

A Theory of Philippine Politics and Its Implications for National Development

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Politics is a process, and connotes some kind of system — simple or complex — which includes all those actions more or less directly related to the making of binding decisions for a society.

This process usually involves a struggle for power—*i.e.*, the power to make those authoritative decisions, meaning decisions that can be enforced in a given society. The process of decision making usually entails both conflict and cooperation, competition and compromise among countervailing forces in the society. When such forces are organized into active interest groups, pressure groups, and/or political parties, they can become effective influences, even dominant influences in the making of public decisions which are binding upon all.

Harold D. Lasswell spoke of politics as being all about *influence* and the *influential*, and subtitled his early book on *Politics: Who Gets What, When, and How?* Here he regards a body politic as "arenas" in which "participants are striving to accomplish their purposes by influencing."

In a later book with Kaplan, Lasswell in *Power and Society: A Framework for Political Inquiry* abandons an earlier reluctance to deal with values and assigns political science (the science of politics) a task beyond mere description, regarding it now as one of the policy sciences whose function is "to provide intelligence pertinent to the integration of values realized by and embodied in interpersonal relations," for which Easton called Lasswell "a policy scientist for a democratic society."

So when Louis Hartz avers that "inquiry into the Aristotelian good life . . . can never be outdated," we are witness to a return full circle of modern political science to the classical concept of politics

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as the means to a good life, an ethical instrument, an activity both necessary and inevitable to the human condition.

Plato's philosopher-king was supposed to be the perfect ruler — the embodiment of wisdom and power — who knew and did what was best for all. Aristotle of course disagreed here with his teacher, and would rather rely not on the elusive one best man but on laws, which embody the collective wisdom of the many, law being "reason unaffected by desire."

Studying more than a hundred and fifty different constitutions, Aristotle concluded that man is a political animal, that only a beast or a god can live without a state. Hence politics is the sovereign of the arts. The highest art is the art of the statesman, for it has to do with those decisions and activities necessary for securing the good life, the *summum bonum*, which was the classical rationale, and has ever been the ultimate justification for the possession and exercise of political power. Thus the science of politics, or the art of the statesman, has always been a challenge to the holders of political power. Both Socrates and Plato, like Aristotle after them, had relied on man's rationality, *i.e.*, the use of reason for acquiring the knowledge and the wisdom necessary to secure man's ends through a judicious choice of means.

It is difficult enough for men to agree about ends, but granting that common ends may be agreed upon, men may still disagree about the means to those ends. Disagreements in society may be resolved if justiciable in the courts of law, those not justiciable (and these would comprise the bulk of social controversy) by political means.

Political means may be peaceful or violent. The resolution of conflicts is never easy, and political battles are daily won or lost in the struggle for power, depending on the power, strength, or influence of the protagonists. Yet conflicts of interests have to be resolved somehow and some consensus secured, or a government will not function or a state endure. Thus, some element of *force* or coercion and a goodly element of *consent* (or at least acquiescence) are necessary for governance. Together, a preponderance of force and a constitutional consensus sustain a state. Even in the most advanced democracies there is no, and there need not be, absolute agreement among all the people all the time on all issues. If there were, and if this were possible, politics would not be necessary in the first place, for there would be no conflicts to resolve, no compromises to effect; both coercion and consent would be out of the

question. Such a society of complete conformity would hardly be human but utopian, a society of angels and saints, or a society of simpletons. Differences of opinion, conflicts of ideas and interests are daily social phenomena that compete for authoritative sanction, whatever the form of government. Therefore, politics in some form and to some degree exists in all human societies, and by definition in all political systems.

The Lockean principles of liberal democracy enunciated in the late seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries went well with Smithian *laissez-faire* capitalism. Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* was published in the same year (1776) of the American Declaration of Independence, which embodied Lockean political theory. Maximum political freedom was the natural brother of maximum economic freedom

However, late nineteenth and early twentieth century developments marked increasing disaffection and dissatisfaction with hitherto revered political and economic doctrines that had resulted in great disparities in the distribution of wealth from free private enterprise. No longer could reliance be placed on free competition as an invisible regulator; capitalist collusion and monopoly deformed and paralyzed the "invisible hand." Thus *laissez-faire* gave way in many countries to state regulation of economic activities, planned economies, and in some countries to state socialism of varying scope and objective.

Economic enterprise ceased to be the exclusive domain of private businessmen; the economy was now to be regulated, planned, supervised, and in some cases taken over completely by the state. The modern state thus developed beyond a purely political entity; limited government gave way to big government; big government became big business — the biggest business, and in some states the only business, as the state absorbed all businesses. The stakes in politics have always been high, even in the old days of limited state functions; in some states of fairly recent date these stakes have become all but total in the drive for complete control of every aspect of human life.

To be sure, many authoritarian, if not entirely totalitarian, states may have sprung from any idealistic human concern, a certain altruism or sympathy for the plight of the less fortunate, the underprivileged in society who could not compete in the existing institutional arrangements and welcomed a revision of the old rules of the game through alternative systems that promised relief from exploi-

tation and misery. Governments that had become inane spectators or even corrupt accomplices of worsening social situations soon succumbed to stronger structures, usually at the expense of individual liberty.

Ideologies offering "new" leads and "new" solutions to the stubborn problems of the human condition all but toppled the theories of Locke and Smith, drawing from Rousseau, Hegel and the German romantics, the French syndicalists, the philosophical anarchists, as well as from Marx, Lenin, Stalin, Mussolini, Hitler, Keynes, Roosevelt, Castro, and Mao.

Karl Mannheim in *Ideology and Utopia* observes that ideals are born of interests, whatever these may be at any given time. Men embrace the ideology that suits their purposes best. An ideology is a belief system functional to a set of interests. It is a package of values and ideals with a convenient label or handle which may serve as a crutch for or a bind in the promotion of an interest or set of interests, whether avowed or veiled, explicit or implicit.

Man after all is a rational being, not only because he is possessed of reason, but also because he is given to rationalization. Political man seeks power for many reasons, and having attained power, desires to maintain this and if possible extend it. But aside from this, he feels the psychological need to convince himself and as many others as possible that what he does and all that he stands for and strives for is right and just. Mortal man ever craves for approval, for recognition, for appreciation, for love, for immortality. Thus, beautifully packaged ideologies will always be with us, vying for our attention, our approval, and our adherence. For on the other hand, man needs to believe in something, or someone, and feels the psychological impulse to identify with the good and beneficent. Spiritual serenity (or mental health) requires a certain minimum of faith in God, or His surrogate, in one's self at least and/or in others. Even as man is naturally selfish, he yearns to be unselfish, or be regarded as unselfish, humane, or humanitarian. People seek a *credenda* (something to believe) and a *miranda* (something to admire) in whomever or whatever they would follow. People are moved by ritual, by ceremony and outward forms; but few look beyond or beneath the surface for the essence of things. An ideology serves as a handy package that can fill many psychological needs.

Indeed, many ideologies may have originated in human concern and compassion; yet often enough they have developed to

camouflage more basic, less altruistic interests. Even the neatest theories lose something upon translation into practice. Thus, the unbridled, unchecked, and unopposed application of theory to operate a given political system can cause social disequilibrium — an imbalance among competing forces and conflicting claims, which if unarticulated and uncorrected for long periods of time can lead to apathy, anomie, distress, and disorganization. Thus have political systems come and gone and political regimes risen and fallen. Political arrangements are usually shifting and temporary; worse, they can be ill-conceived and haphazard. Unless continually or regularly chastened by a peaceful two-way communication between ruler and ruled, even the best-conceived systems can stray from primary intentions and golden purposes. Truly democratic institutions have endured longest, because they have built-in mechanisms for political communication and peaceful change. Political regimes as social experiments can be shaky and unstable, indeed perishable, unless they are sweet and reasonable, wise and just, flexible and responsive as well as responsible, adjustable to the needs of the times and suited to the character and temperament of the people these are meant to serve.

Even the world's most reputable democracies assume more authoritarian tones when the situation calls for stronger government, stricter discipline, and more restraint on individual rights — mayhap *temporarily* to tide over a threatened system through a crisis. Most democratic constitutions provide for such emergencies as a matter of self-preservation, and a crisis government so based may still be constitutional though *de facto* authoritarian. Hence the term *constitutional authoritarianism*.

Any attempt to understand Philippine politics today must come to grips with this term, which seems to be in itself a contradiction in terms. A constitution is supposed to be a charter of liberty, a fundamental document establishing and guaranteeing individual rights against coercive authority, a basic document that defines and delimits the powers of government and fixes its accountability to the governed. Constitutional history is supposed to be a story of how freedom was won from the absolute monarchs and other authoritarian rulers. Is history indeed so cyclical that we shall see authoritarianism restored after all? But if it is indeed cyclical, then once more authoritarianism will give way to more libertarian phases, and so on.

The same constitution that establishes individual rights likewise recognizes the authority of the governing power to rule as the situa-

tion demands: it provides for extraordinary powers in case of emergencies, such as insurrection, rebellion, invasion, or even only threats of these, when the public safety requires it. The appraisal of the situation rests with the President of the Philippines according to the Constitution of 1935, with the Prime Minister according to the Constitution of 1973.

The tension between authority and liberty has ever been a delicate balance achieved hopefully for the good of all, and the ultimate test of whether authoritarian acts of government are still constitutional would go beyond the merely legal or juristic into what is ethical, moral or legitimate in order to maintain a given polity and sustain its people in the face of threats to their way of life and their prevailing system of values.

To be sure, various ideologies compete for the people's adherence and loyalty. The status quo is ever under attack. The proposed transvaluation of age-old values is not a new thing. Tradition itself comes under close scrutiny and criticism by those who would change the world along their notions of what is better or best. So let a hundred flowers bloom: welcome to the club. Variety is not only the spice of life: it is in the nature of politics itself.

There would seem to be no end to the variations of political forms, and constitutions are shaped and reshaped accordingly. Nor is the end of political struggle anywhere in sight. Those in power wish to remain in power; those out of power wish to get into power. The means may differ, and the schemes may be simple or elaborate, the excuses transparent or abstruse. Invariably, everyone interested in political power (which is the mainspring of all other power, since it includes the power of the state, and the state is sovereign over all) adopts the cause of the people and either champions it sincerely or merely pretends to champion it. The struggle for power continues constitutionally or extra-constitutionally, even unconstitutionally. Yet as long as a given constitution exists, it must perforce be defended against those that would sweep it out of operation in order to replace it with another more suited to their ideological predilections. To remake a constitution drastically or to replace an existing one with another distinctly different in philosophy and policy from it is to try to remake society itself, to reorder its priorities, and to redefine its values for reallocation. The entire effort sums up to no less than a revolution.

Whoever seizes the initiative here becomes the leader of the revolution, the initiator and director of social change according to his

lights and his discretion. The conditions in Philippine society from the mid-sixties to the early seventies might be considered to comprise a revolutionary situation. It was open season so-to-speak for any determined leader with ability, some program and the wherewithal to seize the moment and forthwith guide the circumstances of history. The Philippine ship of state had been drifting aimlessly, buffeted hither and yon, and was not really getting anywhere. In less elegant parlance, it was up for grabs. Any enterprising person representing some likely ideology might have taken her for himself. There was no lack of suitors, of would-be captains of state. The leftist threat loomed large; the rightist bid pressed almost as hard. How was a constitution of the center to survive? Clearly, resolute measures had to be taken. The revolutionary situation had to be confronted and diverted, deflected, parried, nay, seized, so that the revolution might proceed with the least pain and the least cost.

And what of the people—for whom all these are supposed to be—were they consulted? Did they realize what the stakes were? Did they know what it was all about? The people are the politicians' darlings, the ideologues' pets, the *cause celebre* of crusades. Yet the people are often the last to know about what happened or what is in store for them.

The Filipino people by and large are an uncomplaining lot, living simple, God-fearing lives. By nature trusting, friendly, and charming, these are people whom centuries of colonial subjection have rendered also reticent, shy, self-defensive, and docile. Yet a great many of them are intelligent, capable, and gifted. Most of them are also generous, peace-loving and law-abiding. Here generally are a people going about their daily tasks with scarcely a thought about the meaning of politics and how this may affect their lives. Even those who are drawn to participate in community (*barangay*) affairs are more social beings than political animals in the Aristotelian sense.

So how are such a people, by and large political innocents, truly to govern themselves? And if they can not or will not govern themselves, who will govern them? How will they be governed? Constitutions can be beautiful expressions of beautiful principles. Yet no constitution has really been self-enforcing. It lives or it dies as men will treat it. It can be sacred or it can be a scrap of paper. Much depends on the leaders of the polity; the rest depends on the people themselves. How far do they really care for enunciated principles? What is meant by meaningful participation?

Or is everything to be left in the hands of a philosopher-king, since he knows best and has all the power to do what he thinks best? It seems the easiest thing to rely on the one best man. Debate is avoided, action is swift. Decisions are made on the basis of mutual help and cooperation (*Tulong-tulong sa kaunlaran*).* Indeed, for developing countries in a race with time to modernize and uplift standards of life, the more expeditious the procedures for development the better. However, the human cost of too rapid modernization may be too great to bear—as the sociologists and social psychologists know only too well. An all-out emphasis on economic development at the expense of political and cultural progress may produce a lop-sided society of dehumanized people steeped in materialist values but deprived of a sensitivity for the finer things in life.

It may be safe to assume that on the whole Filipinos do wish to develop into a modern and more prosperous nation. They will follow a resolute leader who can show them the way. They are disposed to obey authority and inclined to peaceable occupations. They are grateful for favors done for them. They appreciate strong but compassionate father/mother figures. At this stage in their political development they will probably go more for Plato than for Aristotle, for the one best man rather than the laws, which for them have not always been the embodied collective wisdom of the many. If the several referendums under martial law are an accurate gauge of popular sentiment, the people would as of now rather have the philosopher-king decide for them—they would trust him more than their own elected representatives, at least for now. Perhaps their experience with Western-type democracy in the post-World War II period had not been the happiest. Within recent memory, there were the debating societies—the two chambers of Congress and the Constitutional Convention. Impromptu parliaments of the streets rose with the frequent demos, marring the peace of the campuses and the cities. The Filipino people it seemed had had a surfeit of politics—noisy, Machiavellian, and corrupt. They rather welcomed the discipline of a new order, yes, a "New Society", if that is possible. A new beginning, a fresh outlook—these were necessary for coping with the times, at the time.

However, it may be erroneous to assume that the people will buy Plato forever, that time will stand still. The very gains that economic

*Help and cooperation for progress.

and cultural development would bring can arouse in the people once again the latent yearning for more and more truly significant involvement in the affairs of the *polis* in the manner of Aristotle and Locke, Rizal and Mabini, Recto and Laurel. Indeed, no aspect of development may be neglected for long without adverse consequences. The Filipino people paid the price for an over-active political life to the neglect of economic concerns. They should not have to pay similarly for an over-emphasis on economics to the disdain of politics, *i.e.*, the right kind of politics which is statesmanship. In the final analysis, that society is best governed which truly governs itself. Arrangements to the contrary are but passing phases in a people's development and are bound to make way for more salutary dispensations. Growing up is a painful, tedious process, but growth is possible, maturity being the goal of all development.