

KAIROS OF THE CORONA PANDEMIC

Time for a True World Political Authority with Moral Credibility?

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Abstract: At a time when coronavirus has reached pandemic proportions, this paper argues that a trustworthy *true* world political authority, with reliable moral credibility, is needed now more than ever. It is time to revive the common set of moral principles underlying the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the UN organization itself, including the WHO. In the midst of this new *kairos*, when the world is faced with an invisible, indiscriminating enemy, the world is forced to come together in a unique way and unite for the common good: the new normal of *social distancing* may be a new chance for *social justice*.

Keywords: Common Good, Corona Pandemic, *Kairos*, Moral and Intellectual Virtue, United Nations, World Political Authority.

1. Introduction

Moral philosophers, even those who appreciate virtue-centred Aristotelian Ethics, often lose sight of the fact that the *Nicomachean Ethics* is essentially a work that sets the stage for and introduces Aristotle's *Politics*. For him, individual virtue and character naturally entail our *relations* with our significant others: parents, siblings, spouses, children, cousins, friends, neighbours, and the members of our social and political communities. The obvious claim, then, which seems undeniable, is that personal *individual good* is ultimately ordered toward the *common good* in a dynamic dialectical relation.

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Today, for the first time in human history, we are becoming aware of this insight on a global scale as we begin to view the whole world as one community and are able to see, in concrete ways, how we are all profoundly connected in both wonderful and terrifying ways—for better or for worse. This new reality, then, brings great challenges, but also great opportunities. Now when much of the world is under lock down due to the spread of COVID-19, the novel strain of coronavirus which has reached pandemic proportions, our interrelatedness is felt ever more profoundly. Other than the virus itself, which touches all of us even if we do not get infected, the other thing that brings us together during this time is our search for a common and reliable world authority—a trusted and trustworthy authority that gives hope and intelligent direction.

2. Kairos of Corona Pandemic

International UN agencies, such as the World Health Organization, naturally command our attention at a time like this and many willingly listen to its message, even those who may question its efficiency.¹ Of course this kind of global consciousness is not all that new; it arose out of the unspeakable horrors of the two world wars in the last century, after which human beings realized that it was absolutely necessary for our very survival as a race to unite around a common set of moral principles and convictions, which were eventually expressed in the landmark 1948 document famously known as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It was quite remarkable that

¹Like other UN organizations, the WHO has had its share of success and failure. Its present Director General, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, to his credit, has been attempting since 2017 to renew and strengthen the original spirit of the organization in which it was founded in 1948 and, as an African, brings a unique and timely perspective to the organization. There is overwhelming international support for the way he has led this important organization over the last few years and especially for his leadership during the present pandemic, though there have been a few isolated criticisms from prominent world leaders as well.

virtually all the nations of the world, in spite of vastly different cultural, moral, and religious world-views, were able to accept this document; the good-will and concern for the common good expressed at this time gave great hope to the world with its promise of peace and international collaboration to meet the world's most dangerous threats and challenges. As we know, however, this good-will and hope gradually faded, as the very organization that represented and embodied this vision of a united world, was compromised and manipulated by the expansionist interests of the most powerful nations, often times to the utter detriment of the weaker ones.

But as the world is now forced to a standstill, with many of the most powerful nations also experiencing grave hardship, perhaps a new *kairos* has emerged, the *karios* of the Corona Pandemic—an opportunity to renew the original goals and aims of the United Nations project and spirit, and to rethink its very structure (and that of similar international organizations) so that the true spirit of the 1948 UN document, and the UN itself, might experience a rebirth. Is it time for a true world political authority? And, if so, how might such a monumental task be achieved? What will it take to get humanity on the right track 'again'²—on a journey 'towards ethical societies'?

²Whether or not and to what degree the world has ever been on the 'right ethical track' is a profound and complex question and goes to the heart of the philosophy of history. On one hand, there are those who argue for a gradual, linear moral *ascent* discernible through history; at the opposite end, a gradual linear moral *descent* is proposed. More sophisticated and more accurate philosophies argue for a combination of both linear and cyclical moral progress and decline simultaneously, which can only be generally mapped out and then only after careful and crucial distinctions between and among different social and cultural domains in different geographical spaces at different times are taken into consideration. What I mean here by the 'right ethical track' is very specific and modest, namely, to recover the spirit that was more or less prevalent after WWII, when, as I have said, many nations came to see the dire necessity of trying to understand the *other* in a sympathetic way and of coming together in fraternity and solidarity for the common good.

Thankfully, some of the most authoritative moral global voices have been calling out for such an authority for almost a decade now; sadly, however, little or no fundamental change seems to be happening.³ But in the midst of this new *kairos*, wherein we are faced with an invisible, undiscriminating enemy, the world is forced to come together in a unique way and unite for the common good: the new normal of *social distancing* may be a new chance for *social justice*. This kind of distance may give us the space we need to rethink the virtue of justice and the space to clearly see the existential challenges and opportunities for our world. This amounts to not only being more prepared for the next infectious pandemic disease, but to also seeing how the

³An explicit call for a such an authority came forcefully in the last encyclical letter of Pope Benedict XVI titled “Love in Truth” (*Caritas in Veritate*, 2009); it urgently called for a “true world political authority to manage the global economy, revive economies, bring about integral and timely disarmament, food security and peace, guarantee the protection of the environment and regulate migration” (67). What is more, he strategically released it the very day before a G8 Summit meeting in July of 2009 in Italy with the hope that the most powerful persons in the world would listen. But it seems to have fallen on deaf ears. More than a decade after his urgent call for such an authority we find that all these problems have not only gotten substantially worse, but, what is more alarming, are either denied (via false optimism) to be serious problems at all or deemed to be so serious and complex (via false pessimism) as to be beyond repair. Anticipating such reactions, Pope Benedict called out these twin illusory ideologies of pessimism and optimism by an appeal to the theological virtue of hope, especially during his papal visit to Benin in 2011, his second to West Africa, wherein he challenged international organizations to allow the nations of Africa to have as much weight on the international stage as the powerful nations. He stressed that the African voice—precious and timely—was all too often systematically silenced and manipulated in the most perverse ways and on a plethora of different levels. He explicitly called out the developed world for looking down on Africa “with the judgmental tone of a moralizer” and challenged these same nations to commit to real partnerships with African countries. Afterwards, many moral and religious authorities worldwide expressed their strong support for what the Pope had called for.

diseases of income inequality, climate change, proliferation of nuclear weapons, and the growing epidemics of suicide and family disintegration, are all interrelated,⁴ and call for global solidarity.

The great temptation is to believe that if well-known voices with global platforms cannot effect change, then the little voices, like ours, cannot possibly make any difference. The truth, rather, is that every single human being by each and every act, whether good or evil, thereby contributes to the collective good or evil of all humanity; one virtuous or vicious person makes the *polis* that much more virtuous or vicious. This is the fundamental connection between Aristotle's *Ethics* and *Politics*—an insight somewhat commensurate with that profound Hindu and Buddhist doctrine of *karma*—although these Indo-Asian insights plumb the eschatological depths in a way that the Aristotelian speculations do not.⁵ At any rate, the *coronation* of this

⁴In many ways, 'family disintegration' is at the heart of all the other major problems mentioned here, as the moral precepts of all the major world religions and civilizations attest. This is not to idealize either the great civilizations or the great world religions upon which they were established, which often times fail to live up to what is best in their traditions, but just to stress that without a mutual love and respect among parents and children in the family, the smallest and most fundamental cell of each society, the world stands little chance of achieving the global solidarity and fraternity which it so badly needs. A sign of hope today is that precisely because of the failure of the traditional religions, it is possible to detect, as a reaction, a growing global aspiration, especially on the part of young people, towards an authentic ethical transformation and a legitimate concern for universal well-being and human flourishing expressed in a phrase that is becoming more and more global: "I am not religious, but I am spiritual." The danger of slipping into superficial sentimentalism, rather than solid spirituality, is ever lurking in such an attitude, but at the same time it does express something solid and authentic.

⁵Much more could be said here regarding how the eschatological dimensions of the doctrine of *karma* complement some eschatological aspects of the Christian doctrine of 'The Body of Christ,' which teaches that each human being simultaneously exists in others and, therefore,

pernicious little parasitic *coronavirus* is powerfully driving home, unfortunately in a negative way, the point of our interconnectedness, and not in any sort of abstract or theoretical way, but in the very air we breathe—air that we now fear to breathe when too *close* to one another. For better or for worse, we are all in this world together, and the question of authority, especially moral authority, looms larger now than ever, precisely because the reality of our interrelatedness has forced itself upon us in such an extraordinary way. In this context, then, I offer the following philosophical reflection on the category of authority in general, and moral authority, in particular, as a way of supporting the call for a 'true world political authority' in these contemporary *times*, while describing what I understand the nature of such an authority to be.

3. The *Time* has Come

Since I agree with Aristotle concerning the solid connection between the ethical and the political, between the *individual good* and the *common good*, between *personal virtue* and *civic virtue*, the first thing to say about the nature of this 'true world political authority' is that it must have *moral* authority if it is to be qualified as 'true' authority: if it is not ordered radically towards both the individual and common 'good,' it will not really be a 'true' authority at all, nor will it be recognized as such for very long, no matter what kind of *power* it is able to yield; power in itself is not authentic authority.

The history of 20th century totalitarianism especially bears this out as many philosophers, most notably Hannah Arendt, have accurately and powerfully argued. Authority cannot be imposed from the outside unless there is a fundamental acceptance of it, or some ontological correspondence to it, on the

the *final destiny* of one is mysteriously connected to the final destiny of all. At one level, one could argue for this point based on philosophical anthropology alone, without having recourse to any theological or religious doctrine per se, though the eschatological characteristics in both the doctrine of *karma* and the ecclesiology of Christianity give the point so much more humane weight, depth, and urgency.

inside. In other words, there exists a profound metaphysical/ethical analogue between external and internal authority, which the evil of modern totalitarianism in all its obscene and illegitimate power has not been able to eliminate, try that it may. This is part of what Arendt is getting out in her description of totalitarianism in its final stages as 'an absolute evil.' It is *absolute* she writes, "because it can no longer be deduced from humanly comprehensible motives," and so utterly and absolutely distorted that "without it we might never have known the truly radical nature of Evil." For her, all this demonstrates, and I fully agree with her on this point, that:

totalitarianism (not merely dictatorship)—one after the other, one more brutally than the other have demonstrated that *human dignity* needs a *new guarantee* which can be found only in a *new political principle*, in a *new law on earth*, whose validity *this time* must comprehend *the whole of humanity* while its *power* must remain strictly *limited*, rooted in and controlled by *newly defined territorial entities* (viii-ix; my emphasis).⁶

This superbly captures what I am trying to get at in supporting the call for a true world political authority and goes a long way in helping to describe the nature of this authority, while shedding light on some of the most formidable ethical difficulties associated with it. In what follows, I attempt to

⁶Arendt's conviction that evil parasitically grows in intensity over the ages and in its final totalitarian stage reaches an absolute state of Evil in an "attempt at global conquest and total domination. . . [which] may coincide with the destruction of humanity [in that] it begins to destroy the essence of man," (Arendt viii) is similar to the traditional Christian teaching of the antichrist, which "situates the *antichrist of the End* within a series where a long line of predecessors have already nursed the evil that comes to its supreme intensity in him" (Ratzinger 196). In both Arendt and Ratzinger, genuine and true world political authority only appears as a necessity in the light of this absolute state of Evil, which, however brutal and destructive, is nonetheless only parasitical in nature, lacking ontological being per se—analogous to how all parasites exist and operate, including all *viruses*.

unpack all the vigour contained in her insight as expressed here in the context of what all I have already presented above.

I have already stated that unless authority is ordered radically towards both the individual and common 'good,' it will not really be a 'true' authority at all, but this presupposes agreement on what the good is; such a presupposition is problematic, of course, because it sidesteps the central questions in the field of Ethics: What is the good? And who has the authority to say so? Unlike his master, Plato, who attempts head-on answers in a full-blown radically transcendent metaphysics—answers that inevitably end up clothed in mythical, if not mystical, almost inaccessible, language—Aristotle's approach is more practical and accessible.⁷

Like Plato, he does situate the key moral question(s) in the context of bigger questions, but the nature of the questions is different: What is *happiness*? And how do we get it? Happiness or well-being or human flourishing is ultimate, he argues; is not a means to something else because everything else we do, without exception, is done for its sake. It alone is the ultimate end and final goal of all human activity. In his attempt to answer these more ultimate questions, however, he does immediately raise the metaphysical question of the good, but alongside an anthropological one, to keep it down-to-earth so to speak. The very term, happiness, in fact, *eudaimonia* (εὐδαιμονία), already contains the concept of the good—coming, as it does, from two Greek words, *eu*, meaning good, and *daimonia* meaning spirit; thus he suggests that in order to say what happiness is, it is first necessary to say what the good is. His answer is clear enough: the good is simply that which *all things desire* and then asserts that *all things desire* their own perfection, their own excellence,

⁷At least at first: early on in Book One of the *Nicomachean Ethics* he argues that Plato's theory of forms only raises more difficulties than it solves for the project at hand, but he does come back to the spirit of his master's insights at the very end of the *Ethics* in Book Ten by claiming that theoretical wisdom, contemplation of the highest immutable good, is the most excellent of, and the unifying principle of, all the other virtues.

their own integrity, their own proper, to use a modern word—and a key word in Arendt's fecund statement above—*dignity*. Each and everything along the great hierarchical chain of being, according to this philosophy, has its own proper 'dignity' to realize. Human dignity or perfection (hovering around the very top of this chain) is found in acquiring those particular qualities or excellences that correspond to its own complex *principle of life* in which is found rational and irrational, spiritual and material powers. Thus, the intellectual and moral virtues are those qualities that bring *unity* to these powers—a unity, so to speak, which is the very *perfection* of the organism—first at the level of the single person (individual good) and then at the level of the *polis* (common good).

Aristotle's insight into the *natural* tendency on the part of all existing things towards greater and greater unity and simplicity (as an essential characteristic of the good), though paradoxically situated within the context of higher and higher intensities of complexity on the great chain of being, is strengthened by many of the scientific revolutions of the 20th century. The revolutions in physics and genetics, in particular, have played no small role in inspiring moral philosophers to reconsider traditional virtue-centred Ethics over static rule-based ethical models which tend to be legalistic and rigid, and likewise over other ethical systems that argue for absolute and radical relativity.⁸ The implications of this

⁸One must proceed cautiously here since although all the particular truths and principles in philosophy, natural science, and the social sciences, are related and complementary—at least when perceived deeply and accurately—they are at the same time clearly distinct. If there are any weaknesses in the great Immanuel Kant's impressive philosophical system, they can usually be traced back to his attempt to philosophically express, with the same precision, the insights, and truths he saw in Newtonian physics. A few centuries later, many moral philosophers made similar mistakes in their attempts to translate the insights of Heisenberg's theory of uncertainty or Einstein's theories of relativity into their own moral systems—superficially arguing for absolute uncertainty or relativity in the moral realm. There is uncertainty and relativity in the moral realm, of course, and the realms

for our topic are enormous for it brings out the vast difference between the naturalness of genuine authority versus the contrived nature of authoritarianism—wherein more and more complexity and diversity, provided the virtues are present, enriches unity (natural authority) rather than, when they are not present, undermining or destroying it (contrived authoritarianism).

This is part of what I was getting at above when I suggested that authority cannot be imposed from the outside unless there is a fundamental acceptance of it, or some ontological correspondence to it, on the inside: when the lower irrational powers (that are natural and good in and of themselves) of the *human life principle* obey the higher rational powers, a certain harmony and unity ensues in the individual, as long as these rational powers are governed by the intellectual virtues. Something similar is true in the public domain with the common good: the virtuous citizen naturally submits to a virtuous political authority in a mutually enriching exchange whereby the virtuous citizen contributes to the common good and the authorities responsible for the common good contribute to the individual citizen's good. Surely, vicious individuals lacking the intellectual and moral virtues will not submit to a virtuous public authority unless forced to do so, just as the virtuous citizen will not submit to a vicious political authority unless forced; thus the need for law to govern human behaviour.

If the laws are 'just' laws, the just and virtuous citizen will *naturally* submit; if the laws are 'unjust', the submission on the part of the virtuous person will be neither natural nor real. Likewise, the vicious person will not naturally submit to 'just' laws, but if forced long enough (trained so to speak), the submission may become natural and real in that it contributes to both this individual's good as well as the common good. No such 'just' or 'unjust' laws are needed outside the human realm,

of matter and motion are related to the human moral realm since humans are material and in motion, but all existing things, minerals, plants, animals, and humans, are distinct and vastly different kinds of things (even though they are all related) and must be approached with this in mind *as a fundamental principle* of investigation.

of course, because the 'good' of other living things (plants and animals) and even non-living organisms (rocks and minerals) follow 'natural' laws 'naturally'; these laws and the 'submission' to them are more or less fixed and cannot be other than they are, even though there are 'natural' disruptions in their 'natural' cycles of activity.⁹ The minerals in the soil 'desire' to nourish the fig seed that falls into it; if it does so, it achieves its own 'good' and thus its own perfection. The fig seed 'desires' to become a fig tree and give forth figs; if it does, it achieves its own 'good' and thus its own perfection. Aristotle's definition of the good as *that* which all things *desire*, namely, their own perfection, and then his recognition of the complementary hierarchical relations among all the very different kinds of perfections—contributing together to the overall 'good' of existence, and ultimately to the happiness of human beings as the final end and purpose of their existence, had a profound influence on the field of Ethics over the ages, but it also attracted criticisms and misunderstandings, some of which are necessary to very briefly address in order to better appreciate what Arendt has proposed in the context of my support for, and explanation of, a true world political moral authority at this *kairos* in history: the *kairos* of corona pandemic.

Despite the obvious anachronism, one could say that the earliest criticism of Aristotelian virtue-centred Ethics appears before Aristotle. I mean that although Plato and Aristotle at times play by fairly different rules, they are playing the same game, and fighting the same battle: the battle against the moral relativism and absolutism of the Sophists. In his life-long battle against the Sophists, many of Plato's characters in his *Dialogues* are able to express their opposition to Plato's (or Socrates') moral positions better than the actual Sophists themselves. He is so

⁹This statement needs qualification if one introduces 'big history' into the equation since the 'perfections' and 'desires' of all things seem not always to be fixed. In other words, what is to be said of the 'perfections' and 'desires' of the rocks that came together to form our earth some four billion years ago? One could say, I suppose, that the earth itself was what these rocks 'desired' in coming together, and thus the 'good' of their activities was achieved when the globe was formed.

good at stating his opponents' positions that one is often confused as to where the truth lies. The half-truths of the Sophists do, after all, contain truths and some of this confusion is reflected in Aristotle's own expression of his moral philosophy. Aristotle admits early on in *Nicomachean Ethics* that, due to the nature of ethical enquiry, it is not possible to precisely and accurately express moral principles and truths in the same way or with the same precision and accuracy as in other sciences (mathematics, for instance). And Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle all admit that moral concepts do 'change', but by this, they were not advocating moral relativism; they made a distinction between moral concepts changing because society changes and moral concepts changing as society changes. The difference is a subtle, but an important one.¹⁰ To understand the difference is paramount to understanding how Aristotle, following Plato and Socrates, was able to split the difference between absolute Absolutism and absolute Relativism with, what we might call, *relative absolutism*. Not to understand the difference led, in modernity, to influential criticisms of Aristotle's ethics, often based on somewhat erroneous and hasty interpretations of astute philosophers such as G. E. Moore. Moore's arguments, especially, gained wide acceptance at the turn of the last century when he coined a new term to capture some of the criticism that

¹⁰Society changes, of course, because human beings change; but humans change in a way that is different *in kind* from the way all other things change due to the real spiritual/physical unity they are. If time, as Aristotle suggests, is a measure of change, then different things relate to time in different ways according to the kinds of things they are: "Man's participation in the world of bodies shapes the time of his conscious awareness, yet in his spiritual activities he is temporal in a different, and deeper, way than that of physical bodies. Even in the biological sphere, there is a temporality which is not mere physical temporality. The "time" of a tree, expressed in the yearly rings of its trunk, is the manifestation of its specific life cycle, and not a mere unit of rotation around the sun. In human consciousness, the various levels of time are at once assumed and transcended, rendering that consciousness temporal in a way all its own" (Ratzinger 183).

had surfaced long before him, anticipated even by Aristotle. The new term was the 'naturalistic fallacy' and his argument went something like this: by claiming that the good is simply that which we desire is to reduce the good to a natural property since desire is a natural property. This is fallacious, Moore claimed, precisely because the good is a non-natural property and incapable of philosophical analysis (Moore 15-21).

Another version of this is to say that desire is a *descriptive* (or positive) term, whereas the good is a *prescriptive* (or normative) term and it is fallacious to reduce the latter to the former, or to blur the obvious distinctions between these terms, which is what seems to happen if one simply argues that the good is *that* which all things *desire*. To be sure, Moore is right at one level, but as far as I know, he never claimed that this is what Aristotle did; he even appears to appreciate that Aristotle, with his doctrine of the four causes, does the very opposite.¹¹ At any rate, my intention is not to undertake the monumental task of investigating Moore's understanding of Aristotle, but just to point out that to my knowledge not even Moore, who first pointed out the 'naturalistic fallacy,' accused Aristotle of committing it; this accusation, as I have said, seems to stem from hasty misinterpretations of Moore's work.¹² Another questionable attack on Aristotle's ethics comes from those who claim he committed the ethical fallacy of 'appeal to nature'—a fallacy that improperly and without qualification identifies the category of the *good* with that of the *natural*.

It is true that these categories have a profound relationship in Aristotle's thought, as I have ever so briefly and subtly alluded to above, but nowhere does Aristotle argue, without qualification, that an action is morally acceptable simply by virtue of it being *natural*; his concept of *nature* is far too rich and much too complex to be used in such a reductionist sort of way,

¹¹Another function of the 'naturalistic fallacy' is to reduce final causality to material causality, which Aristotelian science and metaphysics forever guards against.

¹²In my judgment, there is much to criticize in Moore's *Ethics*, but there is also much to appreciate.

to say nothing of his treatment of the *good* as it relates to the natural in the context of his exceedingly elaborate anthropology and metaphysics.¹³

¹³For an excellent account of the history of the idea of *nature*, in which Aristotle figures prominently, see Hadot, who presents seven different accounts of *nature* beginning with Homer's *Odyssey*, wherein it basically signifies the 'result of growth,' but not simply in general and in the abstract, as was the case some 400 years later in the 5th century BCE and onwards. The context in Homer is not an abstraction: "Hermes shows Odysseus the aspect (*phusin*)—black and white flower—of the 'herb of life,' which the gods, he says, call *molu*. This 'aspect' is the particular, definite form that 'results' from a process of natural development" (Hadot 18). Odysseus is to eat the 'natural' herb *molu* as a defence against the 'unnatural' sorceries of Circe, a minor goddess, and the god of drugs and herbs, who transforms her enemies into animals through herbs and drugs. Hermes is an interpreter of the gods, whose prototype in the Egyptian god Thoth, known as the 'tongue' of Ra—so also an interpreter of the one supreme god. The second 'definition' comes from fragments of Heraclitus's writings wherein he specifies "a division of each reality *kata*" (i.e., according to) *phusin*. Nature here has to do with "the process of realization of each reality or else with its result" (19) or a "springing-forth of things, an appearance or manifestation of things that results from spontaneity" (18). Hadot gives five different interpretations of what *nature/phusin* means in Heraclitus's well-known aphorism: *phusiskruptesthaiphilei*: 1. The 'constitution' of each thing *tends* to hide (i.e., hard to know). 2. The 'constitution' of each thing *wants* to be hidden (i.e., does not want to be revealed). 3. The 'origin' tends to hide itself (i.e., the origin of things is hard to know). 4. What 'causes' things to appear tends to make them disappear (i.e., what causes birth tends to cause death). Finally, 'Form' (or appearance) *tends* to disappear (i.e., what is born wants to die). The third account comes from fragments of Parmenides's writings: "The origin or birth of the heavens and all that is contained within them" or the "birth (nature) of birth (nature)" or the "origin (nature) of origin (nature)" (18). The fourth is from fragments of Empedocles's writings wherein nature refers to "A process in the sense of the appearance of a thing" (18) (cosmogonic theory: earth, air, fire, water, love, strife). The fifth is from Plato's *Phaedo*: "The subject of the Pre-Socratics' research: That which is produced by spontaneous growth (earth, air, fire, water)

4. Structural Renewal and Reform of the UN

With these clarifications we are in a better position to appreciate Arendt's momentous insights into our theme of the need (now more than ever) for a true world political authority and to understand the central place she gives to the concept of dignity—a modern concept, as I have alluded to above, that captures in a new way the very spirit of Aristotelian virtue-centred Ethics and Politics. This concept, so important for Arendt, was also at the heart of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and, in my judgement, was both the glue that held the entire document together and the honey that attracted the entire world to embrace it. To call this event a milestone is an understatement; a revolution is more accurate. For although human rights discourse had at least a two-hundred-year history before this document emerged, what made it so utterly unique was its *universal* character. As mentioned above, nations from everywhere around the world, in spite of vast religious, cultural, historical, economic, ideological, and philosophical differences, agreed on a list of universal rights ranging from the "right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion," (Article 18) to the "right to a standard of living adequate for *health* and well-being" (Article 25); this article, in particular, underscores the core value of the World Health Organization. Cognizant of the almost insurmountable challenges of interpretation such a list

which 'they' (the pre-socratics) consider (wrongly) to be the primary causes of the growth of the universe' (21-22) and then in the *Timaeus*: "Nature as A Divine Art" (23). The sixth is found in Aristotle's *Physics* and *Metaphysics*: "A principle of inner motion inside each thing, which is also a principle of growth" (23). Hadot importantly points out that Aristotle, in accepting the "analogy between nature and art ... adds [such] radical oppositions to it" (23) that it was to become a "problem that [would] dominate the entire history of the notion of nature." (24). Finally, in Stoic thought, *nature* comes to be personified as "An Artistic fire that proceeds systematically and methodically to engender all things" (25-28). Except for the contributions of Stoic philosophy, Aristotle considers this entire history of *nature* before he puts forth his important qualifications.

presented, the masterminds of the document presented the hermeneutical key in the preamble, namely, the *inherent dignity* involved in being a human person.

Incidentally, it is worth noting here that two of the most important masterminds were from Asia, Charles Malik of Lebanon and P. C. Chang of China, representing both the Abrahamic and Indo/China civilizations and ethical traditions respectively. There appeared to be general agreement among them that *dignity* was cultivated in *rest and leisure*, the very basis of culture and society, which seems to suggest that the rights to rest and leisure in Article 24 were particularly connected to the formulation of Article 16 that stated, “the family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society”—something that Aristotle, as we have seen, assumes in his ethical and political philosophy. In any case, inherent human dignity was certainly the key concept of the document, and the desire to protect and cultivate it was the main impetus of the founding of the UN in the first place, given the ruthless and “humanly incomprehensible” efforts to all but extinguish it. These “absolutely evil” efforts, as Arendt teaches, reveals the absolute need of a *new guarantee* to protect, encourage, and cultivate human dignity through (it bears repeating): “a *new political principle*, in a *new law on earth*, whose validity *this time* must comprehend *the whole of humanity* while its *power* must remain strictly *limited*, rooted in and controlled by *newly defined territorial entities*” (viii-ix).

5. Conclusion

In many ways, Arendt was giving voice here in 1951 (when her important book on totalitarianism was published) to the very ideas and sentiments that gave birth to the UN six years earlier: a new political principle in a new law on earth validated by the whole of humanity. But what went wrong, we may ask? This question is not meant to downplay or forget the many achievements of the UN over these last 75 years, but to stimulate discussion regarding how the organization might be renewed and reformed so that a true world political authority may now

emerge at this key *kairos* in world history. I have suggested above that the stronger nations ended up manipulating the organization to the detriment of the weaker nations, thus undermining the UN's original spirit as a 'family of nations'; this was almost inevitable since the stronger and richer nations were (are) the principal financial donors. This is not a new problem, it was there from the beginning, and there have been many men and women of good will from inside and outside the UN who have sought to address it in varying ways, but without much success. What is more, the strongest nation, and the one that helped to inspire the UN's authentic vision in so many ways from the very beginning, and which took a leading role in its establishment, has now become one of its greatest detractors. The real solution, in my judgment, is a substantial structural reform of the UN so that its power might be exponentially increased precisely by redefining its limits. This insight into authentic power or true authority is most brilliantly articulated by Arendt when she writes that "its *power*" referring to the power of the "new political principle in a new law on earth" must be "*limited*" exactly by being "rooted in and controlled by *newly defined territorial entities*." This is as brilliant as it is radical, since she realizes that the Westphalian order of the nation-state as we have known it for over 300 years has worn itself out.

It is time to redefine the essence of territorial entities in non-territorial ways. The beasts are territorial; human beings can do better by choosing patriotism over nationalism in a 'family of countries' united around, and lovingly devoted to, their common mother, Planet Earth. Arendt's unique feminine genius, in addition to a plethora of brilliant feminine voices from all around the world, have together been singing this same sweet song for decades now, but the world's most 'powerful' *men*, immature and arrogant (most of the brutal dictators have been, and still are, male), are tone deaf and can no longer listen to such music. Is it a coincidence, parenthetically, that New Zealand, Taiwan, and Germany, the countries responding best, by far, to the present pandemic, are all led by women? I don't think so. I shall close with another quote from another Arendt-like woman,

Arundhati Roy, a contemporary novelist and social critic in India whose recent article, "Pandemic as a Portal," captures many of my themes in a powerful way and just at the right *kairos*:

Whatever it is, coronavirus has made the mighty kneel and brought the world to a halt like nothing else could. Our minds are still racing back and forth, longing for a return to "normality", trying to stitch our future to our past and refusing to acknowledge the rupture. But the rupture exists. And in the midst of this terrible despair, it offers us a chance to rethink the doomsday machine we have built for ourselves. Nothing could be worse than a return to normality. Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next. We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, and our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it.

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