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Pierre Manent, *Seeing Things Politically: Interviews with Bénédicte Delorme-Montini*, Translated by Ralph C. Hancock, Introduction by Daniel J. Mahoney, 240 pp. South Bend, IN, USA, St. Augustine Press, 2015

Pierre Manent is one of the most important political philosophers of our day. His books provide a rich historical perspective on political developments in the west; he lays out the distinctive contributions of the Greek, Roman, medieval and modern forms of political forms in his magisterial *The Metamorphoses of the City*. In his previous books, *The Intellectual History of Liberalism*, *The City of Man*, and *Tocqueville and the Nature of Democracy*, he identifies the various strands and tensions within modern liberal democracy. His most recent book, *Seeing Things Politically*, is autobiographical; it is a rich examination of his intellectual formation and growth from the 1970s until the present. In this book we discover the core insights and problems that spawned each book. These autobiographical and philosophical essays take the form of a series of interviews by Bénédicte Delorme-Montini. In the preface, "Seeing Things Politically," (1–9) he states what his intellectual project is all about. He seeks to understand human nature and human affairs. Such an anthropological quest must turn to political philosophy; man is political by nature and it is political order that gives human life its distinctive form and feel. The fundamental order and disorder in our age, and each age, turns on political association. Through a study of ancients and moderns, Aristotle and Machiavelli, he finds a way around the incoherence and disorders of Marxian totalitarianism and Nietszchean nihilism. The discovery and rejuvenation of a "liberal political science of democracy" are an important

part of a political and philosophical response to the collapse of communism. And now liberal democracy faces a new crisis in the loss of a coherent political order. Manent seeks to address the philosophical questions pertaining to political association today in the context of the European Union and the decline of the nation-state.

In the first half of the book (part one, "Apprenticeships," and two, "Philosophy, Politics and Religion"), Manent gives the reader a close look at French political life as well as the French intellectual scene over the last 40 years. Leo Strauss, Alan Bloom, and Raymond Aron loom large in the intellectual life of Pierre Manent. There are a number of evocative personal vignettes sketched out in the book, including a warm memory of Allan Bloom. But it was his mentor Raymond Aron who awakened Manent to the possibility of "seeing things politically" and who opened the way to recover a more practical and yet theoretically informed account of political life in the west. Aron is described as "the perfect gentleman who experienced no need of transcendence" and he "gave each person what seemed to him best for that person without worrying about his own influence." Aron helped Manent find his way through the intellectual confusion and moral disarray of postwar France. The young Manent faced a choice between the Communist hopes of his father and the opposing power and prestige of the United States. Aron assisted him to understand the nature of political prudence, which establishes a balance between principles defending human freedom and dignity with the realistic alternatives and necessities of concrete political life. Simply put, "Aron knew what he was talking about" whereas the communist Sartre did not. Manent discovered that "Christian-democratic-capitalist America" embodies a strong and confident modern soul that remains "distinctive of the West" and in fact was distinctive of the West in Europe. Manent was then led to the deeper questions of political philosophy for greater clarity on the regime of freedom. As he pursued his studies at the provincial lycée and the École Normal Supérieure in the late 1960s the passions and subsequent ideologies of the student revolt of 1968 did not stir him as deeply as did the recovery of ancient philosophy and the study of Tocqueville. He participated in the Tocquevillean school of French thought around the journals *Contrepoints* and *Commentaire*. From his teacher Louis Jugnet he learned about French Thomists Etienne Gilson and Jacques Maritain. Manent was deeply impressed by the Catholic intellectual tradition. Nevertheless, a later encounter with Leo Strauss through Bloom divided Manent between philosophical inquiry and theology. He came to find the Thomistic harmony of faith and reason more problematic because of the Straussian claim that "the way of philosophy and the way of religion are two self-sufficient ways that cannot be joined." Jerusalem and Athens are too far apart for any simple statement of harmony. This intellectual formation thus has allowed Manent's thought and work to shuttle between philosophy, religion, and politics: "I am inside a triangle: politics, philosophy, religion. I have never been able to

settle on one of the poles. Aron situated himself within the political, Strauss the philosophic, and Maritain, the religious. The world draws on these three great sources, turns on these three great axes and therefore in keeping my distance in relation to these three points, I remain open to the diversity or complexity of the world." (59) In point of fact, Thomism has not fully worked out a political philosophy for the modern world in part because Thomas devoted little time to the political philosophy. In contrast to an apolitical Thomism, Manent articulates an Aristotelian political science as guide to how we can deliberate and act in common with an understanding of historical political experience.

In the second half of the book (part three, "From the Modern Moment to Western History," part four, "Teaching Political Philosophy" and part five, "The Universal and the Common") the reader is offered an intriguing introduction to his most recent and ongoing work. This work includes Manent's brilliant and original reformulation of the great question of continuity and change in the classical, Christian, and modern dispensations of the Western efforts to understand and to "enact humanity." He formulates a fascinating notion of "the Cicero moment," a time when the old forms seem to burst open, and there was a need to determine a new political form. Caught between Cato and Caesar, Republican city and empire, Cicero sought to find new features in order to open up a space for deliberation and action. The process of political decomposition and recomposition is an episodic challenge throughout human history. How to preserve civic order? Cicero would make some significance contributions to modern political thought through his discovery of new things such as representation, respect for property, and the humanity or dignity of the human being. We can thus appreciate the modern advance beyond ancient and medieval political forms in light of its "Ciceronian moment." In the modern age the theological-political problem brought about a crisis in political order. Caught between the king and the Church, the prince and the minister of God, who was one to obey? The old forms would burst with the rise of the nation, the reformed Christian churches, the autonomy of spheres, and claims for individual freedom. In the midst of all this, how can the people be well governed? Neither the ancient pagan appeals to nature and virtue nor the appeal to hierarchic authority of the Church would do. Political action seemed closed off. To overcome such political inertia Machiavelli overturned and mocked the old foundations and he redefinined virtue and human fulfillment in this world. Machiavelli's new political science was in part an effort to make action possible and to restore some sense of political hope and courage. Through the modifications of Hobbes and Locke and the broader accounts of Montesquieu and Tocqueville (well studied by Aron), the liberal science of democracy grew to a maturity and thereby provided a sphere for common human action unique to the west in which politics is "opened toward a future that depends upon us."

Manent understands that we must understand both the ancients and the moderns. By examining dialectically the various and opposing political constitu-

tions, Plato and Aristotle provide "a science of deliberation" for actors of any regime. As for the moderns, those before the French Revolution, which would include Machiavelli, Locke, Montesquieu, and the American Federalists, as well as those after the revolution such as Constant, Guizot, and Tocqueville studied the ancients and yet opened their eyes to the new things of the modern era such as pluralism, freedom, and equal social conditions.

But now in the new millennium the opening for political deliberation and action is closing again. Now we must look anew at human nature and return to seeing things politically in order to deal with the decomposition of the contemporary political scene, especially in the European Union. Even though our contemporary politics of universal human rights has deep roots in the Western tradition and has also a global appeal, it may have reached its limits. The European Union, as well as the liberal culture of the United States, reveals its tensions and inner contradictions. How can "public order be built on the protection of private lives alone"? The very realm of a common life is destroyed by the denial of our Christian roots and the understanding of a permanent human nature. Manent very adeptly explains the difference between a "common" life, based on common principles, mediating the universal, versus the appeal to the universal as a lowest common denominator which must seek to homogenize the population, equalize all wants and desires. Its project is to suppress politics. There are some, especially in America, who understand that subjective rights reside in an inner space opened up by Christian conscience. The Europeans tend to fill that space up with post-political and post-religious fantasies that detach rights from any real thought or confident action in response to the central question: What is man? Transcendence and mediation are disappearing. The transcendent truth about man and the mediation of national tradition provide that common ground. What is the truth about who we are: we are free, relational, and dutifully responsible persons under God. National life provides concrete images of excellence and sacrifice. But now Europe lives in a bubble or is "on vacation" if it fails to see the crisis of the day, which includes the lack of confidence in or even care for the truth about human nature and its blindness to the intolerance of liberalism and the fanaticism of Islamic religion. The nation-state is disappearing under the mist of the "religion of humanity." The religion of humanity, according to Manent, is "vaster and more humane" than Christianity. But it demands the equality of homogeneous interests and it forbids inquiry about the human as such; let there be no hint of judgment or rank! Strong and confident political and religious opinions are forbidden in public. But political philosophy thrives on the arguments and disputes of common political opinion. Now political philosophy is nothing more than an endless set of commentary upon Rawlsian liberalism with its veil of ignorance and fundamental principle of equality. Religious discourse is banned as fanatical and not worthy of so called "public discourse." The EU, Manent claims is no longer open to political discourse and deliberation and there is no common life to mediate

our life together. We face a tyranny of rules. These points are finely elaborated by Manent and yet he understands that simple nationalism is not enough. Do we face yet again a Ciceronian moment? Manent thinks so. The last twenty pages of the book, entitled "What is the West?", recapitulates the historic development of political forms from the search for public glory in the ancient pagan city to the Christian appeal to conscience as a limit to political rule. The Christian claims for universal authority and the formation of conscience was undermined as modern liberal democracy took on a new account of what is common for the civic order and constructed a new account of popular political sovereignty. At present it is the "religion of humanity" that most occludes our vision and prevents us from "seeing things politically."

Manent has fulfilled his own ideal of teaching political philosophy (142). The philosopher must become an educator of the civic body, raise the authentic disputes about the best political regime, and work through the partial accounts of justice to find a more comprehensive account of justice. Manent also keeps alive the fruitful quarrel between the ancients and the moderns. At the core of his project is the rediscovery of the soul with its array of excellences or virtues and also the possibility of conversion. However modern, we must continue to see our link to the ancient political philosophy and the Christian unveiling of conscience and its claim to freedom and responsibility under God. The development of political life in the West is a "succession of three waves, each emerging from the thrust and failures of the preceding. This process involves succession and superposition, for each wave rests upon the one that preceded it, the one it covers but that carries it along. It follows that, however modern we may wish to be, we cannot be content to allow ourselves to be carried along by the latest wave. We must, like Glaucon, swim in deep waters, since beneath us lie in successive levels the distinct levels of pagan glory, Christian conscience, and modern rights. The wave that carries us must not make us forget the waves that carry it" (192). Manent's book shows that it is not too late to act; the tides of confusion and homogenization are rising but we need not drown. He ends the book with this encouragement to think and to act: "It is up to us to discern, under the mirroring surface that captivates and comforts us, the different densities and salinities of the underlying waters. It is up to us to discern that we are carried and given life by what we think we have long since left behind" (192). Strong swimmers do not flail helplessly against a strong current, but reposition themselves and find the hidden currents. Pierre Manent bids us to put out into the deep of our Western heritage. "Duc in altum" would apply, it seems, not only to the new evangelization but also to political philosophy.

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