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A PLURALIST STATE? THE QUEST FOR COHERING NORMS.

Abstract:

The reality confronting the world of states today is that almost all societies can increasingly be characterised as fragmented societies. Living with this increased level of fragmentation will be one of the main challenges all states will have to confront, in an intentional manner, for it is not something that can be simply ignored or long resisted.

The challenge of enabling people to live together in large-scale associations is not new and has always been part of the political problem faced by societies. However, it appears as though the range and scope of difference that needs to be accommodated in the state is ever increasing to the point where it even challenges some of the liberal democratic tenets that have long served as the default setting for accommodating such societal difference.

This ubiquitous diversity, therefore, raises questions about the character of a truly pluralist state. What would a stable and viable pluralist state look like? What norms would successfully undergird a public culture that would be capable of generating sufficient harmony, freedom, prosperity and order within such a heterogeneous state?

This paper is but a prolegomenon to this question and will aim to search out some of the norms societies should aim at as they confront this challenge. It will consider the suggestions of a number of theorist and scholars who have thought deeply about living together well with difference. The focus will be on the norms they suggest that should or would pervade the public culture of such a pluralist state? Particular insights will also be drawn from the South African experience. The paper intends to set out a broad framework of transcultural societal norms that would serve the aspiration for a pluralist state well while doing justice to the unique history and context of place and time in which each state finds itself.

Keywords:

Pluralism, societal fragmentation, cohering norms, politics of difference.