

IS GOVERNMENT A SCIENCE?

Can a general code of moral precepts be formulated such as will, in broad outline, at least, guide the statesman in the practical affairs of government? This is the question which Mr Lambek attempts to answer in his recently published work, *Government by the Principle of Moral Justice*.*

The first three chapters of this book deal with the philosophical foundations of social morality. It is not possible in a short review to summarize them, nor is it necessary, for they will only appeal to students of moral philosophy. As the author himself says, the principle of moral justice "brings no novel ideas," for it is only a systematization of well-known social principles.

The precepts of moral justice are formulated in three rules or principles:—

1. "The Principle of Social Equality: the conditions on which the life of the community is built must be the same for all its members." This principle of equality (of opportunity) involves that "every man should have an equal chance in the competition, and the rules should be alike for all," but "each individual must take the responsibility of managing his own life . . . and enjoying the fruits which he is able to gather."

2. The Principle of Coherence in the Production of Values. This asserts that the worker is entitled to the proceeds of his labour, that the producer must not be divorced from the product. It is virtually a corollary of the first principle.

3. The Principle of Preponderance. This asserts that rightful claims of greater weight must take precedence over rightful claims of lesser weight. The practice of settling matters by voting is an instance of this principle; the minority has to give way to the majority. This principle, it will be seen, is of a very different character to the other two. According to Mr Lambek, in certain situations "we are, in accordance with the law of preponderance, obliged to commit an injustice."

The practical application of the first two principles centres round the right of possession, including in this not merely possession of external things but possession of one's self. This is formulated in two main principles:—

(a) The Principle of Liberty, *i.e.*, the right of personal liberty unlimited by any consideration save that of equality.

(b) The Principle of the Preference of Private Property to Joint Property. This principle appears to be a necessary consequence of the Principle of Coherence. It is strengthened by the consideration that "in the exercise of private ownership there can occur no conflicts of administration . . . while in the administration of joint property it will as a rule be impossible to avoid differences of opinion among the shareholders, so that the rights of the minority have to be disregarded."

The author then proceeds to restate the matter in a slightly different manner. "All social rights which are morally justified—and also the corresponding liabilities—can be arranged under four rules for the possession of property." These are:—

(i) "Every man has the absolute right to dispose over his person, inner life and outer movements. . . . The only restriction being . . . other people's rights of possession must not in any way be infringed."

(ii) "Every man has the absolute right to keep and enjoy all values (? things) which he has produced, by personal effort, by means of his lawful (? rightful) property or by means of other resources used with the permission of the lawful owner. The use made of the values produced must not in any way infringe the rights of possession of other people."

(iii) "Every man has the absolute right to dispose of his property," *i.e.*, by free exchange or by gift (including inheritance).

(iv) "Every man has the right to an equal share in the possession of, and disposal over, the profits accruing from lawfully owned joint property; in the first instance, the pre-existent values, the gifts of nature to mankind, such as air, earth, water; secondly, those values which gradually accrue through the increase of population and its joint activities."

It seems to the reviewer that these four rules are independent of the rather dubious "principle of preponderance." Mr Lambek also appears to hold this view when he says: "It can be demonstrated that these rules for possession do not involve any encroachment of the corresponding rights of fellow-citizens," which that principle certainly does. May one therefore beg Mr Lambek in his future work to relegate the principle of preponderance to a much less prominent position than that here accorded to it.

We cannot pursue the deductions to be made from the rules for the possession of property, except to point out the obvious one, that natural resources cannot be rightfully held unless the holder pays to the State (or the community) a rent equal to the full value of the privilege.

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* Published by Levin & Munksgaard, Copenhagen. English Translation published by Williams & Norgate, London. Price 4s. 6d.