

# LOADING *the* STATE'S DAGGER

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The history of political thought is a history of one euphemism after another to disguise the naked power of the state.

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By Robert Nisbet

What we call political philosophy is so overlaid in the West with euphemism, panegyric, and idealization that anyone might be forgiven for occasionally failing to remember just what this philosophy's true subject is: the political state, unique among major institutions in its claim of absolute power over human lives. Euphemisms for the state drawn from kinship, religion, nature, reason, mechanics, biology, the people, and other essentially nonpolitical sources have been ascendant for so long in Western history that it is downright difficult to keep in mind that the state's origin and essential function is, as philosopher David Hume pointed out in the 18th century, in and of force—above all, military force. What procreation is to kinship and propitiation of gods is to

religion, monopolization of power is to the state.

There is no political order known to us in history, from ancient Egypt to contemporary Israel, that has not originated in war, its claimed sovereignty but an extension and ramification of what the Romans called the *imperium*, absolute military command. War is the origin of the state and, in Randolph Bourne's familiar phrasing, is the health of the state. Modern war, grounded as it usually is in the kinds of political and moral ideals, or claimed ideals, which can justify almost limitless expansion of the state at the expense of society, is very healthful indeed to any form of state.

The essence of the state, then, is its unique possession of sovereignty—absolute and unconditional power over all individuals and their associations and

possessions within a given area. And at the basis of the state's sovereignty is the contingent power to use the military to compel obedience to its rule. This is as true of democratic as of despotic states.

The most democratic of contemporary states claims a monopoly of power within its borders, exclusive possession of and control over the military and police, and the right to declare war and peace, to conscript life and appropriate income and property, to levy taxes, to supervise the family and even, when necessary, the church, to grant selective entitlements, to administer justice, and to define crime and set punishment. The political state is the only association whose freedom to act cannot be limited by the state. With all respect to differences among types of government, there is not, in strict theory, any difference between the powers available to the democratic and to the totalitarian state. We may pride ourselves in the democracies on bills or other expressions of individual rights against the state, but in fact they are rights against a given government and in history and practice have been obliterated or sharply diminished when deemed necessary, as in the United States and other Western-democratic powers in the two world wars.

It is not strange, then, that the history of the state should be accompanied by the rich embroidery of euphemism. Any institution born of war, that thrives in war, and that claims unique absoluteness of power over all individuals within its borders requires all the symbolic assistance it can get. Such assistance has for a very long time been the offering of the political clerisy. Like the church, the state must have its defenders, rationalizers, and justifiers, its scribes and prophets. Also like the church, the state must have its dogmas and rituals, its feast days, its saints and martyrs, and its sacred objects.

## Family

The oldest of euphemisms for the state's distinctive military power is drawn from the realm of kinship, which is natural, given the age and universality of family, clan, and kindred in mankind's history. Thus early kings or chiefs might claim themselves patriarchs. Recurrently in history, kings have been rulers of *peoples* rather than territories; they were this in the early Middle Ages. *King* is a derivative of Old English *cyng*, meaning kinship.

The patriarchal image of the state was nourished by a good deal of theology during the Middle Ages; and feudalism it-

self, as we find it at its height, was an ingenious fusion of military substance and kinship symbol. Patriarchalism survived the decline of medieval society, its enduring appeal well illustrated in the modern world by the popularity everywhere of such words and phrases as *fatherland*,

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*mother country*, *sister-nations*, and the like. Mario Cuomo, the keynote speaker at the 1984 Democratic convention, used the word *family* to describe the American nation just under two dozen times. It was with a keen sense of the anti-quity of kinship metaphors in politics that George Orwell chose to give his horrifying totalitarian government the label of Big Brother. But in many ways the most telling example of the power of a euphemism in thought is the argument in political and social philosophy—extending from Aristotle to modern political ethnology—that the state is but the natural development through time of kinship. It assuredly is not, but the myth appears to be ineradicable by now.

## Religion

Religion is second only to family in its fecundity of euphemism for the war-born state. Prepolitical man was as saturated by religious as by kinship influences upon his thinking. Almost as hoary as the patriarch is the prophet in mankind's annals. How better to give root to a military conqueror's acceptance by the conquered than to sanctify, even deify, him; to make him at worst an indispensable voice of the gods, at best one of the gods himself. Egyptian kings were addressed in rescript and inscription as Aton, Horus, Re, and so on in order to give expression to their claimed identities as sun-gods.

The speed with which passage from the human to the divine could occur, and much later than the age of Egyptian pharaohs, is well illustrated by the careers of Alexander in the Hellenistic world and of Octavian, conqueror of Mark Antony at Actium, in the Roman. The latter was obliged by still-respected republican tradition to be more subtle than had been Alexander, but even so not a great deal of time passed before Octavian became officially *Imperator Caesar*

*divi filius Augustus*, a title that artfully fused military, divine, and kinship.

Christianity was born in a setting of emperor-worship, and from the beginning its teachers and missionaries sought to nullify as far as possible the influence of the imperial religion upon Christian

minds. But taking the long history of Christianity into account, it is impossible to overlook the readiness with which Christian faith and dogma could include acceptance of the sacredness of royal office if not personage. The crowning of Charlemagne by the Pope as *holy Roman emperor* suggests first the claim of suzerainty by church over state, including power of investiture of king, but second the allowance by church of sacred character into the kingship. Even the most powerful and assertive of popes in the Middle Ages did not deny to kingships their holy, if derivative, status.

It was, however, in the Reformation that the unqualified divinity of kings was once again proclaimed in the West. As Luther, Calvin, and others saw the matter, elevation of kings to divine status in their rule—directly divine status, unmediated by church—was as powerful a blow as could be struck at the hated and feared papacy. We tend to associate James I of England most prominently with the Divine Right of Kings because of his early-manifest fascination with the theology of the subject. It was under Charles I, though, in 1640, that what must be the all-time high in English belief in royal divinity was expressed. The statement begins: "The most high and sacred order of kings is of Divine Right, being the ordinance of God Himself, founded in the Prime laws of nature, and clearly established by express texts both of the Old and New Testaments."

Despite the numerous rationalist criticisms to which the divine-right panegyric was subjected in the next two centuries, it survived healthily. It was the influential German philosopher Hegel who declared the state—with the Prussian state foremost in mind—"the march of God on earth." And even when the German political idealists chose to retreat God to the background, obvious surrogates for God abounded: Dialectic, World-Spirit, and so on.

Political euphemisms have by no means been confined to patriarchal or

religious views of the state. The kind of rationalism that began to flourish in the 17th century is rich in euphemisms. Some of the more influential are: *machine*, *organism*, *general will*, *popular sovereignty*, *community*, and *welfare*.

## Machine & Organism

To liken anything to either machine or organism was a favorite occupation of 17th- and 18th-century philosophers, and it would have been extraordinary had the political clerisy not seized upon both of these euphemisms as means to advance understanding and acceptance of the political state. The

corporations of his day are likened to "worms in the entrails of natural man." Intermediate groups are declared to be for the most part "little worms which the physicians call ascarides." Undue conflict in government can induce a "pleurisy" that breeds "stiches" and other pains. Hobbes's special form of naturalism scored on both his physical and organic comparisons; and in his mind the physical and organic were really one, for what was the organism but a divinely constructed machine? Man could do no less in the state—to make an organism directed by the laws of mechanics.

In John Locke, too, the impress of the physical sciences is very evident. The state is at bottom "one body politic" with the capacity to move as one body under the direction of a "soul" that gives life to

played by contract applied to almost any relationship.

For philosophers and political intellectuals alike, the idea of contract was mesmerizing. The ugly reality of political-military power in dominance over multitudes could be transmuted into a relationship among individuals that, like any bona fide economic agreement, is simply a free contractual relationship among assenting, willing individuals. It really did not matter whether the social contract was believed to have historical reality at some remote time in the past or whether it was more of a spirit, tacit but pervasive, in a political population. All that mattered was that in theory there be a justification for the absolute state that could render the divine-right or patriarchal theory obsolete.

Natural law was a perfect host for the maturation of the euphemism of contract. In the 17th century, substances were deemed of greater reality than relationships. Man was the primary substance; his social relationships with others represented by traditional institutions were insubstantial, shadowy, mere reflections cast by individuals. For reality, one must begin with the individual; with his drives, his passions, and his reason. One must also postulate, as physical scientists did, some beginning void, some condition of nature in which nothing but man, solid man, existed.

For Hobbes, this state of nature was dreadful, a place of unceasing war, with

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organic could be illuminated by analogy to one or other of the mechanical pumps which in the 17th century dotted the landscape, especially in England; and the social and political could be explained by the organic or the mechanical or, as in the case of Thomas Hobbes, both.

In his *Leviathan*, Hobbes first abjures the use of metaphor in scientific writing (what he refers to as "demonstration"), but his own ears were deaf to his warning. Metaphor abounds in Hobbes's political writings. In the original edition of *Leviathan* there is a frontispiece of a giant human being, his body made up of miniscule human beings. Hobbes is of course laying the ground dramatically for his demonstrations throughout the book that the state is at once organism and machine. The principles of statics and dynamics, so highly visible in the natural philosophy of the age, are seized upon with avidity by Hobbes in his explanation of political process. The state is, just like the machine, an artificial body, one governed by its inherent statics and dynamics. There is an "artificial soul" that gives "life and motion to the body." Human ingenuity has created "engines that move themselves as doth a watch." What is the heart but "a spring; and the nerves but so many strings; and the joints but so many wheels, giving motion to the whole body."

The state, like the human body, can suffer malfunctions as the consequence of foreign substances introduced. Thus, for Hobbes such corporate bodies as the

human society. When the Legislative (the political government) is "dissolved," "dissolution and death" must follow. From Locke there is a straight line to the writings of the *philosophes* in France, so many of whom employed the figures of machine and organism to underscore belief that almost identical processes are

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found in the state and the human body. On such analogies and implicit laudations, modern political science was founded.

## Social Compact

The metaphor of a contract, or compact, among individuals as source and rationalization of the political state was not born in the 17th century, but it reached its maximum expression then in the history of ideas. The idea of contract had been made a popular one by the revival of Roman law, in which contract is given prominent place in civil codes; and the general spread of economic enterprise from the 16th century on could only popularize among the masses the notion of a vindicating role

life "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short." He pointed to the Indians of North America as a contemporary instance of what all mankind had once known. This is amusing, for the Indians Hobbes specifically referred to were those of the Atlantic coastal area, most of them in the great Iroquois League, well used to political institutions and to frequent war. However nasty and poor their lives may have been, it would have made more sense to charge this to the political state than to any prepolitical condition of nature. It doesn't matter. The social contract for Hobbes is the *vis creatrix* by which the absolute state, *Leviathan*, came into being. Awful as its power is, life within it is vastly to be preferred to the even more awful state of nature. Every civil war, every rebellion, even every criminal individual act, is, Hobbes tells us, an eruption, and a dreadful

reminder of the natural condition of man. It was by contract that Leviathan was brought into existence, and it is by contract that under no circumstances may its absolute power ever be challenged.

This was too much for other natural-law philosophers of the century, Locke foremost among them. Yes, an original state of nature in which men had freedoms, and yes, a contract by which natural freedoms were incorporated in the state, but not with the result that such freedoms would be destroyed. Instead, the natural freedoms would be converted into civil freedoms and remain essentially intact after the contract had been made; indeed, they would be crucial elements of the contract. The contract, Locke declared (years before the Revolution of 1688 which so often is still mistakenly thought to have been Locke's prime inspiration) holds the sovereign as well as the subjects accountable, and if the day comes when the sovereign fails to protect individuals' lawful rights, especially the right of property, popular revolt is justified. In fact, it is not really revolt by the people; for whatever there had been to revolt against was destroyed by the sovereign, by the sovereign's prior flouting of the terms of the contract, thus unilaterally ending it and thereby opening the way to the establishment of a new and once again legitimate contract.

We may think of the metaphor of contract as simply a conceit of the 17th and 18th centuries, a plaything that was dropped by philosophers at the end of the Enlightenment. But it is for intellectuals too beguiling a figure not to surface from time to time. The much-lauded work of a decade ago by Harvard University philosophy professor John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, is sufficient evidence of that statement. What Rawls calls his state of nature is "the original position" within which imaginary individuals exist behind "the veil of ignorance." Our minds are directed to a hypothetical group of human beings so anterior to culture (with all its in-built prejudices) that they are ignorant of name, origin, social status, knowledge of good and evil, or even intelligence and temperament. Such beings exist, for Rawls's purposes, in an "original position" that is for all the world like a 17th-century state of nature. And just as his predecessors fashioned states of nature to accord with their respective preferences for government, so does Rawls fashion his "original condition" and his "veil of ignorance" to accord with his unambiguous desire to see equality of condition the law of the land as a result of a social contract devised behind that veil.

## The People

Very probably the most fateful concept of the late 18th century in politics was "the people." Not the numerical aggregate of all who lived within a given set of boundaries, for this could include rabble on the one hand and tyrants and exploiters on the other. Rather, those individuals who could free their minds of sectarian prejudices and loyalties, who could in a rational way make their individual ways to comprehension of the general good and who acted virtuously in political matters—these were "the people," properly understood. If government were based in them, it would be inherently incapable of tyranny, for the people would never

the political community—it will never be to one man's advantage to seek to tyrannize his associates. As soon as the state is formed, it becomes automatically impossible to hurt one member without hurting the entire political body, with all members affected. Similarly, "the sovereign power need give no guarantee to its subjects because it is impossible for the body to wish to hurt all its members." The general will alone is sovereign, and whoever "refuses to obey the general will shall be compelled to do so by the whole body. This means nothing less than that he will be forced to be free."

But what is the general will? Rousseau indulges in no nonsense about majorities or even unanimities necessarily being the substance of this will. For, he points out, there is the "will of all," and although

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tyrannize itself.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau's momentous idea of the general will epitomized perfectly this vision of the people in contrast to a mere multitude. The vision has made its way uninterrupted through 19th-century ideas of plebiscitary dictatorship to 20th-century totalitarianisms. None of the latter would use *totalitarian* as a label. For that matter even *communism* tends to be eschewed in favor of, say, *people's democratic republic*.

Rousseau's *The Social Contract*, published more than a century after Hobbes's *Leviathan*, presented the social contract in a new light. It was nothing in the dim past, nor was it to be construed as tacit in any existing state. It was the means whereby, for the first time in history, the true, the only legitimate, state *could* be brought into being. What was required, Rousseau argued, is a contract among individuals whereby "each of us puts his person and all his power in common under the supreme direction of the general will." Once entered into, the contract is irrevocable and the newly established general will is absolute in power. Rousseau had only contempt for Lockean notions of natural or other rights persisting after the formation of the state. The contract demands the total surrender, alienation, of "each associate together with all his rights, to the whole community."

Such an alienation of rights does not, however, connote despotism. Since all members of the newly formed state are equal—in loss of natural rights and in acquisition of equality of membership in

this *may* be identical with the general will in a given situation, there is nothing mandatory about it. The general will appears only when a people has first banished from its collective mind all thoughts of individual or partisan interest. Rousseau has in full measure the Enlightenment's general hatred of such intermediate groups as kindred, church, and guild, and he insists therefore that it is "essential, if the general will is to be able to express itself, that there should be no partial society within the state." Between individual and sovereign there can be nothing that is not of the sovereign's making and under the sovereign's power.

Rousseau's genius, and the basis of his multifold appeal in the centuries following, lies in the care with which he enclothes his sovereign's monolithic power in such words as *people*, *public interest*, and above all, of course, *the general will*. As I have already noted, the last is so far from being synonymous with the expressed wish of a majority of the citizens that it must be explicitly distinguished from mere numbers. What makes the will general "is less the number of voters than the common interest uniting them." But how, we ask, is this common interest to be ascertained, to be recognized when it exists? Not, Rousseau tells us clearly in his *Discourse on Political Economy*, through any assembling of the people. It is by no means certain that any decision of the assembly would reflect the general will; such a method would be "impracticable" in a large nation; and, most important, such

assembly "is hardly ever needed where the government is well-intentioned: for the rulers well know that the general will is always on the side which is most favorable to the public interest... so that it is needful only to act justly to be certain of following the general will." Needless to say, there have been few governments in history which have not considered their rule, however harsh, as just.

Rousseau believed the religious impulse in man to be fixed and ineradicable. What is necessary, therefore, is to unite religion and the state. This Rousseau does through what he calls the "civil religion." Its articles of faith should be fixed by the sovereign, "not exactly as religious dogmas, but as social sentiments without which a man cannot be a good citizen or a faithful subject." The tenets of this religion will concern the

Mother Russia in the east across the continent and the Atlantic to the United States, the nation became almost literally the Voice of God. Once the sacred state had been premised upon belief that the ruler was a god; now it was the people, conceived as nation, to which holy attributes were given.

The United States serves very well as example of the power of civil religion—down at least through the Great War. Americanism vied with Christianity as the religion of true believers. Americanism had its proper calendar of saints' days for Washington, Jefferson, Jackson, Lincoln, and others. It had its Torah or Pentateuch in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. Medallions, scapularies, banners, epigrams, paintings, statues, and other essentially religious objects abounded. Its Nativity

assemblage; to ignore or oppose them was almost instant ground for popular indictment as heretic. The Kaiser and all Germans were necessarily infidels; worse, minions of hell, disciples of the devil. To be charged with pro-Germanism could be as deadly an experience as being charged with witchcraft in the 17th century.

I am not suggesting, though, that the religion of nation-state was limited to America, no matter at what intensity. Throughout most of the 19th century, down through the early years of the Great War, nationalism could be as ecstatic and mystical a thing for Europeans as for Americans. Intellectuals, today overwhelmingly dismissive of anything smacking of patriotism, were then prime movers in the new religion. France and Germany ran hot competition in the published works of historians and philosophers to establish the sacredness and the appointed mission of their respective nations. Not since the Reformation had Europe known the enthusiasm that now permeated nations rather than cults.

The Great War brought all of this to fulfillment—and then near-disappearance. It is difficult today to summon up, much less explain, the states of mind which were a commonplace all over Europe on matters of devotion, sacrifice, and martyrdom in behalf of nation. During at least the first two years of the war the young, those who faced almost certain death or injury in the trenches, were as religiously caught up as any of their elders. To give one's blood for England or France was like the medieval crusader's gift of blood for Christ. All the primordial militarism of the first states in history was nakedly displayed in the Great War, but few saw nakedness; only robes of divinity. Rousseau's civil religion, at the zenith of its 19th-century ascendancy, saw to that.

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state and its members "only" so far as they have reference to morality and to the duties requisite to the state's welfare. Rousseau speaks with all the force of Dostoevski's Grand Inquisitor about the dogmas of *la religion civile*. "While it can compel no one to believe them, it can banish from the state whoever does not believe them... as an anti-social being, incapable of truly loving the laws and justice, and of sacrificing at need his life to his duty." Beyond this, if anyone, after publicly professing belief in these articles, behaves "as if he does not believe them, let him be punished by death."

## Vox Populi, Vox Dei

Although Rousseau's *Contrat Social* seems to have been one of the least read of his books during the decade leading to the outbreak of the French Revolution, it became one of the best read of books during the Revolution. No one else had so glorified the people—the population, that is, freed of its dissenters, criminals, traitors, bigoted, and otherwise wicked—and so convincingly demonstrated that government could reach any height of repressiveness so long as it was anchored in the people.

It is no wonder, then, that the French Revolution brought the ideas of people and nation to a white heat that would tend to melt all other loyalties. From

was of course July 4th, down until perhaps a half-century ago observed by Americans more fervently than any of the Christian holidays.

Basic to the American religion was the belief in the redemptive mission of the United States in the world. More than anything else it was this belief that governed the mind of Woodrow Wilson during his tragic presidency. For Wilson, both before and after American participation in the Great War, the sacred obligation of America was, in his words, "to teach other peoples how to elect good men." To "make the world safe for democracy" meant, of course, American-style democracy.

If Wilson and other worshippers at the national altar needed anything to quicken faith, to bring belief to a white-hot intensity, it was the almost transfiguring experience in America of 1917-18. Never perhaps in history had a large people known religious conversion so quickly and powerfully. From a nation of neutrals, of fastidious rejection of European wars, Americans became, with only a few exceptions, crusaders, as avid to carry the religion of Americanism to the old world as their medieval forerunners were in their Christian mission. It was a rare Sunday sermon that gave God the attention that America the Beautiful got. After all, nearly 200,000 volunteer vigilantes, the so-called Four-Minute Men, patrolled the land under Wilsonian orders to make certain that the American cause was properly recognized at every

## Social Welfare

During the 20th century, yet another euphemism for political power has made its way into popular usage: the social welfare state. It is one of history's ironies that the word *social* should have been so easily appropriated by the political clerisy. When this word achieved popularity in the West in the early 19th century, the context was overwhelmingly the *nonpolitical* spheres of society—family, neighborhood, local community, and voluntary cooperative association foremost. To French sociologists and radical anarchists alike, the state and the political were in bad odor

after the totalitarianism of the Revolution. Auguste Comte, founder of sociology, led the way in seeking to repudiate the political and to exalt the social as the only feasible alternative to the political. Alas for Comte's hopes, the political clerisy was already at work seizing upon the "social" before he died.

It is not difficult to understand the attractiveness of the "social" in place of the "political," for the latter had inevitably become somewhat stained in the public imagination. There were too many citizens for whom the state was still a reminder of war and taxes, and, in any event, there were simply limits to what could be done with the word *political*. Such neologisms as *politicization* and, worse, *politicalization* didn't recommend themselves when reference was being made to the political state's ownership and control of increasingly large areas of economy and society. Such words may have told the truth, but it is the function of language to be able to conceal, as well as reveal, the truth.

*Social* was made to order as a beguiling prefix. "Social reform," "social security," and "social budget" were so much better as labels for what governments were actually doing than would have been any of these with the word *political* used instead of *social*. Similarly, for those who could dream of an ever more state-dominated future, *socialism* was much to be preferred to *politicism*. And who is to say the clerisy is wrong? How, for instance, could the now-mammoth and always near-bankrupting "social security" system in the United States have ever reached its eminence and load of close to 40 million people if it had been called in the beginning "political security" or something so mercifully exact as "state charity."

Big euphemisms in politics spawn small ones. Thus *civil rights*, once a precise term for individual rights within the governing process, now stands mostly for group entitlements, Social Security and Medicare being only the biggest. *Affirmative action* is the euphemism used for a widening complex of highly negative actions by the state against individual liberties. The phrase is obviously more felicitous to political sensibilities than *quota system*, which is in fact the substance of "affirmative action" enforced by the government.

It is politics alone that has generated the race to euphemism by the various "public interest" groups concerned with enlarging the number of government grants. Thus the once-honored "elderly" or "aged" have been retired for good in favor of "senior citizens." The blind and the deaf have given way to the "hearing-

impaired" and the "sight-impaired." The feeble-minded are gone, succeeded by "the exceptional" in all public laws. And, finally, through political legerdemain, the poor and needy have been at last banished, replaced by "the underprivileged."

## Soulcraft

Recently a resurgence of the moral and the sacred has taken place in American political thought and action. George Will, political columnist, has given benediction to this resurgence in his book *Statecraft as Soulcraft*. The time has passed, Will declares, when the governing machinery can properly limit itself to the actual behavior of individuals and "concern itself with soybeans but not virtue." He is contemptuous of the insistence of the late Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter that government consider behavior, not "the inner mind," of those it rules. No longer may moral matters such as abortion, birth deformities, and school prayers be left where they have been for millennia—chiefly in the hands of the family and the church and in our day the medical profession.

If there is to be virtue in these and related matters, says the self-styled Moral Majority, statutes of the national government and even constitutional amendments are mandatory. Neighbor may be set on neighbor in the interest of total conformity to political laws of virtue. The entire coercive machinery of the state is to be utilized when necessary. But, writes George Will, none of this is to be regarded as "compelling persons to act against their settled convictions; it is not collision of wills.... Rather it is a slow, steady, gentle, educative, and persuasive enterprise." That it is also an enterprise in which police, prosecuting attorneys, courts, and prisons quickly and necessarily enter seems not to matter to the Moral Majority and its prophets.

Will and his allies believe that this assignment of virtue to the political state has Edmund Burke for its ancestor. In truth, it is not Burke, who abominated centralization of political power, and especially in the moral realm, but Jean-Jacques Rousseau who gave birth to the philosophy of political manufacture of virtue and of virtuous minds. Early in his life, Rousseau tells us in the *Confessions*, he had come to the realization that people's moral lives are shaped by political government. It was thus easy for Rousseau to reach the conclusion in *The Social Contract* that when government coerces,

it is only "forcing men to be free" and of course virtuous. Government must penetrate "into man's inmost being," Rousseau declares, if it is to progress from merely ruling men to "making men as they should be." It is the sacred task of government, he concludes, to change human nature, to transform "each individual, who is by himself a complete and solitary whole into part of a greater whole from which he... receives his life and being." Rightly do we perceive the Rousseauian state as a form of permanent moral terror.

It is doubtless cruel, but it is necessary to remind the Moral Majority in America that behind the totalitarian states of the 20th century lie, without exception, vast schemes of attainment of virtue in the citizenry through limitless uses of political force. Lenin, Stalin, Hitler, Mao, and Pol Pot have not been by nature sadists and carnage-mongers. They have been, though we shrink from the word, *idealists*, so certain of being morally right in a world of evil that they believed themselves justified in uses of political power ranging from simple decree to what the Nazis in a triumph of political euphemism called the Final Solution. From Marx, Lenin drew a picture in his head of the perfect socialist man; and in the interest of creating this being, no limit to the use of force could properly be regarded as virtuous. Again, it is cruel but necessary to see Leninism in its several forms as nothing less than Soulcraft.

## Afterword

It is almost too much to bear. More than 2,000 years of political euphemism and panegyric, and with what result? The state, born of war and nourished by war, has become, all euphemism notwithstanding, more powerful, more inquisitorial in human lives, than at any time in its history. It is almost as if Mars, god of war, were exacting tribute from us for having sought for thousands of years to conceal with euphemism the union of war and state. For, in our century the state has reached a pinnacle of force never before known in history, and warfare has taken more lives in devastation, killing, and mutilation than in all previous centuries put together. □

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# Mucking Up the Melting Pot

BY LYNN SCARLETT

Over half a million Indochinese refugees have flocked to the United States in the wake of South Vietnam's collapse. For none of these refugees was the flight from their homeland an easy one, but for one group—Hmong people—the uprooting has been especially traumatic.

Tribal peasants from the highlands of northern Laos, the Hmong were catapulted from a centuries-old slash-and-burn farming culture into the computer age. They were totally unfamiliar with modern urban life, even in their own country. Not only stoves and refrigerators but tables and chairs were foreign. Banks, checking accounts, and supermarkets defied even the imagination in their native home. And they were illiterate—in fact, their own language doesn't have a written form.

When I was asked recently by a United Nations organization to chart the Hmong's problems and prospects in Southern California, where over 33 percent of the 50,000 Hmong in the United States have settled, I found a people struggling to adapt to monumental changes in their lives. But my investigation also revealed something deeply troubling about America's welfare system.

Like millions of immigrants who had preceded them to the United States, the Hmong were greeted by generous volunteers—individuals and charitable organizations—who helped ease them into their new surroundings. Unlike past eras, however, the federal government now has its fingers in just about every dimension of America's melting pot. There are programs to impart to immigrants language and job skills. There are taxpayer-funded housing subsidies, health-support systems, special counseling, and welfare.

It all sounds quite generous, at first. But, talking to the director of the Indochinese Community Program in my area (yes, it's federally funded), I noticed how much support for the Hmong has gone toward guiding them through a maze of government bureaucracy. Immigration papers, Social Security numbers, tax forms, Medicare forms, welfare applications, immunizations—all this, the program director proudly confided, her of-

fice takes care of for the refugees.

Had any of the Hmong in this area, I asked, set up businesses? A bemused director replied that these people can barely cope with the basic procedural requirements of settling down in machine-age America. Surely, she said, not realizing her implicit criticism of what America had become, they could not contemplate throwing themselves against the morass of agencies, councils, commissions, boards, and departments that regulate small business.

Contrast this to the situation in turn-of-the-century New York, where government interference didn't nip entrepreneurship in the bud. The waves of im-

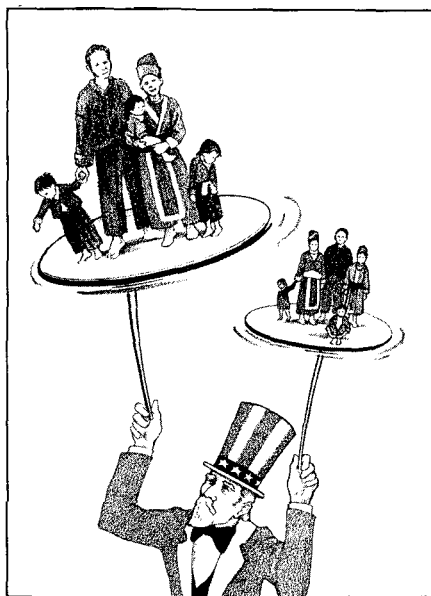
likely to engender the demise of the program—since its welfare rolls are slim, the program is slated to receive no more funding.

In the same building out of which the Indochinese Program operates, I saw healthy, able-bodied American adults lined up for their regular welfare hand-outs. Some, the director complained, have been receiving welfare checks for a decade or more. Meanwhile she could point to a Hmong tribesman—illiterate, speaking no English, with 10 children and almost no belongings, in utterly strange surroundings—who is ineligible for continued assistance because of legal quirks and political finagling.

The program director seemed genuinely concerned, and I asked whether she'd reached out to the community for help. Yes, she said. She had presented a plea for funds to the city council, to county officials, to the mayor, to the local congressman, to the state senator—all government officials! I probed further. What about individuals? Philanthropic volunteers? I was astounded, but *it had not even occurred to her* to seek help from the private sector.

Historically, the United States was a land of opportunity for immigrants. It offered them relative freedom to pursue their dreams. And, with flourishing voluntary, charitable organizations, it provided a flexible support network for the needy. Today, we have a situation in which eager, hardworking individuals, hindered from setting out on their own, become captives of a welfare system that is unreliable yet breeds dependence. And, in a self-perpetuating process, the social workers who administer the system have been inculcated, more often than not in government schools, in the creed that governments, not individuals, solve problems. Slowly but surely this creed has penetrated our ranks, narrowing our vision and capping our imagination, so that a call for help is unquestioningly put out as a call for more government. What an introduction for the Hmong!

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migrants that poured in then have left a rich diversity of shops, restaurants, and services that bear witness to what unrestricted opportunity can mean for individuals.

Today we have, instead, refugees who are increasingly pushed on to the mercy of government welfare programs, as private efforts are crowded out and entrepreneurship is stymied. And what the government gives with one hand, it is often quick to take away with the other. Whether a tribute to the hardworking refugees themselves, or to the vigorous efforts of the Indochinese Community Program's directors, 75 percent or more of the Hmong in this area have found work. Ironically, that very success seems