

Rule by Persons or Rule by Law?
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THROUGHOUT the history of human society, human beings have been subject to the autocratic rule of a person (or elite groups of persons) in charge, not to the rule of law. No human collective, with perhaps a few minor exceptions, has succeeded in developing a social system based on rule by law. This, unfortunately, is as true of our so-called “democratic” societies, which are supposedly based on “constitutional” governments, as of other forms of collectives. In other words, we must face up to the reality that the hopes and aspirations of the founders of the democratic societies of the world have not been realized. We are ruled today, not by law, but by persons.

If we need verification of this conclusion, we have but to look closely at the inner workings of our governments whether it be the Japanese government, the American government, or any one of the other democratic societies of the world. There we find rule by persons, not rule by law. In Japan a nearly complete absence of any semblance of rule by law can be seen in the nearly continuous stream of scandals and corruption at the highest levels of the nation’s political and business leadership.

LIKEWISE, the incident involving the Aum Supreme Truth sect provides an especially tragic example of rule by persons. Here we have some of the brightest and most promising products of Japan’s leading educational institutions unthinkingly carrying out the most hideous and brutal crimes in response to the whims of one person. As the Japanese public watched this gruesome drama unfold on TV screens throughout the nation, they asked themselves repeatedly, “Why?” “How could this happen?” To search for answers to these perplexing questions is the purpose of this article. And since Soka Gakkai’s founder, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, discussed this issue at length in his *Soka Kyoikugaku Taikei* (Value-creating educational theory), I suggest that we begin our inquiry with his writings.

Makiguchi began his comments on this subject by recalling Shakyamuni Buddha’s admonition to “heed the law, not persons.” This, Makiguchi suggested, is the greatest guidance that Buddhism has to offer to the advancement of humankind. “Here,” he wrote, “we are shown the way up from dependence to true freedom, from living in obedience to charismatic power figures to living in unison with universal order.” To blindly follow the will of others is a form of personality worship. In our unthinking worship of and obedience to charismatic power figures, Makiguchi contends, we are “self-sold into bondage” (*Education for Creative Living*, pp. 84–85).

Especially dangerous, in Makiguchi’s view, are those religious leaders who offer exclusive truth to their followers. Persons who respond to such claims, he warns, have no chance to rise above a life of “person dependence”. Just like the lover who has no eyes for anyone but his love, the devotee of a personality cult has not the least inclination to assume an objective scientific stance to calmly compare the various religions, hail the greater similarities, and reject the trivial differences.”

Erich Fromm (1900–80), writing in our own time, supports Makiguchi’s insights in this regard when he describes the psychological and spiritual emptiness that leads a person to follow blindly the will of another person or group. He first observes that faith, whether in a religious, political or personal sense, can have two entirely different meanings, depending on whether it is used in the “having mode” or in the “being

mode." In the being mode, faith is, in essence, an inner orientation, an attitude. It is a healthy, thoughtful, caring approach to every aspect of life. It is life lived lovingly and mindfully. Faith in the having mode, on the other hand,

is the possession of an answer for which one has no rational proof. It consists of formulations created by others, which one accepts because one submits to those others—usually a bureaucracy. It is the entry ticket to join a large group of people. It relieves one of the hard task of thinking for oneself and making decisions. One becomes one of the *beati possidents*, the happy owners of the right faith. Faith, in the having mode, gives certainty; it claims to pronounce the ultimate, unshakable knowledge, which is believable because the power of those who promulgate and protect the faith seems unshakable. Indeed, who would not choose certainty if all it requires is to surrender one's independence?" (*To Have or To Be*, Bantam Books 1976, 1981, p. 30)

THIS kind of person dependence, and the blind, unreasoning behavior that it produces, leads inevitably to catastrophe for both persons and societies. A crucial question, then, is: How can person dependence and rule by persons be avoided in human experience? For Makiguchi, the answer to this question was very clear. Every human being, he believed, needs to be "awakened to consciousness of an underlying order and a commitment to rule by law rather than by persons." It was in this "awakening to consciousness" that Makiguchi saw hope for the future of humankind. And the key to this awakening, he maintained, is education; not the twisted education of his day, which he deplored and cited as one of the causes of widespread person dependence in Japanese society, but holistic education capable of producing creative, aware, responsible members of society. Thus, he wrote in *Soka Kyoikugaku Taikei*: "As we move through the process of acquiring ever more knowledge, the subjective emotional elements give way to more rational considerations. We gain a certain distance from the charismatic figure as our consciousness of an underlying order grows more pronounced. The realization dawns that even that person we had so revered only shortly before is but one ordinary human being. At that moment, like a sunrise outshining the stars that appeared to gleam so brightly, the focus of that consciousness driving our very being shifts from person ... to the natural order and social laws that work equally for all without favor or discrimination."

RULE by persons, then, leads ultimately and inevitably to divisiveness, egocentric individualism, and strife in human affairs. But Makiguchi believed that as ordinary people—through creative, learner-centered, holistic educational experiences—gain awareness of their alienation from the power that is rightfully theirs and realize the impotence of a divided, noncollective existence, they will be able to unite to seek release from their former bondage. Efforts to transform education should be viewed and understood in this context. Our present traditional educational systems were intentionally designed to strengthen and perpetuate rule by persons, even though on the surface they honor and proclaim the merits of rule by law. They were created in order to produce non thinking individuals capable of obediently and mindlessly carrying out the desires and wishes of those they recognized as their superiors. Not only Makiguchi, but more recently Alvin Toffler, Yoshio Kuryu and a host of other scholars and researchers have made this crystal clear and have described how it was accomplished in the early history of the industrially advanced societies, particularly Japan and the United States.

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A closer look at the implications of rule by law, as against the rule by persons that has characterized societies and their institutions during much of human history, will enable us to understand more clearly and to deal more intelligently with bullying, school drop outs, youth suicides, drug addiction, teenage gang behavior and the other daunting education-related problems our society is confronted with today. The counsel of Shakyamuni, and Makiguchi, to “heed the law, not persons” is especially relevant at this juncture in the history of human civilization. □

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