

Just Fear Not Just Reason

RAHUL GOVIND

Fear is already too caught up in the imperative – do not fear – a word enmeshed in its use as negation. This negative imperative captures the autocratic archaic of that which meaning is unable to educt; concealing the content that it lacks. For it appears today a matter of fact that fear – the word – has lost its hold, easily kidnapped by sentences all and sundry. In this it is closest to reason whose use (grammar) is falsely accomplished by banishing precisely that which is germane to it: the certainty and uncertainty of which it can never be certain. In convincing what resists it is unable to ascertain the difference between expression and conversion. To do so would be one or becoming the other. To be it has to possibly not be itself – evidence distinct from and distinctive of the thesis – and so being it can never be characterised or have (be) content. Not dissimilarly, fear is never distinguishable from its possibility which remains indistinct in its imperative negation: sign, locus and invocation of itself. Their exchange value lies in exhibition. Panic as a word – symbolic charge rather than language use – does today what fear never is but whose clue lies in the etymological trenches of the dictionary: “sudden attack or danger, calamity”. Overexposure and the loss of resolution – visual and practical – allow panic to take the baton off fear.

With Hobbes standing in for modernity fear is indentured into political ontology. Natural reason – acting as a strong mitigant – designates in its rationality the possibility of differentiating nature from culture as civil/political. However fear as overwhelmingly – not merely – affective effectively pushes in the other direction: it embodies culture as the (vengeful) ghost of nature. Culture as civil political is its awakening and expulsion: how else to capture the former as distinctively different from the latter, a distinction that lies precisely in the possibility of lapsing into the indistinct i.e. nature the body whose boundaries and (thereby)

unity is never clear, inherently manifold as it is. What falls through is the distinction between sovereignty by acquisition and sovereignty by institution. Whether we – emerging from nature – come together because we fear each other or whether we subject ourselves in abject – beginning here a long afterlife of the subject in political theory – condition to she who threatens our life and (whom) we fear, it makes little of difference.¹ The calamity of nature is recognisable in the (re)cognition that is capitulation to sense at the cost of an irreducible yet nonetheless timely lag i.e. recapitulation. This is rationality, always but a moment or too late. In being-late it makes amends by emending what it purportedly explains. A failed essay at concealing catachresis: that what is being explained and the fact of explaining are wholly inextricable (from each other). Fear is justified fear. Just fear as just fear. Taking flight from the reverberation of affect i.e. the vibration of what is embodied – nature as body encrypting spirit at the limit of signifying it – it is let loose into the vacuous rationality of imperative. Now just use what just does.

Have no fear. (otherwise you will have much to fear voices reason). Is the violence of command – how different from assurance when it is effective – a refuge for sense? Reason has nothing to fear but (fear) itself. If the latter has been said to be rationality, it already infects it with what would have to be left alien. Rationality has to alienate itself – explain itself in terms of what it is not – to evade the charge of vacuity even while it loses ratio. This is the monstrous body, subjective correlate of the ‘political’ state of nature – since only the body has no ratio as the material and residue of the inference that is one – always a moment away from lapsing into or achieving at a stand-still, the “kingdom of tranquil laws”.² Pure reason and pure nature have thereby little to distinguish themselves, perpetually fading they cast culture, as their always final card ventriloquising right: how else to (mistakenly) identify one as (universal) subject. In the monochromatic monotony of tone, the president of a country less than 15 years from becoming a nuclear hit man had said, “There is nothing more to fear more than fear itself”. This ignited: mushrooming Japanese skies.

Brilliant – and deeply profound – in an age awash with fear. One doesn’t have had to have had to have had.../to have traversed the thicket of the Dialectic of Enlightenment to know that nature and culture hardly offer up a self-evident ratio: not merely when held hostage by the bomb. The two terms if discrete alternate only though the self-definition of one; if traced through a third we arrive at an ex-termination i.e. regress, death passing out, passing out... never past out. There fore-defining human nature involves an expulsion whose irrepressible return has been signified as ‘second nature’ (with an indefinable coefficient). There is a connect between the received wisdom of the president of the country-prior-to-its-becoming- a-nuclear adventurer and a selective rendering of Hobbes that allows crass – cultureless – *real* politik. Counter to Hobbes himself, the hobbesians’ effort to construct a state of nature are scarcely aware and callously unaware of the nature/culture of construction. Thereby conceived – as natural – such miscarriage is monstrous pure and simple, impure and confused. Nothing in-between such realism and complete destruction – destruction fanning out catastrophe from the hub of foreign – alien – affairs. The formalism of political philosophy and its mainstream traditions is condensed in the vacuity of the line,

“there is nothing more to fear than fear itself”. The emptiness within blinds it to the destruction it wrecks ‘else’where: where else? Reiterating nature/culture with no ratio determining self and alien is but a unilateral one. In other words, the realism of nature – the primitive insistence that the alien should be possibly exterminated when perceived – is indiscernible from an alienation which has ingested possibility as existence.

Panic one imagines – one cannot be hopeful – is the possibility of conscious fear. It captures a leak gushing across the object continua without limit demanding (and desiring) the subject. Affective it hasn’t been subjectivised into an object. It exists for a subject in so far as it is recognised not as known but incurred. This signifies itself only in false embodiment. Objectification can only be the expression – whether vague or inaccurate – of subject-perception. This is feeling which feels itself without self-contradiction in a way that knowledge can never know itself with contradiction. The subject-object polarity of a knowing that can never itself be known iterative displacement as just comeuppance – is transposed into an alternation of subject-object as concatenation: symbolising inadequacy it invokes the adequate. More rational than rationality such an act is conscious of its act and not suicidal – in the form of knowing – when revealing of the so called object: the all pervading inheritance of a naïve epistemology. This records the rage on the part of the latter which knows it can never know and worse feels it to be so: rationality here as always is lapsing affect. Just fear condensing on the brink of nature, a no-body. It just is.

The *work* – and the (politically) incumbent raw-material – is missing in the political analysis of today which is just rationality, no different from fear. It immures itself from thinking the outbreak – not merely in the form of disease or terror – but the specter and only chance of the subject. This in the meanwhile is documented as naturalised reason: it is reasonable to fear the stranger; we are time and again warned not to befriend the unknown person. (Who else can one *befriend*?). What had induced the need for politics in the first place is reiterated in a state of nature without exit. It is only in this condition that we can speak of justice as fairness referring to ‘practices’ all the while obliterating the distinction between the two – principle and practice – which can be made only in principle. Practice retracts into the former now emptied of distinction, leaving nothing more (or less) to explain, account for, or investigate. Neither interested in what the State does (‘modern constitutional democracies’ are axiomatised) nor in what they are, description, justification and explanation recede into a thought experiment without issue. A return to Roosevelt’s motto, not word for word, there is nothing more just than the treatment of justice itself. Veiled ignorance³ – not unlike the old state of nature – has escaped its laboratory becoming all pervasive. Meanwhile new erstwhile wars mushroom with prediction as justification – this is what time without content can do – that they too will become erstwhile. A blind faith is what just is.

Notes

1. Immanuel Kant. **Perpetual Peace and Other Essays**. (Trans.) Ted Humphrey (Hackett, 1983, Indianapolis), p. 112. Kant of course famously follows Hobbes here, notwithstanding stated positions. "However a man (or a people) who is merely in a state of nature denies me this security and injures me merely by being in this state. For although he does not actively injure me, he does so by virtue of the lawlessness of his state by which he constantly threatens me, and I can require him either to enter with me into a state of civil law or to remove himself from my surrounding". The state wherein one requires the other to enter into a 'civil state' or remove him is left – and has to be left – indefinite. And, perhaps more importantly, how does one distinguish one from the other, the subject from he who is made an object (of action). As an aside it might be said that Hobbes' autobiography is a biography of fear. In his mother's womb, when she trembled with fear at the approach of the Spanish Armada, Hobbes is claimed to have said, he was then born a twin to fear.
2. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. **Phenomenology of the Spirit**. (Trans.) AV Miller (Oxford University Press, 1977, Oxford), p. 91. "Consequently the supersensible world is an inert realm of laws which, though beyond the perceived world – for this exhibits law only through incessant change – is equally present in it and is its tranquil image".
3. There is no need for a veil of ignorance regarding what is being referred to here.