

**The State As A Necessary Evil:**  
An Analysis of the State as a Permanent Concept and Personality

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The paradox evident in the labeling of the state as a 'necessary evil' is reflective of the complex interpretations of what is often viewed as one of the major concerns of political analysis. What is clear, however, is that a credible assessment of the proposition that 'the state is a necessary evil' must involve the defining of the state as a concept, theoretical perceptions of the state, proposed alternatives to the state, and, finally, modern day threats to the state. It is only after conceptual examination and comparison occurs that a reasonable assessment can be culminated.

Although a multitude of meanings are commonly associated with the concept of the state, the most comprehensive and unbiased analysis of the state has been comprised by the organizational viewpoint, which Heywood (2002) cites as being a political association that creates sovereign jurisdiction within defined territorial borders and exercises a continuous authority by means of stable institutions. These institutions are deemed as being 'public' and are consequently responsible for societal organization and wellbeing, are funded at the public's expense, and include but are not limited to the bureaucracy, courts, and social security systems. Additionally, as Dunleavy (1987) attests, the public characteristic of the state's institutions permits the state to produce and implement collective decisions. However, in order to remain legitimate, it is ideally imperative that the state does not impede upon private matters of the individual, but rather, make decisions that will result in the flourishing of society as a whole. As Held (1983) contends, the decisions made by the state are generally supported by civilians because of this public interest, as well as an awareness of the state's sovereignty and its concomitant capacity to punish the unlawful.

The labeling of the state as a 'necessary evil' has pejorative connotations that parallel the New Right's opinion of the state. As Pyper (1995) notes, this negative association is furthered by the New Right's personification of the state as a self interested ogre bent on its own enlargement, an illustration that has been perpetuated in academic circles as the leviathan state. As could be gathered from this less than complimentary imagery of the state, the New Right places emphasis on the classic liberal beliefs of

individualism in all realms of life, including economic spheres. The New Right's desire for independence and self sufficiency equates to a perception of the state as an intrusive force that infringes both personal and economic growth. The New Right's resentment of the state's ability to infringe on civil liberties is articulated by Max Stirner, who declared:

The purpose of the State is always the same: to limit the individual, to tame him, to subordinate him, to subjugate him (Stirner, 1974, p. unknown).

Specifically, the state is viewed as a 'nanny' figure that pursues its own interests rather than those of society and thereby submits itself to shouldering its own growing responsibilities. Although cynical, New Right theorists therefore believe that the expanding trend of state intervention is not meant to better humanity, but, instead, is a method of guilefully forwarding the state's own agenda.

Ponton (1996) details how subscribers to New Right theories cite pressures stemming from society as the main reason for state expansion. These are referred to as demand side pressures and spring from the pressures politicians receive from the electorate, most typically in the form of desires for government funded programs. The New Right also attributes supply side pressures as being internal to the state, and evidenced by the institutions and employees of the state. As confirmed by Heywood (2002), the combination of demand and supply side pressures constitutes the government oversupply thesis, which, according to New Right theorists, legitimizes their claims of the state being autonomous of the people and self invested because the expansion of the state and the creation of big government promotes internal employment and self importance.

Although it is obvious that New Right theorists view the state as 'evil,' they also view the state as necessary, but only in strict minimalist terms. Specifically, Peele (2004) declares that subscribers to the New Right believe that the state should be involved in the maintenance of law and order, the stabilization of currency, and external defense. These items are deemed to be at the most fundamental

levels of human existence, and the New Right is therefore forced to concede their management to the state.

On the other hand, Marxists emphasize their view of the state as being a biased instrument of class oppression by referring to it as the capitalist state. Although this terminology illustrates Marxist's perception of the state's 'evil' nature, this theory specifically suggests that the unsavory aspects of the state stem from its alliance to the bourgeoisie, or upper class. However, the classical theory attributing the state's dedication to the privileged has been submitted to much scrutiny by modern Marxists, resulting in two main theories regarding the nature of the state.

As Dunleavy (1987) clarifies, the first theory underscores the utter dependence of the state upon society's elite economic class. This theory is based upon Marx's own thoughts, as expressed in his frequently quoted writings:

The executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the affairs of the whole bourgeoisie (Marx, 1985, p. 82).

Proposed by Marx in his later writings, the second theory suggests that the state's attempts to mediate class conflicts are a mere façade that, in actuality, maintains the class system while simultaneously providing the state with surface autonomy. This theory presents the state as being less controlled by capitalism than the former, although it should be noted that Marx still believed the market was the domineering force even in his later writings.

As cited by Dunleavy, (1987) classical Marxists believe that the state utilizes institutions such as welfare systems and large public sectors as a means of exploiting the working class into supporting the state. These institutions soften the most damaging and discriminatory elements of capitalism, yet allow the most fundamental aspects of an economy-structured state to thrive while simultaneously popularizing the state to the majority. Despite most neo- Marxists disagreement with classic Marxists

notions, modern subscribers generally do recognize the wide acceptance that welfare institutions funded by public sectors generate.

In addition, Heywood (2003) portrays neo-Marxists as struggling providers of alternate explanations to the rather rigid ideas of classic Marxism, with a particularly strong rejection directed towards the classic notion of economic domination. Specifically, neo-Marxists legitimize their criticism of market superiority by citing Marx's failed ephemeral view of the state, which will now be examined as a means of accessing proposed alternatives to the state.

As Held (1983) clarifies, unlike the New Right, Marx did not entirely dismiss the capability of the state to perform in a positive and productive manner. To further differentiate Marxism from the New Right, Marx also believed that the state pursued universal societal interests. Specifically, Marx held that the state would be an invaluable concept during his proposed transition from capitalism to communism. Referred to as the 'proletarian state,' Marx believed that this state would temporarily exist immediately after the successful proletarian revolution, and eventually wither away as class tensions were soothed. Effectively, the proletarian state would be replaced by communism, resulting in a stateless, classless society. However, as alluded to earlier and substantiated by Ball (2000), communism's collapse in the USSR in 1991 is viewed by both neo-Marxists and critics of the ideology alike as a failure on Marx's part to correctly calculate the state and economy's structure and relationship. Although it should be noted that Marx's ideals were not fully realized in communism's Russian reign during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, key economic features, such as state collectivization and central planning, were implemented, and, to reiterate, failed.

Another alternative to the state as a neutral public arbitrator can be found in the workings of anarchism, an ideology that seeks, quite simply, for the eradication of the state and all its intrinsic bodies. As Heywood (2003) elaborates, although anarchism is the only political ideology to never

succeed in winning national power, it was an undeniably powerful movement during the early twentieth centuries in such volatile political climates as Spain, France, and even Mexico. Ironically based on both classic liberalism and socialist communitarians, the anarchist's desire for a stateless society in which individuals experience maximum freedoms through voluntary amicability has yet to achieve full fruition. Although this failure is partially pinned on the ideology's inability to achieve national power, the inability for anarchism to gain momentum is also reflective of its tendency to speak in ideals rather than ideas.

Although the systematic weaknesses of proposed alternatives to the state have been exposed, that is not to say the state is an impenetrable force. Rather, it is now logical to explore the modern day factors which have the strength to mitigate such an influential norm as the state. As Kellner (2002) notes, the single largest threat to the sanctity of the state has arrived in the form of globalization, and refers to the large scale amalgamation currently occurring in communication, trade, economic, and industrial fields. This transnational integration continues to accelerate at a rapid pace, ultimately strengthening the already domineering presence of westernized capitalistic society. Further propelled by the information technology revolution of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, globalization has allowed for previously unfathomable degrees of communication amongst nations. While certain businesses are reveling in the access to untapped markets, this heightened level of interstate correspondence has effectively translated into the dilution of state borders in areas of culture, commerce, and sovereignty.

To thoroughly grasp the threat globalization poses to the state, it is essential to recall the principle of non-interference established by Hobbes (Frederick, 1993). Suffice to say, an increase in transnational discourse therefore inversely affects the authority a state is able to effectively impose upon its territory. Furthermore, it has been controversially proposed that an increase in interstate exposure lessens a sense of domestic culture while simultaneously strengthening internal schisms, which

consequently increases the need for the state to protect against both physical and intellectual external intrusion and internal ethnic unrest (Huntington, 1997.) This juxtaposition of the demeaning effects of globalization on theoretical state absolutism is coupled with the increase in need for state solidarity to reveal the undeniably complex scenario globalization presents the state. However, despite the encroaching affects of globalization on the state's modern day applications, the categorization of the state as the ultimate defender of its people, and its unique ability to effectively provide such vital services, is of such overwhelming civilian and institutional concern that its eradication is unfathomable.

Although the necessity of the state, as well as its permanence despite modern day threats, has been established, the state still faces regular character judgments as to its inherit benevolent or evil nature. Interestingly, although not readily documented in most texts, it is possible to derive other conclusions from the failures of anarchism and communism that are key when assessing the proposition that that state is a necessary evil. Firstly, the notion that the state is needed is obviously implied by its categorization in the aforementioned proposition as being 'necessary.' When one considers the failure of both communism and anarchism, two ideologies that attempted to eliminate the state in its entirety, the idea that the state is indeed necessary seems to be heavily supported. Although the ideal of individual's abilities to peacefully coexist without the interference of external stipulations is optimistic, history has proven that it is indeed unrealistic. Rather, in order to ensure an acceptable quality of life for the vast majority of the populous, a systemic organization that provides essential items to the public has been demanded by the electorate. Although an admittedly bold statement to make, empirical evidence stemming from both communism and anarchism thoroughly illustrates the people's desire to, at least partially, be taken care of. Specifically speaking, even classical Marxists will concede that communism did not arise and flourish in the USSR under democratic voting conditions. Rather, as confirmed by Held (1983), it was installed by the seizure of power of Lenin's Bolshevik's party in 1917, and perpetuated by Stalin's personal dictatorship turned totalitarian

dictatorship until the mid 1980s. Meaning, neither Lenin nor Stalin, nor their practices, were necessarily representative of their people's wants or needs. In addition, the very fact that anarchism has never garnered enough votes to achieve national power is reflective of the minority stance of those who wish for the state to be abolished. Indeed, it seems although no one particularly enjoys paying taxes, no one enjoys living the unorganized, unstructured, and unsure life that a state ensures against even less.

After confirming the status of the state as necessary and broaching the topic of taxes, it is only reasonable to approach the second categorization facing the state: that of evil. Although Pyper (1995) does not shy away from the fact that the state (and with it, the state's responsibilities,) are expanding rather than contracting, one must be aware that the labeling of the state in such extremist terms is dismissal of the positive potential inherent with the concept and execution of the state itself. Although Marx viewed such institutions as welfare as the state's camouflage for its ulterior motives of protecting the bourgeoisie and the New Right feared the welfare state would stifle personal incentive, the state typically (albeit through taxes) ensures basic necessities that would be difficult for individuals to obtain/access independently. Since such a statement carries with it the potential of promoting conservative notions of human imperfection, a clarification of the difficulties individuals could encounter when attempting to meet the provisions of the state follows. Specifically, individuals often lack the physical man power, monetary funds, or clout to achieve large tasks such as the construction of roads of the maintenance of external defense. Indeed, such tasks require meticulous cooperation and organization if success is the desired outcome. In fact, the observant eye will note that the banding together of the public to accomplish great universal tasks is, indeed, the preliminary stages of the state. Therefore, not only is the necessity of the state further compounded, but the harsh categorization of the 'evil' nature of the state invariably questioned when the positive contributions of the state are considered.



However, it would be naive to neglect the pertinent points originating from the classic liberal ideas carried into the twenty and twenty first century by the New Right. As has already been noted, the expansion of the state's responsibilities transfers into an expansion of the state's power, which can be interpreted and often functions as an infringement of individual rights. In particular, it is important to acknowledge the validity of the government oversupply thesis, which effectively highlights how the state can benefit from its own expansion, and therefore may neglect the best interests of its citizens in pursuit of self enlargement. Specifically speaking, corruption is not an unfamiliar concept to the state, as stated by Lord Acton:

Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely (Fear ed., 1995 p. 88).

This motive of self interest certainly establishes the state's potential for evil in the sense that the state can self perpetuate beyond reasonable limits for its own fulfillment. However, the possibility for a different, subtle evil is also prevalent within the state, and lies within the theory that individuals will become lackadaisical knowing that the state will act as their provider. As Pyper (1995) elaborates, the state can drain initiative by providing its citizens with programs, particularly healthcare, that reasonable employment would also provide. Gill (1996) furthers that this scenario is exemplified in the United States of America, where those stationed in the affluent tax brackets feel that their hard work rewards the impoverished for remaining unemployed or downwardly mobile. However, as referenced by Heywood (2002), the public provision of basic necessities such as healthcare and early educational opportunities act as preventative measures that foster healthy and informed citizens. In turn, as voiced by Bill Clinton's New Democratic Party and Tony Blair's New Labour Party, this public investment in humanity breeds a more competitive and modernized society whose benefits are universal and vast. Therefore, although the state's undeniable potential for evil must be a possibility that remains at the forefront of society's conscious, the ability for the state to suppress instability and encourage civilization must be equally appreciated.

Indeed, the above conceptual analysis of the state, when coupled with theoretical perceptions of the state as well as proposed alternatives and threats to the state, compound upon the complexity of the nature of the state. As with all stigmas, it is essential to be comprehensively informed when confronted with the proposition that the state is 'a necessary evil.' Indeed, proper analysis highlight's man's near universal desire for the state, and provides an interesting prospective on the extremist wording of 'evil' that plagues this proposition. In conclusion, the state's ability to coordinate mass programs both domestically and internationally makes it a vital part of society, while those who assess the state as 'evil' may within themselves possess more malice than the state could ever hope to hold.

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