

The State and the Individual

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As Rousseau asked centuries ago. “By what inconceivable art has a means been found of making men free by making them subject?”

Liberal and Idealist thinkers differ in their answer, which in this short article, we shall try to scan.

Mutuality

There is mutuality of relationships between the individual and the state, of which he is a member. As T.H. Green once put it, “the self is the social self”. (“I am all”). By this he meant, as Aristotle might, that the best state is one in which equal is associated with equal, and in which the bond that holds the community together is the loyalty of the members for the state and its purposes.

At the same time to be a member of such a state, to share its work and to have a significant part to play in it, is both the condition of achieving a well-rounded personality and also the highest satisfaction that a human being can get. Even the most despotic ruler cannot hold a society together by sheer force, To this extent there is a limited truth in the theories of Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and Halifax that governments are produced by consent.

Government depends on will rather than on force, because the tie that binds a human being to the state is the compulsion of his own nature. Every state must recognize the fundamental social impulse in human nature, which is at the same time a moral impulse, and must try to give it realization in a form adequate to the full ideal meaning of morality. This ideal requires that the individuals in a state meet as moral equals, that they treat each other with respect, that all are free to think and act for themselves, and that their thought and actions are guided by full moral responsibility.

That is why we have introduced adult suffrage in India. For this reason coercion ought to be reduced to a minimum, and this is no truer of coercion exerted by the State than of any other form of coercion by the society which has the effect of making persons less than free moral agents. That is why we have enshrined Fundamental Rights in our constitution. For a modern individual, as for Kant, a society of individuals is a “Kingdom of ends” in which everyone is treated as an end and not merely as a means.

Hence, a state cannot aim at less than giving to all men the right to moral

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self-determination and to the moral dignity, as well as economic security, which is at once the condition and the due of personality. A half-fed citizen in the slums has hardly any share in civilization, than a statue in the ancient societies. Such a citizen becomes a ready prey to unscrupulous politicians and ambitious dictators as in Communist China.

General Good

Ideally a state is, as Rousseau said, “a form of association which will defend and protect with the whole common force the person and goods of each associate, and in which each while uniting himself with all, may still obey himself alone”. There is, therefore, a general social good or welfare – what Plato called the health of the community – but it is neither distinct from nor opposed to the happiness of the individual, because it is one in which the individual can share and because the participation is itself a significant part of the individual’s happiness.

Indeed, as Bosanquet explains in his book *The Metaphysical Theory of the State*, the happiness and misery of society is the happiness and misery of different individuals heightened or deepened by its sense* of common possession. Its will is their wills in the conjoint result. Its conscience is an expression of what is noble or ignoble in them when the balance is struck. If we may judge each individual by the contribution he makes to the society, we are equally right to ask of the society what it is doing for this individual. The greatest happiness cannot be realized by the greatest or any great number unless in a form in which all can share, and in which indeed the sharing is for each an essential ingredient.”²

War affords an unique opportunity both to the individual and the state to give out the best to the other. If in the times of war, people do not hang together, they will be hanged separately. There is no clash between our separate and several developments. The individual and the state can say to one another: “the more I give to thee, The more I have, For both are infinites.”

Social Conscience

There must always exist in a state a social conscience which both regulates law and is supported by law. Rousseau explained this in his unique dogma of general will. But Rousseau was merely confused when he tried to find out where in a society the general will is located. Moral judgment cannot in the nature of the case be located anywhere, because no individual and no society are infallible. A good constitution, as our own, is one which both respects an individual’s right to judge and also enhances the probability that his judgments

2 B. Bosanquet. *The Metaphysical Theory of the State*, 1918, p. 133.

will be socially trustworthy. All men rise more or less to this level in so far as they are given the opportunity to share in the moral culture provided by civilization.

Education

Hence the fathers of the Indian Constitution have accepted education as a very important social function in the Directive Principles of State Policy. The chief difference between ancient and modern civilizations lay in the degree by which the modern nation opens to all men goods which in antiquity were reserved to an aristocracy. A state, such as the state of Communist China, which subjects the individuals within her sway to false propaganda, distorted versions and hypnotic appeals in order to use them as tools for ulterior motives, is working against its own interest, because with small minded persons, it cannot perform great deeds.

Community

A State does not only depend upon individuals with a sense of their common good but also upon a community which permits within it a wide range of lesser communities that are largely autonomous within a framework of rights and duties imposed by the State in the interest of the whole society. The antithesis of such a State is therefore totalitarianism which is evidently being practiced to its fullest in Communist China. A free society must be what MacIver has called a "multi-group society". A wholehearted recognition of this ideal by our late Prime Minister made him the hero of minorities in India, and won him spontaneous and overwhelming support from different linguistic States.

Communication

The fundamental difference, therefore, between a free society such as India's and a totalitarian society such as China's is that a free society always believes in the possibility of general communication. A democratic state such as ours does not conceive society as an impersonal group of human beings, but as an intricate force of human relationships. Such relationships are always antagonistic and require mutual adjustment. Such adjustments can be made, because communication can always be made.

This is based on the fact which Gandhiji taught us throughout his life that coercion is at best an absurd method for controlling such complex things as human beings. Unfortunately, this is exactly what is being practiced in Communist China today. This is a method that is likely to fail at once and if it does not it is likely to leave in its train accumulations of resentment,

frustration, and hatred for future failure. Finally, a democratic State must realize that there is virtue in continuity but there is no less virtue in change. If an organization wants to survive, it must adopt itself to the changing tides and events of times. Thus, if non-violence was the means by which India secured independence from the greatest Empire of all times, non-alignment, rightly understood, is the only way to safeguard her freedom and territory. Wisely has it been sung:

“New occasions teach new duties,
Time makes ancient good uncouth”