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The State and the Soul: pre-political sources of social order

JRR Tolkien said that the state is 'a thing that has neither power, rights nor mind', and yet we can find ourselves directly appealing to it for the purchase of universal goods like equality and freedom. So insatiable are these demands, government must either choose who to benefit and who to harm, or rule tyrannically.

This paper will seek to move beyond the harm/benefit dichotomy by inquiring into the proper role of the state. The paper will pay particular attention to the relationship between the state and its pre-political sources - culture and religion; the influence of which the state has very little recourse to affect.

As well as theological themes, the paper will draw on the work of political activists like Simone Weil and sociologists like Philip Rieff, both of whom sought to align the sacred desire for universal goods with the social task of securing them.

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