

Philosophy and the Terrorist Attacks of September 11, 2001

Editorial

We now live in a world that has changed dramatically as a result of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Or rather, that world was there all along, only our perception of it has changed, becoming less naïve, perhaps. The attacks represent many things—loss of security, heightened awareness of vulnerability, expression of anti-Western rage—just to name a few. The Xavier Zubiri Foundation of North America extends its condolences to the families and friends of those killed or injured in the September 11th attacks, and to other victims of terrorism in Spain and elsewhere. Terrorism is ultimately a twisted, egotistical and cowardly power game in which the innocent are merely pawns, to be sacrificed in an attack, or to act as shields behind which to hide. Can philosophy say or do anything about this matter?

It is unlikely that the terrorists who masterminded or carried out the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks have ever spent much time studying philosophy. They probably are unacquainted even with the great Islamic philosophical tradition of Alfarabi (870-950), Avicenna (980-1037), Algazel (1058-1111), and Averroës (1126-1198), just to name the major figures. That tradition, in any case, largely died out by the 13th century. For certain, the terrorists have never read Zubiri. The attacks represent a throwback to the worst features of Islamic culture, dominated by a mentality of brutality, conquest, and enforced submission, rather than to its most enlightened characteristics, those of art, medicine, jurisprudence, and science. It is urgent for the Islamic world to return to the roots which gave rise to its greatest cultural achievements, rather than to its most destructive acts, especially since that is its only real hope of equaling or surpassing the West in power and influence; and philosophy was a significant part of those roots. The path preferred by the terrorists is well illustrated by the rule of the Taliban in Afghanistan; it eschews philosophy and associated enlightenment, and it leads in exactly the opposite direction, to rigidity, impoverishment, and failure.

Building a world order in which the ultimate causes of terrorism are eliminated will surely be difficult. But in this process, it is clear that philosophy has an important role, simply because it is the search for truth at the highest level—a search that is respected in all major religions. And as Zubiri has so clearly expressed, that search ultimately reaches reality. Indeed, our entire existence is submerged in reality, and our intelligence is sentient, directly perceiving that reality. Actualization of reality in our intelligence is truth; in our will, goodness; and in our feelings, beauty. This is the basis, ultimately, on which an intellectual framework must be erected capable of encompassing all other knowledge, and thus capable of enlightening all of humanity. Pursuit of truth must be a worldwide endeavor, respected by all. From it should flow many fruits, including equitable relations among peoples and nations. Only when this is done, will the impetus to such destructive and

ultimately self-destructive acts such as terrorism be blunted. Zubiri's thought, of course, is an ideal basis for this pursuit, as it recognizes that truth is not something complete and just waiting to be compiled and organized, but something which has ever-expanding horizons due to the constitutive openness of reality.

Of course, philosophy cannot single-handedly rebuild the world or create a new world order. But some philosophy ultimately underlies every civilization and every belief system. Bringing this to the surface will be an important first step toward achieving the stated goal. Perhaps the greatest challenge, for Zubiri scholars worldwide, is that of creating a viable political philosophy utilizing Zubiri's philosophical framework, without falling into the trap of making Zubiri an apologist for some particular "-ism". Zubiri himself did not see fit to do this—most likely, he felt that it could not be done until the philosophical framework itself was complete. But surely, building upon Zubiri's ethical and perhaps some of his theological writings, a very profound political philosophy can be erected, one with the power and majesty of his noology. Such a philosophy would have two aspects: 1. Analysis of the nature of human institutions such as governments. This would encompass their reality and its source, which is, of course, reality by postulation. 2. The nature of a just government and its institutions, as a function of truth, values, history of peoples, and related concerns. This would suggest not merely forms of government, but how governments must act to create the best society.

The Xavier Zubiri Foundation of North America therefore challenges Zubiri scholars worldwide to confront the task of developing a Zubirian political philosophy for the modern world. We hope that these very capable scholars will rise to the occasion and submit papers on this theme for the next issue of the *The Xavier Zubiri Review*, as a way of beginning this process.

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