



Short Article

Necessity Has Triumphed over Desire

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Takeaways

Necessity became the intellectual and public policy foundation for modern liberals because it created a new category of individuals: the victims.

Much suffering has been solved by human effort and intelligence. Many solutions arise from the ability of the human being to be and act freely.

We all want peace, we all want to eliminate poverty, in short, we all want to eliminate suffering, but this is impossible and the most that can be achieved is to reduce it.

How can suffering be reduced? The answer is clear: by allowing the individual to pursue their desires within the legal and communal framework.

Article

Necessity is a word that is used a lot in the political and social spheres of our respective communities. This should not be surprising because it has great emotional power for individuals. This word, favored by many in the political sphere, has become a rhetorical and intellectual weapon against the liberties we enjoy. The reason is that, in our world dominated by democratic liberalism, necessity has rhetorically and intellectually triumphed over desire.

The idea of the triumph of necessity over desire in our political societies and, intellectually, in liberalism is not new. This idea and the subsequent problems and attacks on liberty that it entails come from the political theorist Kenneth Minogue. In his famous work, *The Liberal Mind*, Minogue makes a critique of modern liberalism on the grounds that all its public policy and theoretical positions have been dominated by the word and idea of necessity.

For Minogue, the problem with modern liberalism and its attack on the liberty of the individual is because the word desire—which formed the normative anchor of liberalism—was replaced by necessity. Desire was and represented the aspirations of individuals to defend their rights and liberties, against the excesses of the State.

Moreover, each individual in society has different desires and this naturally brings conflict. That difference, and the conflict it brings, is what safeguards liberty because society is built and develops based on the broad liberty of the individual to satisfy their desires. Hence, liberalism—which Minogue distinguishes between classical and modern—emphasizes desire as a tool for the emancipation of the individual from the restrictions on liberty by the coercive forces and statutes of the State.

In the modern world, however, the liberalism of desire lost the fight against the modern liberalism of necessity. Necessity became the intellectual and public policy foundation for modern liberals because necessity, with its emotional power, created a new category of individuals: the victims.

The creation of categories of victims transforms politics into a moral battleground, where state institutions become oppressors and modern liberals become liberators. This liberalism of necessity has turned into a crusade of salvation, which seeks a perfect world where there are no victims, where there is no suffering.

This is noticeable in all politics, and perhaps we are all modern liberals, because when a new public policy is proposed, there is always talk of solving some social problem; there is talk of eliminating suffering. A good example is public policy on the welfare state, where the welfare state is presented as a chalice of salvation for the less fortunate in our society.

Even those who seek alternative policies of right-wing political thought use arguments against the welfare state on the grounds that it creates victims or suffering. In conclusion, Minogue argues that all our politics have been dominated by the liberal mind and this view of victimhood.

Throughout the history of modern society, much suffering has been solved by human effort and intelligence. Many of the solutions arise from the ability of human beings to be and act freely; yet modern liberalism always seeks to create new categories of victims; it is a never-ending process.

Minogue calls the process of seeking new victims and seeking solutions to their suffering “meliorism”—a doctrine that believes in the perfectionism of the human condition by eliminating all suffering in society. This view of the liberalism of necessity ends up becoming a fundamental danger to liberalism’s primary concern: the liberty of the individual.

In its idealistic vision of ending suffering, necessity in society uses the tributary or coercive power of the State to solve problems, because it always seeks to find more suffering and victims, and because eliminating suffering is impossible. Individual liberty will constantly continue to be reduced or endangered as long as necessity remains the focus of the State.

We all want peace, we all want to eliminate poverty, in short, we all want to eliminate suffering; but this is impossible and the most that can be achieved is to reduce it. The important question is, how can suffering be reduced? The answer is clear: by allowing the individual to pursue their desires within a legal and communal framework.

Only a free individual can take the path that alleviates or eliminates the suffering they endure. Adopting a view of liberalism of necessity, mostly with the best of intentions, ends up eliminating some suffering, while creating other suffering in the process, all at the expense of the individual’s liberty.

To think of a liberalism of necessity hegemonizes for all individuals in society particular desires; however, in our modern society there is a plurality of desires and, to fulfill them and alleviate the suffering inherent in society, ordered liberty is essential and solving necessity is NOT.

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