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The Pandemic as Apocalypse

What the Last Two Years Have Revealed about Who We Are

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A salient feature of the modern economy is that the meaning of work has been reduced to its most basic economic function: providing an income for the worker and serving as a factor of production for business. But to get better traction on the growing crisis about work, we need to retrieve the deeper meaning of work—its place in a life with purpose and its role in contributing to the life of the community. This article retrieves the thought of Thomas Aquinas as a framework for thinking about work and asks what the response to the pandemic reveals about our sense of purpose and our sense of community.[1]

Introduction

In late spring of 2020, E. M. Forster's short story, "The Machine Stops," first published in 1909, began making the rounds on the internet.[23] The reason for the sudden revival of interest in the story is not hard to find: a dystopian story of people living in small isolated cells, connecting with others exclusively through machines resonated in the weeks when the Zoom Class locked down. But Forster's story is of interest not simply because he somehow anticipated the replacement of personal connection with Zoom. The story depicts a world in which technology has not only displaced human interaction, but also work itself. The denizens of Forster's world need only push buttons to have their needs met. And as the title suggests, in Forster's vision, such a society will inevitably grind to a halt. Once the habit of work is lost, the ability to maintain the machine erodes and finally collapses altogether.

We are not in imminent danger of such a collapse. Nor is it the case that the response to the pandemic has created a new danger, where none existed before. But Forster's story points to a suggestive connection between our reliance on technology and the resulting loss of a deeper sense of purpose that in the end is not sustainable. As I will argue in this article, our response to the pandemic itself manifested our lost sense of purpose or *telos*. As we reflect on the future of work, we need to attend to the suggestions prior to the pandemic that work has lost some of its deepest meaning, a trend that becomes even clearer in the wake of the pandemic.[4] This article begins with some reflections on Forster's story, and then turns to the theology of Aquinas to discuss the importance of *telos* to good work. It concludes with a discussion of what our response to the pandemic reveals about our loss of *telos* and some reflections on what might lie ahead.

The Machine Stops

The plot of Forster's story is straightforward. We are introduced to Vashti, a representative denizen of her world. Vashti lives in an isolated underground cell that caters to her every need at the push of a button. She occupies her time attending and giving lectures via a technology that is startlingly like Zoom. She is bombarded by a stream of electronic communication from others. One day her son, Kuno, reaches out to her asking her to come visit him. Although she resists, she finally agrees to fly around the world to see him. Her physical encounter with others along the way, and her exposure to the natural world disturb her. Very few people actually travel any more, among other reasons because everything is the same everywhere and there is no point.

When she arrives in what we would now call England, Kuno reports that he has been outside. As a result, he is being threatened with "homelessness," with being kicked out of the community. Kuno is open to the actual world, and had a profound experience in his journey outside. He tries to wake Vashti up to her own imprisonment, but his urgings fall on deaf ears. Vashti returns to her own cell and resumes her life.

Kuno, who has since relocated to her side of the world, reaches out to tell her that "the machine stops." She ignores this. But Kuno's warnings turn out to be prescient. Glitches start appearing in Vashti's world. The music feed deteriorates in quality, as does the food and other creature comforts. At first Vashti and others submit complaints to the committee that maintains the machine, but nothing happens. Instead, people simply adjust to the deteriorating conditions of their lives. And eventually, the machine comes to a grinding halt. All communication

is lost, and the world collapses. Both Vashti and Kuno die, though Kuno has hopes for the world outside.

As Forster unfolds this brief tale, he offers an interesting set of diagnoses about why a culture so heavily dependent on technology cannot sustain itself. The first immediately relevant theme is the displacement of actual human community by a virtual community. Vashti's reactions to Kuno's request for an in-person meeting are instructive. She does not understand why the facsimile of her son's face on a screen is not good enough. And when she does go to visit him, she regards physical contact with others as threatening. The virtual reality keeps people at a safe distance, and this safety is part of why Vashti clings to her cocooned world.

Second, real work has disappeared from this world. The machine takes care of all needs, wants and desires. It is a consumer's paradise, with everything available instantly at the push of a button. But because we need to feel like we are doing something useful, Vashti and others occupy themselves by engagement with the intellectual life. Giving talks to one another about their studies. But this sort of "work" is depicted as pointless. For Vashti, "ideas" are all that matters, and yet the "ideas" are just "ideas" formed in response to other "ideas." On her trip to England, Vashti reacts to a glimpse of the Himalayas with the dismissive "they give me no ideas." Because her world is closed off, the circulation of "ideas" must itself stagnate. Nothing real is ever produced by humans.[5]

Forster relates this loss of purposive work to the loss of common purpose. In the story, we learn that the last time there was a collective pursuit of any goal, it was a vain quest to accelerate transport speeds to the point where we could outrace the sun (i.e., travel faster than the earth turns). Once that project failed, there was no further culturally shared goal, and the cultural energies collapsed in on themselves.

The end of the world created by the machine follows from all of this. A cultural project cut off from anything real ends up focusing on basic consumerism. But people trained to get everything they want by pushing a button are unlikely to know much about how things actually work. As the practical knowledge embedded in real work erodes, the ability to sustain the machine also erodes. Nor is there any internal will to fight back. Nothing has any meaning or point, and the energies that should sustain a vibrant culture are sunk into stale blathering about "ideas."

Shortly before the pandemic, Ross Douthat published his book, *The Decadent Society*, arguing that we live in a decadent society, and speculating on what it might take for us to snap out of it.[6] He defines decadence as comprising "economic stagnation, institutional decay, and cultural and intellectual exhaustion at a high level of material prosperity and technological development."[7] For Douthat, the

markers of our decadence are: stagnation, a slowing down of meaningful innovation and economic growth; sterility, the sharp decline in fertility; sclerosis, our political gridlock; and repetition, the fact that our popular culture has scarcely moved in decades. Douthat associates decadence with the loss of a common project—some transcendent desire or at least a desire to expand frontiers. As he suggests, to move out of decadence we need to either get back down on our knees or shoot for the stars (or both).

Douthat's thesis resonates with the themes of "The Machine Stops." And as I will argue, our response to the pandemic suggests that we really do have an eroded sense of community and purpose. Thus, while there are many features of modern work that need attending to like globalization, automation, rising economic inequality and so on, I think we also need to attend to the possibility that our cultural energies are being sapped. A particular worrying feature of the modern landscape is the waning labor force participation rate of young men, a signal that the cohort that should be most engaged in economic life is looking elsewhere for meaning or purpose.[8] For work to be good work, to have meaning and purpose, it needs to be embedded in a culture that has meaning and purpose. And as Forster suggests, the goal of having our creature comforts well met is not a sufficient purpose.

Aquinas, *Telos*, and Good Work

For St. Thomas Aquinas, purposiveness is the heart of all human actions. As he argues, all human actions are undertaken with some end or *telos* in mind.[9] Without having a reason for acting, we would not do anything at all. A good human life entails thinking about what ends are worthy of pursuit, and ordering our pursuit of diverse goods into a coherent whole. Aquinas's emphasis on purposive action is best understood in light of his understanding that humans are created in the *Imago Dei*, the image and likeness of God.[10]

God is the beginning and end of all creation. God's act of creation was purposive, and *everything* in creation is ordered to God's ends.[11] For most creatures this *telos* or purposiveness is built into their beings. The rock falls when dropped. The dog chases a rabbit when he sees it. But humans are distinctive in that they can order themselves to their own ends. As Aquinas puts it in the prologue of the *Secunda Pars* of his *Summa Theologiae*, "man is said to be made in God's image, in so far as the image implies an intelligent being endowed with free-will and self-movement."[12] Just as God has providentially ordered the entire created universe, we are able, through our free-will, to direct our own actions. In particular, unlike animals, we are able to discern which goods are worthy of pursuit.[13]

And this crucially entails exercising our practical wisdom in ordering the goods we choose to pursue into a coherent whole.[14] That in turn means distinguishing between goods that serve higher ends and goods that are valuable in themselves. Because the universe is created by God, the hierarchy of goods is a dense web of interconnected goods.[15] Many of our actions serve higher goods, while also delivering nested lower goods. That is to say that if we learn to see our pursuit of the good in this life as a mirror of God's providence, we are drawn into lives that are thick with meaning and purpose.

We can see what this means more concretely by thinking about the goods associated with work. Work serves many purposes. On the most basic level, it is the means by which we provision others in our community with useful goods and services. And through the income we thereby earn, we are able to partake of the goods and services others have produced. This provides us with the material basis out of which to build meaningful lives for ourselves and our families.[16]

But part of achieving our own good entails fully developing our human capacities.[17] And work is a direct means of doing so. The carpenter hones his skills over the years, and that increased capability is a fulfillment of the potentials in the carpenter's human nature. The excellence we can achieve in work is a key component of becoming who we are. Moreover, an important potential in human nature lies in our intrinsic sociality. Our emphasis on individual autonomy obscures our essential dependence on others. Hence our own fulfillment has a strong social dimension.[18] Because we are social beings, it is significant to our own well-being that we do work that serves the community. And through our work we can cultivate our relationships with others: with our colleagues, customers, and so on. Because we are social creatures, it is important that our contributions to the community be valued by others. Thus, an important good from receiving wages is not just what we can buy with them, but also the fact that they signal social appreciation for the work we have done.[19]

Finally, work is the means by which we contribute to the larger project of society, whatever that may be. For a culture that is fighting simply to survive, work is the means by which we directly contribute to the common good of sustaining the community. For cultures that have reached a certain level of affluence other common projects may serve to motivate work. Some cultures might pursue aesthetic ideals.[20] Others might be expansive, seeking to settle new frontiers. But in a culture that has some sense of overarching purpose, work would have the deeper meaning of being the means by which we help further that overarching purpose. This would be true even if our own work is at some remove from that common project. The janitorial staff at NASA is playing its part in putting a man

on the moon, as is the farmer growing the crops that sustain us as we work on the "moon shot."

I leave aside here the highest source of meaning for work, namely the theological insight that God has called us to be a sort of co-creator through our work.[21] If we look at work through a Thomistic lens we can see that like all aspects of human life, it is thick with meaning. But this understanding of work as dense with meaning and purpose is much harder to grasp in our modern setting. As Charles Taylor observes, the modern world has compartmentalized our various activities, thinking of the economic sphere as one thing, the political sphere as another.[22] As a result, we tend to primarily see work in terms of the economic ends that it serves: an input to production for firms, and a source of income for workers. Secondarily, we might see work primarily as a means for attaining social status (or being denied it if our wages are low). But in general, we do not see work in terms of the higher goods it serves—its role in helping us cultivate our excellences and the means by which we serve the communities of which we are a part and contribute to the larger cultural projects.

As we consider the problem of eroding attachment to the work force and the problem of burnout in work, it is worth asking whether part of our problem is that as a culture we have lost contact with the higher goods we might seek in life, and that as a consequence our motivations to work might be attenuated. Once a certain level of affluence is attained, the direct motivation of working for material gain might weaken or disappear as in Forster's tale. If this is right, we should worry about the eroded sense of community that is part of a culture that seems to celebrate atomistic individualism, and we should worry about the loss of a sense that the lower goods are meant to be in service of the higher goods. We should worry that we no longer have a sense of deep purpose. And unfortunately, our response to the pandemic suggests that it is in fact the case, that our sense of purpose is weakened, as is our sense of community.

The Absence of *Telos* and a Thick Sense of Community

Ross Douthat has since published reflections on decadence in light of the pandemic, but there he takes up the question of whether the pandemic will deepen our decadence or perhaps move us out of it.[23] What he seems not to have noticed is that the response to the pandemic is itself a manifestation of our decadence. First, Douthat argues that decadence is a product of our own success, and this is true of our response to the pandemic. Only a society advanced enough to achieve expected life spans pushing the outer envelope of the life spans promised by scripture could even have noticed that the corona virus can be lethal for older

persons whose immune systems have deteriorated.[24] As recently as one hundred years ago the population of vulnerable people would have been too small to make a noticeable impact on overall mortality rates. Nor is it clear that we could have afforded to retreat from economic life if we were not affluent and did not have access to the internet.

Second, and more importantly, the response requires that we believe that the essence of life is avoiding death. Consider everything that was restricted or postponed: birthday parties and Bar Mitzvahs; weddings, graduations, and junior years abroad; the last moments with dying loved ones and funerals. Whole occupations were declared inessential; a significant amount of other work involving person-to-person communication was shifted online to zoom. We traveled less, we socialized less, we lived less. For two years in some places. In all of the wearisome debates about whether the "lockdowns" were worth it, very few observed the enormous cost we were paying by not living in order not to die. These sorts of costs did not get factored into the cost-benefit analysis deployed early in the pandemic. Only a few people bothered to do the back-of-the-envelope calculations if we did take these costs into account. If we imagine that the restrictions "saved" 1,000,000 lives, and that each person thus saved had on average ten years of life remaining, then we gained 10,000,000 years of life by doing what we did. But if you assume that the last two years represent only a 10 percent reduction in the stuff of life, then we paid 66,000,000 years of life stuff in order to do it. (US population is 330,000,000; times two years is 660,000,000; counting each year of "lockdown" as a 10 percent loss in living = 66,000,000 years.)[25] That is the best-case argument for lockdowns. It is unlikely that we saved as many as 1,000,000 lives. And the average lifespan of those whose lives were saved would not be ten years, since the virus preys on those who are already very vulnerable; and I, at least, would say that I lost more than 10 percent worth of my life over the last two years. This sort of calculation is the reason why in the past responses to pandemics sought to minimize disruption to ordinary life. Public health is a good because ordinary life is a good.

Douthat attributed our decadence to a lack of some sort of transcendent purpose. What the pandemic revealed is not only do we not have a transcendent purpose, we do not even have a strong purpose in immanent terms, beyond, apparently, just not dying. It is worth asking what sort of view of the world one must have to think that everyone should sacrifice a good chunk of the stuff of life in order to extend the lifespans of a few. I have two hunches. First, as Pierre Manent has suggested, we really do not recognize that death is part of life. In his terms, we think of death as an "accident," an obstacle that cuts us off from pursuing our unbounded desires, and therefore one that needs to be fought.[26] If we see death

as an "accident," that might explain how we could fail to think in terms of a collective sacrifice of two years of ordinary life in order to afford some extra life to those who would thereby be spared a death now from COVID. The second, though, is that we have gotten so used to thinking of life in terms of things that can be measured—namely years, that we have forgotten that the value of our lives is not so much the number of years we have, but rather what we actually do with those years. It seems like we have mistaken the instrumental good of time for the good that it should serve: robust living.[27] In other words, we have lost our facility for thinking well about our *telos*, the higher ends that we should be organizing our lives around.

The models that were deployed to debate the question of whether the response was worth it prevented us from seeing the goods that were really at stake. If the main harm of "lockdowns" was a drop in GDP, that would not matter. But we needed to think of it in terms of what that represents in human terms: businesses ended, the loss of a sense of purpose that work can give, and so on. Just so, in thinking about these lives that we wanted to save, we needed to think about what makes life valuable in the first place. None of this is meant to argue that we should not have done what we have done. It is to say that it should be very alarming that nobody talked about our choices in these terms. It is not clear that we know *why* we do anything. And since thinking in terms of *telos* is essential to a Thomistic anthropology, the blindness we have shown to questions about *telos* suggests that the modern world is very far from understanding a Christian world view.[28]

Lack of Community

The pandemic has not only revealed that we do not think well about *why* we live: It has also revealed that our notion of community, the value of others, is truncated. Here my point can be made briefly. At Villanova University, where I worked, signs mushroomed around campus declaring "Community First! Wear a mask and maintain social distance." Indeed, I think our students had to sign pledges to put community first by obeying regulations requiring them to stay away from each other as much as possible. Those advocating masking and social distancing do so because they care about others: They want to limit the spread of a disease that is lethal to some. And it is true that a potentially deadly infectious disease raises important questions for just how best to express our love for others.

The concern here again is not *whether* we should have adopted these measures. It is rather deep alarm at the fact that virtually nobody noticed the tension involved in prioritizing community by isolating ourselves from one another.

The debate about masks centered largely on concerns about their discomfort and issues about "freedom." In the last six months or so, there has been increasing attention given to the impairments to childhood development that might result from prolonged masking. But almost nobody has pointed out that the sheer loss of each other's faces is an enormous human cost.[29] For areas where masking has been ubiquitous people have gone for two years without seeing the faces of the people they encounter in public. Masks inhibit the face-to-face communication that is essential to being human, and they make conversation more difficult. I do not know if widespread masking is related to the tears in the social fabric that are increasingly being observed, but we are not even asking about what living as a literally faceless crowd has been doing to us over the last two years.[30]

So the pandemic would seem to reveal that we are already sufficiently alienated from one another to not deeply regret the loss of each other's presence (to the extent that we have shifted encounters to Zoom) or each other's faces (when we meet while wearing masks). If one of the significant challenges to building up thicker conceptions of the value of work and the nature of the common good is our failure to fully recognize the humanity of others and their importance to our own lives, the pandemic reveals that we are pretty far gone. We cannot even name social distancing and masking as a tragic cost, even if we might think it is a cost worth paying.

If good work requires a sense of higher purpose and a recognition of the way it serves our community, the response to the pandemic suggests a fraying cultural fabric that might make it difficult to sustain a conception of good work. This is not the sort of thing that can be measured or perhaps even modeled. But as we think of policies to create a climate for good work going forward, we should be aware of the currents in the culture that erode the meaning and purpose of work.

Notes

1. This is a truncated version of a paper presented at the AEI/Kern conference that was the origin of this set of papers.

2. See E. M. Forster, "The Machine Stops," *The Oxford and Cambridge Review*, no. 8 (1909): 83–122.

3. See Alan Jacobs, *The Year of Our Lord 1943: Christian Humanism in an Age of Crisis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

4. A Gallup poll from 2013 shows that only 13 percent of workers worldwide found their work engaging. See Steve Crabtree, "Worldwide, 13% of Employees Are Engaged at Work," *Gallup*, October 8, 2013, https://news.gallup.com/poll/165269/worldwide-employees-engaged-work.aspx. The decline in labor force participation, by working-age men in particular, is suggestive of a declining sense of meaning in work. See Alan B. Krueger, "Where Have All the Workers Gone? An Inquiry into the Decline of the U.S. Labor Force Participation Rate," *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity* (Fall 2017): 1–87.

5. The article will not pursue this theme further, but it is important. Work engages us with the world around us. From a theological perspective the displacement of the real with the virtual further separates us from the God who created the world. See Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* (May 24, 2015), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html. I develop these themes in relation to business in Mary L. Hirschfeld, "What Is the Technocratic Paradigm and Must Business Be Structured by It?" in Daniel K. Finn, ed., *Business Ethics and Catholic Social Thought* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2021): 93–113.

6. See Ross Douthat, *The Decadent Society: How We Became the Victims of Our Own Success* (New York: Avid Reader Press; Simon & Schuster, 2020).

7. For the argument that our economic energies have waned, see also Tyler Cowen, *The Great Stagnation: How America Ate All the Low-Hanging Fruit of Modern History, Got Sick, and Will (Eventually) Feel Better* (New York: Dutton; Penguin Group, 2011). Though note that Cowen is an optimist, as his title suggests.

8. See Ariel J. Binder and John Bound, "The Declining Labor Market Prospects of Less-Educated Men," *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 33, no. 2 (Spring 2019): 163–90.

9. See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, Q 1, A 1 (Lexington, KY: NovAntiqua, 2010), henceforth ST.

10. Thomas is building on Aristotle in his emphasis on purposive action, but his views are fully developed in light of the doctrine of the *imago dei*.

11. See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, III:1, chap. 64 (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 1975).

12. *ST*, I-II, prologue.

13. See *ST*, I-II, Q 1, A 1 and A 2. See also Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals* (Chicago; La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1999): 67–71.

14. See *ST*, I-II, Q 1, A 5. For further discussion of this point, see Mary L. Hirschfeld, *Aquinas and the Market: Toward a Humane Economy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018): 78–81.

15. See *ST*, I, Q 47.

16. Pope John Paul II calls this the objective value of work. See idem, Encyclical Letter *Laborem Exercens* (September 14, 1981), §5, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091981_laborem-exercens.html.

17. See Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus* (May 1, 1991), § 36, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_01051991_centesimus-annus.html: "It is not wrong to want to live better, what is wrong is a style of life which is presumed to be better when it is directed toward 'having' rather than 'being,' and which wants to have more, not in order to be more but in order to spend life in enjoyment as an end in itself." The goal of "being" more refers to the perfection of our human nature, i.e., growing in wisdom and self-command and inhabiting more fully our relationships with one another.

18. See Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. Ernest Barker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), the crown of human happiness lies in the political because we are essentially political animals (I.1). See also Herbert McCabe, *The Good Life: Ethics and the Pursuit of Happiness* (London: Continuum, 2005), 26: "to be human is to be part of a society of other human beings." His reason for saying this is that to become fully human requires the exercise of rationality, which itself is premised on language, which points to our intrinsic sociality (idem, 26–29). Other ways of seeing how essential others are to our own fulfillment include simply noticing that we require others to raise us and care for us in our decline. See MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*; Ephraim Radner, *A Time to Keep: Theology, Mortality, and the Shape of a Human Life* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2016), chap. 4. These ways also include noticing that our economic lives depend on social collaboration.

19. See Richard Sennet, *The Culture of New Capitalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

20. See, e.g., classical Japanese culture: Murasaki Shikibu, *The Tale of Genji*, trans. Royall Tyler (New York: Penguin Classics, 2002).

21. See Genesis 1–2; John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, § 4.

22. See Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 2.

23. See Ross Douthat, "The Pandemic and the Decadent Society," May 8, 2021, https://douthat.substack.com/p/the-pandemic-and-the-decadent-society?utm_source=url.

24. Psalm 90:10 promises us seventy years—eighty if we are strong. Life expectancy in the United States prior to the pandemic was around seventy-nine. Were we to experience the same mortality rates we have experienced in 2020 and 2021, life expectancy would drop by about 2.5 years to 76.60. See Brian McNeill, "U.S. Life Expectancy Continued to Fall in 2021," *VCU News*, April 7, 2022, https://www.news.vcu.edu/article/2022/04/us-life-expectancy-continued-to-fall-in-2021#:~:text=U.S.%20life%20expectancy%20decreased%20from,not%20yet%20been%20peer%20reviewed. To put that into perspective note that the last time we had such a low life expectancy was the year 2000. In general, we fail to appreciate how much gain in longevity we have experienced. In 1960, the year of my birth, life expectancy was under seventy. See "U.S. Life Expectancy 1950–2022," *Macrotrends*, 2022, https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/USA/united-states/life-expectancy.

25. These are my back of the envelope calculations. For a more formal version of the exercise, see Bryan Caplan, "Life-Years Lost: The Quantity and the Quality," *EconLog*, November 24, 2020, https://www.econlib.org/life-years-lost-the-quantity-and-the-quality/.

26. Pierre Manent, *Natural Law and Human Rights: Toward a Recovery of Practical Reason*, trans. Ralph C. Hancock (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2020), 88–92.

27. See Mary L. Hirschfeld, "Healthcare in Service of Life: Preventative Medicine in Light of the *Analogia Entis*," *Journal of Christian Bioethics* (forthcoming), argues for a parallel between our disordered relationship to wealth and our disordered relationship to the question of the value of lengthy lives.

28. Many Christians seem to share this blind spot. Very few religious voices asked us to think about what makes life worth living so we could have some purchase on conversations about what should be given up in order to fight the virus. See Giorgio Agamben, *Where Are We Now? The Epidemic as Politics*, trans. Valeria Dani (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2021), 36.

29. There have been a few exceptions. See, e.g., Mo Woltering, "Stealing Our Faces: The Deeper Effects of the Mask Movement," *The Imaginative Conservative*, September 3, 2020, https://theimaginativeconservative.org/2020/09/stealing-our-faces-deeper-effects-mask-movement-mo-woltering.html.

30. See David Brooks, "America Is Falling Apart at the Seams," *New York Times*, January 23, 2022.