



CHAPTER 1

Politics and the State

Chapter 1 discusses the sovereign state and various typologies of the state. It is argued that states can be classified by their level of intervention in society, ranging from the non-interfering night watchman state to the highly-regulated developmental state. States can also be classified according to their level of responsibility to the will of the people. Such states can be arranged on a spectrum from liberal and illiberal democracies, to authoritarian and totalitarian states.

The chapter goes on to discuss three major approaches to understanding power in the state: pluralism, elitism, and Marxism. In addition, emerging ideas of the New Right are also introduced. After presenting the concept of the social contract as it appears in the work of Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, the chapter offers a critique of this approach and of its various assumptions about human nature from a feminist perspective. This is followed by a review of the concepts of utilitarianism, liberalism, communitarianism, and the general will and how they speak to the proper organization of the state. The chapter concludes by raising a question about the future of the sovereign state in an increasingly globalized world.

Chapter Outline

- **The Political Importance of the State**
- **A Typology of the State**
- **Theories of the State**
 - Pluralism
 - A Continuum from Pluralism to Elitism
 - Elitism
 - Socialism and the State
 - The New Right Theory of the State
 - The Empirical Dimension of the State

- **The Role of the State: What Should the State Do?**
 - Pluralism and Elitism: A Normative Critique
 - The Liberal Social Contract Tradition
 - The Night-Watchman State
 - Utilitarianism
 - Liberalism and Communitarianism
- **The Future of the State**
 - Is the State Being “Hollowed Out”?
- **Conclusion**

Key Terms

Authoritarian	Human nature	Pluralism
Bourgeoisie	Illiberal democracy	Polyarchy
Cold War	Interdependence	Proletariat
Communitarianism	Interest group	Social contract
Corporatism	Liberal democracies	Social democracy
Cosmopolitanism	Natural law	State of nature
Developmental state	Natural rights	Totalitarianism
Elitism	New-medievalism	Utilitarianism
Globalization	Night-watchman state	Welfare state

Discussion Questions

1. Jean Bodin, who wrote in the sixteenth century, defined sovereignty as “the most high, absolute, and perpetual power over citizens and subjects in a Commonwealth.” Does the concept of state sovereignty apply in today’s globalizing world? Should it apply today? How has our understanding of sovereignty changed?
2. What marks the difference between a liberal and illiberal democracy? Is the line always easy to draw? Do pure forms of either one exist or is it more of a continuum of democracy? Why or why not?
3. Totalitarianism is a form of government that first emerged in the twentieth century. Did it also die out in the twentieth century? Explain your position. Can you think of examples of totalitarian states in the twenty-first century?
4. There are varying theories of how power operates within the state including pluralism, elitism, Marxism, and “the new right.” How would you define today’s Canadian state in these terms? What evidence are you drawing on to come to your conclusion?
5. Does politics depend on human nature? If so, on which understanding of human nature does it depend? How might different understandings of human nature affect politics?

6. What characteristics should a strong democracy have? Is Canada a democratic state?
7. Why do some critics of interventionist states argue that a state is too big?
8. Sovereign states came into existence in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Four hundred years later, is it safe to say that the state is no longer the highest authority?
9. The New Right in Canada, the US, and UK shared the promotion of privatization. Why?
10. Why did Mary Wollstonecraft attack the divine right of husbands? What was she responding to with her essay?

Further Resources

- <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/contractarianism/>
Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy entry on Social Contract Theory—Part of an extensive database of terms and concept relevant to the study of political theory and political philosophy
- <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-liberal/>
Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy entry on Liberal Feminism—Part of an extensive database of terms and concept relevant to the study of political theory and political philosophy
- <http://www.iep.utm.edu/soc-cont/>
Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy entry on Social Contract Theory
- http://www.virtualreferencelibrary.ca/?startingCatNo=3432&nfpb=true&click=catDisp&pageLabel=vrl_page_home
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