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Realism, Power-Loops, and Re-Entry. An Imaginary Conversation with Glen Newey over the Gaps of Time and Traditions

We can think of a person as being happy when he is in the way of a successful execution (more or less) of a rational plan of life drawn up under (more or less) favorable conditions, and he is reasonably confident that his intentions can be carried through.
John Rawls

τὰ δὲ πάντα οἰακίζει Κεραυνός.
But the lightning steers beings as a whole.
Heraclitus

1.

While working on this paper and re-reading several of Glen Newey's books, essays, and unpublished papers, I remembered a conversation I had with Glen several years ago. We met in Berlin, in front of the Staatsbibliothek at Potsdamer Platz, a building ingeniously designed by Hans Scharoun and planted slightly oddly on the street, as if to block Albert Speer's plan of a south-north axis leading to the central square of the future "world capital Germania". We then walked between Mies van der Rohe's Neue Nationalgalerie and the St. Matthäus Church over to the Bendlerblock to have lunch in the cafeteria of the Federal Ministry of Defense. On the way we talked – in German – about the layers of history we were crossing, obliquely referring in the Bendlerblock to the place where Tom Cruise was shot (playing Claus von Stauffenberg in Bryan Singer's *Valkyrie*), but over lunch switched to English

Biblioteca della libertà, LIV, 2019
maggio-dicembre, nn. 225-226 • ISSN 2035-5866
DOI 10.23827/BDL_2019_3_4
Nuova serie [www.centroeinaudi.it]

to discuss a paper of mine on monarchy as liberalism's little dirty secret.[1] In retrospect, I have the impression that this short walk from the Staatsbibliothek to Bendlerblock showed many faces of Glen's character, his ability to cross cultural barriers, not only those of languages, his witty skepticism regarding grand narratives, and last but not least his sharp analytical thinking. However, the analytical distinctions he introduced[2] do not exhaust his philosophical legacy. On our way back, crossing Bendlerblock, passing the Villa Parey where the bullet holes of WWII are still visible, and grasping a glimpse of the Berliner Philharmonie, we would switch back to German, and the very same antinomies of liberalism we had discussed over lunch appeared in a different light. It is this conversation, at the edge of different traditions, conducted from the background of contested cultural knowledge, that I would like to take up and continue as a commemoration.

2.

For preparing the conversation, it is necessary to briefly characterise Newey's thinking. One of his central concerns was to question the self-confidence of contemporary political theory of having a firm stand above political contestations. In his early book, *After Politics*, he outlined his leading idea in the form of three central tenets.

> First, politics is characterised by endemic disagreement over what counts as a political question, […] Second, more generally, politics is characterised by endemic disagreement over issues which are by common consent a matter of public concern. […] Third, politics essentially involves the use of power.[3]

However, the strength of this approach was not to develop an elaborate 'theory of the political' himself. Instead, he defended his 'political realist' convictions by showing how various (mostly contemporary) approaches fail

[1] See von Daniels 2016, 456-477. Newey was a staunch anti-British monarchist, and complained that most liberal political philosophers failed to turn their words into deeds, and fierce defiance of the monarchy. This observation is the starting point for my essay.

[2] See the several formulations the conditions for, and limits of, toleration in Newey 1999b, 53-80.

[3] Cf. Newey 2001, 6-7.

to live up to their own standards, e.g. their methodological assumptions.[4] Thus, against John Rawls's approach in *Political Liberalism* Newey argues that "people can reasonably disagree […] about whether their disagreements are reasonable. But if one can reasonably disagree about that, the basis for constructing a reasonable consensus fails".[5] Newey points out that as a consequence, "a theory of justice that meets Rawls's criteria demands curbs on freedom".[6] In other words, there is a point for free spirits – maybe a point beyond good and evil – from which the reasonableness of Rawls' approach can be questioned.

Newey is certainly aware of Rawls's defence of presenting a "free-standing conception" by explicating the self-understanding of citizens within the context of a modern Western liberal society.[7] Some reviewers of Newey's works have noticed, moreover, that he shares with the 'political moralist' approaches he criticises the overall liberal framework and the style of analytical argumentation while providing himself few real-world underpinnings and little genealogical awareness (in terms of the Cambridge School: little contextual reading).[8] Maybe as a rebuttal of these charges, Newey broadened and radicalised his approach in later years. In his last unpublished manuscript, *Rogue Theodicy*, he takes up classical discussions on theodicy and hints at an underlying impulse of his philosophy. It is the 'wild freedom', the freedom before it is tamed in a liberal framework, the freedom to revolt against even God's word that sparked Newey's restless contestations.[9] "Wild freedom – individuals' inalienable liberty of judgement – persists in the commonwealth, in a way that cannot but jeopardise its stability".[10] The broadened perspective allows Newey to consider not just analytical political philosophy but religious traditions and classical authors, notably Plato and Hobbes, and to refer to a

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[4] *Ibidem*, 9.

[5] Newey 2018a.

[6] *Ibidem*.

[7] Cf. Rawls (2005, xlii) and most explicit on the Hegelian task of reconciliation with the past *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy* (Rawls 2007, 10-11).

[8] See the reviews of *After Politics* by S. Chambers (2002, 808-809) and J.G. Gunnell (2002, 683-684).

[9] Newey 2018a.

[10] *Ibidem*, 27-28.

classical tragedy, Antigone, to characterise the inevitable disagreements traversing the political:

> Antigone enacts a collision between two rival forms of fantasised omnipotence, each of which leads to contradiction. It is not that the play pits Creon, an advocate of realism, against Antigone as an exponent of utopian justice. Instead each can be thought of as a political actor seeking to annul the conditions of politics. They each use the language of justice, but in circumstances where their bid to convert their encounter with each other into something beyond politics – an agency of pure decisionism against a pure practice of right – proves self-contradictory.

These sentences from Newey's last manuscript show that something has changed over the years in his way of thinking, or maybe they confirm that he had always occupied a slightly odd position in the discourse of analytical political philosophy. The reason can be insinuated by enumerating once again the topics and problems Newey deals with in his last manuscript: ancient philosophy, the theological tradition, and tragedy as a way of reflecting our philosophical self-understanding in the modern world. All this is reminiscent of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which has the same points of reference, including, implicitly, Antigone in the background of his thinking to reflect on the irreducible tensions within the political. Not just when roaming and discussing on the streets of Berlin another parallel to Hegel needs to be mentioned. Hegel was, like Newey, very much a lecturing philosopher who thrilled on contestations, and through his provisional and constantly shifting form of writing, tried to evade formal closure.[11] This remote reference to Hegel might suffice for an idea of how a conversation with Glen might commence. The question, however, is how it can be conveyed into a commemorative form of writing without falling into the trap of placing the gist of the conversation under layers of historical niceties, or paralysing its ever-changing, multifaceted, political character.

[11] On Hegel's style of writing as a refusal to submit to formal closure and Antigone's role in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, see Steiner 1984, 19-36.

3.

For having a clear and determinate starting point, we can consider one of Newey's last presentations, entitled *Real Legitimation, Anarchism, and Power Loops* (presented in Milan on 14th April 2016).[12] In this paper, Newey radicalised his approach by differentiating it from Bernard Williams's (also posthumous) work on politics and legitimacy.[13] Even though both are commonly labeled political realists, Newey shows through his criticism that he is a different kind of political animal. Newey shares Williams's conviction that the necessary condition for the legitimacy of a state is giving an answer to the first political question, in terms of Williams, the "securing of order, protection, safety, trust, and the conditions of cooperation".[14] Newey frames the question – echoing Lenin's famous essay – more simply: "What do we do?". The formulation is meant to signify that the question cannot be settled once and for all, but keeps coming up and shifts between a descriptive and normative stance.[15] Newey's main criticism of Williams is, however, a different one. He shows that Williams's justificatory strategy, which Williams calls basic legitimation demand (BLD) in conjunction with the critical theory test (CTT), fails to meet its own standard of being realist, instead turning out to be another case of moralism, the very position Williams attempts to demolish.

Williams's argument is that politics requires those who yield power to justify their dominance to those on the receiving end (the BLD). The justification must moreover be more than an avid assurance of having good reasons (what Hegel calls *ein trockenes Versichern*). Eliciting assent from those at whom the legitimation is directed does not suffice either as this can itself be a by-product of the power. Therefore, Williams introduces the further hypothetical condition that assent is only legitimising if it had been give when the ruled were not subject to force (the CTT). Williams concedes: "Who has to be satisfied that the BLD has been met by a given formation at one given time is a good question, and it depends on the circumstances. Moreover, it

[12] Newey 2019.

[13] B. Williams 2005, ch. 1.

[14] *Ibidem*, 3.

[15] See Newey, 2018b, 64.

is a political question, which depends on the political circumstances".[16] This concession makes a perfect target for Newey's scepticism. He points out that the "circumstances" Williams refers to can be characterised in multiple ways, and that the distinction between ideological indoctrination and the political education the CTT relies on can itself be drawn into the sphere of politics. For Newey, the ultimate reason for the CTT giving out both false negatives and false positives is that there is no blanket distinction between politics and non-politics. "We are only in a position to apply the concept if we know we are already in a situation in which the concept itself applies: that is, our use of the concept is, in effect, infallible".[17] But this means that Williams himself has to rely on some moral conception to delineate the area of the political in the first place, thus yielding to political moralism.

A recent political example might explain Newey's point. Advocates of the political movement Extinction Rebellion argue that they have a right to civil disobedience, and even a right to disrupt the economy and call for a new kind of political system as the current system fails to satisfy the BLD, in the words of Williams, the "securing of order, protection, safety, trust and conditions of cooperation". The activists hold that as current governments fail to address the looming climate catastrophe, they fail to secure the conditions of human survival (survival in the double sense, survival of the species and survival in a human way).[18] It is not quite clear whether the activists see this failure as an effect of conscious propaganda on the side of the current system (so that the CTT would rule out its legitimacy) or as a sign of 'a universal objective context of delusion' (in Marxian terms *universeller Verblendungszusammenhang*) that permeates throughout the political sphere, the economy, and the ordinary (non-critical) civil society. In this case, the CTT would give out, in the view of the rebellion, a false positive as (nearly) everyone is in a state of delusion. In any case, the movement confirms Newey's point that the basic political question "What do we do?" arises all the time, even in our apparently settled Western societies. In Newey's words: "For whom it arises, and in relation to which deliberative possibilities, are themselves already political questions".[19]

[16] B. Williams 2005, 136.

[17] Newey 2019.

[18] Extinction Rebellion 2019.

[19] Newey 2019.

Newey coined the term "power loop" to describe "a situation where a purported authority or its proxies tries to legitimate itself to those subject to its power, and the legitimation itself exemplifies this power-relation; so that the legitimation raises the very question it seeks to settle".[20] To use the example of Extinction Rebellion, activists would argue that whatever defenders of the current regime might say – e.g. that property rights, rule of law, and majority decisions need to be accepted – is an expression of unjustified domination of humans over nature.

4.

In an academic context, a typical reaction to this brief exposition would be to question Newey's account by distinguishing various notions of politics (not each issue seems to involve a drama), or various kinds of political realism. However, this would quickly turn into yet another exercise in a more or less elaborate classification that would, through numerous fine-grained reasonable considerations, disperse Newey's more disruptive manner of questioning. Alternatively, one might wonder how far or how radically Newey would be willing to take his account. This question has also a side that pertains to daily political discourse. In times where the distinctions between news and fake news, argument and bullying, public office and private advantage are consciously undermined, any further theoretical deconstruction of the last liberal embankments might seem to serve Newey's legacy poorly, as it creates strange bedfellows. Would Newey really want to argue that everything is up for grabs, depends on circumstances, interpretations, or wouldn't he finally agree that there are, in the end, some unquestionable, objective standards of decency, rightfulness, or whatever else everyone must bow to before politics can even begin? However, wouldn't this turn him into a moralist? Even worse, a moralist post-mortem?
This is a variation of the initial question of how Newey's legacy can be taken up without paralysing its political character. For his writings, it takes on a special form. It is not just the utilisation for specific political views or programs (let's say of the enemies of liberalism) that would be mistaken. As

[20] *Ibidem*.

Newey stresses the concrete and shifting circumstances of politics and the failure of contemporary political philosophy to account for their uncanny and at times irrational nature, any utilisation of Newey's thinking for any political current would be a misappropriation, as it would reinstate one crucial distinction: between the 'pure', written theory, realistic as it might be, and its various 'impure' applications. One might object that this is either not a serious philosophical problem at all, as it pertains to all philosophical theories, apparently without affecting their theoretical dignity, and that insofar as Newey considered himself to be a professional political theorist, it is apparently not one he cared about. Yet this quandary cannot be brushed away so easily. The question of how to preserve and prolong the memory of an oral practice accompanies philosophy from its very beginning in Plato, who has, through his presentation of Socrates as a literary character and through his critique of writing, set the standard for subsequent discussions of this topic.[21] There is no need to elevate Newey to the new Socrates of our time for relating to this discussion, as there is one aspect of Newey's work that baulks at all theorisation. Newey was, especially in his essays for the blog of the *London Review of Books*, extremely eager to employ unfamiliar or strange words, sometimes words apparently out of context, up to the point of including expressions in a review that were arbitrarily suggested by his friends on Facebook.[22] This playful, idiosyncratic way of handling the English language reconnected him to his upbringing, and can only be replicated by following his example. Thus it is not only Newey's character, his way of lecturing, but also his way of writing that shows how Newey wanted to retain a moment of wild freedom, and asks us to take up this flame.

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[21] Socrates' last words "Crito we owe a cock to Ascpelius; make this offering to him and do not forget" (Phaedo 118a) are Plato's signature as a writer who carries on Socrates' burden. See Most 1993, 96-111.

[22] See Newey 2014a, https://www.lrb.co.uk/blog/2014/november/among-the-axolotls, [last accessed November 30th, 2019]. Afterwards, Newey explained in private conversation "some words, though in my original, didn't survive the LRB editors' meat-cleaver – 'antidisestablishmentarianism', 'equipollence' and 'heteroscedasticity' – though most of the genital words did, including the c-word, for which I'm indebted to Jimmy Lenman".

5.

At this point of the discussion, I imagine being with Glen on the way back from lunch, both to continue on with our journeys, again crossing historically tainted terrain, but this time catching the light reflecting from Berliner Philharmonie, which gives me the liberty to respond to Glen's account in a different tone, though a tone that could, through the wink to Plato, already be foreboded.

Newey discusses Plato only briefly in his *Rough Theodicy,* and treats him in an analytical manner, as yet another political theorist. The basic feature he shares with all later theorists is to conceive of a "synoptic theory of justice – one that can apply to society as a whole".[23] Newey argues that the main shortcoming of such a theory is that the pre-political freedom of people to behave contrary to the demands of the theory of justice is denied. Plato's entire project turns out to be one of damage control, though Newey concedes that Plato is at least candid in admitting that the underlying ideology is a form of deception (the noble lie). To use the terminology Newey developed in the critique of Williams, Plato's theory is another example of a power loop, even its archetype. The "legitimation of an authority that exemplifies the power relation" is displayed by the rule of the philosopher-kings in whom reason prevails over appetite, just as they rule over other classes of society. At the same time, Kallipolis shows a world in which all 'wild freedoms' are banned, up to the point of censoring music and expelling all but ceremonial art from the city. Newey sees Plato as a typical political theorist, who fantasises about his theory's omnipotence and is disappointed by the actual course of politics in the world, the type of thinking – and the type of academic existence – Newey revolted against.

However, dealing with Plato almost inevitably draws the interpreter into Plato's weave. The insight that the problem of power loop can, at first, easily be applied to Plato shows that Newey is not satisfied, after all, with stating down-to-earth insights, such as that actual political actors are hardly rational or consensus-seeking, or that before any actual deliberation procedure the dirty deeds of politics needs to be done. Lines like these can often be found as side remarks

[23] Newey 2018a.

in Newey's reviews and blogs.[24] However, these realist observations – one could also say these contributions towards a phenomenology of politics – are not as one might think, Newey's ultimate bedrock "where the spade is turned".[25]

6.

To start with, the power loops Newey notices are not confined to contemporary analytical political philosophy, but can be found in theological and classical philosophical discourse, so they are the structure of our thinking. Without noticing, Newey was about to discover a highly abstract 'science of logic', a logic that is at work in all synoptic or all-encompassing philosophical accounts. To illustrate its abstractness and potentially wide-ranging scope of application, the problem can be reformulated in terms of a systems theory. Whenever something is said to be comprehensive (e.g. God is everything) and then qualify it as something (e.g. God is good), the other side of the qualification (the evil) enters into comprehension and creates a paradox: God is good and evil. The problem lies also at the foundation of political philosophy, and can be diagnosed as early as in Aristotle. In *Politics*, he first claims that the city is a kind of partnership (*koinonía*) formed with a view to some good. He then goes on to define the most supreme and comprehensive partnership of all, which includes all the others ones (houses, families, trade) (*koinonía kyriotáte*) not as a 'partnership as such', but qualifies it in a specific way as a "political" (*koinonía politike*), so that the distinction between the political and non-political reappears within the city.[26] Niklas Luhmann coined the problem as the re-entry of a distinction in itself.[27] I spare myself, at this point, a more detailed discussion of how Luhmann reformulates Hegel's project of a 'science of logic' with the theoretical means of the 20th century, and how exactly his notion of re-entry relates to Newey's notion of pow-

[24] See Newey 2014b, https://www.lrb.co.uk/blog/2016/november/the-clean-hands-problem [last accessed November 30th, 2019].

[25] Cf. Wittgenstein 2001, §217.

[26] Aristotle, *Politics*, 1252a, see for Luhmann's analysis (2009, 22-23).

[27] Luhmann's writings are hardly known in the Anglo-American world. On the notion of re-entry as a way to describe how society is perceived throughout the ages, see Luhmann 1994, 14-27.

er-loops for an implicit reason. Newey's answer is missing, though hopefully the sketch serves as an invitation for someone else to come to defend Newey and analytical political philosophy against the Luhmaniac spin.

7.

There is also an explicit reason why I have mentioned Luhmann, which brings us back to Plato. Luhmann freely explains that a re-entry brings a paradox to the theory. For ears trained in analytical political philosophy, the mere mentioning of a paradox is the worst possible mistake. It brings back memories of the beginning of analytical philosophy, of Bertrand Russell's short letter to Gottlob Frege, in which Russell detailed having derived a paradox from one of the axioms of the *Grundgesetze der Arithmetik*,[28] a paradox that has haunted formal logic and analytical philosophy ever since.[29] However, Luhmann understands a paradox differently. Instead of trying to block it, he explains that paradoxes are inevitable and need to be unfolded through hierarchisation or temporalisation. Alternatively, they can also be reflected by displaying them in the arts.

All of these strategies can be found in Plato, as he is very conscious about the limits of thinking. The following reading of Plato is therefore not simply a refutation of Newey's interpretation, but serves to show how Newey's ultimate concern can be integrated into the philosophical tradition – so that the summit talks among free spirits can continue.

At the beginning of the argument in *The Republic* that leads up to the building of the ideal state (*The Republic* 370c-372d), Socrates presents the outline of a comprehensive city, sometimes called the healthy city (characterised by moderate scarcity, division of labour, decent living conditions including figs for dessert), only to be interrupted by Glaucon. He complains that the city Socrates describes would be a city for pigs – displaying conditions of keeping livestock of the human kind – as it does not include the amenities he is used to, among them eating pork. It is seldom noticed that the further

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[28] Russell's paradox is generated by asking whether the class of all classes that are not members of themselves is itself a member of itself or not: if it is, then it is not; and if it is not, then it is. Russell's letter is included in Frege 1976, 211.

[29] See Link 2004.

argument of *The Republic* depends on this intervention, so that Kallipolis is ultimately not Socrates's but Glaucon's city, a city in which Glaucon's appetite is included and tamed. The healthy city could, from a contemporary perspective, even be 'universalised', as no 'great evils' are found in this state of affairs.[30] Socrates would certainly be satisfied with figs for dessert. Plato thus resolves the paradox of all-inclusiveness – or as Newey calls it: the synoptic theory of justice – by temporalising it, describing the development of the institutional constraints of the philosopher's rule. The story starts with the all-encompassing, synoptic city, then (Glaucon's) appetite is introduced as something external and ultimately integrated into the city again. This manner of argumentation cannot be leapfrogged by presenting Plato's final or ideal theory, as the theory consists of the dialectical form of argument. Plato is also candid about the fact that, ultimately, he has no rational explanation for the 'feverish' appetite, it is an enigma that is simply there. Newey fails to notice, in his brief and un-dialectical discussion of Plato, that it is not just Glaucon's appetite that gets the dialectic going, but also in form of a downward spinning dialectics, the unruly reason of philosopher kings.

After the ideal city has been constructed, Socrates comes up with the thesis that the worst regime, tyranny, is established out of no other regime than democracy (*The Republic* 564a). This argument was, in Plato's time, directed against the democratic-minded *juste milieu,* and the thesis still works today as a provocation or warning.[31] The entire argument is complex, as Plato mixes a psychological typology of leaders and citizens with playful references to historical developments and, of course, revilers of democratic rule were – horribly! – slaves and citizens, men and women who are treated alike (563b). It is to be noted that the entire dialectic of decline starts with a failing on the part of the philosophers, a failing of reason, and in particular reason in its purest form: mathematics. The philosophers who are trained for their entire life

[30] According to Rawls, the great evils of human history will only be "eliminated" once a realistic utopia of a law of nations is established (1999, 7), which in its structure resembles the healthy state of affairs..

[31] Especially after the election of Donald Trump, historians of ideas have made use of Plato again, in order to analyse the current situation. See e.g. D.L. Williams 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/10/05/heres-what-plato-had-to-say-about-someone-like-donald-trump/?utm_term=.aadbf476308b [last accessed November 30th, 2019].

in rationality make an arithmetic mistake in calculating the correct number of citizens for the city – and so the decline starts. Again, the story displays the limits of all-comprehensiveness: this time, the limits of reason. The 'outside', the 'othe' of reason, is the unreasonable, pure stupidity, the inexplicable mathematical error. Once the error is included in the city, the paradox that the rulers are reasonable and unreasonable at the same time unfolds over various stages. By describing how the various regimes (Aristocracy, Timocracy, Oligarchy, Democracy, and Tyranny) and their constituencies evolve out of each other, Plato manages to theorise something which, in Newey's writings, always seem to be untheorisable: the ever-shifting conditions of politics, the neuroses of politicians, and populations (e.g. in Northern Ireland, one of Newey's favourite examples), the demons of history, and mere historical accidents and shortcomings.[32]

The conversation with Newey's thinking over gaps of time and tradition thus shows that his political realism is not simply another hair-splitting critique of liberalism, like the communitarian or republican critique, but one that can be brought into dialogue with the 'dialectical tradition' of philosophy (commonly opposed to the 'insular tradition'). The conversation is not fictitious but a conjecture, as Newey finds himself with the interpretation of Sophokles's Antigone in the midst of this tradition.

8.

Writing about the arts, tragedy, and *Antigone* in particular is a genre of its own.[33] Therefore, I will not take up Newey's interpretation but instead show that the arts are a kind of reflective attitude that, in the 20th century, complement the oblivion of power and politics in Rawlsian philosophy. In the 1950s and 60s, while Rawls reconstructed the Western liberal tradition, American Western movies showed liberalism's concealed, darker side. John Ford's late

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[32] There is one significant lacuna in Newey's writings. He is cautious never to mention the Holocaust as an example, as he is sceptical even with regard to a reverse philosophy of history with the Holocaust as ultimate but obscure rock bottom. See Newey's shattering review of Jonathan Glover's *Humanity: A Moral History of the 20th Century* (Newey 1999a, 15-16).

[33] See Steiner 1984.

Western *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962) reflects the paradox that liberalism must conceal the unruly violence it rests upon. James Stewart plays Ransom Stoddard, an idealistic young lawyer who comes into the stateless town of Shinbone to bring education and the rule of law. The town is held in the grips of terror by the gunslinger Liberty Valance. Only the lone cowboy Tom Doniphon (played by John Wayne) would have the guts to stand up to him, but he remains passive as he is planning to settle into the quietest of marriages with Hallie (Vera Miles), the daughter of the owner of the local chow house. The drama unfolds predictably. Ransom Stoddard falls in love with Hallie, Liberty Valance tortures and ridicules Ransom Stoddard, as he sees in him danger for his regime of violence. At first, Stoddard refuses to fight Liberty Valance, but sticks to his idealistic program. Only after Liberty Valance nearly kills a friend of Stoddard does his anger prevail (like in Glaucon), and he agrees to fight Liberty Valance, surprisingly killing him. The fame of being *The man who shot Liberty Valance* and his civic reforms propelled Stoddard's political career. The movie is told as a flashback, when he comes back as an esteemed senator to Tom's funeral together with his wife Hallie. The town has turned into a respectable, law-abiding city, connected by railway to civilisation, and in a long monologue Stoddard tells the editor of the local newspaper the origins of his affection for Tom. It was him who shot Liberty Valance during the gunfight in the back, so that Stoddard would survive, achieve fame, and marry Hallie. For the sake of the higher good, Tom has abandoned his love and receded into an outsider's existence. The moral of the story is told by the newspaper editor. After hearing the true story of the town's (and liberalism's) origin, he burns the notes his young employee has taken and declares: "When the legend becomes fact, print the legend!".

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