

# Freedom and Utopias

By John Hospers

*John Hospers is a professor of philosophy at the University of Southern California, and editor of the philosophical magazine, The Monist. He is the author of two recent books, Understanding the Arts (Prentice-Hall) and Human Conduct (Harcourt Brace). He was the Libertarian Party's first candidate for U.S. president in 1972, receiving one electoral vote. He is the author of numerous articles in philosophical and political journals.*

“Each person should have dominion over his or her own life.” Nothing seems more simple or more obvious. A may rule A's life but not B's; B may rule B's life but not A's.

Perhaps the single most tragic fact of human history, however, is that there are many people who want to rule not only their own lives but the lives of others. Some of these people write books in which they tell us how they would propose to rule the lives of others and force these others into conformity with their purposes. Such men are the authors of *utopias*.

## Voluntary vs. Coercive Utopias

Some wish only to *persuade* us to live our lives in accordance with their ideals for us. They would have us voluntarily become members of their utopian societies. Some of them are leaders of religious sects, who urge us to adopt their way of life voluntarily, through conversion to their beliefs; such were the pacifist Tolstoy colonies at the turn of the century. Others are secular, such as B.F. Skinner's *Walden Two*, and would have us join their commune so that we can all taste of the “better life” which they believe their utopia has to offer.

Voluntary utopias are relatively harmless; an individual can belong to one or not as he chooses, and can get out of it if it turns out not to be to his liking. It does not interfere with a person's freedom, as long as he is free to decide for himself. But the vast majority of utopias, such as Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, are *coercive*: a plan of life is laid out for everyone, and even if a person does not want any part of it, he must be forced to, “for his own good.” The authors of such utopias would use the enormous coercive machinery of the law to make sure that others behave as the authors wish them to, against their will if necessary.

Why this “moral busybodyism”? Why do some people desire to plan the lives of others? Sometimes it originates in their own inadequacy and insecurity: they cannot manage their own lives, so they divert attention from their own inadequacies by managing the lives of others. Sometimes as children they were constantly required to do things against their will: having been constantly pushed around, they now want more than anything else to push other people around—never mind that the people they push around are not the same people who pushed *them* around. Often they simply believe that the great mass of people are stupid clods, incapable of governing their own lives, and that by telling others what to do they are doing them a favor; people are clay in need of a potter, so

the utopian enters the scene as a savior, to save others from their own stupidity and ineptitude.

More often still, the authors of utopias are not as much convinced that others are stupid as that they themselves are persons of supreme intelligence, who have such a great vision for the human race, and see so clearly what is good for others, that the others can't possibly have as great a vision for themselves. Moreover, they believe that this superior intelligence gives them the right to dictate what course the lives of others should take. When such people obtain high positions in government, or become the power behind the throne, they become the most destructive persons in history, masking their power-impulse with humanitarian slogans about the common good.

### **Contrasting Effects of Economic vs. Political Power**

Power over other people's lives need not itself be evil; that depends on what kind of power it is and to what end it is wielded. A great teacher may have enormous influence over a student's life, but that power is wielded not by force but by the strength or credibility of the teacher's ideas, or the example set by his life. A parent has power over a child's life, for good or for ill, teaching the child morality and consideration and courtesy. A counselor or psychiatrist may exert power over a patient, so as to remove the obstacles to the patient's development and enable him better to make his own decisions and plan his own life.

Neither is purely economic power an evil. A man starts a business and hires employees; they are free to take the position or remain as they were before. The employer has no power to force someone to take the job or arrest him if he refuses. Even in the early days of the Industrial Revolution, no one was forced to take jobs in the new factories; bad as conditions then were by present standards, many eagerly did so, because the income they were offered far exceeded what they received on the farms from which they came.<sup>[1]</sup> "Economic power is the capacity to influence other people's behavior by offering them something the acquisition of which they consider more desirable than the avoidance of the sacrifice they have to make for it. It means the invitation to enter into a bargain, an act of exchange. I will give you a if you give me b. There is no question of any compulsion nor of any threats. The buyer does not 'rule' the seller and the seller does not 'rule' the buyer."<sup>[2]</sup>

Political power, by contrast, is power backed by the institutional force of government—of police, armies, courts, and prisons. A government possesses the legal monopoly of physical force over a defined geographical area, and government operates always by force or threat of force against those who would disobey. If you are "kindly requested" to pay your income tax, and write back that you have thought it over and decided not to, you are instantly subject to apprehension, arrest, trial, and punishment. Not all political power is evil—for example, laws protecting life and property and punishing murder and theft—but still there is no doubt that this is power in its most naked form, the power of the gun to suppress and punish those who would disobey.

The authors of most utopias, however, go much further than to suggest the use of force to protect life and property; they use the force of law to shape other

people's lives in the direction that they dictate, usually involving the most minute details of life.

## Some Historical Utopias

The first utopia described in Western philosophical literature is the *Republic* of Plato. Though benevolent compared with many utopias to follow, it already possessed the main feature of so many of them, of other people being merely pawns on the author's chessboard, for him to move about as he pleased. The aim of Plato's utopia was, as in so many others, a worthy one: to ensure justice in the nation by ensuring that the rulers themselves were just. The requirements for becoming such worthy rulers, however, were severe: all children were to be taken from their parents at an early age, lest the parents fail to recognize unusual talent in their children or do something to squelch that talent when it became evident; those who through manifest talent became candidates for rulership were to be denied contact with large areas of experience, such as acquaintance with persons of questionable character, poems which attributed evil to the gods, and even music of all but the most ascetic kind. The rulers themselves were to possess wives and children in common, and no man was to know which child was his own. Once the gifted few were in a position of power, their rule over the people was absolute: no elections, no representation, no referendum, no appeal.

Plato's utopia was never put into practice as he propounded it. Many others, however, were put into practice without having been described in writing in advance. For many centuries the Incas of Peru had a rigorously stratified social structure with a highly repressive government. All land belonged to the State. Peasants were not allowed to leave their farms or villages without government permission. Family life was totally controlled by the State, including whether and whom one could marry. Criticism of the State was punishable by death or torture: the victim was hanged by his feet or thrown into a pit of poisonous snakes. People suspected of subversive activities were confined in underground caves containing jaguars, snakes, and scorpions. The individual's life was planned not by him but for him by the ruling council of the Incas. But when everything is planned, one cannot develop the initiative required to cope with the unexpected. One unexpected event was the Spanish invasion. Fewer than two hundred of them conquered the entire vast Inca empire.

Under the ancient Chinese emperors (13th to 3rd century B.C.) everyone was forced to work full-time at ten years of age; at twenty he received a field to plow, and at sixty he returned it to the State and lived in dependency on the State. No private ownership of land was permitted. Large families were split up and grown sons were forbidden to live with their parents. Capital punishment was imposed for countless offenses such as minor thefts. The State had a monopoly on water, controlling the supply (sluices, dikes, irrigation canals), and the vital water could be cut off at any time. There was a wide network of State informers to spy on people and report their activities, with one family member often spying on another. Those suspected of crimes were often made into slaves, and conviction was followed by punishments such as decapitation, quartering, strangulation, being buried alive, or being boiled in a cauldron. The ancient Chinese emperor Ch'in Shih Huang was so admired by the modern Chinese dictator Mao Tse Tung that Mao tried to outdo him: "He buried only 460 Confucians alive," Mao

proclaimed. “But he has a long way to go to catch up with us. We have already buried 46,000 alive.”<sup>[3]</sup>

## A Common Pattern

Though widely separated in time and space, each of these coercive utopias exhibits a monotonously repetitive pattern, designed to stamp out individual differences and bring everyone under the total control of the State.

(1) There is almost always the total abolition of private property, because when a man owns his own property he has a certain degree of independence from the State, and this could not be tolerated.

(2) There is usually a condemnation of religion, because the State wants no competition for the allegiance of its citizens, and people are often inclined to serve God above Caesar.

(3) The family is viewed with suspicion, because parents can bring up children in a way that the State does not approve. Thus in many utopias children are taken away from their parents at an early age and brought up by officials of the State.

(4) Individuals of gifted intellect are also viewed with suspicion, since they think for themselves and may well challenge the sovereignty or even the legitimacy of the State. Burning of books is a recurring feature, because books can contain heretical ideas which may mislead the young. The first persons to be arrested and killed are often those who show any intellectual independence; if permitted to exist, they might infect others, so the State either kills them or condemns them to slave labor in remote regions. “The gifted are of no use,” said Ch’in Shih Huang, “and the ungifted can do no harm. Therefore, the art of ruling well consists precisely in the ability of removing the clever and the gifted.”

## The Soviet Utopia

All of these features are abundantly present in the modern Soviet state. The stranglehold of the central government over the lives of every citizen; the omnipresence of secret police and anonymous informers; the prohibition of private property; the attempt to stamp out religion; the inordinate punishments for minor economic crimes (such as keeping a few sheaves of wheat for oneself on a state farm, a crime punishable by death)—all these are inherent features of the Soviet utopia. They have been dramatically set forth in horrifying detail in such books as Solzhenitsyn’s *The Gulag Archipelago*, Robert Conquest’s *The Great Terror*, and Anton Antonov-Ovseyenko’s *The Time of Stalin*.

Solzhenitsyn’s powerful novel *The First Circle* concerns the fate of a corps of engineers in a Soviet labor camp. We get to know each of them, their lost ambitions, their wasted lives, their hopelessness in the face of a system that imposes 25-year sentences for having been reported as saying something anti-Soviet, or for nothing at all. In one passage one prisoner says to another, “They sent me to Vorkuta. All Vorkuta depends on prisoners, the whole Northland. It’s the fulfillment of Thomas More’s dream.” “Whose dream?” asks another prisoner. “Thomas More,” the first one replies, “the old fellow who wrote *Utopia*. He had

the conscience to admit that society would always require various kinds of menial and hard labor. No one would be willing to perform them. Who should? More thought about it and found the solution: obviously there would be people in a socialist society who disobeyed the rules. They would get the menial and especially tough jobs. Yes, the labor camps were thought up by Thomas More; it's an old idea."<sup>[4]</sup>

But the socialist state also excels at concealment of its own tactics in order to preserve its moral image before the world. When at last the prisoners in *The First Circle* are en route to a death camp in the Arctic, Solzhenitsyn writes, "The time had long passed when lead-gray or black prison vans poked through the city streets, creating terror among the citizens. After the war, the idea of building black Marias exactly like grocery vans had been born in some genius' mind, and they were painted the same orange and light blue with a sign letter on the side in four languages, reading either 'Meat' or 'Bread.'" A correspondent for a French newspaper, on the way to attend a hockey match in a Moscow stadium, sees the car which is carrying the doomed prisoners; on the side of the car is the label "Meat." Having seen several such cars that day, he writes for his newspaper: "On the streets of Moscow one often sees vans filled with foodstuffs, very neat and hygienically impeccable. One can only conclude that the provisioning of the capital is excellent."<sup>[5]</sup>

"Once you admit," wrote Hayek, "that the individual is merely a means to serve the ends of the higher entity called society or the nation, most of those features of totalitarian regimes which horrify us follow of necessity. From the collectivist standpoint, intolerance and brutal suppression of dissent, the complete disregard of the life and happiness of the individual, are essential and unavoidable consequences of this basic premise; and the collectivist can admit this and at the same time claim that his system is superior to one in which the 'selfish' interests of the individual are allowed to obstruct the full realization of the ends the community pursues."<sup>[6]</sup>

All socialism, as Herbert Spencer eloquently showed, is slavery. "What," he asked, "is essential to the idea of a slave? We primarily think of him as one who is owned by another . . . [Now] suppose an owner dies, and his estate with its slaves comes into the hands of trustees; or suppose the estate and everything on it be bought by a company; is the condition of the slave any the better if the amount of his compulsory labor remains the same? Suppose that for a company we substitute the community; does it make any difference to the slave if the time he has to work for others is as great, and the time left for himself is as small, as before? The essential question is: how much is he compelled to labor for other benefit than his own, and how much can he labor for his own benefit? The degree of his slavery varies according to the ratio between that which he is forced to yield up and that which he is allowed to retain; and it matters not whether his master is a single person or a society."<sup>[7]</sup>

### **The Utopian's Alibi: Equality**

What rationale, then, do the champions of socialism use as their main source of appeal? Usually they employ as their goal human equality, specifically equality of wealth, which of course requires an enormous state apparatus of enforcement to

sustain. They attempt to evoke hatred, resentment, and envy on the part of those who have less, to be used against those who have more; they consider the acquisition of wealth to be the worst of all evils, and their paramount duty to be the distribution of such wealth amongst the populace. They preach that wealth, no matter how acquired, is ill got, and that the principal duty of the State is to remove it from them. But of course once the wealth is taken from those who have created it, they will soon cease to create it, and the only equality that will finally remain is equality of nothingness—splendidly equalized destitution. Most socialist utopians know this, but they do not mind the mass of humanity being in poverty; such persons are so busy scratching for bread that they are easier to control.

In fact socialism only *pretends* to champion the poor; rather, it is a way of *controlling* the poor through the enormous bureaucratic equalizing process. Socialism is a scare: while officially favoring the poor, its real motive is *power*. Love of power, not love of humanity, is the real motivation behind socialist utopias. The humanitarianism is only window-dressing. Socialist utopians have always been quite indifferent to the sufferings of those whose cause they profess to embrace. “It would be a good thing,” Engels wrote to Marx, “to have a bad harvest next year, and then the real fun will begin . . . Only two or three very bad years would help.” And Marx in turn wrote, “Our fatherland presents an extremely pitiful sight. Without being battered from the outside, nothing can be done with these dogs.”<sup>[8]</sup>

In the struggle of socialists to gain political power, the alleviation of suffering is always set aside until the victory of the socialist ideal. “All attempts to improve life at the present time are condemned as possibly postponing the coming victory. *Today’s* victims of oppression will have no share in the future just society.”<sup>[9]</sup> Moreover, “That waiting has no end. The unborn profiteers of that wholesale sacrificial slaughter will never be born. The sacrificial animals will merely breed new hordes of sacrificial animals, while the un-focused eyes of a collectivized brain will stare on, undeterred, and speak of his vision of service to mankind, mixing interchangeably the corpses of the present with the ghosts of the future, but seeing no *men*.”<sup>[10]</sup>

## **The Humanitarian and the Terrorist**

And thus there comes about a secret, if unacknowledged, alliance between the professional philanthropist and the political terrorist. “If the primary objective of the philanthropist,” wrote Isabel Paterson in the most remarkable book on political philosophy written in the twentieth century, *The God of the Machine*, “is to help others, his ultimate good requires that others shall be in want. His happiness is the obverse of their misery. If he wishes to help ‘humanity,’ the whole of humanity must be in need . . . .

“What kind of world does the humanitarian contemplate as affording him full scope? It could only be a world filled with breadlines and hospitals, in which nobody retained the natural power of a human being to help himself or to resist having things done to him. And that is precisely the world that the humanitarian arranges when he gets his way. When a humanitarian wishes to see to it that everyone has a quart of milk, it is evident that he hasn’t got the milk, and can not produce it himself, or why should he be merely wishing? Further, if he did not

have a sufficient quantity of milk to bestow a quart on everyone, as long as his proposed beneficiaries can and do produce milk for themselves, they would say no, thank you. Then how is the humanitarian to contrive that he shall have all the milk to distribute, and that everyone else shall be in want of milk?

“There is only one way, and that is by the use of the *political power in its fullest extension*. Hence the humanitarian feels the utmost gratification when he visits or hears of a country in which everyone is restricted to ration cards. Where subsistence is doled out, the desideratum has been achieved, of general want and a superior power to ‘relieve’ it. The humanitarian in theory is the terrorist in action.”<sup>[11]</sup>

When Walter Lini, currently premier of Vanuatu (formerly New Hebrides), assumed power after the colonial rule of the French and British, one of his alleged aims was to relieve from poverty all the inhabitants of the islands now under his rule. But what was his self-proclaimed model government for the realization of these aims? It was not the United States, nor even Great Britain; it was Tanzania.

### **Government Planning in the United States**

During the first century and a half of its existence the government of the United States did not attempt to plan the daily lives of Americans; on the whole it left each individual to carry out his or her own plans. Lawbreakers of course were punished, but the scope of these laws was far less all-encompassing than it is today.

The principal break in this “laissez faire” policy took place under Roosevelt’s New Deal. For the first time, and inexorably increasing with the years, government set out to plan countless details of the lives of virtually everyone engaged in a trade or profession. Few people today remember how it all began, and how strongly it was at first resisted. Today, for example, farmers take government subsidies for granted, and federal controls over their crop- acre-age; but in 1933 this attitude had not yet become prevalent. Rose Wilder Lane gives a dramatic description of the coercive measures (and inducements) undertaken in the early days of the New Deal:

The farmers did not want A.A.A. or any other federal interference. In Kansas I met a rabble-rousing New Dealer from Washington who took me to a farmers’ meeting where he spoke with real conviction and eloquence. The audience listened absolutely noncommittal, until he worked up to an incandescent peroration: “We went down there to Washington and got you all a Ford. Now we’re going to get you a Cadillac!” The temperature suddenly fell below freezing; the silent antagonism was colder than zero. That ended the speech; the whole audience rose and went out. The orator later said to me, “Those damned numbskulls! the only thing to use on them is a club!”

Some time later, in a hotel lobby in Branson, Missouri, I met a young man almost in tears, totally woebegone and despairing. He had spent seventy days in Stone County, working day and night, he said, house to house, up hill and down, over those horrible roads; he'd gone to every house, he'd used every persuasion he could think of, talked himself hoarse, and he had not got even *one* man to take a \$2,500 loan from the government; and those wretched people needed everything—why, their children were barefoot, some of them lived in *log cabins*—could I believe it? They *needed* to be rehabilitated, I had no idea what rural slums they lived in; and here he offered them a loan from the government; amortized, twenty-five years to pay it, more time if they wanted it; he offered them horses, and tools, and even a car, anything almost and they just wouldn't take it. They didn't talk or act like such fools either. He couldn't understand it. He had to get some of them to take government help or he'd lose his government job. What was wrong with them? could I tell him? could I help him?

In southern Illinois there was a Terrot. The government men went into that county and took no nonsense; they condemned the land—every farm; offered the owners \$7 an acre, or nothing; this was a model project, tearing down houses, building new roads, surveying a Community Center all blueprinted. The people were frantic and furious; they hired lawyers who told them they could do nothing; they tried to get the facts printed. No newspaper dared do it. The county was listed as rural slums, the land as eroded. When I asked to be shown erosion, the answer was, it was sheet-erosion. That is, the constant effect of rainfall on all earth. There was not an eroded ditch in the county. Every farm was well cared for, every house in repair, painted, cared for—simple frame houses, a few without electricity or plumbing, but many with both . . . None of them wanted to be rehabilitated. None of them would speak to me until I proved that I did not come from the government; luckily I had that proof, by chance . . . And these are the people who were reported in government publications as demanding subsidies.<sup>[12]</sup>

### **Worthy Aims, Harmful Consequences**

And so the planning-the-lives-of-others cancer spread. It was not only the farms; every business enterprise, every industry and corporation, was soon affected. Thousands of hours of company time were required to compile facts and figures and perform utterly useless paperwork for the government—thus adding to the price of every product, though the public did not appreciate this fact. Government came to make decisions for people which formerly they had been free to make for themselves.

Always it was done behind the mask of some noble purpose. Occupational Safety and Health (OSHA) was enacted, ostensibly to promote safety in factories. The act has done nothing for factory safety (the record of American factories in this regard was already excellent), but it has done much to extend the

tentacles of government over the lives of everyone engaged in productive endeavor. Safety was the bill of goods which was sold to Congress and the public, but the power of government over business was the consequence.<sup>[13]</sup>

Health care and hospitals became so regulated by government that they had little autonomy left; ostensibly it was for the purpose of improving treatment, but the aim was ultimate nationalization of all health care. Almost everyone is interested in preserving the environment, though the Environmental Protection Agency, to which this cause was entrusted, was primarily interested in preserving and expanding its own power; it almost succeeded in destroying the Alaska Pipeline, even though the pipeline's existence in no way threatened the natural environment or the animal species.<sup>[14]</sup> Almost everyone is interested in developing domestic sources of energy, although the Department of Energy almost destroyed all access to these sources,<sup>[15]</sup> and the E.P.A. has kept almost all the vast oil and gas supplies in Alaska from being developed.<sup>[16]</sup> As always, the health, welfare, and safety of American citizens has been the facade, and sometimes the actual intention of Congressmen, but the result has been the increase of the stranglehold of government over the freedom of individuals to act in accordance with their own judgment.

## **Regulatory Law**

In each case, Congress created the regulatory organization, passing "enabling legislation" that permitted the agency to formulate its own rules, which then had the force of law. Over 90 percent of law in the United States is now regulatory law, laws never passed by Congress. And thus, with accretions of new regulatory laws (thousands of pages per month), a new "regulatory utopia" was created in the United States, inhibiting their initiative and placing a ball and chain on their productive endeavors. The bureaucrats in the regulatory agencies have the power of life and death over every industry in America, and they are only too happy, as the vise tightens on their victims, to see another capitalist bite the dust—even though it is only from the profits made by these capitalists that the bureaucrats' wages are paid.

The tendency of all these agencies is to grow and expand, creating new rules which require larger enforcement apparatus, and always more and more power over the wealth-creators of America.<sup>[17]</sup> Robert Hertzler, owner of the Sandia Die and Cartridge Company of Albuquerque for eighteen years, has never had an accident in his plant because, he says, "I have taken apart every machine in the place. I started this business with no help. I starved. I was shot at in Korea. The government has no right to come in here." He has developed a special patentable process which he claims the right to keep secret, but OSHA wants pictures of it all. "What about my constitutional rights?" he asked the OSHA inspector. "I don't give a damn about the Constitution," said [the inspector]; "you don't have any." "How do you figure that? . . . You have no constitutional rights because you're in business, because you have employees, and because you have done business with the government."<sup>[18]</sup> But when Hertzler refused him further access to his plant, the inspector said, "We'll get you with what we've already got."

Inhibiting the productivity of businesses, together with making people work from

January to May of each year to pay for the government's "social service" programs, has already gone a considerable distance toward Sovietizing the American republic. Today the receipt of welfare checks and food stamps are taken for granted as a right, though the government can only supply these by taking the money out of the pockets of others: for everyone who gets something for nothing, someone else must get nothing for something. Apparently almost no one is any longer aware of this. But at one time it was quite apparent to many Americans.

### **"Not Yours to Give": The Real Davy Crockett Story**

When Colonel Davy Crockett (1786-1836) was a member of the House of Representatives, he voted for a bill to relieve the victims of a fire in Georgetown. While Crockett was campaigning for the next election, a backwoods farmer came to him and chastised him for his vote, with these words: "It is not the amount, Colonel, that I complain of; it is the principle. In the first place, the government ought to have in the Treasury no more than enough for its legitimate purposes. But that has nothing to do with the question. The power of collecting and disbursing money at pleasure is the most dangerous power that can be entrusted to man, particularly under our system of collecting revenue by tariff, which reaches every man in the country, no matter how poor he may be, and the poorer he is the more he pays in proportion to his means. What is worse, it presses upon him without his knowledge where the weight centers, for there is not a man in the United States who can ever guess how much he pays to the government. So you see, that while you are contributing to relieve one, you are drawing it from thousands who are even worse off than he.

"If you had the right to give anything, the amount was simply a matter of discretion with you, and you had as much right to give \$20,000,000 as \$20,000. If you have the right to give to one, you have the right to give to all; and as the Constitution neither defines charity nor stipulates the amount, you are at liberty to give to any and everything which you may believe, or profess to believe, is a charity, and to any amount you may think proper. You will very easily perceive what a wide door this would open for fraud and corruption and favoritism, on the one hand, and for robbing the people on the other. No, Colonel, Congress has no right to give charity. Individual members may give as much of their own money as they please, but they have no right to touch a dollar of the public money for that purpose . . . .

"There are about 240 members of Congress. If they had shown their sympathy for the sufferers by contributing each one week's pay, it would have made over \$13,000. There are plenty of wealthy men in and around Washington who could have given \$20,000 without depriving themselves of even a luxury of life. The congressmen chose to keep their own money . . . The people about Washington no doubt applauded you for relieving them of the necessity of giving by giving what was *not yours to give*. The people have delegated to Congress, by the Constitution, the power to do certain things. To do these, it is authorized to collect and pay moneys, and for nothing else. Everything beyond this is a usurpation."<sup>[19]</sup>

### **The Utopia of Individual Liberty**

If a utopia is defined as a plan for all of a society or nation, imposed by a few planners at the top, then there is no excuse for a utopia of any kind: it is simply a forcible interference by some person with the lives of all the rest. But if a utopia is defined simply as the mode of organization of a society, then the only utopia worthy of the name is a utopia of *individual freedom*, in which there is *no* general overall plan, but each person is free to plan his or her own life as long as he does not forcibly interfere with the plans of others for their own lives.

A person's own plan for his life may not always be the best, even for himself: he may not know what actions will lead to his own well-being, and his friends and family may even know this better than he does; he may misjudge the consequences of his actions, with disastrous results; he may be weak-willed and unable to carry out the plan for himself that he sees to be best; and in consequence he may end up much less happy than he would have been had he followed the advice of persons wiser than himself.<sup>[20]</sup> But at least the plan of life is *his*, freely chosen at every step of the way by himself. He is free to change it, free to profit by his own mistakes. The authors of coercive utopias do not grant him even that much. Such utopias make him only a sheep, with the government as his shepherd. Utopian thinkers wish to plan the lives and destinies of others, and the moral precept that should be impressed on them every hour of every day is: *The lives of others are not yours to dispose of.*<sup>[21]</sup>

When Frederic Bastiat (1801-1850) wrote his famous defenses of individual liberty, he had been surrounded on all hands by utopian slogans. Among the "heroes" of the French Revolution, Saint-Just had said, "It is for the lawgiver to will the good of mankind; it is for him to make men what he wants them to be." Robespierre had said, "The function of government is to direct the physical and moral forces of the nation toward the ends for which it was founded." Billaud-Varenne had said, "A people to whom liberty is to be restored *must* be recreated. Since old prejudices *must* be destroyed, old customs changed, depraved inclinations corrected, superfluous wants restrained, inveterate vices eradicated, what is needed is strong action, a violent impulse." Lepeletier had said, "Considering the extent to which the human race has been degraded, I am convinced of the necessity of undertaking a complete regeneration—of creating a new people."<sup>[22]</sup>

To all of these, Bastiat replied: "If the natural inclinations of mankind are so evil that its liberty must be taken away, how is it that the inclinations of the socialists are good? Are not the legislators and their agents part of the human race? Do they believe themselves molded from another clay than the rest of mankind? They say that society, left to itself, heads inevitably for destruction because its instincts are perverse. They demand the power to stop mankind from sliding down this fatal declivity and to impose a better direction on it. If, then, they have received from heaven intelligence and virtues that place them beyond and above mankind, let them show their credentials. They want to be *shepherds*, and they want us to be their *sheep*. This arrangement presupposes in them a natural superiority, a claim that we have every right to require them to establish . . .

"I am not contesting their right to invent social orders, to disseminate their proposals, to advise their adoption, and to experiment with them on themselves,

at their own expense and risk; but I do indeed contest their right to impose them on us by law, that is, by the use of the police force and public funds . . . What I demand of them is to grant us the right to judge their plans and not to join in them, directly or indirectly, if we find that they hurt our interests or are repugnant to our consciences . . .

“By what right, then, may the law intervene to make me submit to the social order planned by [others], rather than make these gentlemen submit to my plans? *Is it to be supposed that I have not received from Nature enough imagination to invent a utopia too?* Is it the role of the law to make a choice between so many idle fancies and to put the public police force at the service of one of them?”<sup>[23]</sup>

Bastiat concluded with a parable: “A celebrated traveler arrived in the midst of a savage tribe. A child had just been born, and a crowd of diviners, sorcerers, and quacks armed with rings, hooks, and straps surrounded it. One said: ‘This child will never smell the perfume of a pipe if I do not stretch his nostrils.’ Another said: ‘He will be deprived of the sense of hearing if I do not make his ears come down to his shoulders.’ A third: ‘He will not see the light of the sun if I do not give his eyes an oblique slant.’ A fourth: ‘He will never stand erect if I do not bend his legs.’ A fifth: ‘He will not be able to think if I do not flatten his skull.’

“‘Stop!’ cried the traveler . . . ‘God has given organs to this frail creature; let the organs develop and be strengthened by exercises, trial and error, experience, and freedom.’”<sup>[24]</sup>

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1. On the early history of capitalism, see Friedrich von Hayek (ed.), *Capitalism and the Historians* (University of Chicago Press, 1954), esp. pp. 15-17.
  2. Murray Rothbard, *Power and Market* (Institute for Humane Studies, 1970), p. 172.
  3. On the Inca empire, see Igor Shafarevich, *The Socialist Phenomenon* (Harper & Row, 1980), pp. 132-143; on the ancient Chinese, see pp. 168-189.
  4. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *The First Circle* (Harper & Row, 1968), p. 267.
  5. *Ibid.*, pp. 672-3.
  6. Friedrich von Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (University of Chicago Press, 1944), p. 149.
  7. Herbert Spencer, *The Man versus the State* (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Printers, 1940), p. 122. (First published 1884).
  8. Quoted in Shafarevich, *op. cit.*, pp. 224-5.
  9. *Ibid.*, p. 221.
  10. Ayn Rand, “Collectivized Ethics,” in *The Virtue of Selfishness* (New York:

New American Library, 1964), p. 84.

11. Isabel Paterson, *The God of the Machine* (Caxton Printers, 1964; originally published by Putnam's, 1943), pp. 253-4.

12. Rose Wilder Lane, *The Lady and the Tycoon*, ed. Roger Lea MacBride (Caxton Printers), pp. 168-170.

13. See Dan Smoot, *The Business End of Government* (Belmont, Mass.: Western Islands, 1973), esp. pp. 83-4. See also John Hospers, *Libertarianism*, Chapter 4.

14. See Lindsey Williams, *The Energy Non-Crisis* (Wheatridge, Colorado: Worth Publishing Co., 1980).

15. See C. V. Myers, *Money and Energy* (Darien, Conn.: Soundview Books, 1980); also the series of articles in *Mining Engineering* by Eugene Guccione, Sept. 1974 *et seq.*

16. See Lindsey Williams, *op. cit.* also William Tucker, "Conservation in Deed," *Reason*, May 1983, pp. 34-39.

17. See, for example, Robert G. Anderson, "The Assault on Capital," *The Freeman*, November 1979; Dan Smoot, *op. cit.*; and Carl Snyder, *Capitalism the Creator* (Macmillan, 1940).

18. Alan Stang, "Oshtapo," *American Opinion*, October 1974, pp. 83, 87.

19. *The Life of Colonel David Crockett*, ed. Edward S. Ellis (Philadelphia: Potter & Coates, 1884). Reprinted in Lawrence W. Reed and Dale M. Haywood, eds., *When We Are Free* (Midland, Michigan: Northwood Institute Press, 1981), p. 185.

20. See John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, Chapter 3. On the circumstances in which one person may be justified in deciding on behalf of another, see John Hospers, "Libertarianism and Legal Paternalism," *Journal of Libertarian Studies*, summer 1981 issue; reprinted in Tibor Machan, ed., *The Libertarian Reader* (Rowman and Littlefield, 1982).

21. Ayn Rand, "Collectivized Ethics," *op. cit.*, p. 85.

22. Quoted in Frederic Bastiat, *The Law*, one of the essays in Bastiat, *Selected Essays On Political Economy* (Van Nostrand, 1964), pp. 812. (*The Law* is available alone in an edition published by the Foundation for Economic Education, Irvington-on-Hudson, New York.)

23. Bastiat, *op. cit.*, pp. 88-9, 93.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 95.

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