

Power Against People

A Christian Critique of the State

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Introduction

Ever since that period in European history known as the '18th century Enlightenment,' the idea has firmly taken root in Western culture that the power of the State should be harnessed and mobilised for beneficial purposes. Whether the objective has been the elimination of poverty or the education of the people, the furtherance of social harmony or the achievement of greater equality of opportunity, there has long been a general tendency amongst most people - including Christians - to view Government as a positive force for good and the best vehicle for achieving positive social change. Confronted by some problem or injustice, most people today typically look to the State for a solution and blame politicians when things go wrong. The purpose of this paper is to challenge this mentality by inviting readers to look more closely at the coercive nature of the State and its negative record in history. By doing so, they will see that over-mighty Government and the abuse of State power has been the common factor in war, slavery, political oppression, and religious and ideological persecution. It has also been the chief cause of mass poverty, famine and economic dislocation in the 20th century.

Whilst recognising that the State is a necessary institution with legitimate functions, the central argument of this paper is that the moral and material progress of human societies has been directly related to their success in curbing the power of Government and releasing the creative and altruistic energies of individuals and local communities. As a Christian, I also argue that 'loving one's neighbour' and 'doing good,' is primarily a personal responsibility best discharged through the voluntary co-operation of free individuals acting together outside the State. Conversely, excessive reliance on the power of Government stunts the moral growth of individuals and leaves too many decisions in the hands of a coercive institution whose proper functioning is inevitably hindered by the imperfect human nature of the people running it. For these reasons, containing the power of the State is a constant battle that must be fought and won in every generation. This is especially important in the 21st century, when there is so much pressure to increase the remit of Government across national boundaries, whether by centralising power in emerging regional superstates like the European Union, or by moving towards some loose system of world government via the United Nations. Against these pressures and tendencies this paper will, I hope, sound a salutary warning.

The problem of human nature

Two centuries ago, Germany's great 18th century writer and poet, Goethe, declared: "Men exist only to trouble and kill each other; so was it, so is it, and so shall it ever be."¹ A hundred years later, a similarly pessimistic view was expressed by Sigmund Freud, the father of modern psychiatry: "*Homo homini lupus* [man is a wolf to man], who has the courage to dispute it in the face of all the evidence of his own life and in history?...Civilized society is perpetually menaced with disintegration through the primary hostility of men towards one another."²

Such opinions may be unwelcome in an age when democratic politicians are always offering 'new dawns' and promising to change society for the better, but they remind us that all clear and accurate thinking about politics must be based upon a realistic view of human nature. If human beings are basically good, the scope for improving society through the use of political power may be correspondingly great. If, on the other hand, human nature is inherently flawed, the chances of improving the human condition through political action will always be limited. So, what does experience tell us about the true nature of human beings?

The evidence of history leaves little room for optimism. Despite much progress, it is largely an unedifying tale of violence, cruelty, injustice and tyranny. According to a 1984 study by the Norwegian Academy of Sciences, there have been 14,531 wars since 3600 B.C., with only 292 years of peace over that entire span of 5,584 years. Another study, by historians James Dunnigan and William Martel, *How to Stop a War*, describes some 400 wars fought over the last 200 years.³ Man's inhumanity to man has not only revealed itself through constant warfare; it has also been expressed within individual communities in the relations between rulers and their subjects. Time and again, those in power have behaved like wolves rather than shepherds, preying on the lives and property of their 'flocks' for their own personal gratification. To quote the findings of American political scientist, Professor R. J. Rummel's seminal studies in this field: 133 million people were killed by their own tyrannical governments between 30 BC and 1900.⁴

Turning to our own times, the many victims of genocide in Cambodia, Rwanda, the Congo, and the Sudan, not to mention the current spectre of Islamic terrorism, or recent mass repression in Zimbabwe, show that despotism, hatred, and mass murder are as much a feature of the modern world as of the ancient. In addition, if on a less dramatic note, family breakdown and the growth of crime

¹ Quoted in H. Bennett, *Must England Fall?* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1946) p.11.

² Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents* (London: Hogarth Press, 1930).

³ Both studies were quoted by William R. Hawkins, director of the Hamilton Centre for National Strategy (USA), in his article 'New Enemies For Old', *National Review*, (17 September 1990).

⁴ Professor R. J. Rummel, *Death By Government*, (Transaction Publishers, 1996) chapter 3.

and delinquency in Western countries hardly suggest that human nature is in a healthy state within the world's freest and most advanced societies. Rather, it reinforces our own inner awareness of our moral frailty. It teaches us that even the best human beings face a constant struggle against their own pride, selfishness, greed and lust.

The conclusion to which we are driven, however unwillingly, is that history, current events, and our own daily experience, confirm the accuracy of the Judeo-Christian view of human nature revealed in the Bible: namely, that though we are made in God's image, and therefore capable of much good, enormous creativity and even self-sacrifice, we are also 'fallen' creatures who need God's help to overcome the evil tendencies within us. Because our ancestors misused God's gift of free will and turned away from their Creator, we now have an innate tendency to self-centredness and self-aggrandisement which, if unchecked, eventually poisons relationships and ruins human lives and institutions.

The 'fallen-ness' and imperfection of human nature is of vital importance because it has a direct and deadly impact on politics. It tends to corrupt human motivation at all levels. Bad motives in turn distort and spoil decision-making within political organisations. Whilst it would be wrong to deny that there are plenty of well-meaning politicians and activists who seek the common good, experience teaches us that no-one is immune to the temptation to abuse power for questionable ends. For instance, decisions can be distorted by the desire for personal prestige or the wish to dominate and control others. They can be wrongly affected by the fear of losing face through admitting mistakes. They can also be skewed by personal favouritism and nepotism, or by greed and selfishness. Even the best-intentioned politicians and officials may succumb to bad peer-group pressure because they are afraid of being excluded from some desirable 'inner ring' of influential 'movers and shakers'. Fear of standing alone will always put pressure on insecure individuals to become 'one of the boys', whatever the moral cost may be in terms of unjust decisions or irresponsible policies. And most disconcerting of all, even the desire to do good can become a source of moral corruption if it leads people to believe that the end always justifies the means in difficult circumstances. Idealists who believe that society can be reconstructed according to some perfect blueprint, for example, may become impatient with people who question their vision or obstruct their plans, and be tempted to use force to overcome the resistance of their critics.

For all these reasons, realism about human motives and behaviour should be the starting point of any sensible analysis of the State. Why, for instance, do we need the institution of Government in the first place? What is the essential nature of the State and why is it a potentially dangerous as well as a necessary institution? What are the legitimate functions of Government? What limits should be imposed on its authority and power?

Finding the right answers to these perennial questions is as important today as it has ever been. This is not only because the fundamental problems thrown up by fallen human nature have not changed. It is also because technological developments are constantly increasing our ability to manipulate our environment and harm (as well as benefit) our fellow-human beings. If things go wrong, current 'advances' in biology, surveillance technology and weapons of mass destruction will put terrible instruments of power into the hands of fallible and corruptible rulers. Will democratic institutions be effective in preventing their destructive use domestically and internationally?

The coercive nature of the State

To go back to basics: because of the evil in human nature, men and women cannot live together in harmony without the protection of Government. The maintenance of law and order by properly constituted public authorities is the most effective means by which people can be protected against criminals. At the same time, the very nature of the State poses a potential threat to society given the inevitably flawed character of the human beings who must run it. This is so because the State is essentially a coercive institution owing to its monopolistic control of the police and the armed forces. It is this monopoly of the use of force that allows it to control the currency and impose taxation, as well as helping to ensure that its laws are obeyed. Consequently, even democratic Government is ultimately based on compulsion, since no individual or minority is allowed to withdraw from its control by refusing to acknowledge its authority or pay its taxes. Fines and imprisonment await those who defy the 'rule of the people', just as surely as they await those who disobey dictators.

Recognition of the inescapably coercive nature of the State draws attention to the fact that there is a difference between freedom and democracy. Freedom, in effect, means individual self-determination: the right to shape one's own life and form one's own opinions. It involves the right to own property and choose one's occupation, as well as freedom of speech, assembly, worship and travel. Democracy, on the other hand, essentially means majority rule, or popular control of the instrument of Government, so a conflict between democracy and liberty is always a possibility, if the majority decide to use the power of the State against an unpopular minority or individual. Because of this, limiting the power and functions of Government is actually a more important safeguard for human rights than giving everyone the vote.

This conclusion is reinforced by a fundamental truth about all large social organisations: that they are subject to what is called 'the iron law of oligarchy', a term first coined by a prominent sociologist at the beginning of the 20th century.⁵ What it means is that in any social unit beyond a certain size, it becomes impracticable for everyone to be equally involved in all decision-

⁵ Robert Michels in his pioneering study of the internal organisation of the German Social Democratic Party before the First World War.

making through continuous mass meetings. There isn't enough time for everybody to turn up and have their say, and too many conflicting opinions prevent effective agreement and action. But if in such circumstances authority must be delegated to an executive minority acting in the name and on behalf of all that society's members, one very important consequence ensues: effective power is concentrated in the ruling administrative elite. As a result, popular control is inevitably diluted and the real influence on decision-making of each individual citizen is reduced to practically zero. So if a democratic government decides to abolish private property and take over all private companies and independent institutions, the individual's 'right to vote' will be powerless to prevent him losing effective control over his livelihood. All the decisions which really count will be taken for him by a bureaucratic ruling class living off the proceeds of compulsory taxation. The 'rule of the people' will become purely nominal. It will actually mean slavery.

Another problem arising from the coercive nature of the State is that the intrusion of the political process into more and more areas of life widens the scope for social conflict by replacing personal choice by collective decisions. Whereas the marketplace allows people to buy and sell a wide variety of goods and services which cater for their individual preferences, a system of State control forces them to accept whatever the majority decides is appropriate. This means that decisions which vitally affect family life and personal wellbeing, like decisions about education, employment, health care, and housing, become politicised and therefore a source of disagreement and strife. Collective decision-making through Government may also restrict the scope for innovation and experiment, since it is, in effect, a monopolistic process controlled by small groups of politicians and officials; it therefore tends to obstruct economic and social progress, particularly given that fruitful change is so often pioneered by unconventional individuals and fuelled by unexpected discoveries. Increasing the power of the State is consequently nearly always a reactionary policy, reinforcing as it does the influence of existing prejudices and established interests. The fact that instead of recognising this, so many so-called 'liberals' and 'progressives' have welcomed the growth of Government in the 20th century has been one of the great ironies of history.

Given these truths about human nature and the State, the great problem of politics is obviously the tendency of Government to fall into the hands of people who will misuse its power and authority. As we know from history, the coercive character of the State invariably attracts the ruthless and power-hungry, as well as idealists and would-be reformers. It also attracts self-righteous busybodies who think they know best how to run other people's lives. These three groups (and they often overlap) are sufficiently widespread to ensure that the power of Government is as likely to be misapplied as it is to be used wisely.

Another danger inherent in State power is its potential for giving intolerance 'teeth' by facilitating the persecution of unpopular religious and ethnic minorities. This can take the form of punitive taxation and job discrimination, as well as restrictions on freedom of speech, worship and travel. In addition, the coercive mechanisms of Government can and have been used to plunder the most productive members of society in order to provide a feeding-trough for parasitic bureaucracies. Finally and most important of all, it is the monopoly power of the State which allows human aggression to provoke wars and bloodshed on a large scale.

For all these reasons, instead of automatically thinking about the good that might be done if the 'right people' got hold of the apparatus of Government, we should consider the harm that may result from extending the interference of the State into new areas of economic and social activity.

If realism about the destructive potential of State power is essential to the moral and political health of all civilised societies, it must also be accompanied by an appreciation of the positive case for liberty. Only in this way can we form an accurate judgment about the merits or demerits of alternative political philosophies and programmes. What, then, are the great permanent arguments for personal and political freedom?

The case for liberty

For Christians, the case for liberty is grounded in the knowledge that human beings are made in the image of God rather than being biological accidents adrift in a purposeless and meaningless universe. This means they have been endowed by their Creator with the gift of reason and free will, so that they can share God's love, life, and joy, both with Him and with each other. It also implies that their God-given talents should be used creatively to make the world a better place to live in.

Given these truths, five momentous conclusions follow. The first is that all individuals have a 'right to life', meaning the free and full enjoyment of human existence, as long as they do not threaten or damage the equal rights of others in this respect. Secondly, all human beings have the right to own private property, not only to sustain their lives, but also because they have the right of creators to the products of their enterprise and labour. The third conclusion is that all individuals have a right to freedom of thought and speech, since without it they cannot make full and proper use of their reasoning capacity and free will. Fourthly, all human beings have a right to freedom of choice of calling and employment, otherwise they cannot make full and proper use of their individual gifts and talents. The fifth and final conclusion is that as God's children, all human beings are ends in themselves, and therefore *not* subordinate to the

State. To adapt Jesus' famous phrase about the Sabbath: 'the State was made for Man, not Man for the State'.

The recognition that individuals have such 'natural rights' does not exhaust the case for liberty. It is also based on the acknowledgment that freedom is essential to the moral and material progress of human societies.

In the first place, freedom of thought and speech are necessary to the pursuit and discovery of truth, as John Stuart Mill argued so eloquently and persuasively in the 19th century.⁶ Unless people are free to explore and criticise alternative ideas and theories, they cannot assess their true worth and learn from each other, nor can they increase the sum of human knowledge and understanding by building on the achievements and lessons of past generations. Equally important, individuals cannot grow morally or spiritually if they do not enjoy freedom of choice in setting their goals and living their lives. They can only become better and wiser people if they are free to take meaningful decisions, bear the consequences of their actions, and learn from their mistakes and failures. That is why 'tolerance' (properly understood) is such a vital requirement for the maintenance of a free and peaceful society. If coercion and violence are to be avoided, and the benefits of liberty harvested for the good of all, people must be willing to allow others to hold and express beliefs they disapprove of.

Other freedoms are also essential to human wellbeing. Freedom of artistic expression, for instance, is necessary to the pursuit and creation of beauty and meaning in art, literature, and music. The fact that artistic expression can be abused or misdirected may provide a reason for limiting it in extreme circumstances, but never for abolishing it. Economic freedoms like freedom of property ownership, employment, and enterprise, are similarly vital, because they provide the necessary incentives and opportunities for technological progress and the creation of wealth. They are also essential to the development of a genuinely compassionate society, since all true 'charity' or 'giving' must be a voluntary act – a freely willed disposal of one's own resources of money, time and talents, to help those in need. By contrast, a monopolistic State welfare system financed by taxation tends to frustrate genuine compassion since it reduces the scope for individual initiative in favour of impersonal bureaucratic decision-making. The State may still have a legitimate role in relieving poverty, but it must not be allowed to 'crowd out' the private and voluntary sectors. In this regard, it is surely significant that the total amount of private money voluntarily given by American citizens to help the poor in the Third World, is not only proportionately higher than the equivalent sums donated by the citizens of

⁶ See John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty and Other Essays*, (World's Classics, Oxford University Press, 1991).

more State-controlled European societies, it is also almost as large as the total amount of official foreign aid from all donor countries.⁷

There is another powerful argument for personal and political liberty - though of a negative kind. Since human beings are inherently imperfect and corruptible, every individual needs a legally protected 'private sphere' within which he, or she, can find shelter and security from the interference of others. Only in this way can we limit the potential damage fallen human beings can do to each other. Our freedoms, in other words, are an essential safeguard against the evil within us all.

The negative role of the State in history

The truth of this last proposition is amply borne out by the behaviour of governments and rulers since the dawn of history. Whilst the evil in human nature has always found plenty of scope for its activity in the private lives of individuals, historically its destructive capacity has been immeasurably increased when it has been harnessed to the power of the State. All too often, the institution of Government has functioned as the concentrated and organised expression of human hatred and cruelty. The most obvious manifestation of this has been in warfare. American political scientist, Professor R.J. Rummel, estimates that at least 40 million human beings were slaughtered in armed conflicts between 30 BC and 1900.⁸ And given the fragmentary and incomplete historical data available from earlier centuries, the true figure may be many times higher. But such bald statistics cannot convey the horrors inflicted on the human race by the armies and militias of power-hungry kings, generals and princes; behind them lies the dreadful reality of the terrorisation and wholesale massacre of civilian populations, and the devastation and ruin of cities, provinces, and entire countries. To give one example from the 17th century: the Thirty Years War (1618-48) between Catholic and Protestant rulers resulted in the depopulation and economic regression of much of Germany and Central Europe. The population of Bohemia (Czechoslovakia), for instance, "was reduced from around 4 million to possibly no more than 800,000".⁹ The Mongol conquest of most of Asia in the 13th and 14th centuries, to take another example, was even more destructive of human life, and was regularly accompanied by acts of unimaginable cruelty. Tamerlane, a Turk who proclaimed himself the restorer of the Mongol Empire,

"built 2,000 prisoners into a living mound and then bricked them over at Sabsawar in 1383; piled 5,000 human heads into minarets at Zirih in the same year; cast his Luri prisoners alive over precipices in 1386; massacred 70,000 people and piled the heads of the slain into minarets at Isfahan in 1387...buried alive 4,000 Christian soldiers of the garrison of Sivas after their capitulation in 1400; and built twenty towers of skulls in Syria in 1400 and 1401."¹⁰

⁷ See the *Index of Global Philanthropy*, published in 2006 by the Hudson Institute, USA.

⁸ R. J. Rummel, *op cit*, pp. 70-71.

⁹ *Ibid*, page 54.

¹⁰ Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History*, Abridgment of volumes 1-6 by D.C. Somervell, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947) p. 347.

But the human cost of the abuse of State power cannot simply be measured by the casualties of war and its attendant evils. It must also take into account the countless victims of governmental tyranny down the ages. It is a terrible but little known truth that *more* people have suffered and died at the hands of their own rulers than have been killed in war (133 million – at an absolute minimum - compared with 40 million war casualties between 30 BC and 1900). They have either been the victims of slavery, political revolution and repression, or religious and ideological persecution. Slavery, for instance, was a universal institution until modern times, and involvement in the African slave trade, to touch only the tip of that iceberg, was extremely widespread. It included Europeans, Arabs, Asians, and African tribal chiefs and kings. Between them they were responsible for the deaths of at least 17 million Africans over a period of just over four hundred years (1451-1870). The true figure might even be as high as 65 million.¹¹

The human cost of political revolutions and repression has been even greater than that of slavery. To take the example of China: it is estimated that nearly 34 million people were slaughtered by a succession of Chinese emperors between 221 BC and 1900. Again, given the incompleteness of the available data, the actual death toll may have been much higher – exceeding 90 million souls.¹² This mass bloodletting, moreover, was, as always, accompanied by many individual acts of barbarity. This, for instance, is how the Chinese chronicles describe the behaviour of Chang Hsien-chung after his conquest of Szechwan province in 1644, near the end of the Ming dynasty. When the scholars rejected Chang's claim to be the emperor of the Great Western Kingdom, he had them all massacred and then "set about destroying all the merchants, then all the women and all the officials. Finally he ordered his own soldiers to kill each other. He ordered the feet of the officers' wives to be cut off and made a mound of them, and at the top of the mound he placed the feet of his favourite concubines."¹³

The bloody record of the State throughout history owes much to the fatal fusion of political power with religious and ideological fanaticism. Time and again, religious and political movements have succumbed to the temptation to use force to advance their spiritual and ideological agendas. In doing so, they have violated the freedom of conscience of millions of individuals and resorted to torture and murder on a huge scale.

¹¹ R. J. Rummel, *op cit*, pages 48, 70.

¹² *Ibid*, pp. 54, 70.

¹³ Robert Payne, *Massacre, The Tragedy of Bangladesh and the Phenomenon of Mass Slaughter throughout History*, (New York: Macmillan, 1973) p. 64.

Although Christianity has been a liberating force in history for reasons discussed elsewhere in this paper, playing a major role in the abolition of slavery, the growth of humanitarian legislation, the relief of poverty, and the spread of education,¹⁴ it must be sadly acknowledged that the history of Christendom offers many examples of the misuse of force. Despite the clear teaching of Christ and His Apostles that Christians should love their enemies and do good to those that hate them¹⁵, the Church has repeatedly fought heresy and unbelief with the weapon of the sword, whenever it has found itself in alliance with the power of the State. That, at any rate, was the recurring pattern from the end of the Roman Empire to (in some European countries) the middle of the 19th century.¹⁶ During the 16th and 17th centuries, the period of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, Catholics and Protestants engaged in nearly continuous sectarian warfare, with the bloodiest consequences.¹⁷ The Spanish Inquisition alone was responsible for the torture and execution of thousands of people in Europe and Latin America between 1483 and 1834.¹⁸ And, in addition to persecuting each other, Christians have also betrayed the spirit and letter of the New Testament by their persecution of the Jews. Stigmatised as 'Christ killers', the Jews of Christian Europe were for centuries subject to discriminatory laws and penalties, as well as being the victims of periodic pogroms.¹⁹ Jewish communities were often made the scapegoat for plagues and natural disasters. During the Black Death (1347-52), which killed around 25 million Europeans, Jews were massacred wholesale. In Mainz, Germany, for instance, it is recorded that 6,000 were killed; in Erfurt, 3,000 were murdered. "By the end of the plague, few Jews were left in Germany or the Low Countries."²⁰

Christianity has obviously not been the only religion whose followers have periodically used violence against those of other faiths and beliefs. The same has certainly been true of Islam. Its founder, the Prophet Muhammad, conquered the Arabian Peninsula by force in the 7th century and subsequently commanded his successors to wage war against unbelievers and to punish

¹⁴ For detailed information on the liberating and beneficial impact of Christianity on human progress, see, for example: M. Stanton Evans, *The Theme Is Freedom: religion, politics and the American tradition*, (Washington DC: Regnery, 1994); also: J. Wesley Bready, *England Before And After Wesley*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1938).

¹⁵ See the New Testament.

¹⁶ See, for instance, the relevant chapters in the following two books by the great 19th century liberal historian, W.H. Lecky: *History of European Morals* (2 volumes in one, London: Watts & Co. 1911), and *The Rise and Influence of Rationalism in Europe* (2 volumes in one, London: Watts & Co. 1910).

¹⁷ See, for instance, volume 2 ('The Reformation') and 3 ('The Wars of Religion') of *The Cambridge Modern History* (Cambridge University Press).

¹⁸ See, for instance, A.S. Turberville, *The Spanish Inquisition*, (London: Home University Library, 1932). Also, Jean Plaidy, *The Rise of the Spanish Inquisition, The Growth of the Spanish Inquisition, and The End of the Spanish Inquisition* (London: W.H. Allen, 1978). Both authors provide extensive bibliographies of original sources and other books on this subject by Catholic, Protestant, and other historians.

¹⁹ See, for instance, the relevant chapters in Paul Johnson, *A History of The Jews* (London: Phoenix, 1993).

²⁰ Nicole Duplaix, 'Fleas: The Lethal Weapon', *National Geographic*, (May 1988) pp. 675-94.

apostasy with death.²¹ As a result, within a century of Muhammad's own death in 632, Muslim fleets and armies swept through the Mediterranean world, conquering Egypt, Syria, the whole of North Africa, and Spain. To quote the approving words of one 20th century Islamic scholar, Dr Ali Issa Othman: "The spread of Islam was military. There is a tendency to apologise for this and we should not. It is one of the injunctions of the Koran that you must fight for the spreading of Islam."²² Against this background, current Muslim criticism of the Crusades rings a little hollow. The record shows that Muslims have been just as guilty of abusing power in the cause of religious intolerance, as Christians. Anti-Jewish pogroms have also been as much a feature of Islamic history as of that of Christendom;²³ and so too, has been the imposition of legally enforced discrimination against religious minorities. From the 8th century onwards, Jews and Christians were only allowed to exist in the Muslim world as officially defined second-class citizens (*dhimmis*). As such, they were both deprived of equality before the law and subject to discriminatory taxes and humiliating customs.²⁴ Similarly, the massacres of Muslim civilians during the Crusades, and their expulsion from Spain in 1492, have had their equally bloody counterparts in the Islamic world. It is estimated that between the 12th and 19th centuries, the Muslim rulers of the Ottoman Empire exterminated at least two million of their Armenian, Bulgarian, Serbian, Greek and Turkish subjects.²⁵ Today, Christians and other religious minorities are still subject to persecution in many Islamic countries.²⁶

The alliance between ideological fanaticism and governmental tyranny has not only taken religious forms; it has also embraced secular and atheistic political ideologies. Whilst the most terrible manifestations of this phenomenon have been the totalitarian movements of the 20th century, a subject to which we will return later, it first reared its ugly head during the French Revolution. Not only were many of the leading French revolutionaries militantly anti-Christian and anti-clerical; they were also passionately wedded to the concepts of equality and popular sovereignty, and to the utopian notion that a perfect society could

²¹ See, for instance, such verses in the Koran as: "Believers, make war on the infidels who dwell around you. Deal firmly with them. Know that God is with the righteous." (*Repentance, Sura 9, 123*). Also: *Repentance, Sura 9, 29*, and *Repentance, Sura 9, 73*. (*The Koran*, translated by N.J. Dawood, London: Penguin Classics, fifth revised edition, 1990). For a detailed discussion of Islamic teaching on the subjects of 'holy war' (*Jihad*) and the treatment of apostates, complete with original sources, see: *Resurgent Islam and the Challenge to the Church*, (USA: Kairos Journal, 2006); also the relevant chapters in: John Laffin, *The Dagger of Islam*, (London: Sphere Books, 1981).

²² Quoted in Charis Waddy, *The Muslim Mind*, (London: Grosvenor Books, 1990) p.102.

²³ More than 1,000 Jews, for instance, were killed in anti-Jewish rioting in the Middle East between 1938 and 1949. For this and more information about the treatment of minorities in the Islamic world, see: John Laffin, *op cit*, chapter 12.

²⁴ *Ibid.* See also: Bat Ye'or, *The Dhimmi: Jews and Christians under Islam*, (London & Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1985).

²⁵ R.J. Rummel, *op cit*, pp. 61, 70.

²⁶ See, for instance, the regular reports of Christian missionary and human rights organisations like 'Open Doors' and 'Christian Solidarity Worldwide,' as well as the regular reports and surveys of secular human rights monitoring organisations like Freedom House.

be constructed by political action. Believing that true 'virtue' lay only in the 'people', and that only they, themselves, understood its true interests, the revolutionary Jacobins claimed the right both to monopolise political power and use the full force of the State to eliminate their critics. Nothing, they insisted, could be allowed to restrain the 'will of the people', neither freedom of conscience nor intermediate social institutions like the Church and the family.²⁷ Not surprisingly, their ideology of 'totalitarian democracy', and their seizure of power in 1793, ushered in the notorious 'Reign of Terror' (1793-94) so indelibly associated in the popular imagination with the image of the tumbrel and the guillotine. It is estimated that the resultant bloodbath and civil war may have cost as many as 263,000 French lives. Other studies estimate the loss at nearer half a million.²⁸ But whatever the exact dimensions of the human cost of the French Revolution, one thing is clear: it was the first example in modern times of the connection between secular political utopianism and mass murder.

That the State has had a largely negative impact on human development is not only a lesson of the past, it is also underlined by the significant fact that human progress can be clearly related to the gradual emergence of one section of humanity (the 'West') from under the heel of governmental despotism. Since there is a strong connection between liberty and social progress, because freedom maximises people's opportunities to use their gifts and talents for constructive purposes, it is not surprising to find that the growth of liberty has been both a precondition of improvements in human welfare and a result of the gradual restriction and containment of the power of the State. Whilst it is hardly possible here to give an adequate account of the long historical process by which free societies have evolved and prospered, some of its main features can be outlined fairly accurately.

The growth of freedom and progress

The first great flowering of Western philosophy and literature undoubtedly occurred in the relatively free society of ancient Athens during the 4th and 5th centuries BC, but it only left an enduring mark on the cultural map of the Roman Empire. It did not give birth to any popular movement for the liberation of the ancient world from its twin curses of slavery and monarchical despotism. Whilst individual thinkers like Aristotle and Cicero criticised tyranny, and Epictetus and Seneca proclaimed their belief in the brotherhood of Man, they were unable to reform the outlook and institutions of their contemporaries. Instead, it fell to Christianity to sow the seeds of fruitful change, aided by the collapse of the Roman Empire and the resultant fragmentation of political authority within

²⁷ For a detailed and rigorous analysis of the ideological currents of the French Revolution, see: J.L. Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*, (London: Peregrine Books, 1986).

²⁸ R.J. Rummel, *op cit*, pp. 55, 70. For other detailed estimates of the human cost of the French Revolution, see: Ivan Gobry, *Les Martyrs de la Revolution Francaise*, (Perrin, 1989); Pierre Gaxotte, *La Revolution Francaise*, (Editions Complexe, 1988); Pierre Chaunu, *Le grand declassement*, (Robert Laffont, 1989); and finally, Rene Sedillot, *Le Cout de la Revolution*, (Perrin, 1987).

Western Europe. Two things in particular, apart from the invention of printing, became key factors in the slow liberalisation of Western cultures and societies. At the ideological level, the Judeo-Christian view of Man as a child of God clearly implied the equal dignity of all human beings regardless of ethnicity, class, gender or nationality. Equally important, by asserting that God's Moral Law was above the State, it destroyed the legitimacy of the tradition of political absolutism which had dominated the world of pagan antiquity. Rulers could no longer, it was held, do anything they liked with power, but were accountable for its use to both God and their subjects. At the same time, by raising barriers against the concentration of all political and spiritual authority in the hands of a single ruler, the division of power between Church, monarchs, and nobles which characterised the Middle Ages - and the conflicts it provoked - under-girded and reinforced this gradual change in outlook. Added to this, the long competition during this period between a succession of Popes and Holy Roman Emperors for the allegiance of the peoples of Europe, had one especially fortunate result: the growth of free towns with special charters and privileges wrested from one or the other of these two great rival centres of power. The overall effect of these and other causes (including, for example, the stimulus given to commerce by the revival of East-West trade in the wake of the Crusades) was threefold: the decay of the feudal system, the subsequent evolution of limited government, and the enlargement of the 'space' available for free economic activity. This in turn eventually led to the emergence within Western societies of a wealthy property-owning middle and upper class, with a vested interest in freedom, stability, economic growth, and the encouragement of the arts and sciences. With these conditions in place, the scope for individual innovation and creative genius increased exponentially, and the rest, as they say, is history: the coming of the Industrial Revolution and the unparalleled improvements in longevity and living standards it eventually brought about for the mass of a much increased population.²⁹

The links between the diminution of State power, the growth of liberty, and human advancement, are further highlighted by a closer examination of the processes behind fruitful change. What this reveals is that in nearly every field of human endeavour, whether in the arts or the sciences, engineering or technology, education or medicine, agriculture or industry, the fountainhead of creative achievement has always been the individual thinker, artist, inventor or entrepreneur. It was creative individuals and their backers, not bureaucratic

²⁹ Readers wishing to learn more about the evolution of free societies, should consult the following books: M. Stanton Evans, *The Theme Is Freedom: religion, politics and the American tradition*, (Washington DC: Regnery, 1994); F.A. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, first published in 1960); Alexander Rustow, *Freedom and Domination: a historical critique of civilization*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980); James Mackinnon, *A History of Modern Liberty* (3 volumes), (London: Longmans & Co., 1906); *The Long Debate on Poverty: eight essays on industrialisation and 'the condition of England'*, (London: Institute of Economic Affairs, IEA Readings 9, 1974); and finally, Johan Norberg, *In Defence of Global Capitalism*, (Washington DC: Cato Institute, 2005).

committees and governments, for instance, who revolutionised the technology of agricultural and industrial production, designed the first steam engines and locomotives, and built the first modern roads, railways and canals during the 18th and 19th centuries. It was individual thinkers and inventors who formulated the law of gravity, invented the telescope, founded the science of genetics, and built the first electric motor. In fact, all the major discoveries and advances in science, technology, medicine and mathematics have conformed to this pattern since the earliest times, but especially over the last 400 years.³⁰ The same has been broadly true of progress in the arts, literature, philanthropy and the 'caring professions'. Private individuals and groups (secular and religious), not governments, established the first schools, hospitals, lending libraries and universities in most Western countries. Private individuals also set up the first charities and organisations to care for the poor, house the homeless, fight for animal welfare, and campaign for the reform of social abuses.³¹ The record of their achievements in the English-speaking world by the end of the 19th century is impressive. It includes the abolition of slavery, prison reform, the amelioration of working conditions in the factories, the establishment of the modern nursing profession, the growth of a high quality popular press and publishing industry, and the development of a vast philanthropic and private self-help movement in education, health care, and social insurance. As a result, for instance, around 90% of the population of England and Wales was already literate by 1870, before any major State involvement in education. Much the same situation also prevailed in North America.³² Similarly, by the 1890s, most adult men in Britain were voluntarily insured against sickness and death through their membership of the friendly societies.³³ As for health care, nearly half the population of London obtained free medical treatment from the outpatient departments of the voluntary hospitals in 1894 – yet another example of the altruism and organising capacity of civil society, outside the State, before the mushrooming of governmental power in the 20th century.³⁴

³⁰ For an exhaustive and detailed study of this subject, see: Charles Murray, *Human Accomplishment: the pursuit of excellence in the arts and sciences 800 BC to 1950*, (New York: Perennial edition, HarperCollins, 2004) especially pp.163-204.

³¹ See, for instance, the relevant chapters in the following books: E.G. West, *Education and the State*, (Indianapolis, USA: Liberty Fund, 1994); also by the same author: 'The spread of education before compulsion: Britain and America in the nineteenth century', from the *Freeman: Ideas on Liberty*, July 1996, (USA: Foundation for Economic Education); David G. Green, *Reinventing Civil Society: the rediscovery of welfare without politics*, (London: IEA Health and Welfare Unit, 1993); J. Wesley Bready, *England Before And After Wesley*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, May 1938); Samuel Smiles, *Duty*, (London: John Murray, 1950, first published 1880); and finally: Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001).

³² See: E.G. West, *op cit*; David G. Green, *op cit*; J. Wesley Bready, *op cit*; Samuel Smiles, *op cit*; and Jonathan Rose, *op cit*.

³³ See article by the late Arthur Seldon, OBE, (founding Editorial Director of the Institute of Economic Affairs), the *Daily Telegraph*, (2/10/78). See also: David G. Green, *op cit*.

³⁴ David G. Green, *op cit*, p.71.

The wisdom of classical liberalism

This connection between the growth of freedom, and human progress, was well understood by the great classical liberal thinkers and economists of the 18th and 19th centuries. Not only did they emphasise the liberating and energising impact on society of the containment of State power; they also explained the enormous benefits flowing from the increasing division of labour within free market economies. By widening the scope for the development of individual talents and skills, free market economies, they argued, were increasing the productivity of individuals to an unprecedented degree, and with it, the creation of wealth and the range of alternatives open to them as producers and consumers. Whereas, in the pre-industrial era, the struggle for existence in agricultural societies provided little opportunity for the cultivation of individuality amongst the masses, the advent of free market capitalism, by contrast, led to an exponential increase in the number of new industries and occupations, so multiplying the range and kinds of jobs available to ordinary people. At the same time, by reducing poverty, the productive vitality of capitalism enabled an ever-increasing proportion of the population to gain access to education, thus enhancing their quality of life as well as providing new opportunities for rising up the social and occupational ladder.³⁵

Whilst their appreciation of the benefits of economic freedom did not prevent most classical liberals from acknowledging that the State had some role to play in the protection of minors and the relief of poverty, all of them – from Adam Smith in the 18th century, to John Stuart Mill and Herbert Spencer in the 19th – were firm believers in the virtues of limited government. In their view, the State's primary functions were the defence of the realm, the maintenance of law and order, the preservation of a sound currency, and the creation of a legal framework for the protection of individual rights (including property rights and contracts). They also believed that the State had a duty to prevent fraud, the sale of adulterated goods, threats to public health, coercive monopolies, and all unnecessary restrictions on freedom of trade and enterprise. But beyond that, they thought it was mainly up to individuals and families to provide for themselves and their dependants. It was equally up to them to help the needy through churches, charities, and other private bodies and associations. If, instead, they argued, the State were to try to direct and control all significant

³⁵ The historical and economic literature supporting these claims about capitalism is extensive, but the following works are particularly recommended to those seeking further information: Adam Smith's classic work, *The Wealth of Nations*, originally published in 1776 and available in umpteen editions ever since; *The Long Debate on Poverty*, op cit; Johan Norberg, op cit; Milton and Rose Friedman, *Free to Choose*, (London: Secker & Warburg, 1980); Peter L. Berger, *The Capitalist Revolution*, (New York: Basic Books, Inc, 1986); Deepak Lal, *Reviving the Invisible Hand: the case for classical liberalism in the twenty-first century*, (USA: Princeton University Press, 2006); and finally: Murray N. Rothbard, *Freedom, Inequality, Primitivism and the Division of Labour*, (California: Institute For Humane Studies, 1971).

economic and social activity, it would only impoverish society, by repressing individual initiative and discouraging personal effort and responsibility.³⁶

A tragedy of history: the rise of socialism

It is one of the tragedies of history that this philosophy of classical liberalism, the mature fruit of bitter experience, was gradually displaced within Western culture during the second half of the 19th century by the rise of the socialist movement. Despite all the accumulated evidence of the dangers inherent in increasing the powers of government beyond fairly narrow limits, a growing number of Western intellectuals embraced the idea that a better and more equal society could be created if private property were abolished and replaced by a State-owned and controlled economy. A truly socialist community, it was urged, based on the collectivisation of land and industry, would substitute communal solidarity for selfish individualism, and intelligent central planning for the 'chaos' of market forces. As a result, it would generate greater harmony and prosperity than free market capitalism, putting an end to poverty and social divisions. And as long as socialism was introduced by peaceful consent, its followers believed, democratic institutions could be relied upon to prevent it degenerating into tyranny.

Against these illusions, classical liberal thinkers issued some of their sternest and most prophetic warnings, made all the more poignant when read today against the backdrop of the events of the 20th century. Of these warnings, perhaps the most famous was that penned by John Stuart Mill, the leading philosopher and economist of mid-Victorian England, and a sympathetic critic of the ideals and aspirations of the early socialists.³⁷ As he put it in a well-known passage from his 1859 essay *On Liberty*:

"If the roads, the railways, the banks, the insurance offices, the great joint-stock companies, the universities, and the public charities, were all of them branches of the government; if, in addition, the municipal corporations and local boards, with all that now devolves on them, became departments of the central administration; if the employees of all these different enterprises were appointed and paid by the government, and looked to the government for every rise in life; not all the freedom of the press and popular constitution of the legislature would make this or any other country free otherwise than in name."³⁸

A generation later, a similar note of alarm was sounded by Herbert Spencer, in his 1884 book, *The Man versus The State*. Like Mill, he too, drew attention to

³⁶ For more detailed information see, for instance, Thomas Sowell, *Classical Economics Reconsidered*, (New York: William Morrow & Company, Inc., 1974); also: Norman Barry, *Classical Liberalism and Libertarianism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1987).

³⁷ See for instance: John Stuart Mill, *Principles of Political Economy*, (London: Penguin Books, 1985, originally published in 1848) pp.351-367.

³⁸ *On Liberty*, op cit, pp.122-123.

the fact that a socialist (or communist³⁹) society would necessarily destroy liberty by making everyone dependent on the State. He also poured scorn on the belief that socialist institutions would transform human nature for the better:

“It is assumed that officialism will work as it is intended to work, which it never does. The machinery of Communism, like existing social machinery, has to be framed out of existing human nature; and the defects of existing human nature will generate in the one the same evils as in the other. The love of power, the selfishness, the injustice, the untruthfulness, which often in comparatively short times bring private organizations to disaster, will inevitably, where their effects accumulate from generation to generation, work evils far greater and less remediable; since, vast and complex and possessed of all the resources, the administrative organization once developed and consolidated, must become irresistible. And if there needs proof that the periodic exercise of electoral power would fail to prevent this, it suffices to instance the French Government, which, purely popular in origin, and subject at short intervals to popular judgment, nevertheless tramples on the freedom of citizens to an extent which the English delegates to the late Trades Unions Congress say ‘is a disgrace to, and an anomaly in, a Republican nation.’”⁴⁰

The early classical liberal critique of socialism was not confined to the shores of Britain. It was also expressed in the most forthright terms by Frederic Bastiat (1801-1850), the most important French liberal economist of the 19th century. In his 1850 pamphlet, *The Law*, Bastiat launched a comprehensive attack on some of the central tenets and assumptions of socialism. In particular, he exposed the internal contradiction between the socialist belief in equality and universal suffrage, and their equally strong conviction that the ‘people’ needed to be guided and regimented by the State. If the ‘people’ were wise enough to be entrusted with the vote, Bastiat asked, why should they not be able to run their own lives without official interference? The ironic truth, he wrote, was that like the Jacobins of the French Revolution, his socialist contemporaries considered themselves to be superior to mankind in general, and therefore entitled to be the sole judge of everyone else’s best interests. But the result of this attitude, he argued, would only be the creation of a collectivised ant-heap of a society, dominated by an all-powerful bureaucratic elite – the apotheosis of inequality and despotism! Nor was this the only flaw in socialist thinking:

“Socialism, like the ancient ideas from which it springs, confuses the distinction between government and society. As a result of this, every time we object to a thing being done by government, the socialists conclude that we object to its being done at all. We disapprove of state education. Then the socialists say that we are opposed to any education. We object to a state religion. Then the socialists say that we want no religion at all...It is as if the socialists were to accuse us of not wanting persons to eat because we do not want the state to raise grain.”⁴¹

³⁹ Socialism and communism are essentially interchangeable terms since they both describe social systems in which all the means of production, distribution and exchange are collectively owned through the State. Traditionally, the only significant difference between socialists and communists is that for most of the 20th century the former only wanted to create a collectivised society by peaceful and democratic consent, whereas the latter were prepared to impose it through violent revolution.

⁴⁰ Herbert Spencer, *The Man versus The State*, (London: Penguin Books, 1969) pp.108-109.

⁴¹ Frederic Bastiat, *The Law*, (New York: The Foundation For Economic Education, 1974) pp.32-33.

The socialist fallacy of equating altruism with collectivism, an error which still clouds much contemporary left-wing thinking, was accompanied, argued the classical liberals, by the equally pernicious identification of human co-operation with government-directed activity. As a consequence, far from socialism offering a progressive recipe for communal action and social harmony, it would merely, they warned, replace the purposive planning and voluntary co-operation of millions of individuals in the market place and voluntary sector, by the centralised decision-making of State officialdom. To quote Bastiat again:

“But when the law, by means of its necessary agent, force, imposes upon men a regulation of labour, a method or a subject of education, a religious faith or creed – then the law...substitutes the will of the legislator for their own wills; the initiative of the legislator for their own initiatives. When this happens, the people no longer need to discuss, to compare, to plan ahead; the law does all this for them. Intelligence becomes a useless prop for the people; they cease to be men; they lose their personality, their liberty, their property.”⁴²

The anxieties of classical liberal thinkers about the potentially demoralising impact of socialism on personal incentives and human character, were shared, in a slightly different context, by many of the working class leaders of Britain’s ‘friendly societies’ at the beginning of the 20th century. Alarmed by the prospect that State provision of social welfare would discourage personal thrift and responsibility, the ‘grand master’ of the largest friendly society (Manchester Unity, with over 750,000 members) declared in a speech in 1909: “I venture to assert that the vast majority of my fellow members and thousands upon thousands of members of other friendly societies are totally opposed to any government undertaking the provision of any form of invalidity or sickness insurance for the working classes of this country.”⁴³

And no survey of the intellectual resistance to socialism in the 19th century would be complete, without at least a brief mention of some of socialism’s anarchist critics. Although most of them favoured communal forms of social organisation and property ownership, all of them were opposed to the use of State power to advance a progressive social agenda, arguing that government was a form of institutionalised coercion that inevitably corrupted both rulers and ruled. For instance, the Russian anarchist leader, Bakunin, was Marx’s fiercest critic within the First International (1864-76),⁴⁴ insisting that Marx’s communist programme would create a State as “despotic and brutal” as any other.⁴⁵ Across the Atlantic, an equally critical view of State Socialism was expressed by the American anarchist thinker, Benjamin Tucker. Noting the tendency of governmental power “to encroach beyond the limits set for it;” Tucker predicted

⁴² *Op cit*, p.29.

⁴³ David G. Green, *op cit*, p.52.

⁴⁴ The first ‘International Workingmen’s Association’, to use its full title.

⁴⁵ Quoted in : George Woodcock, *The Anarchist Reader*, (Fontana, 1977) p.143.

in 1888 that State Socialism would end up “destroying individual independence, and with it all sense of individual responsibility...”⁴⁶

Sadly, these prophetic warnings went unheeded by most ‘progressive’ European intellectuals, and the ideological stage was set for the advent of the great totalitarian socialist movements of the 20th century: Communism and Fascism/Nazism.

What is striking about the history of these 20th century movements is their essential similarity. Despite the conventional habit of placing Communism on the ‘extreme left’ of the political spectrum, and Fascism/Nazism on the ‘extreme right’, these competing ideologies were really ugly sisters rather than polar opposites. Both glorified the State at the expense of the individual, and both were implacably hostile to free market capitalism and all genuinely liberal values and institutions.⁴⁷ The Fascist and Nazi commitment to State coercion and political violence are too familiar to merit supporting quotes from Mussolini and Hitler, but although less well known to the general public, Lenin, the founder of Soviet Communism (1870-1924), was equally explicit about his readiness to force Communism down the throats of the Russian people: “If the peasants and workers do not accept the socialism which we are bringing to them,” he declared in 1917, “we shall reply: ‘It is useless to waste words when we can employ force.’”⁴⁸ On another occasion, he stated: “If for the work of Communism we must wipe out nine tenths of the population, we should not recoil before these sacrifices.”⁴⁹ Similar sentiments were expressed by Mao Tse-tung (1893-1976), the founder of Chinese Communism. On the subject of repression, for example, Mao declared: “In this matter we have no conscience! Marxism is rough, it has little conscience.”⁵⁰

Prophecy fulfilled: the Communist holocaust

Given these views and socialism’s totalitarian tendencies,⁵¹ it is hardly surprising that all Communist regimes, starting with Lenin’s in 1917, have given rise to the same phenomena: one-party rule by a privileged elite, political repression and torture, mass executions, hard labour camps, personality cults

⁴⁶ *Op cit*, pp.146-147.

⁴⁷ For detailed information on this theme, see: F.A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1971, originally published in 1944) chapter 12, ‘The Socialist Roots of Nazism’; also: Ludwig von Mises, *Omnipotent Government*, (New York: Arlington House, 1969, originally published in 1944); and finally: Ludwig von Mises, *Socialism*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969, originally published in 1936) pp.574-582.

⁴⁸ *Lenin*, a reprint of an article by Russian witnesses of the October 1917 Revolution, which first appeared in the Belgian journal, *La Sentinelle*, published in Brussels in 1970 (London: Inter-City Research Centre, April 1970) p.13.

⁴⁹ *Lenin, Selected Works, Vol.2, p.702*, quoted in *Lenin*, *op cit*, p.6.

⁵⁰ Mao Tse-tung, *Selected Works*, (Peking, 1977).

⁵¹ See: F.A. Hayek, *op cit*, and Ludwig von Mises, *Socialism*. See also: Tibor Szamuely, *Socialism and Liberty*, (pamphlet published by Aims for Freedom and Enterprise, London, 1977); also: Igor Shafarevich, *The Socialist Phenomenon*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1980).

around the leaders, and grinding poverty for the mass of the population.⁵² What is perhaps less well appreciated is that the human cost of Communism around the world has been even greater than that incurred by Nazism and Fascism during the 1930s and 1940s. Everyone has heard of the Nazi holocaust which killed six million Jews. How many, by contrast, know that Lenin alone was responsible for the deaths of between five and ten million Russians from 1917-1923?⁵³ Again, how many people are aware of the fact that Mao killed at least 32 million Chinese between 1949 and 1976,⁵⁴ and possibly as many as 70 million?⁵⁵ The dreadful truth is that Communist dictatorships have tortured and murdered their citizens on a scale that puts Hitler's crimes in the shade. According to the best estimates, the total number slaughtered throughout the world between 1917 and 1989 by Communist governments in the Soviet Union, China, South East Asia, Eastern Europe, Africa, and Latin America, comes to a *minimum* of between 94 and 110 million people.⁵⁶ That is *double* the total death toll on all sides during World War II. No wonder former American Black Panther leader, Eldridge Cleaver, commented in 1975: "Communism has imposed on people the most oppressive regimes in the history of the world."⁵⁷

The history of the 20th century has not only re-emphasised the link between State power and mass murder. It has also driven home the uncomfortable lesson, for secularised Western societies, that there is a close connection between atheism and totalitarianism. Witness the anti-Christian character of all revolutionary socialist regimes. But is this connection an intrinsic one? Or is it purely incidental, as Western secularists would argue?

Whilst it cannot be denied that many atheist thinkers have been amongst the fiercest opponents of State tyranny - from Charles Bradlaugh in 19th century England, to Sidney Hook and Ayn Rand in 20th century America - it remains the case that atheism opens the door to totalitarianism by undermining the idea that there are any absolute moral values. To put it at its simplest: if there is no God, human beings are merely transient biological machines whose thoughts and beliefs are the unintended by-products of accidental biochemical processes. How, then, can people attach any real significance to the individual and his

⁵² For detailed and comprehensive surveys of the history and record of Communist regimes, see: Clarence B. Carson, *Basic Communism: its rise, spread and debacle in the 20th century*, (Alabama: American Textbook Committee, 1990); John Marks, *Fried Snowballs*, (London: Claridge Press, 1990); Nick Eberstadt, *The Poverty of Communism*, (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1990).

⁵³ See: Dr Robert Conquest, *The Human Cost of Soviet Communism*, (Washington: U.S. Senate Report, 1971). Conquest estimated that a minimum of 35 million Russians had been killed in internal repression since 1917.

⁵⁴ See: Professor Richard L. Walker, *The Human Cost of Communism in China*, (Washington: U.S. Senate Report, 1971). This report estimated that the death toll under Communism might have been as high as 61 million Chinese lives.

⁵⁵ See: Jung Chang & Jon Halliday, *Mao: The Unknown Story*, (USA: Knopf, 2005).

⁵⁶ See respectively: Stephane Courtois & others, *The Black Book of Communism*, (USA: Harvard University Press, 1999), and R.J. Rummel, *op cit*, chapter 1.

⁵⁷ Quoted in *Conservative Digest*, (USA, 1975).

values? Can cosmic accidents really be said to have 'rights'? Even more important, how can life itself be thought to have any objective and lasting purpose, if it is only the product of a random universe rather than being the gift of an eternal and loving Creator?⁵⁸

Liberal-minded atheists commonly deny the reality of these philosophical problems, but it is a historical fact that disbelief in God has, in the minds of key thinkers, been directly related to their rejection of moral absolutes. The German philosopher, Nietzsche (1844-1900), for instance, proclaiming the 'death of all gods' at the end of the 19th century, did not shrink from spelling out the moral and social consequences of his atheistic creed of nihilism. Instead, he gloried in the cult of the 'superman' whose greatness and existential significance would lie in his 'will to power' - untrammelled by any moral scruples and convictions. In fact, Nietzsche explicitly recognised, in this context, that there would be no room in his Godless world of the future for the humanitarian values and impulses of Christianity:

"[Christian morality] granted man an absolute value, as opposed to his smallness and accidental occurrence in the flux of being and passing away...Morality guarded the underprivileged by assigning to each an infinite value...Supposing that the faith in this morality would perish, then the underprivileged would no longer have this comfort - and they would perish..."⁵⁹

Was it just an accident that within only four decades of his death, Nietzsche's terrible prophecy began to be fulfilled in the slaughterhouses of Communist Russia and Nazi Germany? Was it just a coincidence that both Hitler and the Italian Fascist dictator, Mussolini (1883-1945), were admirers of Nietzsche, and were equally explicit in rejecting the notion that the power of the State should be subordinate to an absolute moral code? To quote Mussolini:

"If relativism signifies contempt for fixed categories and men who claim to be bearers of an external objective truth, then there is nothing more relativistic than fascistic attitudes and activity...for the fascist, everything is in the State, and nothing human or spiritual exists, much less has value, outside the State. In this sense fascism is totalitarian..."⁶⁰

The link between atheism, moral relativism, and totalitarianism, is spelt out with similar clarity within Marxist ideology. To quote Marxism's co-founder, Friedrich Engels (1820-1895): "We...reject every attempt to impose on us any moral dogma whatever as eternal, ultimate and forever immutable moral law..."⁶¹ As a result, Engels, like Marx, had no difficulty in openly embracing the use of

⁵⁸ For a fuller discussion of these issues, see: Philip Vander Elst, 'Can we be free without God?' *The Journal of the Royal Army Chaplains' Department*, (Wiltshire, England, Volume 45, 2006), pp.57-61; see also: C.S. Lewis, *Miracles*, (Glasgow: Collins Fount Paperback, 1984) chapters 1-5.

⁵⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, (USA: Vintage, 1968, originally published in 1889) pp.9, 37.

⁶⁰ For the sources of these quotes and a fuller discussion of the link between atheism and totalitarianism, see: M. Stanton Evans, *op cit*, chapter 3, 'The Age of the Despots'.

⁶¹ Lewis Feuer, ed., *Marx and Engels*, (USA: Doubleday, 1959) p.272.

revolutionary terror to achieve the aims and objectives of Communism.⁶² But it was left to Lenin to set out, with unsparing frankness, the full political implications of this relativistic worldview: “The scientific concept, dictatorship, means neither more nor less than unlimited power, resting directly on force, not limited by anything, not restricted by any laws or any absolute rules. Nothing else but that.”⁶³

That omnipotent government has been the great curse of modern times, is readily apparent to anyone who has studied the history of Fascism and Communism. It becomes even more evident when one considers that the predatory State has also been (and continues to be) the principal cause of tyranny, corruption, bloodshed, and poverty, in the Third World. Of no continent has this been truer than Africa.

The destructive role of the State in the Third World

The dominant and politically correct view of Africa blames most of its ills on its colonial past and the supposed sins of Western capitalism⁶⁴ - a view shared by most leftists, ‘greens’, and anti-globalisation protesters – yet the real source of its problems lies elsewhere.⁶⁵ As Ghanaian economist, George Ayittey, has summarised it:

“One word, power, explains why Africa is in the grip of a never-ending cycle of wanton chaos, horrific carnage, senseless civil wars and collapsing economies: the struggle for power, its monopolisation by one individual or group, and the subsequent refusal to relinquish or share it. Since politics constitutes the gateway to fabulous wealth in Africa, the competition for political power has always been ferocious. The ‘winner takes all’ so competitors must fight to ‘their very last man’ – even if it means destroying the country.”⁶⁶

The facts clearly support George Ayittey’s thesis. Since 1960, more than 180 African heads of state have held power, but less than 20 relinquished it or retired voluntarily.⁶⁷ The sixteen West African countries alone, experienced 44 successful military coups, 43 failed coups, at least 82 coup plots, and 7 civil

⁶² For a full description of the totalitarian views and attitudes of Marx and Engels, see: Leopold Schwarzschild, *The Red Prussian: the life and legend of Karl Marx*, (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1948).

⁶³ Lenin, *Collected Works*, (Russian edition, Vol. XXV) p.441; also quoted in: Alexander Dallin & George W. Breslauer, *Political Terror in Communist Systems*, (California: Stanford University Press, 1970) p.10.

⁶⁴ For a detailed discussion and refutation of this politically correct view of Africa and the Third World, see the following: Paul Johnson, *A History of the Modern World*, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1984) chapters 14 and 15; P.T. Bauer, *Dissent on Development: Studies and Debates in Development Economics*, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1971); P.T. Bauer, *Equality, the Third World and Economic Delusion*, (London: Methuen, 1981).

⁶⁵ See the above, plus the following works: Martin Meredith, *The State of Africa: a history of fifty years of independence*, (London: Free Press, 2005); George B.N. Ayittey, *Africa Betrayed*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1992); and finally: Johan Norberg, *In Defense of Global Capitalism*, (Washington D.C.: Cato Institute, 2005) especially pp. 104-111.

⁶⁶ George Ayittey, ‘The African Power Equation’, *The Washington Times*, 20th April 1998.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

wars between 1955 (when they got their independence) and 2004.⁶⁸ All this is bad enough, but the full horror of what has happened in post-colonial Africa only really hits home when one surveys the human cost of governmental despotism and warfare over half a century. According to Ayittey's calculations, more than 13 million Africans have been killed by their leaders since 1960, equivalent to twice the number of Jews murdered by Hitler.⁶⁹ This figure includes: 200,000 Ugandans slaughtered by Idi Amin in the 1970s; 100,000 citizens of Equatorial Guinea butchered by President Marcias Nguema during the same decade; 800,000 victims of genocide in Rwanda; over 400,000 Ethiopians killed under the Mengistu regime; 300,000 annihilated in Burundi; over 500,000 destroyed in Somalia during the rule of Siad Barre; and the deaths of another 11.5 million Africans in civil wars in Nigeria, the Sudan, Angola, Mozambique, the Congo, Liberia, Sierra Leone and the Ivory Coast.⁷⁰

The destructive impact of gangster governments on African societies cannot simply be measured in lost lives and war-ravaged economies. It also includes the looting of whole industries and countries by corrupt dictators and their bureaucracies. In June 2002, President Obasanjo of Nigeria claimed that "corrupt African leaders have stolen at least \$140 billion (£95 billion) from their people in the decades since independence."⁷¹ Other estimates of the cost of official corruption in Africa are much higher. According to John O'Shea, the CEO of the international humanitarian agency, Goal UK: "By the African Union's own estimates, Africa loses \$148 billion a year, or a quarter of its entire GDP, to corruption, and in 2004 a U. S. Senate committee estimated that the World Bank has lost \$100 billion to corruption since 1946 – almost 20% of its total lending portfolio."⁷² The United Nations similarly calculated that in 1991 alone, over \$200 billion was siphoned out of Africa by the ruling elite, *more than half* the continent's foreign debt.⁷³

The concentration and abuse of State power has not only characterised the history and politics of post-colonial Africa; it has also been, and remains, a critical factor in the violent and illiberal political cultures of much of the Arab and Islamic world. As long ago as 1926, an Arab writer, Muhammad al-Mutti Bakhit, declared: "The Islamic religion is based on the pursuit of domination and power

⁶⁸ Patrick J. McGowan, Stellenbosch University and Arizona State University, 'Coups and Conflict in West Africa, 1955-2004', *Armed Forces & Society*, Vol. 32, No. 1, 5-23 (2005), Inter-University Seminar on Armed Forces and Society.

⁶⁹ George Ayittey, 'Dr Ayittey offers a quick response to the questions addressed to him by Sadiq Manzan', (<http://www.utexas.edu/conferences/africa/ads/273.html>), 2006.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Reported in the *Independent* (London), 14th June 2002, and posted on the web at: www.independent.co.uk.

⁷² Letter published in the *Sunday Telegraph* (London), 18th March 2007.

⁷³ George Ayittey, 'Africa's shady politicians are at root of continent's destitution', 27th August 2002, (<http://www.aworldconnected.org/article.php/227.html>).

and strength and might.”⁷⁴ Whilst many contemporary Muslims would deny this, and are totally sincere in their desire to live at peace with their neighbours in free societies, Islam’s critics point out that being a militantly theocratic religion which does not recognise any distinction between ‘Church and State’, Islam has an innate tendency to create political communities within which the power of government is used to enforce religious and ideological conformity. Whether or not this view is correct, it is sadly the case that despite the efforts and protests of many of their bravest writers and social activists (especially in countries like Iran, Egypt and Algeria), most Arab and Muslim countries are ruled by dictatorial regimes with little respect for human rights or for political, ethnic, or religious minorities. According to the *Arab Human Development Report 2002*, published by a group of Arab researchers from the U.N. Development Programme, out of the seven regions of the world, Arab countries had the lowest score for freedom, a finding regularly confirmed by Freedom House’s annual global surveys of political rights and civil liberties.⁷⁵

Given these factors and their lack of any genuine heritage of freedom, it is hardly surprising that violence, not peaceful debate, has been the usual midwife of political change within most Arab and Islamic countries. Between 1948 and 1979, for instance, 25 heads of state and prime ministers, and 20 former prime ministers and senior ministers of Islamic countries were assassinated. Numerous unsuccessful murder attempts were also made on the lives of other political leaders, including 14 known attempts to kill the late King Hussein of Jordan. In the same thirty-year period there were 22 inter-Muslim wars and civil wars, and on 32 occasions between 1958 and 1979, Muslim states broke off relations with other Muslim states.⁷⁶

The unholy alliance between tyranny and violence has been equally prevalent in the Arab-Islamic world since 1979. In the case of Iraq, for instance, it is estimated that 200,000 people died in Saddam Hussein’s prisons and torture chambers between 1979 and 2003.⁷⁷ Much the same picture emerges from neighbouring Iran. As one Iranian has summarised the results of the late Ayatollah Khomeini’s rule (1979-89): “since 1979 more than 1.2 million Iranians have been killed in war, tribal revolts, counter-revolutionary insurgency and mass executions ordered by the government...More than a million Iranians have spent some time in prison during the past decade, with an estimated 100,000 still behind bars. A further two million people, among them many of the nation’s technocrats and teachers, have fled the country.”⁷⁸ The story in Lebanon, Algeria and the Sudan has been similarly dreadful. It is estimated that 95,000 Lebanese died in the civil war between Christians and Muslims (1975-

⁷⁴ Muhammad al-Mutti Bakhit, in *Haquiaat al-Islam wa usul al-Hukm*, (Cairo 1926) quoted by Albert Hourani in *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798-1939*, (Oxford University Press, 1970).

⁷⁵ See, for instance: *Freedom In The World 2006*, Freedom House (<http://www.freedomhouse.org>).

⁷⁶ See: John Laffin, *op cit*, pp.158-159.

⁷⁷ John F. Burns, *New York Times*, 27th January 2003.

⁷⁸ Amir Taheri, ‘Ten years of torment’, *The Times* (London), 1st February 1989.

82),⁷⁹ and nearly 200,000 Algerians have been killed since 1992 in the civil war between the military government and the radical Islamist opposition.⁸⁰ As for the victims of genocide in the Sudan, these not only include the 300,000 deaths between February 2003 and December 2004 in Darfur;⁸¹ but also the slaughter of over half a million black Africans during the war waged by the Arab north against the non-Arab south from 1956-1970.⁸²

The terrible suffering inflicted on the peoples of the Third World by repressive, violent, and corrupt governments over the past half-century, has been further exacerbated by the pursuit of socialist models of development during much of this period. In country after country, State ownership, disregard for property rights, high taxes, central planning, price controls and tariff barriers, have strangled trade and enterprise, wasted resources, deepened poverty, and damaged the environment. Whenever, on the other hand, such countries have taken the path of economic liberalisation, growth rates and living standards have improved dramatically for the majority of the population, and pollution has decreased. This may be hard to accept for those overly influenced by the anti-capitalist ideology of so much of the aid lobby and the 'green movement', but it is an assertion supported by a huge mass of empirical evidence from many and varied sources. Those who doubt this should read *In Defense of Global Capitalism* (Cato Institute, 2005), an excellent and readable presentation and summary of this evidence by a young Swedish economist, Johan Norberg.⁸³

The threat posed by the State to human liberty and welfare, has not, as was once hoped, appreciably diminished as a worldwide phenomenon since the collapse of the Soviet empire at the beginning of the 1990s. Communist dictatorships are still in power in China, Vietnam, North Korea, and Cuba, and radical Islamism's intolerant and theocratic creed threatens the rights and liberties of both Muslims and non-Muslims. The annual global surveys of human rights organisations like Freedom House, show just how widespread governmental tyranny is in today's world. According to its *Freedom in the World 2008* report,⁸⁴ for example, at least 36% of the world's population live under dictatorships – a figure representing over 2 billion people in 43 countries. Another 18% of the world's population live in 60 only partially free countries, due to corruption, dominant ruling parties, or ethnic and religious strife. In other words what this means, is that *more than half* of all humanity (54% of the world's population) lack the rights and liberties we take for granted in the West.

⁷⁹ Jillian Becker, *The PLO*, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1984) p.212.

⁸⁰ See: the Justice Commission for Algeria, *Human Rights Violations in Algeria (1992-2004)*, 32nd Session (5-8 November 2004) p.3.

⁸¹ Dr Jan Coebergh, *Parliamentary Brief*, London, February 2005, (<http://www.sudantribune.com>, 22nd September 2006.

⁸² Leonard J. Davis, *Myths And Facts*, (Washington D.C.: Near East Report, 1985) p.139.

⁸³ See also the works of P.T. Bauer, *op cit*; and Peruvian economist: Hernando De Soto, *The Mystery of Capital*, (London: Black Swan, 2001).

⁸⁴ Freedom House press release, 'Freedom in the World 2008: Global Freedom in Retreat,' Washington DC, 16 January 2008.

The exception that proves the rule

If the growth of the State is as dangerous as its libertarian critics make out, some may wonder how we've managed to preserve freedom in Western Europe, North America, and Australasia, for most of the 20th century. Has it not been possible to live freely under left-wing governments? And has this not shown the viability of democratic socialism and its compatibility with the maintenance of free institutions?

The short answer to this question is that the experience of socialism in the West has been the exception that proves the rule. Socialism did not destroy our liberties, because its advance was checked by the resistance of non-socialist parties, organisations and voters,⁸⁵ and also by the slow but growing realisation on the Left that socialism could not be fully implemented without totalitarian consequences. Whilst a majority of Western intellectuals eagerly embraced this new secular religion during the first half of the last century, doubts about it began to accumulate in a growing number of minds as the decades wore on. One landmark in this process of intellectual awakening was the wartime publication, in 1944, of F.A. Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom*.⁸⁶ Dedicated "to the socialists of all parties," Hayek, an Austrian economist originally sympathetic to socialism, explained its incompatibility with liberty in polite but unsparing detail, reminding his readers of the role it had played in the ideology of Nazism and Fascism. Praised (though not uncritically) by such giants of the British academic and literary establishments as Keynes and Orwell, *The Road to Serfdom* was a huge bestseller on both sides of the Atlantic,⁸⁷ and has remained in print ever since. Another popular and influential assault on the secular creed of the Left, was mounted, eleven years later, by Max Eastman, a luminary of the American literary scene, and a former friend of Lenin and Trotsky. Entitled *Reflections on the Failure of Socialism*,⁸⁸ Eastman's bestseller, like Hayek's, showed how Soviet totalitarianism was the logical and inevitable outcome of socialist ideas and institutions, an analysis all the more impressive for coming from the pen of a prominent former leftist.

Despite the cogency and truthfulness of such critiques, many on the Left refused to abandon their illusions about socialism for several decades. Instead,

⁸⁵ For a detailed history of the rise of the anti-socialist opposition in Britain, see: Kenneth D. Brown (editor), *Essays in Anti-Labour History*, (London: Macmillan, 1974). For an example of an early 20th century critique of socialism, see: W.H. Mallock, *A Critical Examination of Socialism*, with a new introduction by Russell Kirk, (USA: Transaction Publishers, 1989, originally published by John Murray in 1908).

⁸⁶ See note 52 for details of this book and other landmark anti-socialist critiques.

⁸⁷ For a detailed history of its publication and impact, see: *Hayek's 'Serfdom' Revisited*, essays by economists, philosophers and political scientists on 'The Road to Serfdom' after 40 years, (London: Institute of Economic Affairs, 1984).

⁸⁸ Published by The Devin-Adair Company, New York, 1955.

they indulged in the worst kind of fellow-travelling, painting rosy pictures of life in the Soviet Union during the 1920s and '30s, and then, when that became impossible to sustain by the 1950s, transferring their emotional allegiance to Communist China, Cuba, and North Vietnam.⁸⁹ Others, by contrast, recognised the oppressive character of these (and other) Communist regimes, but were unwilling to acknowledge its relevance to the debate about socialism. That said, disillusionment with traditional socialism did gradually become more widespread on the Left,⁹⁰ culminating in the British Labour Party's abandonment, in the 1990s, of its official (Clause IV) commitment to blanket nationalisation – a piece of ideological baggage discarded long before by most of its sister parties in Western Europe. Perhaps these words, written in the *Guardian* in 1978 by its then most prominent columnist, Peter Jenkins, best sums up the lessons eventually learnt (however imperfectly) by the democratic Left: "It is becoming startlingly obvious that the more liberal economies are the more successful. At the same time the entire experience of the twentieth century demonstrates that nowhere have political freedom and full-scale socialism proved compatible."

The State's negative role in the Western world

Although the threat of full-blooded socialism has never materialised in the Western world, this does not mean that the State was a benign force in Western societies during most of the 20th century. Quite the opposite is the case. In the period between the two World Wars, for instance, the gross mismanagement of national monetary systems by the relevant State authorities – notably the American Federal Reserve System – stoked the fires of inflation during the 1920s, culminating in the Wall Street Crash of 1929 and the onset of the Great Depression of the 1930s. That Great Depression, moreover, was made more certain and lasting by the erection, by all Western countries, of huge barriers against each other's exports – an act of government which predictably destroyed international trade, and with it, the jobs and livelihoods of millions of people throughout the world. Worse still, the creation, by the Roosevelt Administration, of an elaborate and quasi-socialist structure of government taxes, price controls, planning boards, monopolies, and other restrictions on American trade and enterprise, discouraged production and investment, and prevented market forces from bringing about that readjustment of costs and prices which could alone have restored full employment. As a result, despite his psychological and political success in creating a new mood of hope and unity among the American people, President Roosevelt's 'New Deal' of the 1930s was an economic failure. It did *not* cure mass unemployment. Nor did similar

⁸⁹ For a detailed study of this phenomenon, see: Paul Hollander, *Political Pilgrims*, (Oxford University Press, 1981).

⁹⁰ See, for instance: David Selbourne, *Against Socialist Illusion*, (London: Macmillan, 1985). Also: David Webster, *The Labour Party and The New Left*, Fabian tract 477, (London: Fabian Society, 1981).

policies in Britain and other European democracies. Only World War II achieved that!⁹¹

This analysis is so contrary to the received myth that the Great Depression was a 'crisis of capitalism' that many may be tempted to reject it, but they would be wrong to do so. It was not the system of economic freedom defended by the classical liberals of the 19th century that failed, but the obstruction and partial abrogation of that system by irresponsible and interventionist governments. That, at any rate, was the opinion of two Nobel Prize-winning economists, Milton Friedman and F.A. Hayek, and it is fully justified by the evidence.⁹²

In the last two decades of the 20th century, there was a reaction in many countries, notably Britain, against the economic failures of past socialist and interventionist governments, especially in relation to the disincentive effects of confiscatory taxation,⁹³ and the poor economic performance of State-owned companies and industries.⁹⁴ As a consequence, there was a general worldwide movement towards the privatisation and liberalisation of Western (and non-Western) economies. But this does not mean that today there is less need to worry about the power and conduct of the State in Western democracies like Britain.

To begin with, the intrusion of Government into all of our lives is extensive since it still taxes us heavily, and regulates more and more of our activities - a pattern common to most advanced Western countries. In Britain under New Labour, for instance, the average taxpayer has to spend the first 5 months of the year

⁹¹ For a full and detailed discussion of the true causes of the Great Depression and the economic crises of the 1920s and '30s, including the failure of President Roosevelt's New Deal, see the following studies: Murray N. Rothbard, *America's Great Depression*, (USA: Sheed & Ward, 1975); also by same author: *What Has Government Done to Our Money*, (California: Rampart College Publication, 1974); Benjamin M. Anderson, *Economics and The Public Welfare: a financial and economic history of the United States, 1914-1946*, (USA: Liberty Fund, 2006, originally published by Van Nostrand in 1949); Hans F. Sennholz, *The Great Depression: Will We Repeat It?* (New York: Foundation for Economic Education, 1993); Milton Friedman, *Capitalism And Freedom*, (University of Chicago Press, 1968), chapter 3. Also: Hayek, von Mises, and others, *The Austrian Theory of the Trade Cycle and Other Essays*, (New York: Center for Libertarian Studies, 1978); and finally, for the general reader, a book endorsed by two Nobel Prize-winning economists: Jim Powell, *FDR's Folly: How Roosevelt and His New Deal Prolonged the Great Depression* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2004).

⁹² See above. Hayek and Friedman won their Nobel Prizes, respectively, in 1974 and 1976.

⁹³ See for instance: D.R. Myddelton, *The Power To Destroy: a study of the British tax system*, (London: The Society for Individual Freedom, 1994).

⁹⁴ In relation to Britain, see for instance: Richard Pryke, *The Nationalised Industries*, (London: Martin Robertson, 1981); George Polanyi, *Comparative Returns from Investment in Nationalised Industries*, (London: Institute of Economic Affairs, 1968). In relation to the USA, see: James T. Bennett & Manuel H. Johnson, *Better Government at half the price: private production of public services*, (USA: Caroline House Publishers, 1981). For a general exposition of the failure of socialist and interventionist economic policies in Britain, see: David Galloway, *The Public Prodigals*, (London: Temple Smith, 1976); also: S.C. Littlechild, *The Fallacy of the Mixed Economy*, (London: Institute of Economic Affairs, Hobart Paper 80, 1986).

working entirely for the State, before he or she can keep a penny of their earnings for themselves. 'Tax Freedom Day' only fell, in 2007, on the 1st June. In 1963, by contrast, 'Tax Freedom Day' for the average taxpayer fell on the 24th April, more than a month earlier.⁹⁵ Overall, the British Government in 2007 took and spent 45.3% of our national product (GDP), an increase of 7.8% in the share of our GDP swallowed up by public expenditure since 2000. That represents one of the fastest increases in State spending ever recorded by a wealthy country in peacetime. To this must further be added the annual cost to the British economy of Government regulation, which in 2007 stood at about £120 billion, equivalent to around 10% of our entire GDP. On top of all this, 6.95 million people are employed by the State – around a quarter of the total working population (an increase of over 900,000 under New Labour)⁹⁶ – and the State controls the provision of nearly everyone's health care and education. Nor is this delineation of the size and scope of Government in Britain a complete one. According to a recent study by a British barrister, for example, there are now 266 ways in which the State can enter our homes with or without a warrant, and the number of these powers given to officials to invade our homes and businesses has increased enormously since 1970. In almost every case fines of up to £5,000 can be imposed for 'obstructing' these said officials.⁹⁷

Some may argue that it is desirable that the power and 'reach' of Government should be as intrusive and extensive as it is in contemporary Britain. Don't we need Government regulations to maintain standards and protect the public against commercial exploitation? Is it not right that schools and hospitals should be paid for and provided by the State to ensure that nobody is denied decent health care and education through poverty? And in any case, are we not a national 'family' responsible for each other's wellbeing, and governed by people who are fully accountable to us as our elected representatives? Why should we worry about the power of Government when we can punish and rectify its abuse at the ballot box?

Much of the answer to these questions has already been set out in the earlier portions of this paper dealing with the nature of the State and the problems of human motivation in a fallen and morally damaged world. The difference between democracy and liberty, and the potential conflict between the two, has similarly been discussed. But there are also other reasons why all of us, Christians in particular, should be concerned about the size and scope of government in modern Britain.

⁹⁵ See the Adam Smith Institute (London) website for details: (<http://adamsmith.org/tax>).

⁹⁶ For the source of these figures and further details about New Labour's stewardship of the British economy, see: Allister Heath, 'Blair Can't Take The Credit', *Blair: A Modern Tragedy: the definitive guide to the Tony Blair era*, a special supplement, *The Business*, 12th May 2007.

⁹⁷ Harry Snook, *Crossing the Threshold: 266 ways in which the State can enter your home*, (London: Centre for Policy Studies, 2007).

In the first place, we should not confuse the State with society, let alone the family. Whilst it is right that the idea of community includes the State, it is not a mirror image of it because government is impersonal and coercive, whereas true community, in the best sense of the word, is based on voluntary co-operation rooted and expressed in personal relationships. In the same way, we can only be genuinely loving and caring human beings, and truly altruistic, if our giving and our service of others is genuinely voluntary and personal. That is why it simply doesn't follow that because, under God, we have a duty to help those in need, we should discharge our obligations to them through the mechanism of the State. On the contrary, by its very nature, the State is one of the least effective instruments for the relief of suffering and want. It has no resources of its own other than what it is able to extract by force from its taxpaying citizens. Consequently, any unnecessary extension of its remit into the field of welfare provision only reduces the capacity of individuals and families to care for themselves and their neighbours. For these reasons, the classical liberals of the 19th century were instinctively reluctant to allow the State to play more than a residual 'last resort' role in the provision of welfare. They preferred instead to rely on mutual aid and private philanthropy, as well as the productive vitality of a free economy, to lift the poor and the needy out of poverty.

Despite the unpopularity of this view today, the history of Government welfare provision in the 20th century has certainly justified their forebodings. As experience has shown, and study after study has documented, the increasing usurpation by Government of the welfare functions of the family and civil society has had similarly harmful consequences in nearly all advanced Western countries. It has undermined personal responsibility and independence; restricted the growth of charities and the voluntary sector below what it otherwise might have been; and worst of all, has created a seemingly intractable culture of welfare dependency. In the process, it has weakened the family and increased the power of the State over the lives and destinies of the poor.⁹⁸ Is this a result we can really be proud of? Does the modern Welfare State truly represent 'the compassionate society'?

The general and largely unquestioned belief that the State should be the major provider of education and health care in Britain is no better founded than the notion that the relief of poverty is primarily the responsibility of Government. Since the overwhelming majority of the population actually pay taxes, including those with well below average earnings, it is nonsense to pretend, like so many

⁹⁸ For an analysis of the failure of the Welfare State in Britain and the classical liberal alternative to it, see the following: James Bartholomew, *The Welfare State We're In*, (London: Politico's, 2004); David G. Green, *Community Without Politics*, (London: Institute of Economic Affairs, 1996); and finally: David G. Green, *An End to Welfare Rights*, (London: Institute of Economic Affairs, 1999). For an analysis of the failure of welfare policy in the United States, see: Charles Murray, *Losing Ground: American social policy 1950-1980*, (New York: Basic Books, 1984).

politicians do, that anyone – apart from a tiny minority – receives ‘free’ schooling or medical care. They obviously do not. What really happens is that instead of most parents, for example, being able to choose for themselves how to spend their own money on their children’s education, their pockets are forcibly picked by the State to finance the provision (via local education authorities) of government-owned and controlled schools. This means that since the State is the monopolistic provider of these schools - paying for the buildings and the equipment, employing the teachers, and determining teaching methods, curriculum, and admissions policies – most parents have little choice but to accept, on behalf of their children, whatever they are given. At the same time, the freedom of headteachers and their staffs to experiment, and to decide for themselves how to run their schools in response to the needs and wishes of pupils and parents, is equally constrained. In short, State provision and control does not add to the resources going into education. It merely acts as a monopolistic straitjacket which strangles initiative and destroys choice and accountability. The end result is that the competitive pressures and incentives that would otherwise operate in a free market to maintain standards (as they do in the small independent sector) are wholly absent.

Would it not be better to reverse this situation by making *all* schools independent of the State, with parents free to choose between them as a result of having their taxes returned to them in the form of education vouchers cashable at the schools of their choice?⁹⁹ If parents are deemed intelligent and responsible enough to have the vote, should they not be trusted to pick the right schools for their children? Much the same arguments apply to the relationships between patients, doctors and officials within the National Health Service, though the case for Government involvement in health care is much stronger than in education given such factors as the high costs of medical care, the difficulties of looking after the elderly, and the problem of obtaining affordable private health insurance for the chronic sick and those with inherited genetic disorders.

All this is not simply a matter of theoretical conjecture and argument: it has been amply confirmed by the experience of the last 60 years, during which the failings of State education and health care have been extensively recorded and analysed, both in Britain and, for that matter, in the USA.¹⁰⁰ One recent front-

⁹⁹ For a vigorous critique of the failure of State education in Britain, and for an exposition of the case for education vouchers, see: Professor Antony Flew, *Power to the Parents*, (London: Sherwood Press, 1987).

¹⁰⁰ For a detailed and well documented analysis of the failure of State education in Britain, and the alternative to it, see: Dr Rhodes Boyson, *The Crisis In Education*, (London: Woburn Press, 1975); S.R. Dennison, *Choice in Education*, Hobart Paperback 19, (London: Institute of Economic Affairs, 1984); E.G. West, *Education and the State*, (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1994); and finally: James Tooley & James Stanfield, editors, *Government Failure: E.G. West on Education*, (London: Institute of Economic Affairs, 2003). For an analysis of the failure of State education in the United States, and a libertarian alternative to it, see: Thomas Sowell, *Inside American Education*, (New York: Free Press, 1993); also relevant chapters in E.G. West’s writings, *op cit*. For an analysis of the failure of the Swedish Welfare State and its illiberal

page news story in a leading British newspaper provides a sad summary of the failure of the British Welfare State to deliver the results once hoped for. Under the heading, “A generation betrayed”, the story begins: “A ‘lost generation’ of unemployed young people is costing the economy billions of pounds a year in benefits, youth crime and educational under-achievement, a major report discloses today...Roughly one in five young people faces a lifetime on government handouts, under-achieving in education and runs the risk of falling into crime, says a report by the London School of Economics for the Prince’s Trust charity.”¹⁰¹

The failure of the British Welfare State to maintain educational standards and prevent the growth of irresponsible behaviour, crime, and welfare dependency, has not, to be fair, been solely due to the shortcomings of Government. Much of it is also attributable to the decay of moral values within a post-Christian secular culture, and the breakdown of marriage and the traditional family. As more and more people have lost any sense of the existence of God and their accountability to Him, so their consciousness of their duties and their sense of accountability to each other has been correspondingly weakened, especially in regard to sexual ethics and behaviour. To quote the revealing and prophetic words of one of the most famous English novelists and atheists of the 1930s, Aldous Huxley: “For myself, as no doubt for most of my contemporaries, the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation. The liberation we desired was simultaneously liberation from a certain political and economic system and liberation from a certain system of morality. We objected to the morality because it interfered with our sexual freedom.”¹⁰² Unfortunately, by enslaving so many to their sexual desires and appetites, this “liberation from a certain system of morality” has not resulted in any growth of inner freedom. It has merely helped, over a long period of time, to fragment families, and by doing so, has contributed to the destruction of young people’s sense of security and significance. That is why teachers and social workers in Britain have been increasingly overwhelmed by a rising tide of youthful delinquency. They are trying to pick up the pieces of a crumbling society.

Despite this important *caveat*, however, it still remains the case that the excessive enlargement of the sphere of the State has contributed to this process of moral and cultural decay. It has not only done so by undermining the

consequences, see: Roland Huntford, *The New Totalitarians*, (London: Allen Lane, Penguin Press, 1971); also: Peter Stein, ‘Sweden: Failure of the Welfare State,’ *The Journal of Economic Growth*, (Vol.2, No.4, 1987). For a general critique of State education, State health care and State controlled ‘public goods’, as well as an exposition of the classical liberal alternatives to them, see: Arthur Seldon, *Charge*, (London: Temple Smith, 1977); also, again: James Bartholomew, *op cit*. For a readable and provocative critique of the State and its failures in every field, and an exposition of the extreme libertarian alternative to it, see: Murray N. Rothbard, *The Libertarian Manifesto*, (New York: Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1978).

¹⁰¹ *The Daily Telegraph*, 10th April 2007.

¹⁰² Aldous Huxley, ‘Confessions of a Professed Atheist,’ *Report: Perspective on the News*, vol.3, June 1966, page 19, quoted in McDowell & Williams, *In Search of Certainty*, (Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 2003).

independence and self-determination of the family, it has also made matters worse by making it harder for the State to perform its traditional function of maintaining law and order and protecting its citizens against criminals.¹⁰³ Obviously, if Government does too much, it will not have the resources and capacity to do any one thing properly. That is why, among other things, it has failed in Britain to maintain a decent transport infrastructure and proper defences against flooding and water shortages.

Two widespread but erroneous ideas

The difficulty of keeping the power of modern Government within its proper limits is exacerbated by the prevalence of two widespread but erroneous ideas. Of these, the first and the oldest is the understandable desire to use the State as an instrument for countering or correcting the unfairness of life. Why, it is asked, should some people have more opportunities and a fuller life than others, simply because, through no merit of their own, they come from more fortunate family backgrounds and their parents can buy them a better education? Why should so many people's chances of happiness be blighted by ill health, ugliness, bad luck, or lack of intelligence? Even if it is granted that people should be allowed to reap the full and unequal rewards of their varied talents and efforts, shouldn't the power of the State be used to ensure a 'level playing field' for all at the 'starting gate' of life?

That life is 'unfair' no Christian would deny. It is an inevitable feature of an imperfect and corrupted world, and we are certainly called to do what we can to alleviate it. We serve a God who 'numbers the hairs on our heads,' 'knows the fall of every sparrow,' and cares about 'the widow, the orphan and the stranger.' Yet, once again, it does not follow that we can or should use the instrument of Government for this purpose. To try to do so is to permanently threaten liberty, since the achievement of strict equality of opportunity is impossible without the abolition of the family and private property. This is because even were it possible to give everyone in a particular generation an equal chance at the outset, natural differences of character and ability would quickly result over time in unequal rewards, and therefore unequal family circumstances and opportunities for subsequent generations. If an egalitarian government took draconian redistributive measures to restore equality of opportunity, it would have to do so repeatedly, thereby violating property rights, denying effort and achievement its legitimate reward, and creating a totalitarian collectivist society dominated by an all-powerful bureaucratic elite – precisely the socialist trap

¹⁰³ For a powerful and well documented analysis of both the failure of the British State to maintain order and combat crime, and its growing threat to the liberty of the citizen, see: Peter Hitchens, *The Abolition of Liberty: the decline of order and justice in England*, (London: Atlantic Books, 2004).

foreseen by the classical liberals of the 19th century, and made so hideously real under the Communist regimes of the 20th.¹⁰⁴

The other erroneous and dangerous idea, one that lies at the heart of contemporary political correctness, is the notion that people must not be allowed to discriminate against each other or express opinions that can be interpreted as condemning or threatening minorities, be they ethnic, religious, or sexual. As a result, we are seeing increasingly blatant attempts in Britain and elsewhere, to use legislation, and therefore the power of the State, to outlaw any act or comment which can be represented as being threatening, unfair or discriminatory towards such minorities.¹⁰⁵ Yet the Common Law already punishes direct attempts to stir up hatred and violence against any individual or group, so why is there any need for new legislation? To prevent the airing of opinions considered obnoxious by a self-appointed politically correct elite? As for the issue of 'discrimination,' what 'right' is really at stake? Is it not the right of the individual to do what he likes with his own property and resources, so long as he acts peaceably and respects the equal rights of others in this regard? It is surely the hallmark of a free society that people should be able to express unpopular opinions without incurring a legal penalty. Should they not also be free to refuse to do business with, or employ, anyone they dislike or disapprove of? To deny this, is to say that others have the right to forcibly impose themselves upon particular individuals or organisations whenever a job is on offer, or a bed for the night, or some other private or commercial benefit or transaction. If people really hold morally offensive views about particular groups or issues, they should be confronted and challenged through peaceful demonstration and debate, not coerced. Only in this way is it possible to win over hearts and minds to truth without violating freedom of conscience. Those who think, nevertheless, that State censorship of politically incorrect attitudes and opinions is morally justified, would do well to remember the words of George Orwell in his Preface to *Animal Farm* (1946): "If liberty means anything at all it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear." It also means the right to be prejudiced in ways that upset conventional opinion, including, for example, the right of dissident scientists and commentators to criticise the new orthodoxy on man-made climate change - something that seems to be becoming increasingly difficult owing to the fact that so many climate scientists are now dependent on State funding and approval for their research and careers.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ For a detailed and trenchant philosophical analysis of egalitarianism and its threat to liberty and justice, see: Antony Flew, *The Politics of Procrustes*, (London: Temple Smith, 1981); and also: Keith Joseph & Jonathan Sumption, *Equality*, (London: John Murray, 1979).

¹⁰⁵ See, for instance: *New 'gay rights' regulations rushed through Parliament*, (Newcastle: Christian Institute, April 2007). See also other information on this and related subjects, on the Christian Institute's website: (<http://www.Christian.org.uk>).

¹⁰⁶ For a critique by dissident climate scientists and other commentators (including former members of Greenpeace) of the new dogma of man-made global warming, see the recent television documentary, *The Great Global Warming Swindle*, (Despatches, Channel 4, 8th March 2007). Also: Patrick J. Michaels (past president of the American Association of State Climatologists and a contributing author to the U.N.

The danger to liberty of supranational government

The problem of Governmental power, and the potential threat it always represents, is extremely relevant to another important and topical issue of 21st century politics: the debate about supra-nationalism versus national sovereignty.

The supporters of supranational bodies like the United Nations and the European Union typically argue that since national rivalry is the principal cause of war, the surest way to preserve peace for future generations is to move towards some system of European or world government (depending on the context) with the power to override selfish national interests.¹⁰⁷ They similarly argue that since national sovereignty is the hedge behind which Third World dictators shelter from international criticism, the best way to protect and advance human rights is, again, by clipping the wings of the nation-state. But these propositions fly in the face of all the evidence and lessons of history discussed in this paper.

As has already been shown, whilst nationalism and tribalism have obviously played an important part in provoking conflict, the principal cause of tyranny and war down the ages has always been the over-mighty State and the fallen and imperfect nature of the human beings in charge of it. Why then should anyone believe that it would ever be safe to concentrate power in a European or World State? Would that not be jumping from the frying pan into the fire? And in any case, what reason is there to believe that a supranational political and legal system would provide better government and fairer decisions than the political and legal institutions of liberal nation-states?¹⁰⁸ Does the current condition of the world suggest that human nature is being so transformed for the better as to make this at all likely? Moreover, how could any world government system function as it should, when so many UN member countries are run by crooks and despots?

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change), *Meltdown: The Predictable Distortion of Global Warming by Scientists, Politicians and the Media*, (Washington DC: Cato Institute, 2004).

¹⁰⁷ For a recent critique of the argument for European unification, and a defence of the nation-state, see: Philip Vander Elst, *The Principles of British Foreign Policy*, (London: Bruges Group, 2008).

¹⁰⁸ For an analysis and exposure, for instance, of the damage inflicted on Britain by her membership of the European Union and her subordination to EU laws and regulations, see the following studies: Christopher Booker & Richard North, *The Castle of Lies: why Britain must get out of Europe*, (London: Duckworth, 1996); Ian Milne, *A Cost Too Far? an analysis of the net economic costs and benefits for the UK of EU membership*, (London: Civitas, 2004); Gerard Batten MEP, *How much does the European Union cost Britain?*, (U.K. Independence Party, 2007); Tom Wise MEP, *Dead In The Water: how the Common Fisheries Policy destroys lives, economies and environments*, (U.K. Independence Party, 2008). For recent critical analyses of the character and performance of the United Nations and its network of related legal and cultural institutions and conventions, see, for instance: Andrew C. McCarthy, 'International Law v. United States,' (New York: *Commentary* magazine, February 2006; and Claudia Rosett, 'How Corrupt Is the United Nations?' (New York: *Commentary*, April 2006).

Before climbing onto the supranationalist bandwagon in the name of 'world peace,' Christians and others should take note of two important facts established by Professor R.J. Rummel's fifty years of detailed research into the causes of human conflict and war. The first is that during the 20th century around 170 million people were slaughtered by their own rulers in internal repression – many more than perished in wars between separate countries. The second is that nearly all wars have either occurred between, or been provoked by, non-democracies.¹⁰⁹ What does this tell us? Simply this: the best way of securing a more peaceful and harmonious future for all is not by eliminating national sovereignty, but by encouraging the spread of liberty, rooted in limited government, tolerance, and the rule of law.

As this paper has argued, the defence and advancement of freedom is a necessary (though not a sufficient) condition of human welfare. It is essential to the release of creativity, the pursuit of truth, the growth of knowledge, and the creation of wealth. It is also essential to the moral growth of individuals and the containment of evil. But if freedom is to survive in the years ahead, many people need to revise their thinking about the nature and role of Government, and learn to recognise that its power to do good is as nothing compared with its power to inflict harm.

In the film *You've Got Mail*, Kathleen Kelly, the corner bookstore owner played by Meg Ryan, says at one point: "I lead a small life, but a valuable one." The tragedy of history is that so many millions of small but valuable lives have been trampled upon and crushed by the predatory State, a process that continues to this day. In the face of this fact, it must be the job of Christians, above all others, to remind people, once again, that whereas this world and its institutions are passing away, God created every human being in His image to share His life and love in His eternal kingdom. That means that the individual, with his immortal soul, is infinitely precious and may not be sacrificed to the transient idol of State Power.

¹⁰⁹ See: Rummel, *op cit*, and his other book, *Power Kills* (USA: Transaction Publishers, 1997).

The author

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He has been a writer and broadcaster on radio and television on both sides of the Atlantic. His many publications include: *Idealism Without Illusions: a foreign policy for freedom* (Freedom Association, 1989); *Resisting Leviathan: the case against a European State* (Claridge Press, 1991); *Libertarianism: a Christian critique* (Christian Institute, 2003); *C.S. Lewis: a short introduction* (Continuum, 2005); and most recently, *The Principles of British Foreign Policy* (The Bruges Group, 2008).

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