Reason in Politics

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In this essay, I explore the role of philosophy in politics and public policy along one dimension that is suggested by the question 'Does reason have a place in the shaping of public policy and institutions?' In considering this question, I focus on the factors that prevent reasoned argument from influencing political process and outcome. Among the factors standing in the way of reason, two, I think, are of special importance. The first is the dominance of interests, and the second is the dominance of fixed ideas rooted not in interests but in myth and fantasy. I begin with the role of interests in politics arguing that interest provides a limited role for reason, but that this role erodes the more interest is an expression of greed. I then turn to belief and the way belief systems operate as the more powerful of the two factors excluding reason from politics.

I

While interest-based politics can create space for reason, what now tends to dominate in politics is not interests so much as other factors operating on an altogether different plane. These are the factors associated with fixed ideas, convictions made impervious to any doubt by forces over which reason has no power. It is possible, of course, to attempt to treat conviction as a kind of interest. We can, after all, be said to take an interest in our belief systems. Yet, an important distinction can still be drawn, within the set of objects in which we might take an interest, between those associated with belief and those associated with the narrower matter of economic well being. For the former, our interest is in validation of belief, while, for the latter, it is in acquisition of property. So far as the matter of reason in politics is concerned, having an interest in acquisition of property has implications significantly different from those having to do with an interest in validation of belief.

What we refer to as economic interests have to do with access to the means to maintain a personal way of life in a private world. The shaping of a private world is particular to the individual, family, or partial group, and not a matter over which it is meaningful to insist on adherence by others. Of course, decisions made about the shape of a private world can have larger consequences, for example, in the form of their environmental impact or the larger public burden private health care can impose.

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Nonetheless, within broad limits, the shape of the private world remains a private concern. This means that the shaping of policy becomes a matter not of imposing a common belief and the way of life that embodies it, but of determining how institutions can secure the integrity of a private world in which ways of life differ for reasons not essentially connected to matters of belief.

That there is a limited role for reason where politics is dominated by interest is suggested by the idea of rational calculation for which interest is the starting point. Because rational calculation involves selecting among alternatives, it requires that the outcome not be altogether predetermined. From the point of view of this calculation, we cannot know ahead of time whether a specific policy is desirable or not, although it is assumed that we do know ahead of time what serves our interest. Thus, rational calculation requires that agents suspend fixed assumptions about the external world, if not about the internal world, and that they inquire, in however limited a way, into alternative possibilities. The ability of agents to do this makes them, at least to some degree, susceptible to a broader influence of reason and reality testing on their political positions. Achieving this end requires that policy and political debate about policy operate at a higher level of abstraction, one on which the object is not to defend and impose a particular end because it represents a moral imperative, but, rather, to defend the possibility of many different ends none of which have any special moral standing of the kind associated with the attachment we refer to in the language of belief. Defending this possibility requires that we treat our chosen way of life as possible rather than inevitable. Thinking about our way of life in this way means that it could be different; it is only one among many possibilities. For us to think this way, we must be able to make an abstraction, the result of which is the idea of the potential for living to take on different particular forms. This is the way of thinking toward which arguments about choice and rational calculation point us. In so doing, they make deliberation about public issues possible, since one can appeal to reason in attempting to judge when policy and institutions do and when they do not facilitate the shaping of many different private worlds each realising an abstract potential in a different way.

We can only do this, however, when we can get outside of the perspective shaped by our private worlds and the special value we invest in them. If we cannot move outside our particular way of living, we cannot invest meaning in policies except insofar as they force public institutions to serve our private ends and validate the inevitability and, therefore, universality of what would otherwise be contingent and particular. However, serving our private ends and validating our particular way of living is not the same as securing the possibility of many different private worlds. For the latter, there must be an investment not simply in a particular way of living, but also in the potential to shape a particular way of living. This means that we disinvest our way of life of that special significance it might have were it the one way of living having moral standing. The possibility of shaping different ways of life, rather than

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the concrete form those different ways of life take, must become our end. When it is accepted that making the abstraction needed to think and live this way is an essential part of public debate, then reason can play a role in the political process, since making the abstraction that enables us to get outside of what is particular to us is what reason enables us to do. Reason plays a role so long as there is or can develop some understanding that security of the private world depends on our conceiving what is particular in it as only one instance of something more universal. Because interest, by its nature, points us in this direction, politics based in interest creates space for reason.[1]

Yet, while this may be the case, the pursuit of interests in politics can also operate as an important factor limiting the influence of reason there. Interest limits reason when it develops in a direction inconsistent with the abstraction just considered. More specifically, reason loses its place in politics when the end of securing our private world becomes the end of excluding others from securing theirs. When this happens, pursuit of private ends does not lead toward the development of an understanding of their dependence on a larger order, and does not provide a basis for involvement with public ends that in some meaningful sense transcend particular interest. Interest develops in a direction inconsistent with reason when it attacks the boundaries and limits to satisfaction represented by the interests and property of others. This refusal to acknowledge limits is what we refer to as greed. Then, it is the attachment of greed to interest that sets it in opposition to reason. If we cannot acknowledge the limitations of our claims to a private world established by the like claims of others, then the basis for rational calculation is undermined and the clash of interests in politics cannot be limited by the end of securing the institutions that instantiate the ideal of many private worlds.

The attachment of greed to interest has normally been interpreted as involving a mediating term, which is the self. In other words, it is assumed that it is the attachment of interest to the self that leads to its attachment to greed, because the self is understood as the locus of greedy desire. The resulting equation of self-interest with greed makes self-interest a destructive force. Insistence that the pursuit of self-interest is a destructive force has provided the counterpoint to arguments in favour of grounding politics in interest, and presents a significant obstacle to any understanding of the complex relationship between interest and reason.

Interpretation of the self as the locus of a destructive form of desire makes repression of the self the logical response to the attack on reason in politics. Yet, without access to the self as mainspring of conduct and relating, and as a primary factor in mental activity, reason is not possible. This, then, creates a conundrum since reason requires access to the self, while the self is seen as the locus of greedy desire and, therefore, the enemy of reason. If we are to escape from this conundrum, we will need to consider the self more closely, and especially to question its identification with

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greedy desire. Put another way, we will need to understand how greedy desire comes to take over the mental space otherwise occupied by a self whose freedom from impulse, including the impulse associated with greed, makes reason both possible and necessary.

In attempting to understand the complex relationship between self-interest and greed, it will prove useful to begin with the observation that to pursue self-interest means to establish a special relationship between the internal and external worlds. More specifically, to pursue self-interest means to have interests that are not fully determined by external factors, but emerge out of an internal process not fully governed by those factors. This means that there must be a negation of external reality, which is also a denial of the limits it sets for us. This necessity to negate external reality suggests where the connection to greed originates. If negating external reality also negates the limits it represents, then, the presence of an internal experience of the kind we associate with the idea of having and being a self means denying limits, an important expression of which is what we refer to as greed. Greed is the refusal to accept the limits that the external reality of the desires of others places on the expectation that our desires will be satisfied. Understood in this way, greed is about the emergence of an inner world and a determination of conduct and relating originating there. Greed, then, is closely linked to the self and its presence as an active factor in thinking and doing. Although this is certainly the case, the connection of the self to the capacity to negate does not imply the equation of the self with greedy desire that makes it the enemy of reason. To see this, it will be helpful to take a closer look at greed.

When driven by greed, our goal is to incorporate all the good things into the boundary of the self. This expresses the organism's original (or primitive) orientation toward the world, which is not a relation of self and other, but a more fluid interchange between internal and external, an interchange in which relating is organised around processes of internalising and externalising with the goal of taking in what is good and getting rid of what is not. The goal of our original greedy self is to consume the good as a way of securing the identification between the self (internal) and what is good in the world (external). We refer to the impulse driven by this goal as 'merger' and to the hope that the goal will be achieved as 'merger fantasy'.

The central point about adult greed is that it is not equivalent to this primitive urge to incorporate the world. There is, rather, a moment in development where the presence of the self moves away from greed, and negation takes on another meaning, one consistent with respect for the separate existence of others, and it does so without necessarily giving up the capacity to negate and thereby make the self the source of what we do. It is the inability to achieve this new level of being and relating that marks adult greed, which is a response to a specific interpersonal experience that blocks development away from greed and in the direction of the new mode of being to which I have just referred. This inability derives from the adoption of an idea about

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desire and the self, which is that desire is a destructive force and therefore the self, as the locus of desire, is also a destructive force. The result of attachment to this idea is a powerful ambivalence that stands in the way of making a positive emotional investment in being and having a self.

The individual's inability to make a positive investment in the self fosters a powerful impulse to attach things of value to it as a way of compensating for its lack of intrinsic worth. This attachment to things of value is a vehicle for acquiring the admiration of others, which, it is imagined, will make up for the self-contempt that dominates inner experience. Adult greed, then, involves seeking recognition from others as a way of creating an alternative self, which is a contingent artefact of our relations with them. In other words, the issue about greed is whether the self is valued for itself, which is to say intrinsically, or only for what it has attached to it externally, which is to say for others. If the self cannot be valued in and for itself, then the individual remains throughout life dependent on recognition, specifically in the form of admiration gained in particular relationships with particular others (Miller 1980). This 'overdependence' on relatedness with others is the essential basis of greedy desire (Kernberg 1980: 246) and the definitive feature of adult greed. If greed develops out of the conviction that the self is of no value, and if that conviction develops out of the experience of the self as a locus of destructive desire, then greed operates as both cause and effect. The more intense the denigration of the self, the more powerful the hold greed has over it.

For the individual to move in the direction of a self-determined life, he or she must discover in the self the active force for deciding, choosing, and determining how to live and what matters in living. When, however, the self, which is the original human impulse to overcome the limits of external reality (the given world), is treated as a destructive force, this cannot happen. As a result, the original impulse to turn inward and to find there a starting point for living becomes an unrelenting impulse to repress the inner source of determination of conduct because it has been judged of no value, and, therefore, to attempt, by adapting to an external judgment of worth, to take from outside what is unavailable within. The result is denial of the intrinsic value of the self in favour of the accumulation of things of value, whose attachment to the self establishes a value it cannot establish on its own terms. Greed, in other words, is the product of the repression of self-interest, and of the failure to invest value in the self that would make it something of interest. And this means that the impulse to repress the self because of the attribution of greed to it is what makes it a destructive force; self-repression, rather than limiting greed, intensifies it.

If greed expresses the lack of self-worth, it will not be surprising to find in greedy desire a powerful impulse to treat the self-in-other with an equal lack of regard. Indeed, it is typically the case that greed promotes a predatory attitude toward others, one that treats them as either means to the accumulation of wealth or obstacles to

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doing so. The instrumental attitude toward others is consistent with rational calculation and suggests how action based on rational calculation can offer only a limited basis for reason. In reasoning with others, we acknowledge that they exist as independent centres of judgment and action. To reason with others is to give up any impulse to coerce them to act on behalf of our ends, and accept that they remain independent of and separate from us. In other words, reason is all about respect for self-boundaries, while greed offers no such respect.

II

Economic interest can provide a limited basis for reason in politics. But this limited basis tends to erode as the influence of greed increases. This erosion becomes that much more marked when we move toward a politics dominated not by interests but by belief. This result has to do with the way in which belief connects us to its object. While we are connected to the object of our interest by the prospect of satisfaction that having it will provide, we are attached to our beliefs by the conviction that our devotion to them makes us good.

The purpose of institutions and policy is now to validate the goodness of the object and our merger with it. To validate means to exclude all doubt, and to exclude all doubt means to assure that no one can question the identification between self, object, and the good. In other words, thinking must be excluded from politics, since there must be no moment in which the ends of policy are not yet determined. Exclusion of doubt and insistence on shared belief as a way of assuring validation creates a world of interaction with others in which differences are excluded. This is the world of the group.

While the goal of merger with a good object does not inevitably lead to involvement in groups, the latter is one of its most common expressions, and does follow in a logical way from the impulse at work in attachment to belief systems. This means that, whereas greed for things of value tends not to require any involvement in group life, the urge to become good by merger with a good object typically does. Conviction as the driving force in politics needs to be understood, then, as a feature of group life. Because of this, the dynamics of group life come to bear directly on the matter of reason in politics, and a brief consideration of those dynamics should help us understand why reason is unlikely to find a place in politics.

It is in the nature of groups, as Freud tells us, that they promote the 'intensification of affects and the inhibition of the intellect' (Freud 1959: 20). In groups, individuals transfer their capacities for judgment outside themselves, onto the group and its leader. To encourage this result, the group calls on the individual's capacity for identification and the associated sacrifice of any firm distinction between self and other. Groups, that is, are held together by the 'earliest expression of an emotional tie' (Freud 1959: 37), which is the impulse to become like the other and, in

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this sense, to create sameness. The group is all about merger and not at all about respect for self-boundaries and the integrity of others. The impulse to return to a primitive form of relating, one that excludes difference and operates before the development of the capacity for reason, makes groups, by their nature, the site of regression. Following this line of thinking, Wilfred Bion, in his essay on group experience, notes how, in joining what he refers to as the 'basic' group, all the individual needs to be able to do is to 'sink his identity in the herd' (Bion 1961: 89).

The basic group is the kind of group in which work is not the end, but, rather, belonging becomes an end in itself. When work is put aside and belonging becomes an end in itself, the group must distance itself from reality understood as what might exist outside the group and not be subject to control by it. In other words, such groups constitute themselves as 'self-contained closed systems' that have 'little or no desire to know' because knowing disturbs the internal harmony of the group (Turquet 1985: 77). Being 'fearful and aggressive toward knowledge', they are 'uninterested in consequences' (Turquet 1985: 77). Put another way, they are fearful and contemptuous of causal relationships because such relationships indicate the presence of a reality not subject to their control.

For our purposes, the essential point about groups of the kind with which Freud is primarily concerned is that they are vehicles for creating reality, and identification is the force they deploy for doing so. To create reality, they create an internal space in which recognition creates self and other. Through recognition, we subsume other into self, present into past. All of this is done in the service of imposing a group-defined reality of self and other.

We can see more clearly how the creation of reality by the group makes it the enemy of reason if we consider further the matter of causality to which I have just referred. One way to understand the problem of reason in politics is to consider it as part of the larger problem of the evolution of the idea of causation from a subjective act of will to an objective attribute of an external reality. Reason becomes relevant in politics only so far as it is possible to adopt the latter standpoint, or, put another way, to acknowledge and enter into a relation with an external reality over which it is not possible to assert omnipotent control. What is irrational in politics, as elsewhere, is the attack on external reality or, more precisely, the insistence that all reality is subject to the kind of control exerted over fantasy life. In fantasy, wishing makes it so, and nothing more is needed to make self and other conform to their desired ideals than agreement on the desirability of doing so.

A special problem arises in politics because politics is conceived as a process through which we create our world. So, politics lends itself to the fantasy of omnipotence to which I have just referred, and, indeed, seems to be its natural home. This is particularly true in the modern context where all 'fixed, fast-frozen' relations are 'swept away' (Marx and Engels 1977), a situation that makes it appear as if politics

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writes on a *tabula rasa*, as if institutions can become whatever we wish them to be, and as if, as part of those institutions, we can also become whatever we wish to be. Then, the only causation is that of the collective act of will constrained by nothing but the presence of an opposing will; and politics is the struggle of groups over control of the agency imagined capable of creating the world. This is the struggle over validation of the hope-invested beliefs embodied in ways of life.

Projection of the fantasised and wished-for omnipotent will onto government, understood as the agency with the power to create the world, gratify all desire and realise all hope, makes government responsible for all that affects our lives and, therefore, the target of desire, fear and blame. The assumed subjectivity of government willing makes citizens the potential victims of the arbitrary exercise of power. And this fantasy of the all-powerful government intervening capriciously into the lives of citizens necessitates its subjection to strict control, especially by starving it of the resources it would need to pursue its end of domination. The latter is the response to the inability to imagine that government might act in relation to an objective reality, one in which cause and effect are not linked in a purely subjective way. This has the effect of making the work of government impossible. But it also has the effect of making politics the struggle over control of the organisation invested with unlimited power to create and destroy.

In the modern world, group-created reality encounters a limit in the system of private realities made possible by the full development of the institution of private property. The imposition of limits on the group construction of reality is linked to reason to the extent that the property system is understood to have its own internal 'laws of motion', as Marx terms them, or, in the more usual formulation, is treated as a self-regulating system. Here, causation resides not in the will of a collective agent, the group, but in the objective functioning of a property system, in what Hegel refers to as the 'mutual interlocking of particulars' (Hegel 1952: 268). This means that, in place of the creation of reality by an act of will, there develops the idea of public policy aimed at bringing about desired outcomes by understanding and working within the limits of the laws of operation of an objectively functioning system. This way of thinking stands opposed to that associated with the idea that the group can create reality so that it accords with a collective fantasy.

When government conceives itself as existing in relation to civil society, and, indeed, as responsible for securing a vital private realm, then it cannot conceive itself as creating reality in the way groups are imagined by their members to do. This also means that government cannot conceive itself on the model of the group or as the agent of the group (the community of the whole). But from the standpoint of the group, once government conceives itself as something other than the agent of the group, it becomes the enemy of the aspiration of the group to make external reality a part of internal reality, and thus, by internalising all external reality, to secure the closed system and the way of thinking appropriate to it.

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The conclusion just drawn can be applied not only to politics driven by belief and, therefore, by the impulse to create identity, but to interest-based politics as well. Interest-based politics comes to share essential qualities of belief- or identity-based politics when interest is the binding force of a group, and attachment to interests is driven by the impulse to belong as much or more than it is driven by the material benefit that, on the surface, defines interest's object. It needs to be emphasised that interest groups arising in civil society and seeking to influence the political process are *groups*, and, therefore, experience the pressures effective in all groups to shift from vehicles for pursuing specific ends to ends in themselves. When this happens, interest groups coalesce around ideas inconsistent with logic and evidence (climate change is a myth, balanced budgets will lead us out of recession), ideas that, if implemented, will do tangible harm to their own advocates. My suggestion is that this happens, in part, as an expression of the power of group identification, which makes the material interests of members secondary to their interest in belonging to the group. In other words, it is not so much interests that block reason as interest groups.

Thus, for example, there is an important distinction to be drawn between the interest of the individual business owner taken by himself or herself and the interest of the businessman acting as a member of a group. This difference lies not simply in the enhanced influence made possible by forming an association, but in the change in the nature of interest that goes with the creation of an interest group. For the individual business owner, deficit spending aimed at assuring economic growth is a policy that might very well serve his or her interest; but the group may not see the matter this way. For the group, more important than economic interest is validation of a belief system central to which is the idea that government is the enemy, a harmful and intrusive force intent on diverting resources to its own ends. Belief in this idea is a decisive part of membership in the group and builds a sense of shared identity among those in it. As a result, the group pursues ends and favours policies that are irrational from the standpoint of interest, policies having nothing to do with deliberation, reality testing, and causal relations. This move away from rationality in politics is fostered, then, not by the dominance of interest, but by making interest a group phenomenon. The effort to advance interests by forming an association of like-minded persons moves thinking from reason to more primitive forms linked to identification.

The conclusion just drawn would seem to conflict with the idea that the movement within civil society in the direction of associations offers a connecting point between the autarchy of self-interest and the development of an interest in public ends, the idea that, as a member of an association, the individual 'belongs to a whole which is itself an organ of the entire society', and 'is actively concerned in promoting the comparatively disinterested end of this whole' (Hegel 1952: 153). To the extent that the associations referred to are groups in the sense considered above, the idea that associations in civil society provide an important link to public ends

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consistent with freedom and self-determination does become problematic. It is possible, however, to consider associations not as groups, or, at least, to think of them as a distinct kind of group to which the concerns raised here about groups do not apply. We can, in other words, distinguish between those groups for which being in the group is an end in itself, and those groups that do work that connects them outside the group.

Freud directs our attention to this other possibility of group life, a possibility he associates with 'those stable groups or associations in which mankind pass their lives, and which are embodied in the institutions of society' (Freud 1959: 15). He characterises those groups of which a higher opinion might be formed not only as more stable, but also as 'organised' and 'artificial' (Freud 1959: 49). Since these organised or artificial groups only operate where the regression typical in groups has been somehow limited if not prevented, their existence expresses the emotional development of their members and the special emotional capabilities made available by that development. Ultimately, what distinguishes the two kinds of group is devotion to work involving something other than securing adherence to the group-constituting fantasy and to fending off contact with any reality outside the group that might disrupt that fantasy. Then, the more interest groups coalesce around a shared belief system, the less their work (if we can use that term to refer to what they do) connects them to external reality, and the less the association they represent assures that reason has a place in politics.

III

The link between interest and reason suggested earlier is limited by two factors. One is the dominance of greed, and the other is the reshaping of interest as a group phenomenon. Where greed is an essential element, however implicit, of the group, the two factors serve to reinforce each other. This is typical in those groups that exist to a significant degree as vehicles designed to serve greed, whether that be the greed for riches or the greed to be good so dominant in groups whose purpose is to secure the special moral standing of their members. In groups of the latter kind, greed's object is not riches as markers of the good but the good itself. The implicit, and often explicit, moral quality of group identification links the group to the greed of its members and makes the pursuit of group interest the enemy of reason. All of this tends, then, to link the attack on reason originating in the attachment of greed to interest to the attack on reason originating in the shift from politics grounded in interest to politics grounded in belief systems and the need to assure their validation.

Indeed, we can say that individual greed and the impulse toward losing the self in the group represent two alternative responses to the same problem, which is coping with a denigrated self by forming a relation to something outside that is judged good. And this means that the strategies used to cope with the attack on the self also foster

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the attack on reason that is so prominent a part of contemporary politics. While, on one level, the two responses to the denigrated self are sharply opposed, this opposition appears less absolute when we take into account the important role greed plays in groups. The group protects itself from the greed of its members not by eliminating greed, but by shifting it from the individual to the group as a whole and making the group the vehicle through which the member's greed can be expressed and empowered. By joining the group, the individual makes himself or herself the locus of what is good, and indeed of everything that is judged of value. In the group, the good is absolute and attached exclusively to members. Through merger into the group, the member becomes worthy of what one author refers to as the 'ultimate narcissistic fulfillment' (Glasser 1992). The difference between the individual and the group is not that in one greed is the driving force and in the other it is not, but, rather, that in one greed is an individual phenomenon while in the other it can only be expressed by the group as a whole and its leader. The know-no-limits quality of the acquisitive spirit expressed most notably in the accumulation of wealth finds its parallel in the know-no-limits quality of group life, in which it is imagined that what constrains the individual operating on his or her own no longer places restrictions on the collective. This means that the attack on reason stems from the prominence of greed whether that attack is associated with the individual or the group. In either case, greed, originating in the inability to invest value in the self, promotes political movements for which reason is the enemy because of reason's connection to the acknowledgement of an external reality that places limits on gratification.[2]

The intense emotional states that tend to dominate in politics and make any appeal to reason useless stem from the intensity of the insistence on the possibility we will realise a wished-for state, and the intensity of our need to dispel, even destroy, any forces assumed to stand in the way of our wish. Aggression in politics is, in other words, not a response to a specific agenda such as the increasing role of government, but, rather, a part of the attack on reason itself, which is an attack on limits. Then, so far as government is associated with limits and, therefore, with reason, aggression must be directed against government. The increasing influence of group identification in politics means that policy-making is not about specific issues (employment, environment, and so on), but always about belonging and the investment of value in doing so as an end in itself. Then, what appears to be a discussion of real, concrete issues is, in reality, nothing more than a struggle over the standing of the group and of those belonging to it. When this is the case, reasoned argument about the issues does not matter.

The space in politics that might otherwise be occupied by reason is occupied instead by fantasy, specifically fantasy associated with the prospect of the ultimate fulfillment. Reason and fantasy differ in essential respects, and this difference accounts for the quality and nature of political engagement. Fantasy depicts subjective

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reality in a narrative form; it is the narrative of the wished-for self in the wished-for world. It is concrete; it is driven by a powerful impulse associated with the prospect of gratification; it attacks the boundaries between persons so far as those are experienced as obstacles to gratification. By contrast, reason is abstract, deliberate, and acknowledges boundaries between self and other, internal and external reality. In fantasy, actors, time and space are all concrete and particular. Abstraction is not allowed. Reason attacks the irreducible quality of fantasy implicit in its attachment to what is concrete and particular. It does so by offering the abstraction of possibilities yet to be determined in place of the life already fully formed. Abstraction makes the particular life something contingent, even ephemeral, no longer absolute and inevitable. By doing so, reason undermines the moral authority of ways of life already determined.

In fantasy, all things are possible, so, fantasy is the ultimate locus for the creation of reality. The problem for fantasy is the translation of the purely subjective, or internal, reality created to serve subjective desire into an objective reality of interaction of separate persons. This translation involves overcoming the barriers implied in the separation of persons into distinct units. If to create reality is to control reality, and if to control reality is to assure that all wishing conforms to our own so that the subjective can be made objective through an enforced sharing of desire's object, then reason attacks fantasy at its most fundamental level. Reason means that we must give up the omnipotent control over reality associated with fantasy and, therefore, also the prospect of gaining the ultimate narcissistic gratification the narrative of the fantasy leads us toward and assures that we will attain.

Reason demands that the impulse to gain the ultimate gratification be countered by another force. Countering this impulse is the work of thinking, which is deliberate rather than impulsive. Internally, the starting point for impulse-driven action is thoughts in the form of images representing driving factors in the mind. Thoughts are something the mind has whereas thinking is something the mind does. Thinking creates ideas that can make action the result of deliberation. Thoughts have a self-contained quality that resists thinking and even experiences thinking as a threat. Bion clearly indicates the importance of thinking in relation to thoughts when he notes how 'thinking has to be called into existence to cope with thoughts' (Bion 1967: 111). Put another way, thinking is what we do to bring thoughts under the dominion of the self. In doing so, we create for ourselves a basis for action different from, and in important ways opposed to, fantasy.

Fantasy is registered in the mind in the form of what Ronald Fairbairn (1958) refers to as a 'frozen drama'. Fantasy, then, is not only a narrative depiction; it is a scripted drama that must be endlessly repeated. But beyond repetition of the drama in thought, there is the enactment and reenactment of the drama in interpersonal space. This enactment expresses the power of the urge to make the subjective objective, or, at least, to create the semblance of objective reality for it. The end of fantasy is not

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simply to have the self exist in a world specifically made for it, but to have others act in ways predetermined for them by the forces shaping the narrative. This is the dramatic aspect of fantasy, and clearly marks its opposition to reason, where, as I suggest above, deliberation replaces impulse, the abstract replaces the concrete, and acknowledging limits replaces the attempt to exert omnipotent control through which we seek to create our world.

When public life becomes the site for enacting fantasy, the stakes are raised. Now politics involves nothing more or less than a struggle over the realisation of the hope for the ultimate fulfillment, which is the underlying meaning of fantasy. Those who resist the effort to enlist them in the enactment of fantasy become obstacles to gaining the fulfillment promised in fantasy's narrative. As the obstacles to this promise, they become the targets of aggression. This means that the dominance of fantasy in public life implies heightened emotional states and mobilisation of significant aggression. Aggression mobilised to protect fantasy is aggression mobilised to prevent reality testing and appeal to any objective logic embedded in reality that might call into question the fulfillment of the hope expressed in the fantasy.[3] It follows that, where emotions rise and aggression takes over, there can be no space for reason.

IV

The more powerful the fantasy element in politics, the less compelling the link between the rhetoric of rights and justice and the ideal of the person conceived as the locus of freedom, which is to say in abstraction from 'every concrete restriction and value' (Hegel 1952: 37). Rather than indicating how the ideal of freedom and self-determination is embedded in ways of life, the rhetoric of justice invokes primitive notions of causation and suggests the presence of powerful resistance to abstract thinking. Where fantasy predominates, justice tends to refer not to freedom, but to entitlement, not to recognition of personhood but to the conviction that all failure of gratification can be made good by assigning responsibility to others and seeking retribution. Conceived in this way, the abstract quality of justice, if it does not disappear altogether, must be clearly subordinated to particular need and the demand that it be satisfied. Here, we are dealing with primitive notions that conceive justice in personal or group terms, especially as a matter of personal gratification and group identity.

This tendency is especially marked where rights are made to derive from need as is implied in the idea of a right to the things we need. If right derives from need, then need is not shaped by the freedom we associate with the idea of right. Need is understood instead as an irreducible, even natural, aspect of living and the individual, so far as we can use that term, is conceived as the loci not of self-determination, but

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of needs that impose themselves independently of self-determination, thus 'basic need', or the need for the culturally shaped 'subsistence.' Once we conceive individuals as driven by needs understood in this way, we disconnect right from freedom and conceive it instead as a vehicle for need satisfaction, to be judged by its efficacy in achieving that end. The disconnection of right from freedom also disconnects it from reason, since determining right does not demand that the individual think, and in so doing make the self the source of need and institutions the setting in which self-determination also determines what we need and how we acquire what we need. This means that the importance of the language of rights and justice does not reflect the importance of reason and freedom but indicates the power of ways of thinking antithetical to them.

Equation of justice with the transfer of loss onto others involves the same confusion of right with (particular) need, a confusion that indicates the weakness rather than the strength of reason in public discourse. Evidently, there are important cases where loss is the work of definable subjects and the appropriate assignment of responsibility plays a significant role. At the same time, the importance of cases of this kind does not support the conclusion that an ideal of justice as freedom is embedded in institutions and ways of thought but, rather, leads us to conclude that being and doing are dominated by primitive impulses associated with entitlement (Levine 2008: 26-27).

In these cases, justice is conceived concretely as is the end and subject of rights. This is done so that justice can serve needs understood to be determined independently of self-determination: basic needs, subsistence, preferences, and the need to make all experience of loss the consequence of subjective will. The prevalence of ideals of justice and right, then, do not suggest the power of freedom and reason as implicit, if not overt, factors in shaping institutions and interaction, but rather the opposite.

V

While politics is not an arena for reasoned debate, it is an arena for the struggle over reason. Indeed, much of public life consists of a battleground for this struggle in which real social issues are subsumed into fantasies about identity. Central to these fantasies is the conviction that reason is the enemy of hope. What is hoped for is identification of the self with the good, and the group is the primary vehicle for advancing this hope. Because of this, mobilising reason-based arguments against the irrational trends in politics can have little effect. Indeed, once we understand the implications of group attachment for the way people think and interact, we can hardly avoid the conclusion that reason cannot play a significant role in politics. Whether we are speaking of groups organised around interests or around identity, and, as I suggest

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above, the distinction is not as sharp as we might at first assume, attachment to the group limits access to reason. And since the political process favours groups over individuals, it must inevitably limit the influence of reason.

But more fundamental than the group dynamic is the role of greed in it, which also affects economic interests, driving them in a direction inconsistent with reason. In the end, it is greed that poses the main obstacle to reason in politics, either the greed associated with the private accumulation of wealth, or the greed associated with the effort on the part of groups to establish an equation between the good and the particular qualities and beliefs of their members. Greed attacks the boundary between internal and external, undermining the idea that there is an enduring reality outside the group and outside the subjective desire of the individual, a reality to which reason provides us access. The struggle over reason, then, is a struggle over reality, or more specifically, a struggle between reason and greed.

What I refer to as 'the struggle over reason' I have elsewhere discussed in the language of accepting loss. This is the loss of the hope for the ultimate narcissistic fulfillment. The capacity for reason is the capacity to go on living without the prospect for the ultimate fulfillment promised either by the group or by the endless accumulation of wealth. For reason, we must give up the idea that we are uniquely worthy and accept life in a world where our worth is contingent and limited. This is possible only so far as the contingent life is deemed of value, even if its value is not of the same order as that demanded by greedy desire. We reject reasoned argument because only by doing so can we hold to the conviction that the loss of our unique and absolute moral standing can be made good. No exercise of reasoned argument can appeal to an unreasoned attachment to a hope for a fulfillment without which we are convinced that life can have no meaning.

For reason to have a place in politics, the project of enacting fantasy and seeking, thereby, to fulfill the hope embedded in it must be given up. In the end, the hope for the ultimate fulfillment is the hope that we can replace a self judged unworthy of it by one whose value knows no limits. In place of reasoned argument in achieving this end, what is needed is a way to counter the conviction that the self has no value, since it is this conviction that empowers all movements against reason. Strengthening the self cannot be the work of moral education because morality represents the attachment to an external good self through which the intrinsic badness of the self can be disavowed. This makes morality a part of the attack on the self. There are, however, forms of education that do not inculcate moral values, but speak to the individual's capacity to recognise the potential for self-determination present in self and other (Levine 2011: Chapter 7). To speak to the self understood as this potential for a life yet to be determined is to strengthen the self and make it possible for conduct to express its presence. In brief, we can say that to strengthen reason against the forces working against it is to strengthen the self against the demands for

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moral thinking, and to strengthen the state as a counter to the power of the group, so that dependence on the group will be weakened and with it the need to repress the self in the interests of survival.

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Notes

[1] In the following, when the term 'interest' is used without qualification, it refers to material or economic interest as described above.

[2] Insistence on the ultimate fulfillment has the paradoxical effect of dismissing the possibility or desirability of seeking gratification in reality expressed in the self-deprivation demanded in many groups. Contempt for reality is consistent with experience of it as inferior to the wished-for world, and, therefore, what gratification it offers as an inferior and suspect alternative that must be renounced if we are to sustain our hope for a true gratification in a world 'beyond'.

[3] Aggression in politics can also be mobilised by the need to prevent others from having what we cannot have for ourselves, in other words, by envy rather than greed. Then, the end of politics becomes the deprivation of others rather than the satisfaction of the self. The more envy comes to dominate in politics, the more destructive political processes are likely to be since the goal of envy is not to acquire the good but to prevent others from doing so even if that means destroying the good.

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