

Distinguishing the state from the government philosophy essay



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Max Stirner claims that “ The State always has the sole purpose to limit, tame, subordinate the individual-to make him subject to some generality or other.” 1

This claim seems quite negative and to many people it evokes the ideas that the state is something unwanted and useless. Something existing just for ruling over us and making our lives more difficult. There is quite great amount of people that are sure of their point of view which takes the state for entity trying to achieve more and more money from ordinary people and at the same time doing nothing important or beneficial for them.

On the other hand, it is not as difficult as it seems to find people who agree and support the idea and existence of the state. In their opinion, the state exists for our good, tries to help and foster the citizens, cares about the individual as about someone who is truly subordinated to it, but the existence of the state is highly profitable for him. It is obvious that the individual delegates his power to the state but it is not a punishment or some kind of duty. According to them, the delegation of power is based on the common agreement which is useful for everyone.

These are only two notions contrary to each other which are supposed to explain or described a necessity of the state. Obviously, every human being capable of thinking about the things and phenomena that happen around has his own ideas and positions, so there is a lot of different explanations and definitions of the role of the state.

But do we know what the state exactly is, anyway? Does everyone, who agrees or disagrees with the existence or speculates about the importance of

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the state, knows what he talks about? Is there any clear definition of the state? In fact, these are the questions which are not always easy to answer. Many well-known political scientists have tried to explain the term “ state” so several theories of the state have been developed.

One could also ask why to study the state at all. Simply, because it affects everyone’s life. Whether you think the state is important or not, Andrew Heywood writes: “ The shadow of the state falls upon almost every human activity. From education to economic management, from social welfare to sanitation, and from domestic order to external defence, the state shapes and controls, and where it does not shape or control it regulates, supervises, authorises or proscribes. Even those aspects of life usually thought of as personal or private (marriage, divorce, abortion, religious worship and so on) are ultimately subject to the authority of the state.”² As far as I am concerned this quotation of Mr. Heywood proves the case of the state influence upon the lives of all citizens subordinated to it. Therefore, this is the supreme reason why to analyze the entity of the state.

WHAT IS THE STATE, AND HOW CAN BE DISTINGUISHED FROM GOVERNMENT?

The essential question to answer is what the state exactly is or how we can understand the term “ state”. The Hegel’s explanation appears to be very simple to understand: “ The state for Hegel means any ethical community which is politically organized and sovereign, subject to a supreme public authority and independent from other such communities.”¹ Naturally, we could take the definition for granted and moreover, not to speculate about it any longer. Anyway, could we be fully satisfied with the definition written <https://assignbuster.com/distinguishing-the-state-from-the-government-philosophy-essay/>

above? Obviously, Hegel missed one of the most substantial features we use to describe the state nowadays and it is a legitimacy to use power to maintain the order and also the territory on which the obeying of the law (that represents the order) is enforceable.

These two matters are regarded as crucial in the definition by Max Weber:

“...a state is a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory. This explanation seems correct, but there could be a little inconsistency. In juridical standpoint every human being has a right for a self-defence; it means that everyone is legitimately capable of using physical force to prevent someone who wants to harm them from doing so. So, in this case physical force can be used without any punishment and is still taken for legitimate. Therefore, it is not right to claim that the legitimate use of physical force is the monopoly of the state.

Anyway, is there any suitable definition of the state? The answer is not unambiguous because the state can be understood in many different ways. Three of them are analyzed by Heywood², who describes idealistic, functionalist and organizational approach to understand the state. Firstly, the idealistic approach was mostly represented by Hegel, who used the principle of altruism. Altruism is in general the way of behaving when someone helps others and concurrently does not follow their own interests. So, the state is ethical community based on the universal altruism – it means that everyone does not care about their own interests but about the interests of whole society and state. Heywood claims³ this conception, which is built on the ethical principle, is confusing because we cannot distinguish between <https://assignbuster.com/distinguishing-the-state-from-the-government-philosophy-essay/>

institutions come under the sphere of the state and ones that are not. For example, according to idealistic approach it is not clear whether family could be understood as an institution of a state or as a private institution.

Secondly, Heywood talks about³ functionalist approach that takes the state as a complex of institution trying to maintain order and social stability.

Marxists were

supporters of this approach, they describe the state in functional way and claimed¹ that “ Capitalists also use different wings of the state to uphold their capitalist ideology. For example, the government attacks on single parents or the continual harassment and implication of laziness in relation to the long-term unemployed.” The drawback of this approach is according to Heywood² the fact that every institution requiring order could be wrongly made identical to the state e. g. school, family. Last but not least, Heywood claims that the most appropriate approach to the state is the organizational one. “ The organizational view defines the state as the apparatus of government in its broadest sense: that is, as that set of institutions that are recognizably ‘ public’ in that they are responsible for the collective organization of social existence and are funded at the public’s expense. The virtue of this definition is that it distinguishes clearly between the state and civil society” ²

So, Heywood regards the organizational approach to the state is the best among the great amount of different approach. He also identifies³ five key features that define the state: the state is sovereign, state institutions are public not private, state is legitimate, state has the right to use power and every state has its own territory.

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The state is sovereign – it means that the power of the state is not dependent on any other power. Thomas Hobbes used the term “ Leviathan”, which is the great imagined sea creature. He explains: “ This Leviathan is the State — whether in the form of an absolute monarch or a democratic parliament, it does not matter. The important point is that the State will be given a monopoly on violence and absolute authority. In return, the State promises to exercise its absolute power to maintain a state of peace (by punishing deviants, etc.). “ 4

State institutions are public – it simply means that the state cares about the good of all citizens and follows their interest. There are also private institutions such as families. However, in Marxist view¹ the state does not care about the common good but prefers the capitalist class to proletarians.

State is legitimate – it means that “ the decisions of the state are usually (although not necessarily) accepted as binding on the members of society because it is claimed they are made in the public interest or for common good. “ 3 In everyday life we take the state for legitimate because we obey the law about which we think is the best for us and for the good of other citizens. Sometimes it is difficult to define whether the state is legitimate. For example, the problem of Kosovo; is it enough when certain group of people declare they form the state? For achieving the legitimacy it is need to be accepted as the state also by international organizations.

State represents dominance – it means that the state is supposed to use the physical power to maintain the order. “ If no social institutions existed which knew the use of violence, then the concept of state would be eliminated, and

a condition would emerge that could be designated as anarchy, in the specific sense of this word. Of course, force is certainly not the normal or the only means of the state - nobody says that - but force is a means specific to the state." Naturally, it does not mean that the state use the force and violence permanently; this feature deals with the right of the state to use physical force when the law is not obeyed.

State has its own territory - is generally understood as the principle that the state territory encompass all surface within the borders of certain state. But this idea was disproved or amended by some political scientist. " This idea is incorrect. The territory of the State, as the territorial sphere of validity of the national legal order, is not a plane, but a space of three dimensions. The validity as well as the efficacy on the national legal order extends not only in width and length but also in depth and height." 2

Anyway, although we know different approaches to the state, we also defined key features; the entity of the state is still wrongly mistaken for the government. The best definition gives 3 Andrew Heywood again.

" The state is more extensive than government. " 3 By this definition means that the state encompass all public institutions and the government is only one of them. So simply said, it means that the government is a part of the state, is on the lower position.

" The state is a continuing, even permanent entity. Government is temporary. " 3 So, it is obvious and usual that government is not the same forever. People elect new government and the previous has to go, simply said. On the other side, the state exists independently of the ruling
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government. However, the government can change the political system or regime in the country.

Government is by Heywood understood³ as a means of the state. “ In making and implementing state policy, government is ‘ the brains of the state, and it perpetuates the state’s existence.”³

“ The state exercises impersonal authority.”³ The principle according to which state ought to be impartial and independent from the government. In state’s institutions people who are specially trained and skilled should work and it ought not to matter whether they are sympathizers of the current government or not. Unfortunately, this principle is often circumvented in many states. Slovakia is not the exception. Every time when government gets changed, the complete change in state’s apparatus follows. It is often very irresponsible measure. Mainly when there are loads of people that are really skilled and professional in their field but they

are substituted by partisan sympathizers. Although these new people are less skilled and not as prepared as the ones before them.

Last difference between the state and the government according to Heywood¹ is that the state follows interests of all citizens whilst the government cares only about the ideas and needs of party sympathizers.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, state can be understood in several ways; as a complex of the public organizations, as a group of people and institutions fulfilling some criteria or as an implement of power or force through which general order is

maintained. As I once said in the essay, there are many approaches to the state, great amount of different definitions and also loads of opinions about necessity of the existence of the state.

As far as I am concerned, this vagueness in the matter of the state stems from the unclearness of all political science. Obviously, political science does not come under the field of exact sciences. Therefore, it has to face up many challenges and problems that are not typical for exact sciences that are based on facts and positive proofs such as the constant changeability of social and political phenomena, the weak existence of paradigms and also immense number of the factors or elements that affect political and social behaviour.

And what about the state? Naturally, I am not a political scientist - at least not at present - so I cannot find any satisfying definition of the state. But I, personally, feel that the existence of the entity such as state is highly important and needful for everybody, for every citizen. I cannot imagine the existence without the state; a people needs to be organized and establish some structures and organizations to make our lives simpler.

It does not matter whether someone thinks the existence of the state is important or not, but in my point view, everyone ought to agree that the state is one of the most important things affecting our lives. As written at the beginning of the essay, the state affects every human activity. Every single day we take part in the sphere of the state. From schools, our jobs, our bank accounts up to TV News; all of these are covered by the state, in fact.

Therefore, it is quite important to analyse the state and matters related to it since the state influences or lives indeed remarkably.