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Control of the Personal as a Means of Political Control and Power: Thoughts for a New Millennium

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Abstract. This article explores the utility of significantly controlling the governed's personal sphere of life as a means of maintaining and further increasing political control and power by political authorities in the new millennium.

Political authorities have been of two minds about the utility of significantly controlling the personal behavior of the governed--constituents/subjects/followers/the ruled--as a means of maintaining and further increasing political control and power. On the one hand, political control and power may be facilitated by developing and enforcing prescriptions and proscriptions about aspects of personal life. The governed's attention becomes so preoccupied with compliance or covering up noncompliance that any coherent, substantive, and significant contesting of political control and power becomes extremely unlikely. This may be the case for those of the governed who are allowed to intensively immerse themselves in personal license or whose daily life involves biting the bullet of constraint and deprivation. Political conflict--if any--takes place on the playing field of the governed's personal sphere not the authorities' coveted sphere wherein power is exercised.

On the other hand, political control and power may be impeded and even reduced by developing and enforcing prescriptions and proscriptions about aspects of personal life. Just as some politicians have preached that all politics is/are local, effecting a salient interface between the authorities and the governed focused on the latter's personal sphere may function as the fault line from which the authorities' political control and power may crumble. In essence, the governed may be willing and even desirous of abrogating any responsibility for monitoring huge aspects of the authorities' political sphere of influence--but may be willing to risk everything when motivated by a personal slight.

Does the coming new millennium necessitate a new look at the viability of the control of the personal as a means of political control and power? It certainly is becoming easier to monitor the personal as an intermediary step towards personal control. However, at least in developed countries that are variants of representative democracies, this is becoming the case not only for the personal sphere of the governed but for the authorities as well. This latter trend may be related to the rather facile surfacing of peccadilloes and even major sins allegedly perpetrated by political leaders. Much as with the return of the repressed in psychoanalytic theory, developments in telecommunications and computer technologies may lead to increasing political control and power for and by the governed through the control of the authorities' personal sphere. Hence, in the new millennium, politics may partially be a case of the chickens coming home to roost. (See Arat, Y. (1998). *Feminists, Islamists, and political change in Turkey*. *Political Psychology*, 19, 117-131; Lacombe, D. (1996). *Reforming Foucault: A critique of the social control thesis*. *British Journal of Sociology*, 47, 332-352; Liska, A.E. (1997). *Modeling the relationships between macro forms of social control*. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 23, 39-61; Vaughan, D. (1998). *Rational choice, situated action, and the social control of organizations*. *Law and Society Review*, 32, 23-61.) (Keywords: Personal Control, Political Control, Power.)