**The Polycentric Republic: A Theory of Civil Order for Free and Diverse Societies**

David Thunder

**Acceptance Speech**

Let me begin by saying that I feel very honoured and grateful to be among those who have received the *Expanded Reason* prize this year. I feel grateful and humbled because I am sure there were many other deserving candidates. It is gratifying to see my efforts to integrate philosophical and social scientific perspectives recognised by such prestigious institutions as the Joseph Ratzinger Vatican Foundation and the Universidad Francisco de Vitoria. But I am also grateful to the sponsors of this award, whose work contributes in important ways to the advancement of human knowledge and wisdom. For this award helps to highlight and promote work that escapes the limitations of disciplinary ghettoes and overcome the artificial gulf between normative and explanatory-empirical work in the social sciences.

This award is also an occasion of gratitude because it reminds me that I am only standing here because I have been supported over the years by a web of institutions and persons who kept me moving forward, from my parents to my school teachers to my university educators to the research support I have received from the University of Navarra’s Institute for Culture and Society and Spain’s State Research Agency, not to mention countless conversations with colleagues in corridors and conferences. Last but not least, I want to extend a special thank you to my parents, whose love and support launched me into the world, and my beautiful wife Olivia for supporting me as I shepherded this book over the finish line. And how could I not mention my two beautiful children for reminding me that there’s more to life than abstract ideas.

“Interdisciplinarity” is quite in vogue these days, but interdisciplinarity is not just a nice thing to engage in, but a requirement of reality itself, whose complexity requires the synthesis of disciplines that have become insulated from each other in the modern era. We cannot master every method or excel at every individual discipline, but we must somehow take on board the learnings and insights of neighbouring disciplines, otherwise we get trapped in sterile abstractions or are held back by the arbitrary prejudices of our own discipline. For example, in my own case, I have learned that much modern political philosophy has confused a historically contingent institutional reality – the modern State – with order itself, due to its neglect of history, that demonstrates the contingency of State institutions, and other social sciences, that demonstrate the ordering power of non-State associations.

True interdisciplinarity means harnessing available knowledge and ideas to bring our abstractions more in line with reality. Pope Benedict XVI reminded us that opening the horizons of human reason is a much deeper endeavour than talking “across” disciplines. Rather, it involves the brave pursuit of the truth, wherever it leads us, and the willingness to challenge existing disciplinary conventions if necessary. Seeking the truth means avoiding reductive and simplistic formulas and methods to capture complex realities. It means refusing to settle for a rigid compartmentalisation of reality between philosophy and the physical sciences, or between ethics and the social sciences. I cannot think of a more fitting way to close these remarks than with the quotation from Pope Benedict XVI that you can find on the brochure for this event:

“The proposal to broaden the horizons of reason must not, therefore, be counted simply among new lines of theological and philosophical thought, but must be understood as a call to a new openness to the reality to which the human person, in his unity and totality, is called. This means overcoming old prejudices and reductionisms, in order to open the path toward a true understanding of modernity.”