious of Rousseau-inspired political solutions to the “anomie” of modern life, Jouvenel freely draws on those classical dimensions of Rousseau’s thought that address the need for statesmen to kindle political *affections* as an alternative to the coercive use of state power. *Sovereignty* contains one of the richest accounts of the permanent requirements of statesmanship written in this century. Drawing widely on examples from the Bible, classical literature, history, and political life, Jouvenel shows that the offices of *rex* and *dux*, of founder and stabilizer, are permanent and difficult features of political leadership that are rarely embodied in the same man. To illustrate this point Jouvenel cites richly instructive examples and highlights two images—the one of Bonaparte inspiring his soldiers at the bridge of Arcola and the other of St. Louis under the oak of Vincennes calming all who come to see him. If politics unites innovation and conservation, founding and stabilizing, then statesmanship must incorporate both the active prince who agitates and stirs the political community and the pacific prince who moderates conflict and restores affections. But Jouvenel emphasizes that there can be no “end of history,” no theory of politics or conception of the common good that can displace statesmanship or the political art. The persistent danger is that these requirements of statesmanship will be ignored by antipolitical currents of modern thought that deny the *naturalness*, hence the goods as well as the evils, inherent in social and political authority.

Following the historical presentation outlined in *On Power*, Jouvenel investigates how modern doctrines of sovereignty undermine

natural forms of human association. He points out that these doctrines typically give rise to an atomized society directed by an increasingly centralized state that usurps the responsibilities of civil society. Therefore, in order to restore the preconditions of social friendship it is necessary to reconceive the foundations of political authority. In a profound analysis that is central to the book's explicit theme, Jouvenel explores the unlimited willfulness—and hence vulnerability to both nihilism and totalitarianism—inherent in the modern doctrine of sovereignty. Reversing received opinions, Jouvenel shows that French conservative liberals such as Guizot, Royer-Collard, and Tocqueville, as well as the most important theorists of the ancien régime, recognized and advocated the “limited will” of the sovereign and hence the intrinsic and proper limits of human and political willfulness altogether. This is perhaps the central and most radical theoretical insight of the book. Jouvenel suggests that human and political liberty can be fully articulated and defended only if the “self-sovereignty” of man is rejected, that is, if sovereignty is reconnected to broad principles of natural justice. This leads Jouvenel to analyze, in two chapters of the concluding section of his book, the “political consequences” of Descartes and Hobbes. He clearly establishes that neither prototypically modern thinker provides a principled basis for political and human liberty, because neither can account for the social nature of man and the nonarbitrary character of the moral life. Jouvenel establishes the intimate link between “the authoritarian conclusions of Hobbes and the premises of an absolute libertarianism,” or moral latitudinarianism. The conclusion of chapter 14 of *Sovereignty*, “The Political Consequences of Hobbes,” includes Jouvenel's clearest statement of the essential dependence of liberty upon individual self-restraint:

It looks as if the writings of Hobbes contain a serious lesson for our modern democracies. To the entire extent to which progress develops hedonism and moral relativism, to which individual liberty is con-