

“The Power, The Pride, The Reach of Perished Rome”:  
Pierre Manent and the Science of Rome

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*On ne peut jamais quitter les Romains.*

—Montesquieu, *De l’Esprit des Lois*, XI.13

*We never understand more than the half of things when we neglect the science of Rome.*

—Pierre Manent, *The City of Man*, 206.

The impact of Rome on the Western mind and imagination is so immense one may suggest it impossible to think or imagine the West without Rome. Invocation of “Rome” gives rise to a long list of experiences and personages, to mention only the likes of republic, empire, and Church; consul, senate, and tribune; Pagan gods and the Christian God; Caesar, Cato, and Cicero; Ambrose, Augustine, and Jerome; glory and fall, virtue and decadence, triumph and decimation, massacre and martyrdom; and so on. It is not for nothing that the cliché persists —“All roads lead to Rome” (or, as the French theologian and poet, Alain de Lille, originally phrased it in 1175: *Mille viae ducunt homines per saecula Romam*—“A thousand roads lead men forever to Rome”). Politically speaking, Eric Voegelin once remarked the following: “To be the heir of Rome has remained the supreme authorization of European governments for more than a millennium; and the line of tradition was kept up through the time of the national states, with diminishing prestige, until 1806. Even then, the idea was not dead...” One can extend Rome’s influence beyond European governments, even if not as direct inherited authority, certainly in the mediated form of influence and as serious object of consideration. The American Founders notably attended to Roman experience, and the political science of the *Federalist Papers* found much to draw from Rome. Yet it is seemingly rare for today’s political science to consider Rome deeply, with anything more than mere historical interest. Even contemporary political philosophy rarely takes up Roman thinkers with the expectation of finding fresh insights.

While a late nineteenth century poet like Thomas Hardy might have been moved to speak of “The power, the pride, the reach of perished Rome” upon visiting the ruins of the Fiesole, for contemporary scholars it is more likely the case that “[t]he Romans of history pass for thick-haired, thick-headed rustics, for a people of soldiers, not to say downright bullies. Even if one concedes that they had a certain political genius, they are reproached for the centralizing imperialism that was its fruit.” To be sure, libraries abound with works acknowledging the Roman aqueducts and certain agricultural innovations, not to mention once more (and literally this time) the roads. However, on more interesting—or spiritual and spirited—matters the Romans are often deemed but intellectual epigones of the Greeks, from which follows that Roman political experience and order is a diminution of the preceding Greek situation. If this is something of an exaggeration regarding academic views, it is nonetheless true that many acknowledge the influence of Roman law and jurisprudence, but to reiterate, mostly *historically*. While earlier modern political scientists and philosophers sought important

lessons—even political wisdom—in Rome, from Machiavelli to the American Founders, today we tend to think less seriously and *politically* about Rome.

That said, a number of popular accounts questioning American imperialism in light of Rome exist, which further corroborates the Western imagination's attraction to Rome. Is there somehow then a dearth of imagination in current political science? Or perhaps the problem is of a more technical nature in terms of the deficiency of sources. Formulated as a question, must modern historiography fill in the minutiae as further facts continue to be uncovered—anthropological, sociological, etc.—for political science to develop a properly political understanding of Rome? The ancient sources, such as Livy and Polybius, are often deemed untrustworthy, and the political histories of early modern political philosophers are likewise criticized for their lack of 'accuracy.' One senses among enlightened opinion that to be truly modern means being altogether *too* modern for ancient political practices and theories. With what assurance, however, can we say we are indeed distant and therefore wholly "beyond" Rome? To be sure, whatever else the modern political project entails, it endeavors to reject much of ancient political thought and practice. Would not then its very success bear the price of burying or obfuscating the past? But is it not equally true that whatever its success, and however it might be measured, there is nonetheless a remarkable paradox at the heart of this project? Accepting that modernity was born as a political project wrought by writers who reflected deeply on antiquity, not least on Rome, even as they sought to "overcome" it, there is reason to think that Rome remains present, or that its presence is part of our present, even somewhat inescapably. This paradox, and curious logic of modernity, serves as a point of entry into the work of Pierre Manent, and his focus on the importance of Rome.

In this paper I discuss Manent's undertaking of what he calls a "science of Rome," situating it within his broader "science of political forms," which is arguably his greatest contribution to political science. The science of Rome especially illustrates the latter science's political and hermeneutical importance. The science of political forms examines the types of human associations that have successively unfolded in the West, and through which Western history becomes articulate; or, alternatively, by way of which one can most adequately articulate the *political* history of the West. Manent's more recent work emphasizes a greater sense of continuity from the ancient *polis* to the modern nation than his previous stress on the "modern difference" had claimed, while highlighting different differences, as it were. His science of Rome further explores this continuity by finding modern beginnings or precursors in Roman thought and practice. Modernity has more than one beginning, suggests Manent. A proper understanding of modernity—and of our present political situation—rests upon examining such multiple *archai*. The famous quarrel between the Ancients and Moderns, which is itself a sort of contest between two forms of political science—the ancient science of the city and the modern science of the state—is thereby qualified by Manent with a third term and science, extrapolated from Roman experience.

On this front and various others, Manent engages with Leo Strauss's claims, sometimes agreeing and other times adjusting Strauss's conclusions. Manent argues that Rome contains a unique and important moment in the course of Western development, for it offers the only example that contains two political forms in rapid succession—two polar, or opposing, "mother" forms—in the transformation from city to empire. Thus, while ancient political science accounted for the city *after* the city's emergence and existence (even arriving near the time of the city's demise), and modern political science is inaugurated as a project to *begin* the new political form of the state, Roman science is situated in and between two forms. Thus it

grapples with reconciling ancient knowledge and a new or modern experience, while moving beyond ancient experience in the midst of forming a new or modern understanding of things. Interesting in itself, the Roman situation further bears on later Western political development, particularly because it is in Rome where the rule of One fully emerges. Rome makes genuine monarchy possible, and so opens the way for true unity in the form of a consolidated people under a single ruler, as well as humanity at large under God's dominion. The political unity and universalism emergent in Rome drives later European political development, not least as the Christian City of God deepens the meaning and substance of universal community, invoking additional subsequent responses. Rome is therefore doubly important for understanding the European present, as it laid the seeds for the eventual emergence of the nation as a new political form (in the trajectory from Roman monarchy to the Christian king), and exemplifies the confusion concomitant with transition, as likewise now in the European project's endeavor to abandon the national form—the latter even going a step further by rejecting the very need to found any new form or explicitly articulate the kind of community it espouses.

Manent's science of Rome is wrought through readings of great texts, and yet, as has been said, "for Manent, textual interpretation has never been an end in itself." Rather it is a matter of learning "how to think about the world." So far as the present world goes, Manent is considered one of the most important contemporary philosophers of the nation-state. It is his contention that the hasty desire to do away with the present national form that mediates "physical and spiritual aspects" of European life, and upon which Europeans "predicated everything still worthy of being cherished in [the] several national histories as well as in common European history," has brought Europe to "the verge of self-destruction." A crucial part of restoring balance to European political life rests in garnering a coherent understanding of Europe's long development: "It is...a matter of becoming aware of our political genesis and substance." Grasping the significance and effectual truth of Rome are central to such recovered awareness, and may contain as much as half of Western self-understanding, if indeed "[w]e never understand more than the half of things when we neglect the science of Rome."

### **A Science of Political Forms**

As is well known, central to classical political philosophy was a concern with the *politeia*. The term is rich with meaning as partly indicated by the fact that English translations vary, rendering it as "constitution," "republic," or "regime." Arguably "regime" is the most appropriate term since *politeia* includes, but is not exhausted by, the formal or legal constitution of a political order, nor is it necessarily republican, in any strict sense. Nonetheless, most concretely, the regime is the arrangement of authoritative offices or honors, particularly regarding the highest form of office, for example, the *ekklesia* or assembly of citizens in an ancient democracy. More broadly, any given regime both represents and constitutes a certain way of life, a political culture or ethos—that is, a public morality and sense of justice that its laws, institutions, and members personify. In short, it is "a comprehensive good and moral order" to varying degrees. Classical political philosophy, however, not only took for granted, but even made explicit, that such a comprehensive good and moral order could only exist in the city, or *polis*, for this kind of human association alone reached the requisite level of *autarkeia*, or self-sufficiency. Thus, the extent to which a science of regime in the classical sense is helpful for modern political societies may be debated.

One thinker who has stressed the continued relevance of a classical science of regimes, and one who has had a great influence on Manent himself, is Leo Strauss. Strauss makes it very clear

how important the ancient insight of the regime remains today: “The qualitatively different regimes, or kinds of regimes, and the qualitatively different purposes constituting or legitimating them, [...] by revealing themselves as the most important things, supply the key to the understanding of all political things.” Manent does not reject this claim outright; however, the regime, any regime, must *be somewhere*, which is to say it is embodied in some way—within some broader form—and these embodiments have changed over time. The classical political philosophers engaged in the study of regime change, but the broader form never changed in their experience, and they largely denied the possibility of politics beyond the *polis*, as found in their critique of non-Greek, imperial life. Nevertheless, with the transformation of the city to a new and distinct form, it is plausible that the regimes will be impacted. Is it not then conceivable that the ancient cycle of regimes operates differently, or more than altered even broken, when the framework—or form—of regimes alters or expands?

For Manent, the form of human association is the framework and instrument “to put things in common” and so to “crystallize the fact of being human.” Each such political form or body relates the speeches and deeds of a community to a broader complex of space and time, providing continuity with the past and hope for the future. Stated differently, a political form is the political endeavor—requisite for the being that is a political animal—to make universal humanity concrete in a particular form or cadre, and thereby mediate this inevitable tension. Such formation or concretization is the condition for what Manent calls *opération*, or political action, and every form bears intrinsic properties and possibilities of *opération*; the community is the cadre for action, and thus the delimited body that makes certain internal and external actions possible. Therefore, each form can be conceived as a manifestation of human confidence in the ability to act, providing the circumstances that shape morals and passions, human self-understanding, and the range of human activity in life as lived with others. It is fair to say that according to Manent, there is a certain link between the dimensions of a form and the potency of its inhabitants’ souls, and thus the kind of rule and rulers, or regime, that is made possible: political physics and political psychology intertwine. More concretely, a form makes possible the “*production du commun*,” initiated by the “primary and master form,” namely the ancient city, from which other forms metamorphosed. By no means rejecting the science of regimes, Manent therefore offers what emerges as a necessary supplement to the classical perspective with his science of political forms. If the regime is the “key” to unlock political understanding, as Strauss suggests, then its displacement into a new kind of political space or body has opened the door to an additional, or concomitant, science.

One may suggest here the analogy of the human body with its visible form, and the human soul in its invisible form, which together form the person. We know from experience that bodies and souls come in a variety of shapes and kinds, and shape does not necessarily correlate with kind, but all such ensouled bodies are living persons. For example, one finds courageous souls in both large and small bodies, just as both tall and short people can have either just or unjust souls. Yet a courageous soul manifests itself differently in a different body, for action depends on some level on the contingency of the body’s size and strength, or its unity and ability. Thus, it is a question of some interest whether any given regime can exist in any size or kind of form and whether or not there are certain limitations. One may wonder, say, can democracy exist in both a small form like a city or a large form like an extended state? The dimensions and expanse of a political body is not without consequence, and the differences between ancient and modern democracy are not unrelated to this, as well as other differences, between the ancient city and the modern state. However, all such forms, or polities, are on some level human

creations, even as they are extensions or reflections of human nature, for they result from human speeches and deeds. Being so constituted suggests a certain amount of fixity as well as the ever-present possibility of change. In light of this, a science of political forms asks to what extent certain virtues or characters are related to particular forms or political contexts: are all passions and excellences of the human soul always and anywhere possible, or does the concrete cadre of community delimit what may become manifest?

At any rate, there are, Manent writes, “a finite number of political forms,” and this, he adds, is “one of the most important theoretical propositions of political science.” Its great import resides in the fact that the human and political world has structure and order and is not therefore indefinitely variable. Strictly speaking there are four political forms: the city, the empire, the Church, and the nation (or nation-state). The Western historical succession has roughly followed in this order, although not to the utter exclusion or elimination of previous forms, and indeed non-Western empires preceded the city (which are arguably non-political), just as tribes of a less political nature preceded the original civic order. As intimated, the importance of the first form can hardly be overstated, for it is the ancient city that began the course of succession. The city is the first establishment of human order oriented towards action; it is indeed a sort of work of action, or itself “a common action.” It is the framework that first made possible the unique political “dynamic” or “movement” of the West that consists of the capacity for action and the production of the common thing—*la chose publique*, the *res publica*—that evokes the appearance and reality of human self-government. It is neither reducible to an instrument that satisfies basic human needs, nor is it in essence a means of protecting rights. Rather, the city *is* action, which ever carries with it the possibility, or danger, of transgression; therefore, it must be governed. At one point Manent characterizes governing as “action over action,” and as the most difficult action of man. There is, therefore, a “sad truth” to the city. Although the city is constituted by liberty—the freedom to act and the production of common activity—it is nonetheless inseparable from war: both internal faction, or civil war, and external war with neighboring cities. After all, there is something “terrible” about or in human action, for it both expresses the human being and exposes him. Every actor steps outside of himself at the risk of losing himself, or of initiating a course that is transgressive, beyond his intentions and various other limits. Later efforts of reform in political thought and action have sought to transform the dynamic of the city, so as to separate the liberty of the city from its accompanying disorders; that is, to allow for action while vying to circumscribe its destructiveness. “Subsequent history appears overall as the ever renewed search for the political form that might make it possible to gather again the energies of the city while escaping the city’s fate as free but destined to internal and external enmity.” What is more, Manent now argues that the energy and action of the city and the possibilities bound up with it likewise make the later modern project possible; hence the aforementioned continuity from the first emergence of the ancient city: “If we wish to understand the modern project, we must understand it on the basis of this first complete mobilizing of human action, that is, of the city.”

The ancient city’s energy was both its source of liberty and greatness while it was the very same that led to its downfall, for the Greek cities exhausted themselves in what Thucydides memorably called the *megiste kinesis*, or history’s gravest crisis, namely the Peloponnesian War. In its wake emerged the superimposition of the Macedonian empire. While the city is the first form, and indeed a natural political form as it contains all the ingredients of political life and its fulfillment, the empire too is “a *natural* political idea” as it “corresponds to men’s unity, to the universality of human nature, which wants to be recognized and addressed by a unique

power.” We cannot offer an extended discussion of all political forms here. But it is in considering the transition of the Greek cities to empire in comparison with the Roman city to empire that we may introduce the science of Rome. Manent is very adamant about the fact that the Greek empire did not radically transform the cities; while there were changes to the cities, the “profound transformations...did not affect the city as such.” In other words, “Athens submitted to Philip of Macedon while retaining its form as a city.” As previously mentioned, classical Greek political philosophy resigned itself to studying *regime* change, and neglected consideration of changing forms, even perhaps denying the possibility as such; at any rate, dramatic transformation in form was outside of Greek experiential reflection. In contrast, what makes Rome so fascinating is that “it underwent the greatest political transformation ever seen”—a transformation of political form that included a change of regime. Roman thought was both brought to bear on this event while likewise contributing to it.

### **The Science of Rome**

There is something “enigmatic” about Rome, partly because of its difference with Greek political experience, but it has a uniqueness beyond the Greek comparison. Indeed, the central section of Manent’s book engaging the question, *Les métamorphoses de la cité*, is entitled “L’énigme de Rome.” This section is further divided into three sections: “Rome and the Greeks,” “Rome under the gaze of the Moderns,” and “The study [*l’enquête*] of Cicero.” While forming the bulk of Manent’s science of Rome in the text, it is not isolated to this part, for the third division of the work, entitled, “L’Empire, l’Église, la Nation” devotes two out of three of its sections to an interpretation and discussion of St. Augustine, particularly his *Civitas Dei*. A science of Rome consists in examining Rome from the point of view of its three primary forms—the group of which Manent refers to as “the Roman series”—namely, the city, the empire, and the Church. For reasons of space, our discussion will be limited to the first two in the series.

Manent addresses the question of why Rome took such a different course from Athens even though both began similarly as cities, and so how it came to be that a city could give rise to an empire from within—how “the city itself could give birth to the empire, the city itself that experienced such an extension, which made this nearly unbelievable effort unto itself to transform itself from a small city into a global empire.” He traces the causes and consequences, or the human motivations and effects related to such an extraordinary event, revealing the political meaning of such an occurrence and its effect on human life. In his discussion he reveals how “the most delicate questions of morality, and even the most difficult question of ontology (such as the status of individuality) find themselves related to the question of political form.” If historians face the question—both in terms of comparing Athens and Rome, and Rome’s transition itself—political scientists, he argues, rarely engage the problem systematically. Thus, a “comparative political physics” is in order.

One finds many of the same elements in the political history of both Athens and Rome, the numerical division between the few and the many and their associated dissensions, as well as the notable personages who led either of the parties as all bearing especial importance—these being the primary sources of regime change. However, the class war developed differently in the two instances. Manent recounts that the spring of political development in Athens was in the fact that the power of the people grew due to a succession of eminent men, from Solon to Pericles, who took the side of the people, meeting their demands and guiding them. This succession of brilliant and aristocratic leaders *drove* the growing power of the people in

Athens. In contrast, Manent argues, in Rome, the peoples' demands were *controlled*, and thereby used, diverted, and hindered, by an aristocratic body, namely the Senate. No such equivalent body existed in Athens; however, the difference does not reside in institutional controls alone. For while Athens' chain of great leaders came to an end with Pericles' death, the invitation of corruption through election of men of ill repute such as Cleon, and the final ignominious defeat by Sparta in the Peloponnesian war, the equivalent instillation of corruption in the Roman city did not take a parallel course. Again, something unique happened, for if Athens was consumed by a spiral of corruption that included simultaneous internal faction and external conflict, typical of all cities in demise, Manent writes that Rome was "wholly renovated or renewed" in the midst of similar disorder. The self-destruction of the republican city in this case signified the coming into being of the empire. In Rome's case extreme corruption meant neither death nor end, but the introduction of a novel metamorphosis. As Manent profoundly and provocatively puts it: "if in Rome alone extreme corruption did not prove mortal, then it signifies that Rome is a phenomenon that enters in contradiction not only with political ontology, but even with ontology tout court: in Rome, death is not mortal [*la mort n'est pas mortelle*]." No doubt the figure that best resembles or summarizes this problem of the transformation from city into empire and the defiance of ontology is that of Caesar. Caesar's name is itself associated with a new phenomenon, "Caesarism," and his name remained a title of rule well after his death. Once again, Manent describes how such novelty was beyond the purview of Greek political science. In doing so he addresses Aristotle as well as Strauss and the latter's unequivocal defense of classical political philosophy. Reading Aristotle's *Politics* as an account providing "a natural history of the city" and as the most exhaustive account of the city's development as a political form, Manent finds that its course moves towards a situation where a democratic regime is increasingly the only possible regime. The natural history of the city follows something like a natural course of democratization; democracy, whether of the good or bad variety, is the final regime of the city. It is therefore no accident that the good form takes for itself the generic term for regime, *politeia*. Consequently, Manent argues that a "caesarian" future—a truly stable and genuine rule of one—was not foreseen; especially as a regime that *follows* upon a republican or democratic one. True government by one alone was foreign to the Greek city, and the traditional cycle of regimes erstwhile had an order, or chronology to it. The numerical interplay of the few and the many dominated the ancient *polis*, as accounted for by Aristotle, and while the latter eventually discusses a variety of monarchies in the *Politics*, there is only one that turns out to be effective and not merely a species of another kind of regime: the royalty of "heroic times." But this singularly effectual form of royalty in the Greek world was only ever a momentary phenomenon, akin to a founding moment rather than a concrete regime—*before* a republic's existence—and Aristotle himself treats it hastily. The long and short of Manent's argument here is that royalty and tyranny, the two forms of rule by one, are ultimately "two modalities" of oligarchy in Greek experience: "there is no regime of one" in the Aristotelian analysis of the city. Novelty of a caesarian kind presupposed a transformation of the political form itself and its emergence indicates a reversal in the normal course of regime succession, for Caesarism is the case where monarchy succeeds a republic no longer capable of governing itself. Manent herein argues that it is Rome that made genuine monarchic experience possible, and the "vector of European political history is the victory of monarchy, properly understood."

Political life, always and everywhere, is a question of numbers. Political life always rests upon a certain relation, a certain mixture, between the many and the few; between the people and the nobles, or the "greats."

It was the particular case of the ancient cities to ignore the essence of the third number, for there was no third number. The third number, that of One—the monarch, the prince. To be sure, one member of the few could appropriate power, and become a tyrant. But tyranny was merely an extreme modality of oligarchy, and did not introduce a qualitatively new number; it did not clearly constitute the one. Certainly Caesar can be called a tyrant and he was. Cato, said Cicero, preferred to kill himself than be forced to raise his eyes to the face of a tyrant. But Caesar was also something else. At the moment of extension, the interplay between the few and many, the republican challenge, could no longer order the city. Thus the city fell beneath the power of the one. It was not however only a matter of power...for the very idea of being together changed.

The “political physics” of Rome—the extension of the city’s dimensions—can be examined through the parallel distance that emerged between one citizen by the name of Caesar and his equals. The “question of Caesar” is inextricably bound up with the “enigma of Rome.” The case of Caesar is one of a man having detached himself from the regime and rulers, garnering sufficient power so that his death and divinization serve to found a new form, that of the empire. For a citizen to have been so “extraordinarily elevated” above those who were erstwhile his equals “presupposes a considerable modification in the form of the city. For such an elevation to have been possible it was necessary that its base—which is to say the city itself—experience a prior extension capable of supporting this elevation.” But what most characterizes the Caesarian period is the confusion and indeterminacy of the political and moral order, and Manent argues that precisely this problem of indeterminacy, this confusion about order and form, and the blurred nature of the human association, is witnessed and expressed in “one of the works that in truth has been the most influential in the moral history of Europe, and a work that precisely seeks to add order in the moral and political landscape in the time of all disorders,” namely Cicero’s *De Officiis*.

Manent’s analysis at times privileges the transformation of the form and then otherwise suggests that it was Caesar’s action that gave rise to the transformation. Additionally, he speaks of the role of philosophy and Cicero’s impact upon Roman thought and action. It would seem that searching for one cause of human change is to belie the complexity of human and political phenomena. The science of Rome as situated within a science of political forms does not offer a static model for political development; rather it seeks to understand the political and moral disposition of actors within their respective communities—the form that delineates as well as informs political and moral possibilities. It is the kind of science that is sometimes referred to as “non-linear.” If the character of politics changes, as does the shape or form of community, its essence nonetheless remains the same, which is precisely why one can and must continue to speak of both “the city” and its “metamorphoses.”

### **Rome and “the Ciceronian Moment”**

Manent writes of the “perplexity of Cicero.” The latter grappled with of a period of “indetermination,” or a “gray zone” between two forms, facing the dual task of understanding and response. Thus Cicero is “really the first to have confronted the political problem of the West, that of the viability of the city, of the ‘exit’ from the city, and the passage from one form to another.” Such a remarkable extension of the city and transition of forms leaves political and moral things blurred and uncertain, the sources and forces of authority insecure. No less distorted was the relation between theory and practice, and here again the contrast with Greece is helpful. For in the Greek city, philosophy, or political philosophy, appeared only *after* the flourishing of the city, and even amidst its decline. “Greek philosophy played, so to speak, no



role in the *political* history of the Greek city. This is altogether different in Rome.” In fact, so great is the political role that “Greco-Roman philosophy” played in Rome Manent argues the Roman empire “effectively realized the union of philosophy and the political order.” Or, to put it differently, “something like a ‘passage from the Ancients to the moderns’ is already produced in Rome at the end of the republican period.” Thus, taking Cicero seriously in and through Manent’s science of Rome helps make intelligible the fact that the original, or classical, political-philosophical experience was spiritually present even while its very concreteness was receding and the difficulty of recovery was setting in. Reading Cicero in light of political forms and their transition makes manifest the great significance of his thought.

For Manent, Cicero appears as something of both a passive witness to the transformation—as a classical philosopher reflecting on the truth of the situation—and a sort of active agent of transformation—as a modern philosopher effectuating the truth of a new situation. It is not that Cicero consciously developed a wholly original approach, for he himself freely admits to adopting and introducing Greek philosophy to Rome. However, Manent argues that it is precisely the absence of intended originality that is of interest, which itself constitutes the originality of his position: “he sought to illuminate an experience that did not produce its own light by way of a light from without,” and in the process, because of the emergent political context he was pressed to make certain modifications to the classical categories. All he had learned (i.e., from the classical understanding of the republican regime, the notion of the mixed regime, etc.) was no longer adequate to make sense of a Rome that sundered its original civic boundaries while submitting to a single, divinized man—a Rome that did what no city had done before: stretch itself to embrace the entirety of the known world under the rule of one.

We cannot follow the intricacies of Manent’s profound textual exegesis here, but suffice it to say that Cicero’s resultant adaptation of classical thought offers a redefinition of political order, approaching or anticipating the moderns in various ways, even as it seeks consistency with classical thought. The developments intimated include: the “instrumentalization” of politics, the privatization of virtue and the importance of private initiatives, the concomitant attention to the individuality or particularity of each, the protection of private property as a priority of politics, the new definition of the magistrate as embodiment of the public person, and the separation of morality from a concrete or particular community and its strictures. So far as monarchy is concerned, Cicero adds a princely part to the classical notion of the mixed regime. The sum of these changes amounts to raising, or energizing, the numerical one over an expanded but politically thinned out, or tamed, many. Stated otherwise, the erstwhile Greek relation of man and the city is profound modified:

For the Greeks, the individual citizen, dependent as he was on the city, was likewise the equal of the city, insofar as the city in its turn was dependent upon him, on his command and obedience. This equality took on a spiritual sense and became paradoxically visible with the person of Socrates, who treated Athens as if he was dealing with an individual interlocutor to whom he might offer several reproaches. In Rome, the reciprocal dependence between the citizen and the city is loosened, and the city becomes definitively much larger than man.

So large does the city become, so far are the citizens’ souls stretched from the particularity of, and participation in, their city, that Cicero invokes something striking and wholly foreign to Greek thought: a “society of human beings as a whole [*universi generis humani societas*].” The “*opération romaine*” consists of unifying, “miraculously,” the two ancient and opposed political forms of the city and empire and so by extension its two principles: the ideas of liberty

and of universal peace. No doubt this *opération* is constituted by great tensions, not least between republican virtues and imperial right. And in the process Rome moved close to—the closest in Western experience at that time—to collapsing the distinction that is decisive for any particular form: the difference between the interiority and exteriority of its form.

Rome carries the promise to gather humanity, the hope for *l'humanité rassemblée*, in the universal combination of liberty and peace. Rome's chaotic and violent history notwithstanding, its authority persists today, under another name: "The promise of Rome is always present and tentative under the abstract name of democracy." This promise has today become a temptation, even an illusion, which Manent refers to as the desire for "pure democracy," or a *kratos* without a *demos*: "democratic governance, which is very respectful of human rights but detached from any collective deliberation." He argues it is particularly manifest in the European project. If there is something imperial about the European Union in its process of going beyond the national form, Manent argues that it lacks the "cruel dynamism of the Caesarian transition" and is "deprived of all real principles of movement, superimposing an empire without emperor to a republican liberty deprived of energy, under the authority of an undefined notion of humanity." One may find a sign of progress in the fact that the European construction is a process as soft as Roman history was cruel, however, the European Union's unlimited enlargement and absence of foundation—its lack of "Roman ambition"—really signifies, for Manent, that "nothing significant is taking place and nothing durable is being produced." Contemporary Europeans are therefore in a "gray zone" anew, but now the political ambition requisite for founding is replaced by the hope of going "beyond politics," of living "post-politically," in a truly global or universal community: the community of humanity. Humanity, however, does not constitute a political body or form, as it is incapable of governing itself. "Humanity" cannot act, and there is no correlative discourse, or *opération*, to make such action possible. The European project's own political failures and difficulties of coordinating action in a state of formlessness intimate as much.

### **Europe and the "Roman Syndrome"**

Manent argues that what he calls the "Ciceronian moment" extended well beyond Cicero's death, in and through the periods when Europeans were uncertain as to what political form or human association they both desired to live in and could indeed establish. Since the fall of Rome, Europe's history can be understood as a constant attempt to revive empire amidst periodic experimentation with civic republicanism, while the entire scene was complicated by the "Christian proposition" and the Church's deep and universal sense of community that was, however, without proper political *opération*. Eventually a remarkable achievement came about as a wholly new form emerged, namely the nation. The point is not to retrace this history here, which Manent has ably done in various places, but to note that Europe now faces the "Roman syndrome" anew: what form shall it take? The important difference, however, is that if there was a richness of options in the past, today's considerations are burdened by the assumption that forms of any kind are no longer needed. Undoubtedly, the condition and even advocacy of formlessness has consequences for the state of democracy.

One hears often enough today that, "we are reaching the end of the institutional age of power" and now live in the "age of networks" where anything fixed and formal must give way to fluidity. Likewise common are claims regarding "the moral transformation characterizing our global times" so that it is no longer sufficient for people to "believe that their responsibilities (and their own self-interests) are identified with their nation and its 'interests.'" On this basis,

the traditional understanding of national interests apparently needs redefining, so that “a nation’s true interests are more and more in necessary alignment with those of humanity at large.” Alternatively, rather than seeking to replace the nation with humanity at large, others suggest that the “national ‘container’” and the “national outlook” can be supplanted through negation: “The necessary internal and external opportunities for action and organization can only be created through *negation*, through a radical critique of the customary concepts of politics and the state. The emerging order to be comprehended and developed is a *nova res publica*: the *cosmopolitan empire* of Europe.” All this to say, the strong desire to transcend the nation is understandable given the horrors of the past century that emerged in relation to the national form.

It is well known that modern democracy emerged within the framework of the nation, but in so giving democracy a body through the nation, it later become democracy’s worst enemy in the form of virulent nationalism. This “terrible dialectic,” as Manent evocatively calls it, had manifest in the wars and totalitarian movements of the past century, and has inspired the desire to altogether detach democracy from its originating condition. However, Manent continues, this democratic movement seeks to make “democracy unconditional, to free the democratic soul from the national body, and to endow democracy with the purity of angels,” which is to deny any limits or circumscription: thus “democracy could create for itself a body without limits, a body of indefinite extension, all to ensure that democracy could never become the slave of its own condition.” If this sounds ridiculous, Manent argues it is exactly what the European Union pretends to be: “‘Europe’ is indeed the astral body of angelic democracy.” But what is key is for such a development to succeed, Manent writes, is that “we need to suppose that the human condition has been radically altered such that man as a political animal has undergone a decisive modification, or else that man is simply no longer a political animal.” To this he rightly adds: “it is a risky wager to make when embarking on an enormous political enterprise.” Even as we aspire to construct a world on the universal principles of equality and rights it is far from self-evident that an “empire of law” can persist without concomitant political bodies, or that the law alone can and will be the sole regulator of social life. In fact, in light of Manent’s *histoire raisonnée des formes politiques* there is no *reason* to believe life will be more satisfying or better ordered without a plurality of properly political bodies. Thoughtful consideration of Western political history—and of the *dynamique de l’Occident*—helps strip us of such risky wagers and dangerous illusions.

## **Conclusion**

Our discussion of Manent’s “science of Rome” has revealed that it is not, per se, a corrective to modern historiography on Rome—in its better and worse forms—nor is it necessarily a substitute for it. Rather, it is a different science; one of *political development*. The science of Rome is a political science, and is situated between classical political science and modern political science—between the examination of the ancient city and of the modern state—for Rome, Manent demonstrates, is not adequately covered by either of these. Rome began as an ancient city but became something else, and thereby something beyond the exigencies of classical political science, and yet Rome did not fully become a modern state, to whatever extent it shares some properties of the modern state, not least because the modern state is itself the product of modern political science. Thus, Manent’s science of political forms encompasses these three kinds of political science and the specific human associations they each describe, analyze, and even create.

The science of Rome is the missing middle term in tracing Western political development in “large blocs” so as to properly appreciate the “*dynamique de l’Occident*.” Manent’s emphasis on “movement” or “dynamics” does not preclude constancy over the course of development; rather at each stage, or with the establishment of each form, it reveals that a new order was born. As the form changed, the political remained. The Greek city begat the new element of the common (*koinon*), Rome gave rise to the public thing (*res publica*), and the European nation spawned the *public* in its various declinations, such as public interest, public opinion, and public space. In each case, the new association and the new manner of operation consisted of self-government of some kind that had an overwhelming impact on the lives and souls of inhabitants. With this in mind, one can suggest that an examination of Western development through a science of political forms is restorative in at least three ways: it restores the fact that the human condition is a political condition, and so human activity is both possible and circumscribed by the political form groups of individuals establish for their lives due to their (political) natures and their desire to be well governed. Second, and by extension of the first, Manent’s narrative reminds us—or European in particular—of the need to act, or to make coherent action in the world possible. Third, in restoring a political reading to ancient texts Manent likewise offers a *regard politique* upon the present world; thus his account itself serves as a sort of “operational discourse” to orient political action.

If it is fair to say that political forms are a “cause” in history, Manent’s approach offers a profound substitute to the historicist temptation of making History itself a “cause.”

Furthermore, Manent’s qualification of the Ancient-Modern debate likewise offers a more profoundly political interpretation of differences and continuity. For example, rather than being overwhelmingly concerned with different conceptions of history across the ages, Manent sees a more effectual role for conceptions and realities of community over time. This is not to discount the import of History as a formidable part of modern consciousness, but an account that can tie threads or ages together—a political history with something like an essential *dynamique* at its core, anchored in the originating act of *koinonein* (or putting in common) in the city—while acknowledging important breaks or variance at the surface, makes for a coherent account. Indeed, it is an account that makes the world accessible to the human mind in making itself accessible to men’s minds no matter their time and place, all of which is consistent with Manent’s own underlying conception of science and scientific rigor.

By reminding us of the political adventure of the West as a constant search for establishing order—putting words and deeds in common—among particular human groups, ever since the birth of the city and over the course of its remarkable *metamorphoses*, Manent illuminates the peril we face in forgetting the truth of our political natures. In the current situation then, Manent is himself not unlike Cicero whom he admires, adopting and adjusting the political science of days past to respond to the present situation. To be sure, the task today is arguably greater, for there are three distinct varieties of political science to address and an expanded course of development that has by no means come to an end. The confusion and complexity in the present state of science is not unrelated to the confusion and complexity of the present state of politics. However, clarifying the middle science of Rome may offer a dose of lucidity regarding both past development and the prevalent Western resistance to political foundations and forms.