

Mortal God—Dying God?

NEGRO PAVÓN D. (2014). IL DIO MORTALE: IL MITO DELLO STATO TRA CRISI EUROPEA E CRISI DELLA POLITICA. ROMA: IL FOGLIO. 109 P. ISBN 978-88-7606-532-3

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The events of the last two months of 2015 which took place in the Europe and, especially in France, renewed once again some questions about the political nature of the EU and that of its members. Should we speak about the EU as a state? Alternatively, an empire? Is it possible to affirm an autonomous statal nature of the members of the EU? Finally, is the current depression in Europe purely economic in character or it is also a political crisis? These problems are not only for political scientists but also for philosophers, and each of them has their own answer. This review outlines one of the possible answers given by the eminent Spanish scholar, member of the Royal Academy of the Political and Social Science, and philosopher Dalmacio Negro Pavón.

The political philosophy of Negro Pavón is based on the recognition of the crucial distinction between Government and State. According to him, Government is the primary institution which existed in each hierarchical human society and whose existence was conditioned by human nature itself. While State was created by Government as a tool helpful for the administration. Each human community from the beginnings of its existence required Government but not State. These are the two main starting points of the Negro Pavón's conception: political life is possible even without State; State is an artificial construction made by Government for the first time at the end of 15th or the beginning of the 16th centuries.

The first forms of western political organization of human life were the Greek *Polis*, the Roman *Urbs*, the Christian *Civitas* o *Res publica Christiana*, the Byzantine *Basileia* and, finally, the State-Nation (p. 17). Leaving out the Byzantine example, Negro Pavón constructs two major lines for the political evolution of Western civilization. The first begins in the *Polis* and leads towards the State-Nation, the second begins in the Roman city

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and leads towards the Christian Republic or, what is the same, the Church¹ and further to Empire. Thus, the modern state, which Negro Pavón, following Bertran de Jouvenel, defines as a “State-Minotaur”, is a monstrous hybrid of the State-Nation and the Church (p. 83–84). However, here I put the cart before the horse and I should backtrack a little.

All of these forms, from *Polis* up to Empire, were the forms of Government and not of State. One more preliminary note. It is quite evident that State became possible only in a Christian or more generally, in a Monotheistic culture. Pagans including the ancient Greeks with their Philosophy or the Romans with their Law could not even imagine State, an artificial identity which embraces everything and absorbs everything. The image that had the most similarity to State was the Aristotelian Polis, which was a whole while its citizens were only the parts. However, such form of the political organization was possible only in a small city and no more. The closed structure (one of the hardest questions was to receive the rights of the citizen of the polis) was not able to extend outside its limits. Alexander the Great proved that Aristotle’s theory was not applicable to big spaces.²

Only the appearance of the Christian Church made European States possible, although not in a day. The idea of the single God, who created the universe, visible and invisible, united all Christians under the rule of divine law. That is why the Middle Ages, according to Negro Pavón, cannot be called a time of political theology. Quite the reverse, it was a time of juridical theology, of the theology constructed through law. Within the borders of the Holy Roman Empire and, more widely, of Christian Europe, every political institution was subdued to the law, was the part of the whole regular order. The emperor on one side, and the Pope on the other, both claimed to be God’s vicars. Later European kings of the 13th and 14th centuries declared the same thing. However, the very recognition of Christ’s supremacy, of His existence as the Highest Sovereign unfastened the political space, opened it towards the sacral plane, and finally subdued all the temporal orders to divine law. Government was built into the political universe as a necessary element of the God’s justice.

The appearance of State was first described by Machiavelli and a little later by Vitoria and Bodin and slowly the situation changed beginning by assuming temporal *potestas* and unifying the political space under its control. The demolition of feudal castles, the overcoming of feudal legal customs and, further, the unification of the judicial system within its borders were, in fact, the first steps in the formation of a new political order, known as *absolute monarchies*. During the Reformation, when the Catholic Church had lost much of its power, State began to usurp ecclesiastical *auctoritas*. As a result, State power acquired the sacral character, State became a sacred place, the sources of its sanctity were found within itself. God, in this case, was thrown out of the political order, the State’s political space became closed. The apogee of this process can be seen in the works of Hobbes and Spinoza.

1. More comprehensively Negro Pavón analyzes these lines in his *Introduction to the History of the Forms of the State* (Historia de las formas del Estado: una introducción), published in Madrid at 2010.

2. Here seems convenient to remember that Julius Evola proposed to translate Carl Schmitt’s concept of *Grossraum* as “the space of the Empire” (*spazio imperiale*).

The artificial identity described by Hobbes, and the *Mortal God*, whose name Negro Pavón used as the title for his book, devoured not only Government but also the Church. Negro Pavón accentuates many times the mystical nature of the Hobbesian Leviathan and, at the same time, its closedness as a social system. In contrast to Empire, which was an open-space political structure, the Hobbesian State represents a closed, tight space (like the human body) where political life, in fact, does not exist. This State is, without any doubt, a political object. However, the politic remains only at its external borders not inside. The civil religion established by the sovereign reinforces the mystical nature of State and its genuine independence from the God as a political ruler.

Almost the same can be found in Spinoza's political theology. State emerges as an artificial identity as a result of the social contract. However, and here Spinoza moves further than Hobbes, his State has a potent neutralizing activity. Within its limits, State dissipates the citizens, anticipating any possible conflict, especially religious. In the Spinozian State, the private life of the citizens became private in the full sense of this word. The resident who leaves the public space, even for a short time, becomes closed in his house or the temple of his religion. Only inside, being completely isolated from other people, can he perform the rites of his religion. When he comes outside, he becomes only a citizen, one of many, a little part of the State. This whole space limited by the state borders was completely depoliticized in all senses, it was neutral and without conflict. Neither in the Spinozian nor Hobbesian State were there "people" in the classical meaning of the word. The *populus* disappeared after the creation of State and lost its political subjectivity, being transformed into a multitude of individual citizens.

The State epoch in European history signified a time of closed political subjects who conserved the Politic only in their interrelations but completely demolished it inside themselves. State assumed the functions not only of Government and Church but also, in some sense, of God himself. The autonomy of State law-giving reinforced political autonomy. That is, the only authority remaining within State was State itself. In some sense, a real alternative to State was the Holy Roman Empire, which was an open-space political entity composed of many autonomous principalities. The power of the emperor did not have any mystical components, and the inner space was full of the different political conflicts between not only the principalities but also individuals. That is to say that the inner space of the Holy Roman Empire was not neutral in any sense. I suppose that such inconvenience was one of the reasons for Samuel Pufendorf to call the Holy Empire a "political monster."

The question of the position of individuals in State remains the problem of "state anthropology" (in contrast with political anthropology which does not exist in such conditions). In the neutral space, where political action is not possible, it is substituted with some types of public or, better to say, administrative activity directed towards the "common good." It is crucial in this case to make a strict distinction between the *res publica* of Cicero and other Greek and Roman thinkers, and the "common good" of State. The citizens themselves as "political animals" formulated the first of them and, consequently, this concept reflected their interests and their will. The second defined State, and explained its

goodness and necessity to every citizen as individuals and collectively. In such a way the only unique possible political actor within State, the only entity who could define what was good or bad, right or wrong, was State itself. Its inhabitants, in this case, occupied the position of children who had only the illusion of activity, while State began to define everything in their life, up to the regulation of the sexual conduct or suicide.

The depoliticization (in his book Negro Pavón widely uses the concept elaborated by Carl Schmitt) which took place in Europe during the last two or three centuries converted Europeans into apolitical children incapable of living their lives without recourse to State. To emphasize the difference, I stress the point that the Russian political experience is entirely different according to Negro Pavón's conception, from that of the inhabitants of Empire. The mighty (and sometimes despotic) imperial power which could destroy the life of the individual was, however, very far from the people. There was an absence of the depoliticization and neutralization processes. The citizens were taught from childhood to avoid any contact with State power and resolve any emerging conflicts themselves. All this permitted the elaboration within Russian social culture many formal and, more often, informal ways of conflict resolution, and allowed the creation of a properly political culture. An attempt to change Russia's political form from Empire to State led to the growing political crisis that began just after the fall of the Soviet Union.

Returning Negro Pavón's first question about the political nature of the EU, it is possible to make some principal conclusions. First, the EU cannot be classified as a classical State, although it has a common government, as it lacks other crucial features, such as stable borders, a united legal system, a single political order and, finally, the absence of the other sovereigns within its limits. Secondly, the EU cannot be called an empire though there is an open political space and the many political subjects inside. The leaders of the EU do not recognize one higher sovereign, and do not have any formal subordination between them. Within their states, all of them have a depoliticized and neutralized space and a dissipated and atomized population. Third, the inhabitants of the EU have mostly lost their political culture having been transformed into apolitical children without any real autonomy. Finally, the only exit possible for them, according to Negro Pavón, is to abandon the idea of State and using their constitutive power create a new political order with Government but without State. The actual problem is that State will counteract them using all its power and all the available instruments including the police, the army or even a state of the emergency.

The "Mortal God" of Negro Pavón logically continues his great "Introduction to the History of the Forms of the State". However, this is not a mere continuation which serves only to adjust some details. This brief but deep analysis shows Negro Pavón's approach to the EU's crisis. It is highly significant that such a view was formulated by an intellectual from the Spain—the limitrophe of the EU and published in the Italy, another *enfant terrible* of today's EU. It is fascinating also that Negro Pavón's appraisal of the EU situation coincides in its major points with that formulated by some Russian intellectuals. From both extremes of the European world, it seems to be in a deep depression. Where is the exit? Maybe it is that proposed by Negro Pavón in the "Mortal God" and further devel-

oped in his next book dedicated to the “Iron Law of the Oligarchies” published in Madrid at the end of 2015.

Смертный Бог — умирающий Бог?

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