

9.

THE DYNAMICS OF POWER, AUTHORITY AND FREEDOM

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This text is the synthesis of a personal interpretation of the dynamics that exist – within the overall human psycho-social relationships – between the psychological need for Power compared with and in conjunction with that of Authority and Freedom¹.

9.1. A PSYCHO-SOCIAL VIEW OF INSTITUTIONS

An appropriate starting point is Papagno's lapidary statement (1979): «There is no society without institutions». However, as «institutions» can be of two basic types, we must first agree on the meanings to be attached to this term. The validity of the opening statement, intended to express a necessary truth, remains unchanged (or is actually enhanced) but, correspondingly, it also acquires two different meanings. There are – and we may refer to these only – institutions of a formal nature that are explicit, manifest, and codified, even from an external standpoint, taking the form of a body of laws and regulations, more or less complex, but always stated and defined and not merely taken for granted. But there are also institutions of an informal nature that are, on the contrary, implicit, indeed taken for granted and hidden from view, and the effects of such institutions come from within, from the most concealed and deepest levels of man's intrapsychic activity and his interpersonal and social relations.

The fact of being formal members of a social group, i.e. *socii* of any given *societas*, implies, first and foremost and even more important than the observance of the rules that objectively govern any form of association, an involvement in the subjective dynamics resulting from a sense of belonging. In other words, it implies *membership*, a phenomenon characterized by complex and variable

¹ This contribution has already been published in 1989 (a date that is by no means coincidental) by the Ateneo Patavino, in its highly regarded periodical *Science and Culture*.

vicissitudes reflecting the pressures not only for, but also against participation in the particular form of association in question. Also, we must never lose sight of the fact that we are considering a form of social interplay always fraught with ambivalence and conflict. For example, the fact of being and considering oneself Italian – both for individuals and groups – is, at one and the same time, part of and/or pertains to both the formal and informal levels of «Italianness» as a having institution.

What we have just said fits in well with the observation that the limits of an approach based on criteria that are more relevant to constitutional or legal studies – or, if we may be permitted to say so, that reflect an objectivistic, sociologically oriented world-view – are inherent in the identification of institutions with society, and viceversa. Such an identification, if taken literally and interpreted radically, can lead only to more or less banal, unsophisticated histories of the «corridors of power», characteristically oblivious of human sciences in general and of anthropology and social psychology in particular.

The foregoing also implies, significantly, a correspondence or logical correlation with Gramsci's ideas on the difference between polity and society, the legal and the real state of a nation, without its necessarily implying, we should add, a process of identification or overlaying of the two distinctions. In effect, the dichotomy mentioned between formal/informal institutions may apply to both sides of the demarcation line between polity and society, albeit with a different level of probability. In other words, both polity and society are regulated and function (or become unregulated and cease to function) both at the level of the explicit and formalizing processes of interaction between the people forming part of them and at the level of the implicit processes involving the same people, which are none the less real even though they refer to communication and are without formalizing implications.

The phenomenon may be summarized as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. – Society and institutions as inter-relation processes.

	POLITY	SOCIETY
FORMAL INSTITUTIONS	Contents of values and norms codified by power	Contents of values and norms rationally shared, accepted and observed by individuals and groups
	LEGAL COMPACT	SOCIAL COMPACT
INFORMAL INSTITUTIONS	Types of accepted and shared communication process between citizens (or subjects) and power	Types of accepted and shared communication process between individual and individual, individual and own group, group and group, etc.
	CIVIC COMPACT	PSYCHOLOGICAL COMPACT

From this discussion, it is also quite clear that, contrary to what is generally thought, we must consider not just the link between polity and society, but rather two (if not four) problems of congruence: firstly, the one we have just mentioned and, secondly, the one that, correspondingly, can be assumed between the formal and informal levels of the two sides. In addition, there is also the problem of the overall congruence of the system but, at least for the time being, we shall avoid going into that aspect. As can be observed, the various problems can, to a large extent at least, be put in relation with the way in which power is wielded and, therefore, in an ongoing two-way causal relationship, with the sources of legitimation of power itself or, rather, using terms more suitable to include the informal institutional level as well, the way in which this power was generated and formed.

Returning to our main subject, therefore, we may rephrase the opening quotation and say: There are no institutions without power. This applies of course to the formal level and, perhaps even more so, to the informal level as well. In this sense, an examination and an analysis of the anthropological meaning of power, its cultural and psycho-social scope, is inextricably bound up with a similar examination and analysis of the term «authority», its meaning and scope. It should also be borne in mind that, from the viewpoint of this study, «mental» scope or representations have precedence over the social or historical-cum-institutional dimensions of the problem.

9.2. THE FALSE SYNONYMY BETWEEN POWER AND AUTHORITY

To understand the relationship between the terms «power» and «authority», a linguistic digression may be useful to analytically demonstrate first of all why these two words cannot be considered synonyms, contrary to what is generally thought.

The words are not synonymous for the simple reason that the terms «authority» and «power» do not refer to concepts that necessarily coincide. Without the pretension of undertaking a fully fledged linguistic study, which would go beyond the limits of this essay and the competence of its author, we shall nevertheless try to examine the meaning of these terms and their semantic origins, i.e. what they have expressed and continue to express in the minds of men throughout the course of history.

To do this, we must use the tools provided by semiotics, which (using Morris's terminology) includes syntax, semantics and pragmatics, with particular emphasis on semantics, which deals with the meanings conveyed by messages. As is well known, even when transmitted with the maximum syntactic accuracy, signs and symbols make no sense unless there is a prior agreement between the sender and the receiver on their conventional meaning. The emphasis given to semantics is not enough, however, as the three components or factors mentioned are interdependent. In the case we are considering, the study of the meanings

of power and authority and the relationship between them (not forgetting the unavoidable implications and links with liberty) is a problem which concerns, both semantics and pragmatics, jointly and separately, for those aspects which fall within their respective fields of application. To examine the relationships existing between power, authority and liberty, we must therefore closely examine both the meaning acquired by a whole range of signs used in the innumerable messages exchanged by people and the bidirectional influence of the behaviour stemming from them, i.e. the pragmatic aspect.

9.2.1. *Power*

«Power» means «faculty» (as in «mental, or physical faculty», for example), «legally assigned might», «possibility and capability of acting». All these concepts are well expressed – in our European linguistic and cultural area – by the Latin term *potestas*, which means both the ability to realistically use some form of might to assert one's own will, and the legitimate actualization of such will. (We shall later see, however, that there are in fact two kinds and sources of legitimation: «republican» and «imperial»). These meanings are reflected in the Latin verb «posse» and its derivatives in the Romance languages (*potere, pouvoir, poder*, etc.) which have two complementary, albeit quite distinct meanings: «being capable of» («can») as opposed to «being allowed to» («may»).

A person with power is, therefore, by definition a doer, one who is allowed and able to act, one who has the pragmatic right to do something, a performer, an achiever, a controller of things, a person who gets things done. It is interesting to note, for example, that the German noun *Macht* (which corresponds to English «might», both from the Common Germanic *mabtiz*, a derivative of the verbal root *mag-* to be able or powerful, cf. Old English, Old High German and Gothic *magan*, meaning «to be able») is identical in form with the third person singular present indicative of the verb *machen* (deriving from Old High German *mabhōn*, akin to Old English *macian*, both deriving from a Common West Germanic root, meaning «to make» or «to do») and is sometimes used, in cases where the English word «force» would be used rather than «might», to indicate the concrete nature of the power involved, (e.g. the term *Wehrmacht* literally means «defence-force», i.e. army, but etymologically the two words mean «war-might», or «war-makes» if we interpret *macht* as a verb, in other words, a force that «makes war», «is able to make war», «may and therefore can, i.e. has the power to make war»).

The term «power» thus refers to a situation of factual and legal capability and is applicable to the situation not only of «magistrates» in all societies of the «republican» type (from Ancient Rome to the Republic of Venice), but also to that of «prefects» or whatever the title may be of those responsible for various activities in societies of the «imperial» type. The difference between the two meanings of the same word – and also between the two ways in which *potestas* or power is exercised – derives from the two constellations of meanings, which are radically different from each other.

9.2.2. Authority

The word «authority» etymologically implies «authorship», i.e. generating something or someone, being the source or origin, the author and creator, all concepts that are well expressed – once again in our European linguistic and cultural area – by the Latin term *auctoritas* (cf. Greek *auxánein*) from which the English word derives. The key word in this case is the Latin verb *augere* which has the following meanings: generate, increase, enlarge, extend, accelerate, cause to grow, propose, support, develop, authorize and allow.

«Authority» thus means (Benveniste, 1969) the conferring, both conceptually and on the level of values, with precedence and in addition to the social dimension, of the possibility and capability of being and doing. Similarly, the term «author», in this context, means a creator, a promoter or inventor of opportunities, a person who lays foundations and extends possibilities, a protector and a guarantor. The role of an authority figure, or of a person temporarily endowed with authority, a situation in which anyone may find himself, is always identifiable both at the level of individuals and of those supra-individual entities that we may generically term groups: this function is present wherever and whenever someone supports and advises while, at the same time, assisting another, i.e. acts within the framework of a helping relationship with someone else.

The most paradigmatic case is that indicated by the word «council» (from the Latin *consilium*) indicating a body, however termed, endowed with authority of some kind or another. Normally and institutionally (in all cases at the informal level and often at the formal level too), it has the function not of wielding power but rather of being the source (author) of such power. A Council – including in this term bodies such as the national controlling body of a political party, the board of directors of a company, the Cabinet, the council of a youth association, or the United Nations' Security Council – simply has the task (which may not be at all simple) of deciding what has to be done and of giving the power to do it to someone – from inside or outside the Council itself – judged to be trustworthy, fit and capable. In substance, the Council is the author of the power we discussed in the previous paragraph.

The authority function is generally considered very respectable and venerable, indeed honourable (*colenda* as the Ancient Romans used to say) for the very reason that, through an interlocutory role, it involves generating, developing and increasing power, while at the same time controlling and guiding its exercise. It is no accident that the role of authority also evokes a situation of «accepted dependence» (Horkheimer, 1936), rather than a condition of «power deriving from prestige» (Geiger, 1959).

For all the reasons stated so far, authority and power can and must be thought of as two separate and non-synonymous terms: they represent two different concepts which refer to two quite distinct roles and functions. If, as we shall see, there are cases or situations in which someone may attempt to superimpose the two roles, this does not happen in consideration or in virtue of semantic synonyms (the functions of authority and power remaining quite distinct, even when

they are merged, or in some way combined in the same person or entity), but because of particular anthropological and cultural or psycho-social situations. The two words, concepts, or dimensions always and in all cases remain separate.

9.2.3. *Liberty*

Everything depends therefore, totally independent of any inexistent synonymy, on the actual workings of the authority/power inter-relationship.

Before going into this point, however, it is useful to complete our linguistic digression to achieve a better overall understanding of the question we are considering.

«Liberty» means individual spontaneousness not conditioned by any cause or, more precisely, limited only by «universal necessity» as the «cause of causes»; the possibility of accomplishing the activities or tasks implicit in one's role and functions as a person and a citizen (*civis*) without infringing on the rights and interests of others (or even of oneself!); the absence of arbitrary constraints; choice conditioned by existing possibilities (Plato). To complete our review of Latin terms, so relevant in our European cultural area, the word *libertas*, which has descendants in all the Romance languages (*libertà, liberté, libertad*, etc.) as well as in English, comes from an Indo-European word (reconstructed as *leudh*), from which the Greek *eleuthería* also derives. In the Germanic languages, there is another family of words stemming from the Indo-European root *pri-* through the Common Germanic *frijo* (from which the words *freedom, Freiheit* and so on derive). The Old English word for liberty was *frīols* (akin to Gothic *freihals*, Norse *frælsi*, Old Frisian *frihelse*, Old High German *frihalsi*) which derives from the word for freeman, literally a man whose neck is free (cf. Old High German *frīhals*, Norse *frjál*), an allusion to freedom from slavery.

A «freeman» (or woman) is therefore (Benveniste, 1969) one who is emancipated, independent, liberated, not subject to others, master of himself, immune, exempt, in short, free; one who is not subject to constraints imposed by others, who is not in a condition of slavery or bondage and is not conditioned by ties and commitments in his mutual dealings with other human beings. It should be noted that this concept is nearly always definable in negative terms (not subject, not bound, not constrained, etc.). The theoretical possibility of referring to the territorial concept, as defined in ethology and biology, and to its ramifications to achieve a better understanding of the importance and limits of reciprocal behaviour should also be noted.

9.3. REPUBLICAN MAN

Psycho-social anthropology, the standpoint from which we are considering this problem, allows us to comprehend, in both denotative and connotative terms,

what being a «citizen» (*civis*) means in a situation we have described as «republican», as opposed to what being a «subject» (*subiectus*) means in a situation we may generically describe as «imperial». We crave the reader's indulgence if, in outlining these situations, we sometimes overstate the case, but such an approach can be useful above all in a presentation and as an illustration of paradigmatic models, even though such situations may not always be easily and consistently identifiable in real life.

Be as it may, the central core of the situation we are considering may be outlined as follows: the citizen of a «republic» in his acts and in his participation, both active and passive, in the life of the community of which he is a member observes fairly clear «rules» which (for the aspects we are considering) are marked by a radical, clear-cut and well-defined separation, once again forming part of the informal rather than the formal «compact», between the holder and role of authority and the holder and role of power.

In any case, at the minimal level, the existential aspect of power is always clearly separated – whenever it is wielded by or incarnated in the same person – from the existential and practical aspect of the authority role. In other, more down-to-earth, terms, the person holding and wielding authority does not hold and wield power, and viceversa. The logical points of reference and the time-space loci of the two aspects of authority and power are and have to remain separate. This is not because of ethical, constitutional, moralistic, or other reasons, but because of other factors that have precedence over them. It is simply not possible to hold authority and power, because this is not allowed by the informal institutions of a «republic».

The best example that can be called to mind in this connexion, quite appropriately as we referred previously to the Latin terms *auctoritas*, *potestas* and *libertas*, is the Roman Republic. Under that regime, all institutional «compacts» (psychological, civic, social and legal as it came to be expressed in the constitution) were based on a very clear separation between authority and power. This, in the author's view, is the very essence of republican society and was present at all levels and in all forms and activities, whether concrete or otherwise, in which the daily life of Rome was played out (from the family to the dynamics of politics).

The classical philologist Richard Heinze (who died in 1929 and to whom, after Mommsen, we owe according to Eschenburg, 1965, a part of the explanation of the semantic development of the word *auctoritas* in Ancient Rome), considers this term to be something that was specifically Roman and that became consolidated «to such an extent that it not only imposed legal or quasi-legal obligations, but it also gave rise to a stable institution [...]. A Roman's private and public life was governed in its entirety by the rule that no important decisions could be taken without first consulting those he considered to be competent in the matter. What was the basis of *auctoritas*? [...] It was the idea that no one is capable of understanding everything, particularly if left to fend for himself; it was the respect for a person embodying greater experience, competence, or sense of responsibility, linked with the desire to proceed at all times with the greatest

prudence possible [...]. *Auctoritas* was acquired by a man who had demonstrated the worthiness of his whole personality; it was used in the service and for the well-being of fellow citizens and, in its highest and purest expression, in the service and for the well-being of the commonwealth (*res publica*)» (Heinze, quoted by Eschenburg, 1965, pp. 22-23). The situation is quite clear, even though the emphasis of this conceptual outline by Heinze, which goes back to about 1925, may seem too emphatic for modern readers.

It is important to note that the existence of the citizens' liberty is actually guaranteed – in a «republican» society and, obviously, *within the context of what is allowed by the social, historical and economic situation*, i.e. within well-defined historical limits, which in this case have no bearing however on the «qualitative» thesis we are developing – by the separation between the time-space aspect of authority-holding by an individual or by a social group and the corresponding and complementary time-space aspect of power-holding. In short, it is guaranteed by the separation between the holder of authority and the holder of power.

It is useful to repeat that this state of affairs, appearances notwithstanding, is in no way conditioned by the legal framework (whether constitutional or otherwise), which comes *after* the anthropological and psycho-social realities outlined. This means that, in «republican» society, all three aspects take shape first of all inside individuals and groups, i.e. also within the type of interpersonal and social relationships established between one individual and another as well as between the individual and the various groups of which he is a member. We may refer to such institutions as subjective and inter-subjective institutions, present in the psychic activities of «republican man».

As regards the Roman Republic, this situation corresponds to what was formally and precisely described by Cicero in the first century before Christ. According to Cicero, the Roman constitutional system rested on three interdependent pillars: *auctoritas*, represented by the Senate, *potestas*, represented by the magistrates of various kinds operating at different levels and with different tasks, and *libertas*, shared by all citizens as active members of the super-individual community which constituted the Roman city-state (*urbs*).

Consultation of authority by power was a right and a duty constantly and concretely exercised through habit and practice. At the top of the power structure there was the Consul, whose title derived from the fact that he was the person who consulted the People and the Senate. The latter, in turn, was a *Consilium* or council (a word which also corresponds to the Greek term *symboúlion*, from *syn* «with» and *boulé* «council, will»). Thus, whenever any *magistratus* (official) was called upon to answer for the consequences of a measure adopted or an action taken by him in the exercise of his power, the first question put to him was whether and how he had convoked a *consilium*. Similarly, a *pater familias* who wanted to take one of those grave decisions for which his power has become notorious (the repudiation of his wife, the expulsion of a son, etc.) had, first of all, to convoke the *consilium* of his relatives and clan, i.e. the *auctores* of his *potestas* (the source of his power). This does not mean that he was necessarily obliged to follow the advice of these *auctores*, but the exercise of

his power was in any case subject to their judgement and consequently strongly conditioned by it. In substance, the freedom to make decisions was accompanied by the requirement of prior consultation in a kind of group dynamics that is quite unique.

The overall balance of the republican system, although historically only relative, is the guarantee of liberty on the basis of a separation of the roles endowed with power. In other words, a given balance between the three aspects authority, power and liberty, as outlined above (Figure 1), allows a given type of expression of each of them and of liberty, in particular.

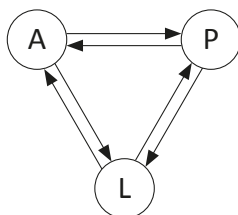


Figure 1. – Representation of psycho-social republican anthropology.

9.4. IMPERIAL MAN

We may now consider the basic meaning, again denotative and connotative, of the term «subject» (*subiectus*) in a situation we have described as «imperial». The basic core of a situation of this kind is the absence of a separation between the holder or role of authority and the holder or role of power, which in practice coincide. In other words, in this case, *potestas* has the peculiarity of being self-generating: its *auctor* is indistinguishable from *potestas* itself. The focal point of the transformation of «republican anthropology» (and its institutions) into «imperial anthropology» (also with its institutions, both formal and informal) is the different source of legitimation of power, once again using legalistic terminology to describe anthropological realities. In short, the holders and wielders of power are also firmly endowed with authority. The logical and time-space loci of the two institutions are and must continue to be unified, thus giving rise to a continuous loop process.

Once more taking Ancient Roman society as an example, we can follow the development of «imperial man» by studying the historical changeover from the Republic to the Empire. The crossing of the Rubicon is generally and rightly taken, both factually and symbolically, as the real turning-point. However, the transformation of republican society into imperial society did not actually take place at that moment, but it is unquestionable that this was the crisis that marked the breakdown of the former balance, thus opening up the way for new anthropological and psycho-social structures (Figure 2).

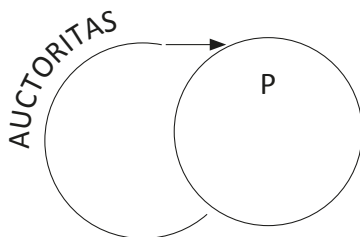


Figure 2. – Representation of psycho-social imperial anthropology.

The «crossing» of this little stream could perhaps be better termed – with greater historical and anthropological accuracy, or at least more incisively – the «metamorphosis» of the Rubicon. It is by no accident that the tragedy of Julius Caesar has been so vividly analysed, discussed and felt to be personally relevant in both history and literature. Caesar was in fact the last major figure of the Republic and the first standard bearer of the Empire, but he was personally unable, both historically and formally, to impose the new order, as he was prevented from doing so by the punishment for his crime of «betraying» the Republic. From that historical «crossing» onwards, however, power – including military *might*, formerly characterized by its submission and obedience to the civilian establishment – increasingly tended to lose all respect for authority.

The actual transformation was successfully carried through later and with greater flexibility by Octavian, who, in the year 27 B.C., received from the Senate the title of Augustus (meaning «generated»). This title in actual fact was just a screen, an apparent and showy confirmation that the republican anthropological tradition had been maintained and preserved. The novelty was represented by the fact that Octavian was to keep that title for good, making it practically hereditary. The Senate was thus deprived of its prerogative of being the *auctor* or generator of *potestas*. Consequently, with Octavian, *potestas* and *auctoritas* began to be merged within the same person and tended to become one and the same thing. By keeping the title and making it substantially transmissible to his heirs, he also took de facto possession of the *functions* previously identified with the Senate, i.e the body that had bestowed the title upon him. In short, he took upon himself the role and functions of the Senate which, consequently, lost its authority, a situation that is well described by the Latin verb *exautorare* (whence the Italian *esautorare*).

In the ancient Roman Republic, the lasting and overwhelming power of any single individual was unknown. In the person of Augustus, power (*potestas*) was thus combined with an extraordinary authority (*auctoritas*). The Emperor, who after the civil war governed wisely and not as a tyrant, had unlimited decisional power, but despite this he continued to consult the Senate. We may say he advised the Senate on how it should advise him. Consequently, from then onwards, the authority of the Senate derived from the authority of Augustus and the roles played respectively by the *princeps* (Prince) and the Senate were gradu-

ally reversed. In the times of the Roman Republic, *auctor* indicated the person presenting a motion, but the Latin expression (using the ablative absolute construction) *auctore principe* later came to mean more than just «on the Emperor's proposal». In actual fact, this expression acquired the meaning «by order of the Emperor» which, in those times, was interpreted as a formula with magical overtones having the same force as an order.

Obviously, as always happens in such cases, Octavian and his behaviour were also in large measure the effect and not just the cause of the complex psychosocial changes that had taken place in many facets of Roman society: economic, cultural, political, etc. We say this notwithstanding certain interpretations that have come to be considered classical both of the situation and of the personality of the man Augustus. In effect, if such interpretations were true, this changeover could have taken place even earlier. Thus, even before Augustus, similar charismatic personalities had appeared on the Roman scene who would also have been capable of mobilizing military forces of equal (if not greater) effectiveness and numbers. Octavian referred to himself as *princeps* (prince) and added the word *civium* (of the citizens), thus giving a new meaning and value to this word from a formal standpoint. Under his successors, who from then onwards were to be descendants of his own family, thanks to the hereditary nature of the title, *auctoritas* definitely acquired a new aspect. After Octavian, we can observe further changes on the linguistic level as his successors adopted titles such as *dominus*, *divus* and even *deus*. It should be noted that *dominus* was the only term formerly used by slaves when addressing their masters, and this explains why this word, because of its tyrannical connotations, was avoided by Augustus and by his first successor Tiberius. It should be observed rather that, while the term *princeps* was an expression of the formal equality of the Emperor with other citizens, the term *dominus* expressed his superior position and the formal subjection of the person writing or speaking to him. The word *dominus*, moreover, often indicated the divinity of the Emperor, embracing in a single concept the meanings of both *dominus* and *deus* (lord and god). As noted by Mommsen, it is precisely this terminological transformation from *princeps* to *dominus* that allows us to gauge and follow with the greatest accuracy the internal development of the imperial regime from principedom to despotism.

Starting with the Emperor Septimius Severus (193-211 A.D.), who surrounded himself with important jurists, the expression *auctoritas principis* (the authority of the Prince) acquired harsh and absolutistic overtones. Ulpianus, one of the great men of law active during the reign of Septimius Severus, is the author of the maxim: «Quod principi placuit, legem habet vigorem» («What is pleasing to [literally: has pleased] the Prince has the force of law»). It was thus the jurists who condensed the meaning of sovereignty into one word, thereby transforming it into an instrument for imperial domination.

Auctoritas imperialis and later *auctoritas maiestatis* are periphrases indicating the unlimited power of the Emperor, who was both legislator and judge. Thus, *auctoritas* no longer flowed from below up to the *princeps*, but came to him from above and then proceeded downwards «through all his members» (Gmelin, 1937).

9.5. THE REPUBLIC OF VENICE

Apart from those «republican» situations that were present or at least traceable in the ancient *poleis* or city-states and in particular, as we have seen, in the Roman Republic, which was an exemplary case, a more recent instance – and one which is equally fit to be used as a model – is the Republic of Venice. In Venetian society, intra-individual, inter-individual and group dynamics – as well as the anthropological situation on the one hand and the institutional situation on the other – unfolded for more than a thousand years against a backdrop of norms that can unquestionably be defined as «republican».

It is no accident that, in the period when princely states were consolidating their power throughout Europe and in Italy in particular, Venice continued to represent an exception. It is no accident that the power of the Doges was limited by numerous and significant checks and balances entrusted to various community structures, with the result that the nomination to this office was more often «feared» than coveted by the candidates. It is no accident that, as we can still see today, Venice lacks (even from an architectural standpoint) a whole series of signs and signals characteristic of the situation we have defined as «imperial»: there are no statues or images of «founding fathers» or national heroes, there are no feudal keeps or towers (obviously excluding bell-towers), etc.

It may be useful to briefly evoke how Venetian society was born and to describe its first period of aggregation and development. Bands of refugees, who had fled from the mainland during the «barbarian» invasions, made their home in the Lagoon and began to establish stable roots there more or less at the time when the Lombard kingdom was being consolidated in other parts of the Italian peninsula. Quite soon, the six main islets, that were later to form the territory of the city of Venice (the *sestieri*), formed a community able to express from within itself government structures and functions constituting the *organized projection* of the psychological and civic relationships existing between the components of the new *societas*, even before they were constitutionally fixed and publicly codified. Each of the islets (a *sestiere*) designated two or three electors to choose the citizens judge to be most worthy to meet in Council with the function not only of selecting from among their number the Doge and other magistrates of the Republic, but also of assisting (and checking) them during their mandate.

The six *sestieri* thus constituted the territorial basis of a Council of twelve or eighteen electors whose task was to choose the 480 citizens forming the Grand Council (*Consiglio Maggiore*). It is interesting to note that the Grand Council designated – through very complex and intricate mechanisms that we cannot go into here – all magistrates from the highest, the Doge, down to the lowliest official of the Republic. It is also extremely significant and interesting to note that – in virtue of rules that were applied from internal conviction, even before they were socially codified – the twelve or eighteen primary electors of the Grand Council could not themselves form part of that body.

This is not the place to go into detail on the complex network of psychological and civic, social and legal-cum-constitutional compacts that regulated

the life of the community. What is important is to underline that, in every case, the system was designed to *guarantee* – with anthropological and psycho-social aspects having as usual precedence over legal and normative aspects – the de facto separation existing between those holding power and those holding authority or, as it would once again be more accurate to say, between power-holding by various citizens and authority-holding by various (other) citizens.

It is extremely indicative that of the first seventeen Doges only three were deposed without some form of physical or moral punishment (one was assassinated, four were first blinded and then exiled, two were banished after being excommunicated, etc.). Each of these seventeen individuals suffered a more or less tragic fate for the simple fact that, through the exercise of their power, they were tempted to repeat the «metamorphosis of the Rubicon»: i.e. to overthrow the republican status quo and introduce an «imperial» situation. In each case, the bone of contention was the problem of succession: instead of leaving the task of «authorship» of the new Doge to the Council, and therefore to the community at large, each of the Doges in office regularly tried to make the title hereditary, thereby appropriating the function of authority, notwithstanding their having been elected by the Grand Council and their having sworn never to resort to such modifications of the civic and social compact.

We may conclude even from this summary description that Venetian society was particularly vigilant of the informal institutions by which it was governed and regularly and severely «punished» any transgressors. Moreover, as this approach was adopted from the very beginning of the Republic's history, it was bound to channel, organize, structure and condition the subsequent development of the Venetian commonwealth in a republican sense. The Grand Council – which was in turn, it should be noted, subject to a whole series of checks and balances – was to be the sole depositary of authority able to express from among its members the power of the Doge with an absolute and mandatory separation of the two functions.

The history of the numerous and notorious, or lesser known, Venetian conspiracies very expressively confirms what we have been saying: Marino Bocconio in 1299, Baiamonte Tiepolo in 1310, Marin Faliero in 1355, and other minor figures regularly tried to change the nature of the relationship between authority and power from a «republican» to an «imperial» model, by attempting to establish a princely regime and to make the title of Doge hereditary. In each case, the conspiracies failed, sometimes «by chance» (as certain historians naively maintain) and at others thanks to the guaranteeing mechanisms provided by the Constitution and the institutions of Venetian society. In both cases, we refer to mechanisms insuring the «self-regulation» of the system and acting at the formal and/or informal levels. The final result was however that, during a period when elsewhere princely states were being structured and consolidated, «imperial» conspiracies in Venice regularly failed and were always followed by the dramatic punishment of the culprits as a lesson to whoever might think of trying the same thing.

The case of Marin Faliero is exemplary. He was a Doge unquestionably endowed with many positive personal qualities, he had great charisma and, more-

over, had earned great merits in the service of the community, which had benefited from the achievements of his period of office. But he too was unable to resist the temptation to make himself Lord of Venice. His conspiracy was uncovered after only two days. He was arrested, tried, sentenced and beheaded – between the two well-known columns still to be seen at the front of St. Mark's square – without any regard for the merits he had previously earned. All members of the community were required to file past his headless body, as a moral warning, as we read in the chronicles of the time.

It is unquestionable that the psychological guarantees and the multiple social checks that the Venetian Republic was forced to introduce and «invent» over the centuries, as its development progressed, with the object of maintaining a stable «republican» status quo, had to be numerous and complex. The various Councils, many of which are still famous today (the Council of Senators – *Consiglio dei Pregadi* –, the Lesser Council – *Minor Consiglio* –, the Council of Ten, etc.), had the basic function, in addition to the specific tasks of each, of mutually guaranteeing each other by ensuring that no individual could prevail over the others and establish «imperial» rules for structuring the balances within the community.

It may be legitimately objected that this kind of community, with its drastic separation between authority and power, was only able to develop and last for centuries within the framework of a situation of relative oligarchy. The families that could claim full membership of Venetian society numbered only 2,000 or slightly more, even in the periods of the oligarchy's greatest extension. This is a quantitative problem, however, and as such has been deliberately left out of this study. Moreover, it may be observed that the situation we have outlined also led to a sort of social pathology, due to the excessive number and qualitative and quantitative intricacy of the various Councils and of the checks that each of them had to exercise over the others. Thus, in the later periods of the life of the Republic, we observe a process of ever increasing bureaucracy and an excessive accentuation of the role of the Councils, factors which – together with others – led to substantial lengthening of times and complication of the procedures governing the acts of the State machinery and to a net decrease in operating effectiveness, if not to a more or less complete paralysis of community functions.

However, this too is a problem that goes beyond the limits of this essay and concerns, if anything, the definition of the correct and optimal positioning, or rather the correct balance of elements, required to achieve the maximum efficiency and effectiveness of any «republican» system.

This subject could be further developed with appropriate examples.

We could analyze, for example, the relationships between power, authority and liberty in the Roman Catholic Church, in the various phases of the French revolution, or even in various real-life situations – when examined in depth – as they exist at the present day. We might thus discover, for example, that many so called «republics» are in reality «empires», while other formally monarchical systems are really «republics». Such an exercise may be left, however, to the reflexions of the reader.

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