

MOTES from the Dust Bin

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HARDY INDIVIDUALS PLUS WELL FOUNDED INSTITUTIONS EQUAL CIVILIZATION

Society is not an end, but a means. To attempt to create a ‘great society’ from the top down—by edict or legislation or executive order—is folly. Civilization is the result of the positive interaction (not necessarily cooperative) of individuals through member-serving, or citizen-serving institutions promoting self-control. Barbarism is the result of negative interaction (not necessarily uncooperative) of individuals based on fear, or due to dependency on might; on an overlord or tyrant for control of behavior. But no civilization is complete, it is always in process; always struggling to reach or regain or to remain on the high road between tyranny and anarchy. And no barbaric tribe or horde is without some vestige of civilization, however stunted by oppression and/or deprivation and/or ignorance.

Given the principle of general imperfection, everything from the cosmos to the tiniest ‘sub-particle’ is not only imperfect, but imperfectable. Humans are far from perfect, though I once heard the direct opposite case posed by a mute and partially blind quadriplegic. With a pointer attached to a hard-hat, letter by letter, painstakingly, from an alphabet painted on a board held in his lap, he tapped out a pretty respectable argument holding that *everyone and everything* is perfect. The listeners were quite taken by this, many agreeing enthusiastically. I took his thinking seriously enough to disagree, at my peril. I was given unfriendly glances and my disputation was hooted and hissed. Still, I persisted. For should a man put forth his arguments in public without risk of rebuttal? By all that is, the case is quite the opposite: He puts them forth as a challenge.

The physically challenged man’s argument had to do with the notion that we are all perfectly what we are, set forth in a sufficiently round about way so that it would not be noticed by more casual thinkers that he was blatantly question begging—especially since the very process of laying out his thoughts was so tedious. But, perhaps he was not aware of that himself. Many a brilliant thinker has had to have unsavory elements in an otherwise appetizing philosophical stew pointed out by others. In all due respect to the others in the room, my opposition did seem particularly ironic. Here was a man for whom virtually nothing worked but his refined mind, a wonder in itself, arguing that everyone was perfect, versus a youthful healthy man of athletic build, erect posture, uncorrected eyesight, and not so much as a cavity or hang nail asserting that nobody’s perfect. The irony was not lost on the gentleman in the wheelchair. He found the whole thing quite amusing, and I loved him for it. Had the outcome depended upon a vote, I would have received but one. In the end, the question was not resolved to anyone’s satisfaction, but that lends support to my side of the argument—there is no perfection.

If the building blocks are imperfect, how shall the building fare? If individuals are imperfect, how shall communities attain utopia? If humans are imperfect, the government of humans will be imperfect, and the state can never disappear—which is why Marx is not a hero, but the clown prince of economic and political philosophy. Rather than wither, the socialist state will grow in power and presence.

It must grow. It will stalk you if you resist. It will kill you without remorse if you rebel. It cares nothing for individuals. It has no feelings. Its stated morals are malleable and relative to its perceived self-benefit, and nowadays it perceives by means of statistics. It is the manifestation of the ‘will to power.’ The modern techno-state is the ‘superman.’

Of course, a bridge need not stand on perfect foundations to bear the load. Bearing the load, however, does not make it a perfect bridge—only a practical one; perhaps even a substantial one; a functional, but only a temporary route across the chasm. One can always seek and even expect improvement (an airplane, perhaps, or spaceship), but only by improving the parts can the whole be enhanced. Only by improving *individual* humans can the tribe, or nation, or world ‘community’ be elevated. This improvement; this elevation; this revelation cannot be attained by sheer prosperity. (Prosperity, incidentally, always widens the gap between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have-nots’—because the have-nots still have nothing!) Despite unquestionable technological advance, I believe it would be found, were an honest investigation to be conducted and the results allowed to speak plainly, without the distortion of preconceived opinions, that humans have not grown more wise with the passage of time. Though literacy may have increased, and more ways of calculating have been invented, and athletic skill levels seem to have been raised, so have the horrors of war and the perils of environmental contamination. People, generally, are not improved in their attitude or behavior regarding virtue and vice since antiquity, though their lives have vastly improved.

Not ‘how to improve society?’ (as socialists would have it); but ‘how, then, to improve individuals?’ That is the proper question. For by each person’s improvement, the society consequently improves. Let me state that more forcefully: Only by the improvement of its members can a society improve. Society is not improved by the conquering of diseases, extending life expectancy, improving upon the rate of infant mortality; outlawing sickness and death—it is only enlarged and elongated by these measures. More life does not mean better life. Less death, by itself, does not mean that society is a whit improved, though we might consider it more ‘advanced.’ Even a prosperous society does not necessarily indicate a happy or improved society, as you are discovering in America at the threshold of the 21st Century.

You want a stronger community? Strengthen the character of its members. You want a just society? Raise fair minded, respectful children. You want loyalty and trust and a rampant sense of responsibility? See that there are consequences for bad behavior. Without these, you will have oppression. If you are not already oppressed, watch how these traits are eroded by government until you are.

Government means to control. Governments, in fact, promise to improve the level of control to benefit the citizenry. Government will always act to increase its control at your cost, until it costs you your freedom. Government, despite propaganda to the contrary, is surreptitiously interested in preventing rather than promoting individual improvement, because better, stronger, smarter, more courageous, more challenging individuals are anathema to its mandate, which is to control the many. The more ignorant and helpless are the many, the easier to control them.

Therefore, friends, realize that the government is your constant enemy. It will not help you except temporarily and by accident on the way to helping itself. Furthermore, much of its action is not even under its own control. Nevertheless, its end is total control of everything and everyone, no matter what its leaders, its officials, or its official documents may promise to the contrary. Traditionally, in America at least, the government is seen to have three functions: law making, law enforcing, and law interpreting. (Although, as America aged these functions became law confusing, law ignoring, and law changing). The founders divided the government into branches accordingly. Why? Because they knew that if all the reins were held in the same hand, they would gallop full-speed into tyranny. The three branches were expected to check each other. Why? Because the founders knew each branch would try to usurp the powers of the other three—again, in order to establish tyranny. It's inherent to government.

Is tyranny really so bad? There are times; situations here and there in history whereby tyranny is a must—in the face of anarchy, for instance. But once ensconced, the tyrant can be nearly as bad as the mob. You could resort to rebellion; revolution; civil war, but such things are so messy; so terribly disruptive. You may want peace so badly that you are willing to part with your liberty to have security. But in that very act—the act of meekness (a womanly virtue); the act of cowardice (a manly vice)—you surrender to oppression. As oppression increases, the level of action necessary to relieve it is also raised. So you will ultimately suffer a greater disruption; a greater conflict than the one avoided by not asserting your rights. By not insisting on the right to be wrong; by not demanding to shoulder the consequences of your own misguided behavior, you lose the precious attitude of self-confidence; and with it goes the right to happiness. For happiness cannot be experienced without earning it. By relieving you of responsibility (an apparent good), the government relieves you, *de facto*, of your dreams; your goals; your individual potential: your chance at happiness. Then come drugs.

So there will still be pleasure—sex, drugs, and rock 'n roll! That can't be prevented. But where's the fulfillment? A fleeting moment of pleasure can be conjured by galley slaves when the rowing stops; by amputees when the pain of gangrene is relieved with the loss of infected limbs; by wanderers in the wilderness, with songs of a promised land they can hardly imagine and dreams of a savior; even by prisoners of war between sessions of torture. Would we call any of these happy? They are merely relieved. Happiness must be earned. You must do something that makes you proud. You must prepare yourself in advance (often enduring pain) for later, sometimes unexpectedly higher levels of happiness. You must continue to be virtuous and persist in overcoming adversity without expecting 100-percent success. You must behave in a manner conducive to happiness to be worthy of it, and only by being worthy of it can you attain such a state—admittedly temporary by the very nature of a dynamic Universe.

Only when a large percentage of individual citizens are sufficiently self-developed, self-assured, and (properly) self-interested to govern the government will the state be deprived of its brutish sway and begin to cooperate in the improvement of civilization, and not toward a people's 'great society,' but toward a society of great people. While this can never really occur in an imperfect world, it can certainly be continually in process. And, after all, improving is infinitely more satisfying than degenerating—take it from me—or ask your grandfather! —*Mythokrates*