

The Nature and Role of the State

The modern state is the result of social, political and to some extent economic evolutionary processes, which as should be obvious, have not reached any sort of endpoint. The processes, themselves, in many ways, follow the same sort of patterns as those in other areas, including 'life sciences'. This can be exemplified by recognising that the majority of the development through time of the state has been unplanned and driven by gradual and in some ways, chaotic pressures, whether social, scientific, technical, artistic or economic in nature. Alongside this, there have been occasional organised political and social factors which have resulted in some step-changes (although not necessarily large) in the relationship between the state and its underclass.

The State has become the essence of the nation, representing itself as the only centre of authority and power within the geographic borders of the country. This has left the underclass, as I have called them, in virtually all cases, simply people who live on the same piece of land, whom the state has typically defined as a resource, to support, underpin and maintain its foundations and structures (economic, political and social). Whilst in modern times, with the slow advancement of democratic processes, the relationship between the State and its population has altered somewhat, becoming more sophisticated with the corresponding advancement in scientific, economic, political and sociological theory, knowledge and thinking, it remains the case that the State and its self-perpetuating institutions, has maintained its central and dominant ownership of power, with only in reality a limited bow to the principles of universal democratic rights. The underclass remains, largely as subjects of the State, rather than citizens supported by the State.

The next obvious evolutionary progression in the relationship between the citizen and the State, is the recognition that the nation itself, is the embodiment of the collective ambition of its citizens, transforming the role of the State, instead, into one of supporting citizens at home and representing them overseas, in order to maximise both individual, communal and national achievement. This reversal requires both the changes outlined in previous essays, and also a complete mindset change within the institutions of the State. If those people who are actively working within all the State institutions recognise themselves individually as empowered, active, participatory citizens, alongside their fellows, and are led and developed as such, within these institutions, they surely can operate in a manner which reflects all the ambitions, opportunities for personal development and success of every other citizen. In this way, power shifts from State to citizenship, underpinning and strengthening democratic ideals, enabling every citizen to genuinely become an equal stakeholder, albeit with their own lives, and greatly diminishes (as long as citizen-vigilance remains) the migration of power-seeking people to, what were previously, the centres of power.

In the typical current relationship between State and the People, there is a tension due to the pressure exerted in both directions at the boundary, whereby citizens who may organise to agitate for a power shift from State to populace, meet resistance from State agencies who, from an opposite standpoint, are driven to dispel agitation, to ensure their 'need' for control is maintained. Progress towards both a more egalitarian sharing of power (in all its senses) and also the development and evolution of systems, processes and institutions wedded to democratic principles has been slow throughout the history of modern society. The manner in which changes, driven by rational objectives, have occurred has been the story of conflict (often with violence) between organised members of the populace, with some principled ideas for change, and forces of the State, resisting such change in the interests of those who exert and perpetuate its dominant position within the nation. These are the very people who benefit most significantly from the 'status quo' and are therefore strongly resistant to changes which may undermine their privileged positions.

Changes therefore have (and may) come about by three different methods. Firstly, as is normally the case, by agitation, building pressure on the State, which, perhaps after various attempts at resistance, may give a little (as little as possible) to dampen down the pressure for change, and at least for the moment offer some degree of satisfaction to the agitators. This is evolutionary change, and is typically slow and nearly in all cases, maintains the overall dominance of the State. The second method which may occur is through the revolutionary explosion of overwhelming pressure, at first resisted by the State, but becoming so intense as to result in open and violent conflict. The outcome may be the imposition of new State mechanisms and principles by those who seize power, but often leads to new elites controlling the State just as firmly as the preceding regime, with citizens, once again left disempowered individually and collectively. It is perhaps in the nature of those who lead the revolutionary forces for change to be of a certain character which exhibits itself once they have overturned to previous regime, as a 'lust' for permanently exercising their own newly-won power and status. This obviously impacts greatly the potential for significant devolution of power to the citizenship. The third possible manner, in my opinion, in which change can come about, is through radical evolution, where specific 'design' changes to the systems, processes and institutions of the State and nation are developed and proposed, and whereby the citizenship and the pre-existing State discuss and agree an implementation plan for a systematic overhaul, leading to significant changes, recognised as benefiting all citizens, as well as the collective nation. The State in this case, will be required to shift its outlook from one of defending the 'status quo' (which equates to a re-evaluation of the question "Whose interests do I represent?") to instead rise above the parochial and look at the big picture objectively, with a view to cooperatively developing a much broader egalitarianism in the interests (if truly done with integrity) of the whole citizenship. This recognition can free the citizenship and fully release their potential, individually and collectively, to enhance their own, their communities' and their nation's prospects and capabilities.

Striking a new balance between State and citizen requires, firstly an acceptance by all citizens to rise to the challenge of externalising the concept of active, participative and in particular, empowered democratic citizenship, as explored previously in other essays. Secondly, it requires a commitment by all to invest in a culture which develops, from infancy, the understanding of what defines an empowered citizen in real terms, such that it is second nature to those growing up in such a culture. This embeds the whole concept into each individuals foundations, and to some extent, not only defines the relationship with, and expectations of other citizens, and their respective communities, but also the State. Thirdly, a recognition by all (those who work or operate, outside of the State institutions and agencies, as well as those who execute roles within those same bodies) that citizen empowerment must not lead to a stifling of the ability of State institutions and their employees to function effectively and efficiently. Finally, it is also absolutely imperative that the State must not be seen to be the centre of power. This reduces the 'glow' of power emanating from the State and limits the instinctive attraction of 'power moths' to the glow, and thus stymies their potential to undermine democratic principles in operation.

In practice, to both ensure that the new balance always maintains the principle that the power held by each citizen equally is retained by them at all times, whilst ensuring that decision-making and operational execution within the boundaries of the State is efficient, it is, in my view, vital that a new and very-far-reaching basic value within all the bodies of the State, of openness and traceability is adopted without hindrance. This allows all citizens to be fully informed at all times (as they wish) about the activities of those bodies which act purely on their behalf.

It is clear, in my view, that the current relationship between citizen and State is upside down, where the citizens, at least to some extent, are seen as resources to enhance the positions of those who are leading figures in the State (politically, socially and economically). The State claims (in the current model) to act in the interests of its citizens, and at the same time, denies them an active role in defining the way in which the nation functions and the direction of travel in which it is steered.

Some might argue that in many nation states, the direction of travel, including the destination on the far horizon, is not defined at all, but left purely to the vagaries of unfettered free-market social and economic ideology. The response from those same leading figures when questions are raised reflects the view “Don’t concern yourself – we know best”, This is contemptuous.

The idea that a nation is not defined by the State, but is instead a collective concept equally shared within the personal boundaries of every citizen, turns the upside-down model the right way round. The citizens are the nation, and the State has its function transformed into one of a representational and supporting role. This changes the answer to the question “Who’s in charge?”, and ensures that the State answers to the citizenship, rather than the other way round.

The final piece of this picture is that, from the notion that everyone who lives on the same piece of land bounded by the geographic borders of the nation, is an equal stakeholder in empowered citizenship, and therefore all aspects of diversity within the population are of equal importance and value. This stakeholder diversity greatly enhances the capability of communities within the nation, and thus the nation itself, to ensure that the whole really is greater than sum of its parts, as the inputs and contributions from a wide variety of sources with different perspectives, leads to a much richer outcome for all, as long as they make a commitment to explore, experience and learn from those differences and embed the learnings within their own foundations, sharing their own perspectives in return.

The advent of democracy in modern times has been used to counteract the over-riding power of the State and those who sit at its head. Bit by bit, progress has been made but always in confrontation with those who exercise the vast majority of power. In order to truly deliver into the personal space of each citizen, everything which by natural law, belongs there, requires all those who believe this to be the right objective to pursue, to commit to do whatever is necessary to remove the obstacles and bring about a system based on equitable democratic citizenship and communal enterprise in which everyone makes their maximum contribution because they are fully recognised as equal stakeholders and have a great sense of belonging to a common purpose.