

SOCIAL IDEALISM

A Philosophical Response to Humanity's Existential Threats

Philip Allott

Philip Allott's Social Idealism is a ground-breaking social philosophy presenting human society as a multi-dimensional process over the course of time. It allows us to explain the current ineffectiveness of international law in responding to humanity's existential threats. It shares in a tradition of Philosophical Idealism originating in ancient Greece.

It reveals the DNA of human society. *A human society is not a thing but a process in three dimensions. (1) The everyday interaction of human beings in that society. (2) Shared ideas about the nature and purpose of the society. (3) A system of authority that applies those ideas to everyday human activity and enforces them.*

These three dimensions form the real, the ideal, and the legal constitutions of a society, including international society. The three constitutions change from day to day, each causing change in the others. Their interaction causes the general development of the society over the course of time.

Societies take countless forms, including the society of the family and the society of the nation-state and the international society of the whole human race, the society of all societies. Each society embodies the universal DNA of human society in a unique way.

Philosophical Idealism says that the human mind makes reality out of *ideas*. And one form of idea is the *ideal*. Ideals such as Truth, the Good, and Justice act as magnetic targets that lead us to behave in ways that make our lives better. They are an expression of the inherent rationality of the human mind.

Social Idealism takes the view that the ideal constitution of a society includes ideals which lead the society to seek to make a better life for its members. They inspire the morality and the legality that help us to make a better life individually and collectively. Their absence or weakness in a particular society is liable to cause that society to fail to make a good life for its members.

International society, the most important of all human societies, is failing to make a good life for its members. International society is in a state of virtual anarchy characterised by new forms of war, terrorism, governmental corruption, international crime, gross social and economic inequality, the threat of pandemics, microbial resistance, and an inability respond collectively to the challenges that face the human species.

The source of the failure of international society is to be found in its ideal constitution, its second dimension, its shared ideas about the nature and purpose of society. By the end of the eighteenth century, everyday social activity in the first dimension of international society had produced a collection of powerful *nation-states* which took a *new view* of international society, seeing it as a society of nation-states, each pursuing its own self-interest. And that view was reflected in the idea of an international legal system made, applied, and enforced by the governments of the states.

This new view, which has survived in the ideal and legal constitutions of international society until the present day, was convenient to the governments of the great powers of the nineteenth century, not least in the global exercise of their power, including the making of colonial empires.

Society seen as a system of permanent change allows us to change society by intervening in any of its three dimensions. *Social Idealism* focuses on the second dimension, asserting a different idea, which is in fact an age-old idea, of the nature and purpose of international society as a society of all human beings and all subordinate societies, including the nation-states, serving the common good of all-humanity. A revolution in the mind creating a dramatic possibility of effective collective activity in responding to humanity's existential challenges.

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