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The Critique of the State

What kind of political order would there be in the absence of the state? Jens Bartelson argues that we are currently unable to imagine what might lurk 'beyond', because our basic concepts of political order are conditioned by our experience of statehood. In this study, he investigates the concept of the state historically as well as philosophically, considering a range of thinkers and theories. He also considers the vexed issue of authority: modern political discourse questions the form and content of authority, but makes it all but impossible to talk about the foundations of authority. Largely due to the existing practices of political and scientific criticism, authority appears to be unquestionable. Bartelson's wide-ranging and readable discussion of the suppositions and presuppositions of statehood will be of interest to scholars and upper-level students of political theory, social theory and the philosophy of social science.

JENS BARTELSON is Professor of International Relations at the University of Copenhagen. He is the author of *A Genealogy of Sovereignty* (1995), as well as articles in journals such as *Political Theory*, *Review of International Studies* and *International Sociology*.

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To the memory of my father

Contents

| | |
|-------------------------------|----------------|
| <i>Preface</i> | <i>page</i> ix |
| 1 The spirit of criticism | 1 |
| 2 Unpacking the living museum | 30 |
| 3 Throwing the state out | 77 |
| 4 Recycling the state | 114 |
| 5 Dissolving the state | 149 |
| 6 Conclusion | 182 |
| <i>Bibliography</i> | 189 |
| <i>Index</i> | 210 |

Preface

This book is a treatise on political criticism and its consequences. As such, it is an inquiry *into* criticism and its conditions as much as it is an exercise *in* criticism of its consequences. As the title indicates, the book's main object of inquiry is the concept of the state and the changes this concept has undergone in political discourse during the past century, largely as a result of the critical attention it has received within political science over this period. Since the concept of the state has been crucial to the identity of the discipline, this book can also be read as a study in disciplinary history. To the extent that the discipline of political science can be suspected to define the boundaries of our political imagination, this book can be read as a study in political theory. To the extent that we believe that political theory has political implications, this book can also be read as an inquiry into the politics of the modern state.

This project has grown out of two convictions. The first is that criticism is a constitutive feature of modernity, and the second that the state concept has been foundational to modern political discourse. From Kant to Marx and far beyond, criticism has been the main instrument in fulfilling the promises of the modern age. By chasing premodern ghosts out of political institutions and political inquiry, criticism would emancipate us from everything that had previously stopped us from realizing our full potential as social beings. From Rousseau to Hegel and far beyond, the modern state has been envisaged as the place where such expectations were to be realized. Replacing premodern conceptions of political authority and community, the discourse on the state created a new home for man in a new world. Now that this world has come of age, some would even say that this home is about to crumble.

From these two convictions a question arises: what is the precise relationship between political criticism and the concept of the state? In my attempts to answer this, I was led to question the conditions of criticism as much as the concept of the state itself, gradually discovering that far from being inherently opposed to authority, criticism ought to be understood as conducive to its smooth functioning, not because of what it says, but

rather because of what it does by saying what it says. So when somebody says that the modern state is withering away, that may well be seen as a way of breathing new life into it.

The attempt to answer this question has resulted in a book that tries to repoliticize the question of the political by rescuing the state and its authority from the paralysing spell of conventional modes of political criticism, by insisting on the need for historical *and* philosophical inquiry into the foundations of political authority and political criticism alike. As such, this book is based on the assumption that far from being exclusive, historical and philosophical approaches should be more closely integrated within political theory.

Many institutions and individuals have contributed to the completion of this book. A generous grant from the Swedish Council for Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences (HSFR) made it possible for me to do much of the research needed. A pleasant term at the Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study in the Social Sciences (SCASSS) made it possible for me to devote myself to writing, unencumbered by other duties. Many people have read and commented upon individual chapters or in other ways provided me with crucial input. During the initial phase of this project, Ronnie Hjort, Per Jansson, Torsten Nybom and Olof Ruin all contributed with valuable suggestions. While I was at SCASSS, Barbro Klein, Göran Therborn and Björn Wittrock all patiently took part in long discussions, as did John Broome and Sven Danielsson. Chapter 2 was graciously commented upon by Kari Palonen, Wyger Velema and Peter Wagner. Chapter 5 was read and commented upon with considerable acumen by Fredrika Lagergren and Johannes Lindvall. In the end the entire manuscript was subjected to thorough review by Terrell Carver, Henrik Enroth, Kjell Goldmann, Peter Hallberg, Bob Jessop, Sofia Näsström-Skold, Magnus Reitberger and Tomas Tranæus, all of whom suggested fruitful revisions. Finally, Alexandra Segerberg read the manuscript with meticulous attention to intellectual content and details of language.