

## K 6. SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY from the BEGINNING

1/05

Start with the new born baby with impulses that it later learns from others are good and bad even for itself, and good or bad in effects on others. Its first social contacts are with a parent or two parents which feed it and keep it alive (as it later learns from them). It learns its identity first and then distinguishes other people & other things. It finds it can move or effect some things & others not. It soon finds that some things it does produce negative reactions from those persons it affects, & others positive responses. It knows innately which it likes. It finds that other people do things to it which it likes & things which it doesn't. In due course, it learns much from others and learns that they respond favorably to some things it does and restrict or punish it for things it does to others that are forbidden. It also learns that various groups not only restrict it but also place obligations upon it. But the groups learn from individuals that there are limits to what it can require of them, that there are privacy rights upon which individuals will insist. And there are even obligations that groups can be asked to fulfill with respect to individuals. Groups, societies can be asked to provide fair and ample opportunities for them to develop their finer potentialities, & though outside the family few groups do that, they do provide some opportunities.

It is of course true that these respective obligations and limitations applicable to both individuals and groups or societies are not generally as well observed as they are supposed to be and ought to be. That is the social problem--to do better in these respects than either generally does. The social philosophy that overextends the individual rights & sees no social obligations is anarchism or libertarianism, while the social philosophy that sets no limits on societies is totalitarianism or worse yet theocracy. The result of the latter two is tyranny, the result of anarchy is Hobbes battle of each against all so that life is poor, nasty, brutish and short, No case can be made for either extreme, and the best case is for the middle position which has been described as the ideal to be sought.

It should be clear from the above that the individual is born as a member of groups. They precede the individuals born (even when society consisted only of families or tribes) and ever since then, and groups greatly mold the individuals from birth & throughout life, though individuals can always do much to determine how to respond to the influences upon them if they choose to do so.

The well-being of all individuals is the value guiding my social philosophy, or more properly, the full development of each individual's finest potentialities. Each person is a product of what society's and the individual's own choices make

of the individual's genetically determined potentialities. Individuals do not exist for society, society exists for the individuals so it has a purely instrumental value, even though it does much (some deliberately & much not by careful plan) to develop individuals. It is important therefore that it have the proper objective in developing individuals, namely the full development each individual's finest potentialities. The individual should have freedom to choose to develop its finest potentialities or not insofar as it knows those potentialities and how best to develop them. That freedom limits what society can do, but it can at least provide fair and ample opportunities for individuals to develop their finest potentialities. Probably only through trial and error can individuals find their finest potentialities, and many may never really know correctly. Nevertheless the opportunities should always be open.

The major problem for society is how best to deal with the anti-social impulses of all individuals that potentially harm other individuals. They should never be socially reinforced, should always be discouraged and if possible redirected into harmless channels. Restorative justice and rehabilitation should be used when possible, & withdrawal from society only when really necessary.

The individual has several problems in addition to trying to learn what its best genetic potentialities are and how best to develop them. The first is to learn that giving in to any impulse, good or bad, strengthens it, and choosing the better makes it easier to do so subsequently & increases the opportunities to do so. The individual needs to learn that it depends on others for all its needs, survival from the beginning, then material, social, intellectual, aesthetic and moral needs. It needs to learn that it at most can contribute only a little at the margin compared to what all it receives from society. And that it therefore owes it to others to make its finest contributions to society in return. That moderates but does not solve the problem that one naturally tries to serve itself primarily, and then the few it cares most for, and then values it chooses to serve, and only last if at all the interests or needs of others or of the human race in general. I would think the individual justified, however, if it chose to employ whatever finest potentials it has developed that serve society more than itself, rather than sacrificing that in order to meet some emergency need of someone else.

So far as we know, earliest human societies were tribal, & people in each tribe probably learned much about how best to live with each other. As tribes came into conflict over hunting grounds, violence between them probably erupted before one found a new area. As larger social groups came under one leader, his desire to control more people led to violent conquests.

When nations were eventually formed, fearful of such attacks they formed military establishments to repel any such. This was called "realism" to protect people who wanted a peaceful existence. But the bigger one nation's

military establishment the more fear that caused in other nations, and they got allies or armed more or both to deter attackers. But the resulting mutual threat system to deter each other depended upon the credibility of threats. To keep threats credible, some had to be carried out, so the system produced wars. "Realism" finally created stockpiles of nuclear weapons so large that, had even an accident or miscalculation led to even an unwanted nuclear war, if all nukes were thrown at each other by the U.S. & the USSR, both countries would have been utterly destroyed and life on earth might have disappeared as a result of the fallout. This was the ultimate consequence of the society's structure and ideology so dominating the individual that it would sacrifice all individuals to maintain a social system that with modern military technology could be suicidal. Luck not good management avoided that catastrophe once, but the system is still in place and the danger is thus not just in the past. This is where "realism" brought the human race. Should we try idealism instead?

First let us return to another aspect of early humans, not their social organizations but their belief systems. We know little about the ideology of primitive humans. Survivors have managed to learn enough about nature to survive, but have not gone much beyond that. We call much of what surviving primitive peoples think pure superstition or belief in magic. Whether to explain natural forces they do not understand, like the rainstorms & lightning & thunder, or to explain how a sick person can be talking to them at one moment and the next moment be dead as though something had left the body, primitive religions developed beliefs in a world that transcended that experienced by our senses. Various religions and the ethics they developed from them are very important to this day. Unfortunately, although most religious ethics involve what is often called the Golden Rule (Do unto others as you would have them do unto you), each religion usually claims to be based upon Gods special revelations to some people, & claims all people should be obliged to follow his revealed will. Partly for that reason wars have broken out between religious groups and now lead some to terrorism. Yet religion has also at its best produced some very fine people and a great deal of the human race's finest music and art.

So both social organizations and belief systems have evolved to produce violence and suffering at times instead of contributing only, as they should, to the development of humans finest potentialities.

In the present age, a different belief system has taken hold of much of the developed world. It is said to be the only ideology that is purely rational and so defensible. It encourages individuals to get the most of whatever they are after in the world while giving up to get it only what they have to give up. I call this the "smart guy" ethic. It ignores the effect on everyone else of such action by the individual. The individual is to look out for itself, since no one else

will. And that is one's only obligation. This idea is closely related to, and maybe derived from, the usual doctrine that every business has as its sole objective to maximize its net profits (profits minus necessary costs). That is often but not always accompanied by the statement that business is business, meaning that ethical considerations are not relevant, that that is an unrelated subject. It is obvious that this ideology has an appeal to anyone's natural egoism and desire to promote one's own well-being, or at least to get whatever one wants without having to worry about anything else. This ideology appears to have spread widely throughout the economic and government world.

But I contend that it is the most subversive social doctrine that is possible. It can destroy every potentially good social relationship among people. No one can maintain even a good friendship if one is discovered to be simply trying to exploit the friendship for personal gain. That is not true friendship. And no potentially wonderful marriage will be such if either party or both are in it only for what they can get out of it for themselves and care not at all about whether they are helping the other person. There is no true love involved in such a marriage. As for business, productivity sinks the more laborers try to get their pay or promotion by doing only the minimum necessary to get it. Without the so-called work ethic among laborers, there can never be enough supervisors to keep everybody working as well as desired. One can pay labor for the time, but how much is produced well is determined by labor. And if the supervisors have the same smart guy ethic, they will be on the take rather than doing their job well. Indeed that attitude on the part of CEOs and accountants & auditors etc. explains much of ENRON, WORLD COM etc. The economy does not work properly with the smart guy ethic. So its excessive individualism is also self-defeating and cannot be generalized and work for all. In government this ethic results in government for special interests and the circulation of people between business being regulated and the government regulators. Democracy is utterly destroyed and a business plutocracy governs, aided by legislators having to be financed by special business interests.

So beliefs in "realism" for individuals, especially those in business & government, or beliefs in God's revelations to limited groups of people have produced some very bad results for many in human society.

But is there a true realism instead of what was mistaken as realism? What almost everyone should know from experience now is that human empathy and friendship, both of which we all have naturally, and love (the type formerly called agape) that leads to promoting others well-being, and human cooperation for equitably divided mutual benefits all enhance the quality of human life while their opposite degrade it. So it is simply rational, it is emotionally satisfying, it is realistic, it is also ethical, to guide life by developing these insofar as possible

rather than using their opposites. This is not turning our backs on religion but on conflicting revelatory claims while fully recognizing something basic in almost all religions as the Golden Rule which cannot cause trouble or lead to violence. Violence causes human suffering and should be avoided like the plague since the alternatives improve life for everyone.

It should be clear that between any two individuals and between any two groups there are potentials for conflicts, some of which could become violent (depending partly both on belief systems and on the legal frameworks in which the conflicts occur) and potentials for equitably shared mutually beneficial relationships. It is rational to structure societies so that the latter dominate and the conflict relationships are minimized, although when societies develop with no rational thought given to their development, this is not to be expected.

There is an enormous amount of personal goodness in the world among mature adults, but they do not know enough, and can not learn enough, to know how to structure societies to maximize equitable mutual benefits in human and group relationships. Indeed nobody really knows all that, so a rational approach to the problem of social organization inevitably involves some trial and error.

The problem is that political power to make the necessary decisions in every society tends to be held largely by people who want power too much and tend to use it badly instead of trying to develop society rationally for the proper ends already discussed. In a democracy, to the degree that people control even indirectly, they do not know how to do what is needed. The social problem as always is the "limitation of and the "control of" social power by whomever held. Judis suggests that democracy works best when people follow leaders who at least have the public well-being at heart rather than serving special interests. The relatively recent rise in public and political influence of public interest non-governmental organizations is potentially helpful, however. It is almost indispensable that at least some widely respected mass media present the problems to the public from the point of view represented here if there is to be much hope of movement in the proper direction, for if all mass media were to oppose this sort of social philosophy it would likely have no chance of much support.