

POLAR OPPOSITES IN POLITICAL THEORY

Two Philosophies: There are two diametrically opposed political philosophies, each with a respectable philosophical heritage, each one able to muster vigorous logic to support its conclusions.

Absolutism: There is, on the one hand, the philosophy that starts with the premise that the individual in himself is nothing but a unit in the structure of the society or the state, realizing himself only as the state assigns him a field of accomplishment. There are some imposing names in this tradition; Plato, Hegel, Fichte, F. H. Bradley, Bosanquet.

Liberalism: On the other hand, there is the philosophy whose initial premise rests on the concept of the supreme worth of persons. According to this philosophy, individuals have a priori right to life, with the corollary rights to defend and sustain that life. Society is simply the name given to the human relationships within which individual persons further the ends of life; and government is simply an agency, instituted by contract, to protect individuals in their God-given rights. There are imposing names in this tradition: Locke, Adam Smith, Jefferson, Bastiat, Mill, Spencer, ~~Von~~ Mises.

A Middle Ground? Most of us do not care to embrace either extreme, choosing rather to place ourselves somewhere in the middle. Is there a middle ground which is philosophically tenable? If so, where is it?

A Higher Law? Is there a moral order, not subject to human revision or repeal, to which the human order ought to conform, by which the social order is judged? If so, which political theory is most nearly harmonious with it?