

COMMENTS ON ‘UNHAPPY FAMILIES’

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I

First of all, let me thank Simon May for the kind invitation to participate in this unique forum and, more importantly, Xavier Marquez for writing such a thought-provoking paper.¹ In what follows, I will offer some critical remarks on the paper. With further clarifications in this work in progress, I believe Marquez will have provided an even more substantial work advancing our study of the topic.

II

There have been innumerable studies of regime types. Many of these began in antiquity, as Marquez is quick to point out.² Today, classification of regime-type is often the stuff of ‘comparative politics’. These classifications aim to serve specific functions, such as understanding how best to achieve political stability.

Moreover, it is easy to see the value in better understanding differences between regime types. On the one hand, this knowledge can be taken as a guide for new states depending upon the political goals each state may wish to achieve. On the other hand, our views on foreign policy may also be affected by such knowledge, such as if we had evidence of ‘domino effects’ and the like. In these ways, the

¹ Xavier Marquez, ‘Unhappy Families: Three Ways of Thinking about Imperfect Political Regimes’ (work in progress).

² Marquez is certainly correct to note that much of our philosophical canon has historically been non-democratic. (See Thom Brooks, ‘Plato, Hegel, and Democracy’, *Bulletin of the Hegel Society of Great Britain* 53/54 (2006): 2450.)

identification of regime types is about more than what should be called x and what should be called y : regime types clearly matter in several ways.

Marquez has done several admirable things in his thought provoking ‘Unhappy Families’. For example, he has drawn any number of distinctions that provide real benefit in our understanding of how we think about regime typology. Thus, we learn of interesting distinctions such as a political society’s ‘character profile’ and so on (31). While I believe such discussions in the whole might be brought out a bit more—perhaps a discussion of a society’s character should say something about how a state’s character relates to an individual person’s character and comment on work in virtue ethics in this area—these are each presented in some detail to useful effect nonetheless.

III

While there is much of great use, I fear the paper could be of even greater use still.³ One primary concern is that I am unclear as to the main thesis of the paper. The title of the paper and its introduction makes much of regime typology, such as the state as family. Yet, after the first section, this ends. What then follows is a rich analysis raising many interesting distinctions—and I benefited from the discussion—but I was unclear how the preliminary discussion directly relates to what follows. Thus, we have much discussion about various topics, such as the place of interests, but without any clear and direct comparison nor contrast with competing views. It was unclear precisely what was being argued against, as well as a greater appreciation of the novelty of Marquez’s views.

³ One quibble I will not address in my main remarks concerns 18n17 where Marquez notes that democracy might be understood as a system where parties lose elections. Interestingly, such a view would fail to characterize the early United States as a democracy as there were no official parties as such.

I believe the paper may have a few gaps. One gap is the absence of much of the literature in comparative politics. For example, the work of Mark Gasiorowski immediately comes to mind, as does Ronald Inglehart. These figures have published several studies on regime types, none of which are noted in this paper. It would be interesting to see how Marquez's work might expand and improve on such previous work. At present, this is unclear.

A second gap is that while the paper makes much of the problem of stability, I found it surprising to find no mention at all of John Rawls's *Political Liberalism* and the rich literature this work helped build on this problem (31).⁴ Furthermore, Marquez speaks often of a 'political regime' that seems not unlike an understanding of a 'basic structure' (6). It would have been helpful to learn more about how Marquez's views develop from those of Rawls. In addition, Marquez speaks of the 'well organized' regime, but nowhere compares nor contrasts his understanding with similar ideas found in Rawls's work. Again, it would have been very helpful to learn more.

I also found interesting Marquez's remark that non-democracies are 'not justified' on the grounds that such regimes fail to protect the interests of all (24). The evidence appeared to be Lee Kwan Yew's Singapore and perhaps this example may be well defended. However, it was not clear to why precisely a non-democracy could not better protect the interests of all than a democracy (where we may also find abuses of power), not least in light of GWF Hegel's defence of constitutional monarchy.⁵ In his *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel argues that *only* an unelected, hereditary monarchy may represent the interests of all. This is because in democracies people express their particular interests in voting, but untrained and undisciplined in focussing on the

⁴ See John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (paperback edn (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996). See also Thom Brooks and Martha C. Nussbaum (eds), *Rawls's Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, forthcoming).

⁵ See Thom Brooks, *Hegel's Political Philosophy: A Systematic Reading of the Philosophy of Right* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007).

interests of all instead. Whatever the merits of Hegel's arguments, there could be a case for non-democracies representing the interests of all and I thought the view that this was 'not justified' too quick and in need of further elaboration.

A final worry I had about the paper is that it moves along far too slowly and that many of its points could have been made more quickly. There is little signposting between sections and distinctions arise that do not directly appear to arise in relation to later discussions. I could not help but think that the paper could be more narrowly focussed. While much of the helpful discussions and distinctions might then be lost, what we would gain is a more clearly distinctive position.

IV

All in all, I greatly enjoyed reading this paper with the above comments and criticisms notwithstanding. Nor do I think any of my criticisms creating outstanding problems for the paper. Instead, I would hope that a new draft might arise from these comments with a tighter focus and a closer eye on the distinctiveness of the project versus alternative proposals. This will help an already interesting paper more clearly make its mark.