

A short response to Guijarro

I appreciate the Guijarro's artfulness in linking words like meaning, sense and context to political notions, but – given my lack of experience with linguistics – I feel more comfortable with the good old tried and true terms

1. Evil

I feel that one of the important, but basically ignored, themes of politics is the fact that evil exists, e.g. Unabomber wanted to kill Chomsky.

The key European proponents of the classical liberal school to which I belong have a tendency not to want to look at evil. One of them states that if you let man interrelate freely with man (ideas, goods and services, love ...) then everyone will soon be in an earthly paradise.

2. Reason in terms of individuals and not abstractions

I also consider it a trap to manipulate abstract notions like society, without correspondingly always keeping an eye fixed on individual actions. Society is essentially a set of individuals.

3. The role of political groups

Certain groups dedicate themselves to changing the behaviour of individuals. They tend to be religions or ideological groups, e.g. a church wanting to create saints or a party wanting to create modern progressive man.

Political groups have enough to do without also trying to change man.

If Chomsky was endangered by the Unabomber, I think that it was appropriate that policemen be assigned to protect him. The police are legitimate users of force, intended to protect people from evil.

The challenge then is to manage them and all the other uses of force used by the state.

Democracy seems to be the preferred management scheme, but neither its elected managers nor its seemingly necessary civil servants are altruistic. They're much more interested in using the force of the state to ensure their re-election and/or to expanding their power.

4. The acute absence of altruism

Citizens aren't altruistic either. They want the politicians to use the force of the state for their betterment, almost always to the detriment of another group of citizens.

Frédéric Bastiat summed it up nicely with:

L'État, c'est la grande fiction à travers laquelle tout le monde s'efforce de vivre aux dépens de tout le monde. (The state is a magnificent illusion whereby everybody tries to live a bit better at the expense of everyone else.)

This is exemplified by the most glaring immorality of our times which is the use of the force of the state to turn everyone alive into creditors, with their unborn descendants becoming debtors without ever having been consulted, which is pretty close to slavery.

There aren't many citizens and any politicians around who will decry this immorality, despite their impressive oratorical powers or their supposed humanity, compassion and generosity.

This leaves the state in the position of doing lots of damage and becoming evil. Inevitably, it founders from time to time through war, bankruptcy or revolution, only to be born again, because - on a day to day basis - there's a need for someone to exercise legitimate force to protect us from Unabombers.