The Civil State and its Totalitarian Opponents

by Dr. Ali Mabrook

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If the creation of a civil state is, indeed, the urgent demand of a majority of Egyptians in [our] revolution’s aftermath; and if a civil state is to serve as a solid base for the future, it is unfortunate that the term itself—as employed in the current Egyptian debate—appears to be a mere slogan, which people are expected to accept or reject without question. In other words, the concept of a “civil state” is viewed through the prism of dogma, rather than derived from a thorough process of intellectual investigation and review. Any attempt to epistemologically analyze or refine the concept is generally rejected by those who view such an attempt as engaging in philosophical abstraction, which they condemn as a major sin [against the teachings of Islam], deserving of repentance.

This reveals the unfortunate continuity of a superficial way of approaching concepts while neglecting their internal components, and it is precisely this approach that is responsible for the current impasse of the Arab state. For example, this “extrinsic” approach is responsible for the way Arab states are treating democracy as some superficial or/and practical institution or form of government, while neglecting its foundational (i.e., theoretical and philosophical) components. This, in turn, allows the external forms of democracy to be manipulated and employed as masks, to embellish the authoritarian and despotic practices of ruling elites.

This naïve and formalistic approach to the concept of a civil state is clearly visible in relationship to the clothing worn by Arab rulers. [In the Arab world, a] state may be classified as a “civil state”—so long as its ruler does not wear a military hat, or the turban of religious leaders—while the inner, foundational principles of a true civil state are not only neglected, but virtually unimagined by the public at large. People forget that without these inner, fundamental principles, it will be impossible to erect a civil state, even if the ruler is not a military officer or religious leader. Often, the absence of this “civil principle” compels officers or religious leaders who rule Arab states to adopt a military uniform, or religious vestments, as can be seen in Syria and Morocco.

Everyone still remembers how the current Syrian president—who inherited authority from his father a few years ago—was compelled to become part of that nation’s military establishment prior to his inauguration as president. A similar phenomenon occurred when the King of Morocco, Muhammad VI, had to adopt the religious title, “Prince of Believers,” in order to ascend the throne. The fact that a nation’s ruler serves as the uniformed commander of its
armed forces, or as the “Prince of Believers,” should not be viewed as undermining or negating the existence of a civil state. Rather, this phenomenon reveals the complete absence of any civil state in the first place, and of the structures required for its existence.

In other words, the absence of a civil state [in Syria and Morocco] is not due to the military or religious garb worn by the rulers in question. Rather, they were invested with military or religious uniforms because of the absence of a civil state and its foundational structures. Unfortunately, the current Arab focus on what style of clothing is or shall be worn by rulers—at the expense of the inner, foundational principles of a civil state—seems to reflect an obsession with marginal, rather than essential, issues.

Regardless of what external “uniform” rulers may don, we should focus our attention on the principles required to establish a true civil state. But what are these fundamental principles?

Awareness of these inner principles requires understanding the historical and sociological context in which the state, as a political phenomenon, emerged to govern human society. That context reveals the fact that “civility”—in the true sense of the word—is a natural and essential component of any legitimate state. A state thus betrays its own nature, when it loses or abandons its civil essence.

Historically, the state emerged to facilitate the transformation of human beings from a condition of natural existence (in which people were occupied solely with the fulfillment of their personal needs and instincts) to the state of civil community (in which people establish regulations to organize co-existence). While the natural (or “uncivilized”) condition of human existence is based on the law of the jungle (i.e., supremacy of the strongest), a civil community is based on the rule of law, which—according to John Locke—provides a comprehensive set of rights that is responsive to community members’ aspirations. The civil state is thus, in essence, a state that confers “rights,” rather than a state that endows rulers with the power to oppress.

If we agree upon the fact that there are many ways in which these “rights” may be secured, it follows that a state will not lose its civil essence, whether it is governed by rational or religious law, so long as these two kinds of shari’a (law) are based on the full implementation of, and respect for, of the principle of “rights.” Both religious shari’a and rational shari’a may constitute a path to attain “the right.” But we should be fully cognizant of the fact that religious shari’a is in need of profound and extensive epistemological work, to eliminate its man-made contradictions with the proper aims of a civil state.

While religious shari’a has often been employed as a mask to justify discrimination and oppression, we must also admit that rational shari’a has, historically, been abused as well. Yet while history suggests that oppression perpetrated in the name of “reason” can be exposed rather easily, it requires greater effort, and sacrifice, to expose those who oppress others in the name of “God.”

This analysis refers not only to the plurality of paths leading to “the right,” but also—and most importantly—to the fact that there exists no single and ready-made path to “the right.” That is to say, people are free to establish their own path to “the right,” according to the nature of their respective experiences, and not simply borrow from other contexts. Unfortunately, anyone who follows the current Egyptian debate is aware that the various
parties to this debate generally believe and assert that there is only one—ready-made—path to “the right.”

While the state is, in principal, humanity’s tool for organizing civil relationships in accord with “the right,” it has often been diverted from this purpose, and failed to perform its intended role. Whenever this occurs the state becomes a sacred cow, which people are enjoined to worship. In the process, the state betrays its essential purpose, and human beings are reduced to being mere tools in the hands of a blind and aggressive force. In other words, it becomes a totalitarian state based upon absolute dogmatism, regardless of whether the content of that dogmatism is religious or secular.

State-sanctioned dogma inevitably degrades human beings, by positioning them as mere tools to verify, and conform to, the dogma in question. Dogma gives rise to a state in which people are compelled to serve a “transcendental” power, whether God (i.e., those who claim to speak in His name); the supreme hero; a political party; class; tribe; sect or any other power that seeks to diminish human beings’ freedom and autonomy.

Totalitarian systems are based upon the assumption that human beings are mere “tools,” rather than effective entities. I still recall how—on the night of Mubarak’s resignation—a man [in Tahrir Square] lifted a placard that read, “It was God and God alone who felled Mubarak’s regime.” I asked him: “What have all these people been doing for the past two weeks?” He replied: “The people were merely tools in the hand of God.”

This last statement reveals how some political groups may drive Egypt towards a religiously-masked totalitarianism. The statement “God and God alone felled Mubarak’s regime” expresses a genuinely political, rather than religious, reality. For when some people insist on attributing human actions to God, we should realize that their attributions are merely metaphorical. In reality, they are attributing [the revolution’s success] to those who hide themselves behind God, and claim to speak in His name. Attributing the fall of Mubarak’s regime to God thus reveals the attempts of certain religious groups to steal the Egyptian revolution, so that they may dominate post-revolutionary Egypt in the name of God.

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If it was called "the civil state," it would have been consistent with the state of the land where they live. As an example, if it was called "the state of the land," it would have been consistent with what is required from the people to be incapable of the state. And if it were a state, it would have been consistent with the state, and if it were a state, it would have been consistent with the state of the land. And if it were a state, it would have been consistent with the state of the land. And if it were a state, it would have been consistent with the state of the land. And if it were a state, it would have been consistent with the state, and if it were a state, it would have been consistent with the state of the land.
الدولة، فإن أحدًا لا ينشغل بالسؤال عنه. ويستند الناس أنه مع غياب هذا المبدأ الجوائي، فإنه لا يكون ممكنا بناء الدولة المدنية، ولو كان القائم على رأس الدولة من غير العسكر ورجال الدين. بل إنه قد حدد أن قام على رأس الدولة العرقية من جاء من خارج دائرة العسكر ورجال الدين، وأنه غياب المبدأ المدنى للدولة على أن يردى إلى الجنرالات أو الفقهاء، وذلك بمثل ما حدث في كل من سوريا والمغرب.

فالم تذكر ما جرى مع الرئيس السوري الحالي الذي ورث السلطة عن أبيه قبل بضع سنوات، حيث فرض عليه النظام أن يصبح جزءًا من مؤسسة العسكر (يصبح جنرالًا في جيش البلاد) قبل أن يصبح رئيسًا. وهو نفس ما جرى، ولكن في إنجاز آخر مع الملك محمد السادس في المغرب، حيث ألزم النظام أن يحمل كجزء من لواء الملك وتهيئة كلف "مدير الموضوع" بما يحمل من دولة دينية كثيفة. والطبع فلن يهنئ النور إلى ما جرى من ارتداء أحدهما من الجنرالات ووضع الآخر لعامة "임ير الموضوع" على رأسه، بوصفه إلغاء لحرية دولة دولتهما.

بقدر ما هو علامة على غياب تلك "المدنية" أصلا، فالطبيعة لم تغيب عن الدولة إرتداء الرجلين؛ أدهمًا ما زى الجنرالات والآخر زى الفقهاء، بل إنهما قد ارتدى هذين الرؤبين لغياب المدنية أصلا، وعلى نحو تبدو مع مسألة الزي هو "نتيجة" لغياب المدنية، وليس "سببا" له.

ولسوء الحظ فإن الإنشغال الراهين بالتالي الخارجي للحاكم، على حساب وجوه السعي إلى ترسيخ المبدأ الباطنى الجوانى للمدنية، يبدو إنشغالا بالهامشي والعارض، على حساب الجوهر واللازم.

وعلوته يبدو هكذا أنه إذا كانت العبرة في مسألة "المدنية" الدولة، هي في جوهرة حضور المبدأ الجوائي المؤسس لها، وليس في زى القائم على رأسها، فإنه لن يؤثر في مدينة الدولة أن يكون المقام عليها متن يردود زى العسكر أو رجال الدين، إذا أن المبدأ الجوائي المؤسس لتلك المدينة قد تحقق، وحبط بالاحترام الكافى، أولا. ولكن ما هو هذا المبدأ الجوائي الذين يؤسس لمدنية الدولة؟

إن "المدنية" هي سمة صمغية بالدولة، وإلى حد ما يمكن القول بأن "مدينة الدولة" يكاد يساوي تعريف "انية الماء". فلا توجد من "دولة" إلا وهي "مدينة" بل تعنيها، ولا يمكن أن تكون غير مدنية إلا حين تخون طبيعتها. فقد نشأت الدولة كدينة لإستبعاد تحول الإنسان من حال الوجود الطبيعي (والذي يشتبه فيه التفرد بمجرد أشياء حاجاته وفرائشه الطبيعية) إلى حال الاجتماع المدنى (والذي يشتبه فيما ينظم حاجته للاجتماع الضروري مع الآخرين).

وهنا فإنا إذا كان القانون الحاكم لحال الوجود الطبيعي للبشر هو قانون "سبيكة الآقوى" الغالب في الطبيعة، فإن القانون الذي يبني عليه الاجتماع المدنى هو قانون "الحق" الذي تصوغه الجماعة - على قول جون لوك - "شاملًا وواضحًا لحاجة الجميع"، وما يعطيه ذلك من أن الدولة المدنية هي في جوهرها، دولة "الحق"، وليس دولة "القوة أو الإكراه أو القمع.

وإذ تتبعد الطريق إلى هذا "الحق" الذي هو جوهر الاجتماع المدنى وروحه، فإن مدينة الدولة لا تتجاوزها إذا ما حكمتها شريعة "عقلية" أو "دينية" طالما كانت تلك الشرع قامة على الفاعلية الكاملة لبند "الحق". فالحق أن "الدين" يمكن أن يكون، شأن شان "المسيح" تماما، طريقا إلى "الحق"، على أن ذلك يستلزم اشتغالا معرفياً، واسعاً يرفع ما جرى ترسيخه من التعارض بينه وبين المدنية.