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DE JOUVENEL'S PURE POLITICS: REDEFINING THE POLITICAL IN POST- WORLD WAR II THEORY

Jouni Vauhkonen (2002): A Rhetoric of Reduction, Bertrand de Jouvenel's Pure Theory of Politics as Persuasion. Jyväskylä Studies in Education, Psychology and Social Research 209. Jyväskylä, FIN: University of Jyväskylä.

I had the honor of being thesis opponent for Jouni Vauhkonen's *A Rhetoric of Reduction: Bertrand de Jouvenel's Pure Theory of Politics as Persuasion* (2002). The study explores the theoretical writings of de Jouvenel from the mid-1940s to the mid-1960s, the period during which he wrote in both French and English on political power, politics and politicians, forms of government, political groups, authority, and political process. The focus of Vauhkonen's attention is the formula de Jouvenel articulated as the essence of political process: "A tells B to do H". That formula (a speech act) is understood to be doubly reductionistic, that is, both a microscopic lens through which to redefine or purify political science/theory and an essentialization of pragmatic political acts. I am writing this article as both a review

of and a commentary upon Vauhkonen's study and the subject matter with which he is dealing.

The study is framed rhetorically and textually. Vauhkonen develops the book with the help of Quentin Skinner and Kari Palonen: Skinner's understanding of the historical-rhetorical contexts of theory and Palonen's conceptualization of *texta*, i.e., intra-texts, inter-texts, co-texts, and context as interpretive approaches to more fully analyzing political writing. Vauhkonen wants "to find out what de Jouvenel may have been doing in saying what he said" (p. 3). The saying is interpreted principally with the help of Palonen, and the doing, more with guidance from Skinner.

The book rolls out in roughly three sections: (1) It opens with what is termed an intra-textual strategy: internal relationships between ideas developed in various of de Jouvenel's writings are probed in an attempt to discover dynamic as well as sustained aspects of his thinking over the two decades under scrutiny. (2) The second section deals with what are identified as co-texts in a so-called historical-rhetorical reading of de Jouvenel's thought. The book provides a demonstration that de Jouvenel's book chapter "Pseudo-Alcibiades" attempted a reversal of Plato's ethical analysis of relationships between philosophy and politics. In the heart of the second section, the end-of-ideology debate in France and the United States is expertly reviewed, and then the French exploration of depoliticalization (*dépolitisation*), including discussions of political banality and various political parties' moves toward so-called unpolitical beliefs, is featured. The idea of *dépolitisation*, particularly, is shown to have both theoretical and practical-pragmatic implications. (3) Third comes the rhetorical study, termed a rhetorical-historical reading, involving a search for what Aristotle called enthymemes (see below), and a probing of "A tells B to do H" as a formulation that reduces the scope of politics to its most basic unit — one person asking another to pursue a line of conduct, that is, a political policy.

Questions can be raised about Vauhkonen's handling of each of these three sections of the work. I raise them less to criticize the book than to open dialogues on theoretical and metatheoretical issues that his work suggests. To begin: The intra-textual approach essentially collapses de Jouvenel's writing from the '40s, the '50s, and the '60s into a single body of thought. While that is not necessarily a serious problem

in political studies committed to philosophical propositions and comparisons, it certainly seems to do damage to a work committed to rhetorical principles. A kind of semiotic — almost semantic — emphasis comes through, as concepts are explicated largely for their definitional qualities. De Jouvenel's understanding of what it means to be *un politicien*, his discussion of the *terminus ad quem* (the ultimate regime), his conceptualization of relationships between politicians and citizens, and the classic worry over relationships between political means and ends are explored systemically in writings across the time period. Such a reading of de Jouvenel has the feel of a formalist exegesis; de Jouvenel's thoughts are de-historicized, even de-rhetorized in part, by such moves. The rhetorician's — and Skinner's — commitments to the study of discourse-in-use, language-in-context, are left behind in this intra-textual analysis.

More interesting to students of rhetoric and politics is the second section, to co-textual study: In what ways were de Jouvenel's inquiries related to other, contemporaneous political questions, practical and theoretical? One should note that the question is answered in this book by de Jouvenel, not Vauhkonen; that is, the author argues that there are allusions to the end-of-ideology debate and *dépolitisation* in de Jouvenel's writings. Granted, one can argue that we better understand authors' intentions by following their allusions to related contexts. And granted, there is a good chance that the co-texts — and their contexts — as identified by authors will reveal something of their skills in analysis, refutation, and theorization. But, one should not grant that contexts so referenced are the end of the matter.

De Jouvenel's writings over the two decades under examination came during the author's residencies in France, Great Britain, and the United States, meaning that numerous political contexts were potentially relevant even if de Jouvenel did not mention them. His concerns for theoretical simplification and focus, for ideological misasmas, governmental responsibility, etc., would take on more and equally interesting implications if explored vis-à-vis: the debates over centralization and nationalization of educational and transportation industries in post-war Great Britain; the sorrow expressed over the end of socialism in the 1947-48 numbers of the *Partisan Review*; not only the end-of-ideology but also the much broader end-of-liberalism arguments in the United States; the decolonialization uproar in

France; the analysis of language games and pictorialization in Wittgenstein; the coming of speech act theory in England and the United States as a tool for understanding political discourse; the discussion of the role of tradition and traditionalism in the new science of political anthropology as it was developing in the work of Georges Balandier in France and Edward Shils in the United States, for example; and even the coming of game theory as a method for analyzing political disputation in the work of economist Kenneth Boulding and political theorist Anatol Rapaport at the University of Michigan.

I do not mean to suggest that Vauhkonen should have explored all of these contexts in hopes of finding all of the possible historically based applications of de Jouvenel's work. Rather, I would argue that social-historical contexts other than those too easily identified as "co-texts" could enrich and make even more relevant de Jouvenel's works in three different countries. The rhetorical force of works always must be understood within contexts — even contexts not salient to the author of those works. Plato could have had no idea of how his writings would be used in fascist contexts, nor could Marx have predicted Stalinism. The 1950s architects of Third-World African nationalism and post-colonialism likely were surprised with the applications of their arguments by First-World American black nationalists in the late 1960s.

The assessment of rhetorical force depends, often, less on explicit argumentation than on the contextualization and even recontextualization of discourses. The power of the enthymeme lies less in rational demonstration than in the moral perceptions of an audience, as de Jouvenel well understood: "The views of the good which are presently held are the politician's data which he uses to move people as he desires" (de Jouvenel quoted in Vauhkonen, p. 27). Those views spring from people living in a here-and-now, not from philosophical abstractions and general logical demonstrations.

The point here is this: I applaud Vauhkonen's analysis of the end-of-ideology debates (I came to appreciate not just its American champion Daniel Bell but likewise its French ambassador, Raymond Aron) and *dépolitisation* (a movement so far as I know without American support immediately after World War II). But, I hunger for more contexts within which to view de Jouvenel, all the more to appreciate the many facets of his thought.

I come now to the third section, that which is explicitly rhetorical in its focus; I begin where I left off in the examination of the second movement of the study: the enthymeme. Vauhkonen has relied upon a definition of enthymeme from the famous Oxford philosopher-historian of skepticism, Myles F. Burnyeat. Burnyeat defines an enthymeme as it often was in the late nineteenth century, as a truncated syllogism (or argument, *sullogismos*), constructed for “the simple audience” by “the speaker [who] is no specialist on the question to be decided” (quoted in Vauhkonen, p. 15). Such a definition (1) makes the enthymeme rationally inferior to a proper or complete syllogism, (2) suggests that political reasoning must be bifurcated because of intellectual or class differences between audiences, and (3), worse, ignores the source of its persuasive power, its bases in audiences’ generally accepted beliefs (*doxa*). De Jouvenel, as I suggested earlier, emphatically understood doxastic power in his “Pseudo-Alcibiades”, and indeed used that source of persuasion to suggest politics’/politicians’ virtues in the face of philosophy’s/philosophers’ critiques.

The issue here, of course, is really not over which is the better definition of *enthymeme*. Rather, I am interested in where definitions of *enthymeme* lead one’s inquiry. Burnyeat’s definition leads Vauhkonen to construct chains-of-reasoning out of de Jouvenel’s ideas, so that the chains themselves become the objects of our attention. A more rhetorically (situationally) attuned definition might lead us to examine de Jouvenel’s writing as doxastic, that is, as grounded in the values and beliefs of his readers. Then we are positioned to ask the rhetorician’s foundational question: *For what audiences was de Jouvenel writing?* People in the international Congress for Cultural Freedom, with whom he worked? French leftist intellectuals, his genealogical kin? American or British liberals and socialists, his English-speaking interlocutors? With Quentin Skinner, I believe that “understanding any proposition requires us to identify the question to which the proposition may be regarded as an answer” (quoted in Vauhkonen, p. 10), with the corollary that we cannot identify such questions without knowing who might be asking them. Who sat in de Jouvenel’s audiences? Who was expected to read him? A rhetorical analysis that ignores particular audiences, in my view, is not complete.

Additional facets of the audience question come to mind when we think rhetorically about de Jouvenel's formula, "A tells B to do H" [simply, ABH]. While I am willing to accept the assertion that the formula/speech act is the heart of de Jouvenel's deliberative political rhetoric, I think that it can be further developed. For one thing, if the ABH formulation is the conclusion of an enthymeme, then as I have been arguing we must inquire into audiences: What is it in de Jouvenel's French, British, and American audiences that led him to attempt to persuade them that politics is a matter of A telling B to do H? For another, de Jouvenel complicates the formula by identifying three different species of As: A! is another politician or person of equal rank, A!! is a political/party leader, and A!!! is a sovereign. So, the formula can be written in three forms: A!BH, A!!BH, and A!!!BH. It should follow rhetorically, then, if there are three different kinds of speakers with such different *ethoi*, are there not different speech acts depending upon how we understand the idea of telling?

More specifically, the English verb "tell" is a speech act termed a directive—a saying that, if successful, culminates in an action by the person-told-to. (To be sure, "tell" can also have declarative or performative dimensions when it refers to a verbal act of story-making or story-reciting. From the ABH sentence structure, however, we clearly are not dealing with declaratives or performatives here.) The force of "to tell" when understood as a directive speech act cannot be assessed independent of context generally and, more important, independent of social and power relations between the interlocutors at the moment of the telling. This is what the rhetorical perspective brings to speech act theory: A!'s telling can probably best be understood contextually as a *request*; A!!'s telling, as *advice* or an *order*, depending upon the degree of party discipline involved in the political system; and A!!!'s telling, as a *command*. If there are three different possible directives in the illocutionary act "A tells B to do H", then of course there also are three different possible responses (up-takes): B might *comply* with A!'s request, *deliberate* or *approve* of A!!'s advice in a party congress, and *obey* A!!!'s command.

Returning to the general point, a speech act analysis done by a rhetorician cannot and should not decontextualize utterances, no matter how much some of J. L. Austin's or John Searle's followers would wish they could. Or, to put this in the language of the for-

mula, rhetorical analysts should be committed to (1) determining the sources of A's social and power relations with B, (2) exploring B's options in response to A's telling, and (3) even asking what it means "to do H" in particular situations. Does "doing H" involve extra-political (extra-institutional) behavior, voting or other marks of personal response or political commitment, some collective organizational activity such as party formation, or even just a rethinking of B's social-political identity in light of the recommendation to "do H", as we could have witnessed in the *uhuru* days of African decolonization or the 1970s height of women's consciousness raising?

The question about doing-H brings us to one more level of analysis of de Jouvenel and of Vauhkonen's interpretation of ABH as a "rhetoric of reduction". It is tempting to argue, as does Vauhkonen, that de Jouvenel has reduced politics to a single speech act. If he is suggesting that "the political" has been reduced by being divested of its institutional activities — governing, administering, judging, redistributing, punishing and rewarding, etc. — then, yes, there is a reduction in the scope of the political. All of those assertive, directive, expressive, and commissive speech acts have been reduced to a single directive: telling someone to do something. But, it can be argued with equal force that he was expanding, not reducing, politics in the ABH formula. In "A tells B to do H" de Jouvenel was exploring what it means, not to administer government, but to act politically. In focusing on what it means to act politically, he was radically inflating the idea of politics by depicting it in even everyday acts wherein one person tells another what to do, what conduct to pursue.

And herein, to me, lies the genius of de Jouvenel's theorizing and Vauhkonen's exposition of that theorizing: "*The political*" *potentially becomes deeply imbedded in all speech directives, whenever and wherever A tells B to do H*. I certainly am not asserting that de Jouvenel was conscious of all of the possible implications of such a position, and Vauhkonen does not pursue them. The fact that he touches upon matters of political ethics, the demands of responsibility in civic politics, and de Jouvenel's concern for political order in his writings about sovereignty all suggest that Vauhkonen is aware of the formula's potentials, yet he leaves them alone.

That de Jouvenel was reformulating the idea of what it means to act politically in the period lying between the fascist and Stalinist regimes of the '30s and the great western popular political actions of the '60s is a fact that begs for more development. De Jouvenel's reformulation of political behavior, I should think, is best understood as the precursor to the West's attempts to grapple with both the personal and the social understood as politics, that is, with both the identity and class politics of our time. When "acting politically" comes to be understood, not as actions taken by Aristotle's or Cicero's magistrate, but as popular activity designed to affect or even revolutionize the operations of the *polis* and the perceptions of the citizens residing within it, the world of politics has been made anew.

I will go no farther. In this review-commentary, of course I have cheated. I have asked Vauhkonen to write a different book — one without an intra-textual analysis, one where co-textualization is controlled by the historian-critic and not the author, and one where the rhetorical is defined wholly in terms of the popular. Of course, too, I hope that he will pursue one or more of these lines-of-inquiry in future work and in dialogue with additional scholars; de Jouvenel is such a rich thinker because of his associates and possible interlocutors, and the 1940s to 1960s, such a turbulent era in which to examine political theory. When political theory is explored for its grounding in time and place, for its contestation of a variety of other practical and conceptual discourses, and for its abilities to make demands of assent and allegiance upon its readers, then it breaks free from philosophically governed regimens and is assessed by its persuasive powers. That, ultimately, is the lesson we should derive from Vauhkonen's study. And that, too, I think, is what de Jouvenel was "doing in saying what he said".