

Decline of Nation-States

Sijia Yu¹, Mingming Deng²

¹Nanjing Foreign Language School, Nanjing, China

²University of Chicago, USA

Keywords: Arendt, Classic study, Political philosophy, Nation-states

Abstract: In the 21st century, refugee problems greatly challenge the classical understanding of nation-states. By appealing to Hannah Arendt's theory on totalitarianism, this passage introduces and analyzes nation-state problems. It first discusses the significance of nationality, and by answering questions like what is a nation-state and what is a city-state, it attempts to solve the dilemma of a natural state. In conclusion, this passage may help us better comprehend refugee problems and the notion of nationality.

1. Introduction

Let us begin with a quick analysis of nationality as a social identity. First and foremost, having nationalities means a sense of security. Arendt assumes citizenship safeguarded people not only of their civil protection but also of all legally established and officially recognized identities. And the loss of protection suggests the loss of legal status. That means only people with the same national origin could gain protection from institutions, and that people with different national identity needed some exceptional rights unless they were utterly dissected from their motherland. With that said, the legislative branch of any country could not be responsible for foreignism.

What Arendt means is that people deprived of nationalities will also be deprived of political rights and human rights. Therefore, the whole question of human rights was inextricably merged into the question of humanistic emancipation. Only the sovereignty can emancipate and safeguard welfare. Surely, the stateless people together with the minorities were convinced that loss of national rights was identical with loss of human rights. Arendt more or less concurs with the Rights of Man, supposedly were inalienable. Yet rights were unenforceable whenever people appeared a loss of national citizenship. The national frustration was firmly proved that true liberty could be fully attained with attainment of nationality, that without a central government exists no human rights.

As a result, refugees will be undesirable not only in their own countries but also in other nation-states. Arendt concluded, "once they had been deprived of their human rights, they were rightless, the scum of the earth." (P267)

2. What is a Nation-State

Nation-state by nature extends governmental authority. The conditions for the birth of nation-states stems out from homogeneity of society and rootedness in its culture. If the wisdom of the extension of a form of government could not handle new world problems, it was doubtful whether we could still track down the origin of nationality.

Ancient city-states thus stick to ethnic homogeneity, trying their best to eliminate those natural differences which will bring negative impacts to the society. The ancient regimes or modern nation-states, so often insist on ethnic homogeneity, is because they hope to extinguish as many as possible those inevitable and always existing different features and differentiation processes.

Yet theoretically, peace means that people may enjoy the same amount of pleasure and frenzy, without any needs or desires to fulfill. To be sure, peace necessitates an accord with nature to imbue the state without choosing with more pleasure than the frenzies overcome leud desires. And people with peace are less likely to become subject to jealousy and passions.

3. The Dilemma of Returning to Nature

In Rousseau's theory, mankind longs to return to the state of nature, but they can never manage to do that. From a contractarian-philosopher's perspective, especially those who have examined the society from its origin, acquiescently felt the necessity of returning to the state of nature. Because the man in the natural state will always stay true and avoid lies, everything that comes from nature will entail a sense of reality; there will be nothing biased apart from those fabricated conspiracies.

A man in the natural state thereby can only turn to nature for help, and the only thing that he ought to care for is his illness, which is an ideal situation for humans. Rousseau was specific about the remedy: no matter how useful medicine may be among civil societies, a savage left to his own capacity has nothing to hope for but survival. Of course, savages have nothing to be frightened about except for the pathological state. But when a man moves far away from the state of nature, he eventually loses his strength and courage. Pure movement of nature thereby is a priori to all reflection.

To be clear, the force of natural pity is stupendous, which will prevent a man from harming anyone, even after he himself has been harmed. Here, Rousseau appealed to a Lockean analysis. Rousseau first justified the fact men live in absolute tranquility within the primitive state, "where there is no property, there can be no injury." He will be both innocent and enlightened, restrained by instinct and reason to protect himself from the harm that poses threats to him. ".....placed by nature at equal distances from the stupidity of brutes and the fatal enlightenment of civil man, and limited by instinct and by reason alike to protecting himself from the harm that threatens him." (P117) Innocent animals behave by instinct while enlightened men behave by freedom. That is, nature alone operates everything for its residents whereas man contributes solely to his welfare as a completely free agent.

Nature might be able to replace laws, morals, and virtue because no one will disobey its gentle voices. People bury natural feelings which motivate them to follow moralities in mind and rely on natural feelings to live. It is therefore certain that pity is a natural feeling that, in the state of nature, replaces moral laws, with the advantage that no one could refuse its gentleness. The faculty of perfecting oneself draws the man out of morality and causes the man to become unfortunate. Evils begin to emerge. "It would be sad for us to acknowledge that this significant faculty contributes to the birth of human tragedy. Morality makes people who have suffered from tyranny the most distinguished. Accustomed incrementally to the sense of freedom, Rousseau argued those people enervated under tyranny acquired by degrees that severity of morals and that pride of courage which made of them the most prestigious. Due to the advent of morality, the definition of goodness in new society becomes different from the one in natural society and punishments are also harsher. "Since morality is introduced into human actions, the welfare accompanying the ideal state of nature was no longer that suited nascent one; punishments henceforth had to be exercised more stringently as the conditions for offense-behaviors became more advanced.

Nevertheless, man cannot return to nature. Rousseau praised the constitution created from the most sublime reason and accompanied by friendly and respectable powers. Rousseau praised Geneva's constitution for its excellence, dictated by reason and guaranteed by friendly sovereignties. Laws can help to repress crimes. Admittedly, more violent the delights, the more legislations are needed to contain violence. Savage people can become ruthless because there are no laws established to punish behaviors that violate others' basic human rights. Consequently, with everyone punishing the slander shown him in the same manner to his individualistic criterion, turmoil arises over the cruelty of judgment.

Everyone in the country should follow the law, or the state cannot operate efficiently. Regardless of their division, if a national leader and his international rival run their separate governments exclusively, both of them might not govern their realms well. The people and the leaders then make a contract that both sides should obey the laws, which is the foundation of a country. The establishment of the polity as a genuine contract between the people and the leaders by nature is a self-fulfilling prophecy, by which both parties answer directly to laws stipulated in it and the concrete bonds that unite them. Without laws, people will lose protection and liberty.

In an ideal state, people can fully enjoy basic human rights prescribed in the law. Arendt supposed if one wished to live freely, to conform to laws based on their own volitions. Creating nationalities for people will ensure that this society is always heading for the same goal based on the same interest. People's sovereignty can thus guarantee their rights and society's stability. As Rousseau has commented, sovereignty is at last generally and completely acknowledged. To be specific, treaties with honor delineate a nation's boundaries, ensure the rights of men, and maintain tranquility.

4. The Dilemma

If a man leaves the state of nature and owns a nationality, he will become sociable and lose his strength and courage. Compared to animals, if any creatures lose half of these advantages in the process of domestication, one could argue that all the care may contribute to the problem of degeneration. Therefore, Arendt might argue that mankind alike lives; the social individual in becoming sociable and a slave of his own. Eventually, he grows weak and timid, soon his gentle way of living fulfills his courage to face obstacles.

Having nationalities thus can ensure that society operates effectively. For any alienated beings, he would have wished to live within a country where the sovereign power and its residents share only the same interest so that all their functions always tended only to the general prosperity.

If people have nationalities, their human rights will be guaranteed and society will maintain stability. Yet as Arendt points out when the decline of nation-states arrives, refugees could no longer find their position in this world.

References

- [1] Arendt Hannah Rise of Totalitarianism © ____ by Penguin Classics P267-302
- [2] Rousseau Jean-Jacques The Major Political Writings © 2012 by The University of Chicago