

# THE STATESMAN

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By Shanon Brooks

In Philip Bobbitt's latest book, *The Shield of Achilles*, he makes the case that the internal forces that at once sustain the Modern State and forge new States, are 1) defensive or military strategy and 2) legal or constitutional order, or rather, the relationship between the two. To say this another way, Bobbitt's makes the case that throughout history, people have come face to face with a threat. To survive that threat, they bond together and create a defense. To ensure the defense holds, society creates a legal system to specifically support that defense or military strategy. And then as the threat evolves, the defense and legal system evolve to counteract the latest threat.

However, to clearly understand his premise, we need a definitive understanding of the rationale behind the very existence of government.

It is sometimes difficult for us to grasp the beginning of government (it begins as the actual application of the legal code or the constitutional order or the form of government—it ends overbearing) as it seems to have always been with us. We daily live with its modern intrusions and almost motherly nurturing, complaining about its abuses—only half comprehending their nature or cause. Government coddles us from cradle to grave; it manages the quality of our food, regulates everything from the speed of our vehicles and the language used in entertainment and the media, to who manufactures our clothes and the cost of our health care. Being ever present and nearly omniscient, we never stop to think why it is there, or whether it has a purpose beyond safe guarding us from every possible mishap or inconvenience.

Tocqueville predicted that our relationship with government would be that of an ignorant and self-centered child and an indulgently controlling parent:

The [government's] power is absolute, minute, regular, provident and mild. It would be like the authority of a parent if, like that authority, its object was to prepare men for manhood; but it seeks, on the contrary, to keep them in perpetual childhood: it is well content that the people should rejoice, provided they think of nothing but rejoicing. For their happiness such a government willingly labors, but it chooses to be the sole agent and only arbiter of that happiness; it provides for their security, foresees, and supplies their necessities, facilitates their pleasures, manages their principal concerns, directs their industry, regulates the descent of property, and subdivides their inheritances: what remains, but

to spare them all the care of thinking and all the trouble of living?

So it stands to reason that we little comprehend or even consider the original purpose or occasion of the State. However, to illuminate the potential development of future government, and to shed some light on Bobbitt's supposition, we need to revisit the origin and evolution of the State.

### **The Nomadic Age**

Society came into existence as an end to a means for personal protection. People have from the beginning of history joined forces for mutual protection from the threat of violence, mischief and personal abuse, not to mention destruction of property. During the Nomadic Age, violence was a daily expectation. It was personal, it was close-up, it was the definition of survival: "kill or be killed." It was based in literal self-perpetuation, not motivated by love or protection of a sovereign other than one's self or clan.

Due to the nature of the age, the hunter/gatherer did not have much to protect beyond his life and a few meager possessions. This did not require more than himself and a few other persons working in concert, and as they tended to be always on the move, the groups were usually no more than the core and extended family. Having little or no society outside of family, there was no cause for an administration of law. Protection (order) was maintained by brute strength and was self-provided. If indeed there was government at this level, its constitutional form was little more than a patriarch or a council of elders and the strategy was simple survival.

## **Agrarian Age**

Although many of the wandering tribes had achieved a level of accumulation and abundance, it was not until there occurred a shift from gathering to staying in one place and producing crops that relative abundance became common place. In order to cultivate a sufficient amount of acreage to meet the needs of the family and develop additional stores, farmers tended to work cooperatively during planting and harvesting. Their stores became objects of envy and required their collective protection as well. It was here that the first semblance of society emerged. It can be imagined that these agrarians came together in defense of each others' fields, homes, and particularly their stores of food. In fact, it is no stretch of the imagination to assume that they would store their grain and other commodities close together or even collectively as it would clearly be easier and require fewer guards to protect these community treasures. Soon walls were erected with towers which made it even easier to guard and provide advanced warning.

Upon the announcement of a threat, all of the participants would come inside the walls and bond together in mutual defense. As dependent as these growers became on each other in some aspects of community, they nevertheless lived in a very rural environment and, for the most part, remained extremely independent. Government became more plausible as the need for protection became more vital.

But the system employed was locally democratic in contrast to the regional government or empire under which they often labored. The history of the Hanseatic League and the independent development of guilds makes this point well.

## **The Industrial Age**

It wasn't until the advent of mechanization and mass production that society developed its current perpetual reliance on government. Clearly during the two previously mentioned eras, there were great empires that covered the earth headed by mighty dread sovereigns who dictated their will to their subjects. But outside the required allegiance, universal taxation and proper oblations to the God or Gods of the period, government did not permeate the lives of the average man or woman. It was not until the lure of plentiful factory work with the promise of currency wages (that enticed the agrarian to leave his "by the sweat of his brow" existence) that government evolved to its current form.

As the people flocked to the cities, overcrowding, unsanitary conditions, increased crime, corruption of all sorts and hundreds of other problems prompted the people to clamor and beg the government to solve the latest crisis. Again, Tocqueville states that

". . . the dread of disturbance and the love of well-being insensibly lead democratic nations to increase the functions of central government as the only power which appears to be intrinsically sufficiently strong, enlightened, and secure to protect them from anarchy.

". . . The love of public tranquility, becomes at such times an indiscriminate passion, and the members of the community are apt to conceive a most inordinate devotion to order." He concludes that the Americans ". . . are constantly excited by two conflicting passions: they want to be led, and they wish to be free."

## **The Threat**

The dichotomy here is that there is no accumulation of wealth or advancement of the standard of living without cooperation and government. At the same time, once men begin to gather they always tend to excess, creating a situation where within a few generations the administrations of government have stepped over the line of personal stewardship almost with the blessing of the people themselves. Few exceptions to this natural cycle exist, exceptions that at once give us a model and a result by which we may judge our current situation and a system for potential emulation. One such model may be the township of colonial New England.

If Bobbitt is right, and the roots of all society are strategy and order (and that as those strategies change to accommodate new threats, the form of government changes to align itself with the new strategy), what does that mean for America as it faces perhaps its most pernicious threat ever? One thing history has shown is that success is defeat. Just when we think a system works and we let down our guard, the universe shifts and what worked yesterday suddenly becomes ineffectual. The pattern to victory for the U.S. for the last hundred years has been the formula of stronger, bigger, louder, better financed, etc. In facing this new threat, which we have not begun to comprehend, and which we are wholly unprepared to confront, are we making preparations using the vestures of past success, not cognizant that the playing field has changed, that in fact our enemy is no enemy at all, rather a technique? How does a society defend itself against an unknown threat? Our old stand-by has been to go on the offensive. But against who? Terrorism is not an enemy but a method, a system of warfare. How do you fight a system without a perpetrator;

without a face? We seem to believe that you must create a face, overwhelm a supposed enemy; and that will let the rest of the "terrorists" know that we mean business.

That will also prove to be the beginning of defeat.

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