

ON HER MAJESTY'S SERVICE

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The central question in the history of political theory has been Hume's puzzle: Why does one person obey another? This obedience is the foundation of rule, and rule is politics. Because obedience is so common it is easy to fail to question it. Andrew Fraser's paper on 'Monarchical Forms and Political Realities' brings Hume's puzzle once again to the fore.

Fraser's thesis is that only a republican jurisprudence breaking formally with inherited monarchical traditions can reconcile legal authority with public liberty, civic equality, and social fraternity in Australia and Canada. Liberty, equality, and fraternity are now frustrated by the institutional structures of Australia and Canada, Fraser argues. He holds that the political realities of the modern liberal democratic nation-state cannot be reconciled with the legal image of authority derived from a monarch. The combination of the two in Canada and Australia, to say nothing of Great Britain itself, is doctrinal incoherence. In place of this monarchical jurisprudence, according to Fraser, we need a republican jurisprudence. Only with a republican jurisprudence can we challenge the monopolisation of the public sphere by governmental and bureaucratic elites. These elites have evolved in the name of the Crown and the unembodied people-at-large. If a republican jurisprudence can break down the monarchical traditions, Fraser hopes, the way would be paved for a regenerated civic humanism focused on the institutional conditions of the good and just life. Fraser presses his case in a wide-ranging, vigorous, and provocative argument drawn from an impressive array of sources. There is little I can add to it. No doubt there are certain aspects of jurisprudence and philosophy of law that are especially relevant, but these lie beyond my ken. Since I agree with much of Fraser's description of modern liberal democratic society, the remarks that follow are musings on some of the issues he raises, and not a detailed commentary on his paper.

One of the central tenets in Fraser's description of the liberal democratic polity is that it is conceived of as a gigantic national household. It is a unit of production and consumption and nothing more. This conception Fraser finds, for example, in the constitutional guarantees of free trade. He also finds it in the aspirations of politicians like Pierre Eliot Trudeau: 'It is better first to free man through

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technical progress: to liberate him from physical misery so that he may concern himself with culture' Culture is like dessert: separate, later and optional at the table of life Miserable people have no culture, it seems

The materialism and hedonism of Australian society is a familiar refrain among social critics. (I know of nothing similar for the sybarites of the true north.) In times of economic expansion such a hedonistic culture can be developed and sustained. The chairman of the Economic Council of Canada was once heard to remark that growth avoids all problems. When growth ends, he added, we will have problems. And also, as Fraser fears, we will have little experience or skill in solving problems. Still less will we see these problems in their true perspective.

Bear in mind that the electorate has always been capable of some pretty sharp discrimination, however much it is said to vote with the hip pocket. Australian voters have generally kept a balance between the federal House and Senate and between the federal and state governments. Canadians, too, usually keep a federal balance. Moreover, the Australian electorate always has shown a mind of its own in state and national referenda, much to the chagrin of politicians and pundits.

There is discerning skepticism in the public's perception of social institutions in the International Values Survey. Compared to other nations, Australia does not seem an exception. See the selection of responses below:

<u>% expressing confidence in:</u>	Nation					
	UK	Denmark	Aust	Germany	Japan	Belgium
Police	86	85	81	71	67	61
Parliament	40	36	56	53	30	34
Civil Service	48	46	47	35	31	41
Business	48	46	47	35	31	47
Press	29	33	28	33	41	28

Source: Melbourne: Morgan Gallup Poll, 1983

Australia's chief political institutions of the national parliament and public service and the police forces fare well in this international comparison. At the same time it is clear that the respondents were not uncritical. They did make distinctions among the political

institutions and between them and the business and the press. Of course we have no comparable information from an earlier period so we do not know if these results represent a decline. If they do, the decline is not limited to Australia. A confidence rate of 56% for parliament reflects a critical skepticism.

Moral criticism abounds in our society, but it is seldom self-conscious or labelled. (Unlike the rose, ethics smells sweeter under any other name.) The Sydney Telegraph's periodic assaults on the New South Wales Department of Youth and Community Affairs are pious in the extreme. The weekly forays of the ABC's 'Investigators', the Willesee brethren, and '60 Minutes' are each moral watchdogs. Fairness, the public's right to know, and responsibility are invoked every day of the week. But Fraser's point is that we are too preoccupied with the goods of life to attend to the good life.

Fraser follows a double line of reasoning in which he argues that this preoccupation with (largely material) goods (or the means to them) stems from the doctrinal incoherence of our monarchical sovereignty and that this incoherence could be rectified by the birth of a republican jurisprudence. Playing the devil's advocate, I ask whether some incoherence might not be valuable? It might allow for the combination of a productive liberal ideology and a careful conservative practice. In some circumstances such a combination may be better than any coherent alternative.

I ask further whether the monarch set above politics is not the unifying symbol of community over and above the goods of life, as Fraser acknowledges in passing. If, like Fraser, we want to shift the focus of our public life away from the goods of life the one institution we have that is above the play of self-interest is the monarch. In the past the Crown has intervened to protect French Canadians from English Canadians and to protect North American Indians from all Canadians. More recently the distance between the Crown and the government of the day in Great Britain has made it possible for CHOGM to be persistent in its attention to South Africa. Without the Crown I should think that the Commonwealth would have disbanded in the last two to three years over South Africa. I also note that the Spanish monarchy has been the major guarantor of electoral democracy in an illiberal society.

Insofar as political institutions are important in their own right, in both Canada and Australia it seems to me that the problem is not the dead hand of imperial sovereignty but the federal division of powers. In Canada federalism has promoted separate development in each province. Each province is at least as well-integrated into the U.S. economy as it is into the Canadian economy. The result is Balkanisation, as Fraser notes.

I ask if the relentless individuality of liberalism has not accomplished great things? It has allowed racial minorities and women to make great strides in the last generation. This question arises because so much of Fraser's argument seems to be addressed at liberalism, and not at monarchical sovereignty. One of the ironic paradoxes of bourgeois individualist liberal society is that its chief critics are bourgeois individualists who have done rather well out of it and now pine for fraternity. Since I am one myself, on this point I speak with authority.

But the most peculiar characteristic of liberal society has always been the liberal myth. What is the liberal myth? It is the myth that liberal society has no myth. According to this myth the nation consists of only liberty, equality, and democracy. These three are at once the ends and means of social life. Together they are a sufficient foundation for society. When a problem arises, it is dealt with by a redoubled application of one or more of these principles. Most of the electoral competition, such as recently edified us, in liberal politics concerns the balance of the three.

The liberal myth is that a liberal society survives the tests of war and depression because it delivers the (material) goods of life. As long as the goods are delivered, citizens are obliged to obey. Citizens are imagined in this story to be the ruthless calculators of self-interest that inhabit the literature of economics. This is liberalism's solution to Hume's puzzle. Seminal statements of this conception range from Thomas Hobbes to John Rawls.

The truth, however, is much more prosaic. Liberal societies persist as well as they do for the same reasons that other societies persist. Inertia, preoccupation, nationalism, custom, and habit. These, by the way, were Hume's response to his own puzzle. In fact liberal society rests on myths - one of which is the Crown in Australia and Canada.

Fraser's concern is that we may be reaching the point where the liberal myth of the rational calculating self-interested citizen may become a reality. If it does, then trouble lies ahead. The prognosis alarms me, but I am not sure of either the diagnosis or the therapy.