

Statesmanship as Human Excellence

by Daniel J. Mahoney

This paper renews the classical case for statesmanship as the elevated standard against which all political action can and ought to be judged. Statesmanship involves the exercise of "commanding practical reason" (the phrase is Pierre Manent's), an authoritative exercise of judgment and foresight at the service of the civic common good. But important currents of contemporary theory and practice efface differences at the very heart of human and political life: distinctions between authority and authoritarianism, the noble and the base, reason and will. They do so in the name of a terrible simplification, one that reduces politics to something other than itself. In conjunction with this, a toxic egalitarian moralism rejects the very category of human excellence (and our broader civilized inheritance) as barely concealed covers for oppression and exploitation. Against these debilitating extremes, Mahoney sketches the path of a true and capacious realism that can do justice to political phenomena as such.