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PSCI 220

Dr Josefson

Liberalism & “Being in the Momentary”

In chapter 3 of Josefson, Jim Josefson is critical of liberalism by stating that it results in a situation called “being in the momentary”. He argues that it does not create genuine freedom. According to him, Liberalism is more concerned with individual liberty and a society that is market centered. This confines individuals in situations that discourage them from being fully involved in political existence. He states, "And there it is: being in the momentary. According to this view, the purpose of human life is to satisfy the natural desire for happiness, which is the satisfaction of whatever desires an individual chooses. That end is simultaneously subjective, objective and self-validating" (Josefson, 2019, p. 42). In this text, Josefson explains how liberalism makes individuals feel like they have freedom while they are still trapped within pre-defined boundaries that are imposed by both political and economic systems.

Josefson also argues that liberalism creates a sense of agency that is superficial and consequently strips society of its ability to engage in important political actions. He states, “This is not living in the moment but living in the momentary, the tiny slice of time in which we enjoy the pleasure of satiation. It is the tiny moment before restless desire moves on to the next thing" (Josefson, 2019, p. 42). His argument states that the fact that liberalism emphasizes personal choice prevents people from attaining freedom that enables them to positively alter and shape the society they live in.

Josefson also compares this version of freedom with what he perceives as genuine political engagement. He states, “Instead we need to recapture a vision of human freedom in the moment rather than the momentary" (Josefson, 2019, p. 46). This statement agrees with the ideas of thinkers such as Hannah Arendt, who believe that true political freedom results from active participation in changing the public life and not from simply accepting the structures received.

I sort of agree with Josefson’s argument, specifically in his idea that liberalism limits freedom by constraining the ability of the society to reshape the world they live in. In many liberal societies, citizens have a choice, like which product they choose to buy or which candidate to vote for. However, the choices they make will not challenge the systems of power. This results in the illusion of freedom which hides the truth from society itself.

Another argument that can be made in opposition to this idea is that liberalism actually provides a foundation for individuals to practice various forms of freedom. By defending individual rights and making political participation possible, liberal democracies enable a system where people can protest change. This problem then is not liberalism itself but how it has been practiced.

Josefson's political implications are essential. If liberalism actually confines society to "being in the momentary" then society should fight back / "wake up" and come up with ways to encourage more engagement with political existence. This could mean structural reforms that enable community-based decision-making and direct democracy. Lastly, Josefson's critique challenges us to question what freedom truly is and whether the existing liberal models are working to preserve it.

Reference

References Josefson, J. (2019). *Political Philosophy in the Moment: Narratives of Freedom from Plato to Arendt*. Routledge