

On the State and the Nature of Anarchopacifism

by Robert Hieger

When it comes to the organization of society, most people, the world over, agree upon certain universal principles. Among these are:

- I. The right to live life free of onerous obligations to others, i.e. indentured servitude or slavery
- II. The right to shelter and sustenance in the form of food and drink
- III. The right to live life as one sees fit

These principles, in and of themselves, make intuitive sense to the average person. In practice, the problem is that these ideals rush headlong into the rights of many other individuals who might very well define that to which they are reasonably entitled differently.

In the evolution of human thought, probably the first means of addressing this conflict was religious teachings. But the church alone could not tend to the needs and desires of all people. Further extrapolations of religious thought most probably led to ethical studies, philosophy and later, governmental models.

The inherent problem with governmental forms is that they make the supposition that the individual is incapable of determining how she or he should behave in relation to others and therefore cannot act individually to contribute to the organization of society. If this were the case, however, a simple question arises that poses a great challenge to the institution of centralized government. What makes people who attain to positions of power in government any more inherently capable than those who they govern, of determining acceptable personal conduct, if these empowered few are nothing more or less than people, themselves?

Herein lies the inherent contradiction in the notion of statehood—its tacit assumption that individuals are incapable, on their own, of thoughtful and ethical conduct and therefore must be ruled. The absence of such rule implies, in this vein of thinking, a state of chaos (not to be equated with anarchy which simply means the absence of centralized government) in which every person is out for her or himself, and will necessarily hoard, to the detriment of all others, goods, wealth and livelihood.

What a cynical and pessimistic view of humanity! Humankind deserves and sorely needs a more optimistic view.

The answer to this fearful view is the State, a theoretical entity predicated on principles of internal obedience and inherent distrust in that which is external to its domain. And if we look objectively at history, what is a country, state or province but a demarcation of land on a map, or

an arbitrary designation of boundaries in the waters leading to one shore or another? Isn't it funny that when we fly above land masses or masses of water, none of these lines portrayed on maps exist? All we see is the lush greenery of the country, the urban outlines of cities stretching to the horizon, or the vast expanses of water that separate land masses. None of these sights visible to the naked eye suggest division. Rather, they suggest integration, a notion quite integral to nature and to life itself.

What, then, is the alternative to centralized government? Why is the immediate answer to this question, more often than not, “chaos” or “anarchy?” Perhaps it is natural to fear that which we do not understand or that for which we have few working models in daily life. First, as mentioned earlier, “chaos” and “anarchy” are two very different things, and should ever more not be lumped into the same category.

Nonetheless, if the construct of centralized government is stripped away, it is necessary to put some form of organization in its place. Critical questions must be answered. Among these are how to make certain that all people are fed, clothed and sheltered, that they are free to pursue their aspirations, and that they contribute to the whole of society in ways of which they are capable. Contrary to the common assumption, a society without centralized government would not abhor organization, but would welcome it and would necessarily possess a much higher degree of organization than that to which we are now accustomed.

The Question of Money Versus Value and Services

Let us start with the proposition that people, services and products are of indeterminate value or invaluable. Money can, for this reason, be viewed as an unnecessary and all too time-consuming encumbrance. If this is the case, it becomes possible to work cooperatively rather than compete for positions in order to attain wealth, which can be equated with power.

Already quite well-defined within our existing society are subgroups of people capable of getting the food to market, of farming the food, and of defining the infrastructure of cities. These are but a few such subgroups. They are also capable of communicating their needs to one another and interacting to produce a synergistic whole. This can be, and is often done even now, without the supervision of centralized authority such as our current governmental structure. This communication between subgroups is the basis for organization and cooperation.

Inevitably, when such alternative organization is proposed, the first question that arises is “How will I get paid if there is no money? Without government who will protect me? If no one gets paid, how will society work?” Perhaps a somewhat flippant answer is “How does it work now?” Even so, there is truth in this question. If one’s needs are fulfilled by virtue of cooperation among subgroups in society, remuneration, as we now know it, becomes irrelevant. In other words, “What care I if I am not remunerated by the person to whom I provide a service or a product as long as my needs are met?”

Money is perhaps the most abstract means of exchange ever devised. It cannot define value because people, the time they give to service, and the products they produce are invaluable. To associate these things with arbitrary numbers reduces people to numbers. And just as mathematics

has exponents—also known as powers—money becomes a means of exponentially increasing the power of those who pay over the power of those who work for those who pay. In essence, money has no value except the power which we, as people, invest in it. The great irony is that we spend out lives slaving to accumulate this valueless, meaningless substance. If we pry its grip from our lives, suddenly work becomes more about pursuing a goal or reaching for a level of excellence because it nourishes the soul and contributes to the greater whole of community.

The Nature of the State

As mentioned earlier, the State is the answer to a fearful question, and is founded on distrust of everything exterior. The very presence of borders is a manifestation of the ultimate form of competition—war. Thus states are founded on war and necessarily need war in order to maintain their separation from that which lies beyond their borders.

The vicious cycle and self-fulfilling prophecy is that the industry set into motion at war time produces large amounts of money—here more representative of power than perhaps in any other context—that grease the machine and ensure that the paymaster retains the title to the lives of those who work for her or him. Immediately following the war cycle is a bust, proven historically over and over again. The inevitable build back to “prosperity,” if one can call it that, leads inexorably to the ultimate money machine—war—once again.

Even amongst the ranks of those who live by this philosophy, consciously or unconsciously, there is one prime example of someone who recognized this at a crucial time within American history. President Eisenhower, in his farewell speech to the nation, warned against the buildup of military industrial complex, saying that “Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies in a final sense a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and not clothed. The world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, and the hopes of its children.”

All of this blood, all of this sweat spent in the illusory goal of protecting boundaries that are figments of our imagination. What are we fighting for? Are the others inherently bad? Do they really wish our destruction? Or perhaps is it more likely that they are desperate for their own survival and eventually aspirations, of which they are robbed by the hoarding that is an inevitable byproduct of borders and protection as such? Perhaps these questions appear as naïveté to many people, but it is precisely these questions that humanity must muster the courage to ask. Failure to do so produces the current spirals into the abyss that we see in our world now.

If we remove these borders, look at world community, and celebrate differences, the need for protection would likely diminish greatly. Would violence disappear? Unfortunately, this is not likely. However, one of the primary causes of violence, fear as manifested in the construct of State, will have been removed from the equation. Life would not be perfect, but the journey toward a more perfect life would become possible, and the absence of competition that arises from borders would allow for more joy in that journey.