

Anatomy of the State  
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### **What the State Is Not**

- the State is usually thought of as a social service and a necessary factor in achieving humanity's ideals
- democracy has further created an identification of the State with society at large; for example, 'we, the people, are the government'
- Rothbard argues this provides cover for government actions as just, non-tyrannical, and voluntary by individuals; for example, government debt is owed to ourselves
- but "the government is *not* 'us.' The government does not in any accurate sense 'represent' the majority of the people." (p. 10)
- in fact, "the State is that organization in society which attempts to maintain a monopoly on the use of force and violence in a given territorial area; in particular, it is the only organization in society that obtains its revenue not by voluntary contribution or payment for services rendered but by coercion...the State obtains its revenue by the use of compulsion; that is by the use and the threat of the jailhouse and the bayonet. Having used force and violence to obtain its revenue, the State generally goes on to regulate and dictate the other actions of its individual subjects." (p. 11-12)
- various myths, however, have obscured these facts

### **What the State Is**

- the natural state of humans is to use readily available natural resources to create products for living
- voluntary exchange of such products for others has contributed to living standard enhancement; this is the true 'natural' way to attain 'wealth': find natural resources, create products that are 'property', and exchange for similarly-obtained property of others
- thus, property rights and exchange (market) are the key to peaceful production and exchange as opposed to violence over scarce resources
- Franz Oppenheimer argued there are two means of obtaining wealth: economic means—production and exchange as described above; political means—seizure of other's products/resources via force and violence (confiscation/theft)
- Rothbard argues the economic means is the natural way while the political means is exploitive and parasitic, detracting from production by lowering incentives
- given the above, the State may be said to be an organization of the political means; it "is the systematization of the predatory process over a given territory." (p. 15)
- "The State provides a legal, orderly, systematic channel for the predation of private property; it renders certain, secure, and relatively 'peaceful' the lifeline of the parasitic caste in society." (p. 16)
- predation follows production, yet the State did not come about via a 'social contract' but via conquest and/or exploitation

- for example, the classic conquering tribe that looted its conquered neighbour found that it was more efficient and secure to allow production to continue and simply rule while extracting a tribute (tax)

### **How the State Preserves Itself**

- a major concern for the ruling elite is how to maintain their power
- their typical approach is the use of force but their basic problem is ideological
- any government (regardless of 'type') requires support from a majority of its citizens (even passive resignation) given the minority status of the State (nobility and bureaucracy)
- the ruling class necessarily must be small as it is supported by production surpluses
- while it can attract some allies in the population, "the chief task of the rulers is always to secure the active or resigned acceptance of the majority of the citizens." (p. 19)
- creating vested economic interests is one way to secure support; sharing the benefits of rule attracts followers but still not a majority
- "the majority must be persuaded by *ideology* that their government is good, wise and, at least, inevitable, and certainly better than other conceivable alternatives." (p. 20)
- the 'intellectuals' of society take on this role; they create and disseminate the ideas/beliefs passively adopted, for the most part, by the masses
- these opinion-molders are needed by the State and thus offered security, income, and prestige within the State apparatus
- the arguments by the State and intellectuals to garner support of the masses are varied and many but come down to a few basics: the rulers are wise/great (e.g., divinely appointed, society's elite, experts) and leadership/rule/government is inevitable (i.e., evil would befall society without it)
- one very successful device to achieve support has been the union of the Church and State; with this, rulers were anointed by God or were God and it was blasphemous to resist
- "The States' priestcraft performed the basic intellectual function of obtaining popular support and even worship for the rulers." (p. 23)
- instilling fear about another system or none at all has also been successful; present rulers provide an essential service: protection against marauders/criminals (they wish a monopoly on such predation)
- with the creation of various nation states, the State has identified itself with the territory it governed; "Since most men tend to love their homeland, the identified of that land and its people with the State was a means of making natural patriotism work to the State's advantage." (p. 24)
- the intellectuals work to convince the masses that any attacks upon the nation are attacks upon them, not simply their ruling caste; this way, wars between rulers are marketed as wars between people and the masses come to the aid of their rulers who are protecting them
- this leveraging of *nationalism* has only really arisen in recent centuries within the West as people use to view conflicts as between nobles
- the State has used a number of ideological weapons; tradition is one and becomes more powerful the longer the State retains control
- independent, intellectual criticism is one danger to the State and individuals are sometimes attacked via an appeal to ancestral wisdom, or to minimize the individual in light of the collective

- individual dissent/criticism of the mass's opinion are ridiculed so no one can see the emperor has no clothes
- State rule is also made to seem inevitable, resulting in passive resignation of the situation when dissatisfied (historiographical determinism)
- conspiracy theories are denigrated as they birth searches for historical misdeeds and attribution of responsibility, leading to doubt about the State's propaganda that they are a 'social service' with the welfare of its citizens paramount; rather than the State being the focus, 'social forces' are identified making 'everyone' responsible
- guilt about individual profit-making and/or well-being is also denigrated as greed, exploitation, and/or excessive affluence, opening the door to private wealth confiscation; thus, parasitic predation by the State can be twisted to be marketed as moral and collective
- “In the present more secular age, the divine right of the State has been supplanted by the invocation of a new god, Science. State rule is now proclaimed as being ultrascientific, as constituting planning by experts.” (p. 28)
- individual reason and free will are considered inferior to determinist collectivism but is actually 'coercive manipulation' by rulers; “The increasing use of scientific jargon has permitted the State's intellectuals to weave obscurist apologia for State rule” (p. 28); for example, “A robber who justified his theft by saying that he really helped his victims, by his spending giving a boost to retail trade, would find few converts; but when this theory is clothed in Keynesian equations and impressive references to the 'multiplier effect,' it unfortunately carries more conviction.” (p. 28)
- “ideological support being vital to the State, it must unceasingly try to impress the public with its 'legitimacy,' to distinguish its activities from those of mere brigands.” (p. 28)
- as Mencken argued, government can be viewed “not as a committee of citizens chosen to carry on the communal business of the whole population, but as a separate and autonomous corporation, mainly devoted to exploiting the population for the benefit of its own members.” (p. 29)

### **How the State Transcends Its Limits**

- the checks/limits to State power that are occasionally created have been twisted by its supporters to help legitimize its actions/policies; from ruling according to divine law to divine approval for any action by the State, to democracy as a check on monarchical rule to the State having absolute sovereignty/power
  - judicial review has been transformed from a device meant to limit the State to another means of creating ideological legitimacy and reinforcing State power
  - legitimacy is supported when the majority accept the government and its actions but can be challenged by limiting devices; the State can circumvent such devices by creating an agency to decide on the 'legality' of these but it tends to be part of the State (and its decision-makers appointed by the State)
  - abuse of powers and overreach by the State are thus 'legitimised'
- (the State, in creating an ultimate arbiter of power that is part of itself is akin to the foxes appointing one of their own to be in charge of the henhouse, ignoring the wishes of the chickens)

-Rothbard summarizes John Calhoun's proposal to provide veto power to states regarding federal powers but then dismisses this by suggesting this could simply open the door to state tyranny, leaving the individual at their mercy; individual veto power would be the ultimate protection

-“the State has invariably shown a striking talent for the expansion of its powers beyond any limits that might be imposed upon it.” (p. 42)

### **What the State Fears**

-the State's largest fear is a threat to its power

-it's death can come via conquest by another State or domestic revolution

-it is not surprising, then, that these threats receive a lot of attention and propaganda so as to have the masses come to the defense of the State (usually in the belief they are defending themselves)

-“In war, State power is pushed to its ultimate, and, under the slogans of ‘defense’ and ‘emergency,’ it can impose a tyranny upon the public such as might be openly resisted in time of peace.” (p. 45)

-every war has brought increased and imposed social burdens upon the population

-evidence that the State's primary concern is its own protection can be seen in the crimes it pursues most vigorously (e.g., treason, currency counterfeiting, tax evasion, desertion)

### **How States Relate to One Another**

-States invest much time/energy to relationships with other States

-territorial expansion is a natural tendency of States that inevitably leads to conflict between them; the war that tends to result is punctuated by periods of peace and shifting alliances

-internal attempts to limit State power reached a zenith in the 17th-19th centuries via ‘constitutionalism’

-external attempts were addressed through ‘international law’, much of which grew out of the needs of merchants/traders; governments also had some interest in order to limit interstate destruction, giving rise to ‘civilised warfare’ where mercenaries were hired that could be dispensed with immediately following the cessation of hostilities (also gave rise to professional armies)

-for the most part, relationships between States remained civil despite being at war and people travelled freely with trade continuing unaffected

-this approach has been lost with modern warfare that tends towards total destruction

-agreements between States helps to minimise conflict due to the idea of treaty sanctity; this, however, is different from contracts that deals with private property that government tends not to ‘own’

### **History as a Race Between State Power and Social Power**

-there exist “two basic and mutually exclusive interrelations between men are peaceful cooperation or coercive predation” (p. 53)

-economic history can be viewed as a contest between these

-peaceful cooperation has been termed Social Power while coercive predation State Power

- the former can be viewed as human power over nature in order to benefit individuals/groups, while the latter is parasitic seizure of the former's productive capacity
- there have been times when Social Power has been able to exceed State Power but invariably the State confiscates the benefits for its own purposes (usually resulting in slavery, war, and destruction)
- despite attempts to place limits upon State Power via constitutional directives/guidelines, we have again entered a time where the State has perverted creative benefits and moved increasingly towards tyranny