



Power Against People: A Christian Critique of the State

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*The following is an extract from Philip Vander Elst's full paper of the same title. The whole paper can be downloaded from [here](#), in order to follow the full arguments and see further explanatory examples. UCCF and **bethinking.org** offer this paper to encourage consideration of these important political topics, but do not endorse any particular view on these issues. An alternative view is given in Paul Bickley's paper *State Expectations*, also on **bethinking.org**.*

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. [...]

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 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.

[...]

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. [...]

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.

[...]

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.

[...]

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 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]

[...]

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 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. [...]

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 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.

[...]

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 around the leaders, and grinding poverty for the mass of the population.[52] [...] 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 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 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 capitalism[64] – 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 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.

[...]

The State's negative role in the Western world

[...]

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.

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 cooperation 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.

[...]

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 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." [...]

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 supranationalism 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.

[...]

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.

References:

N.B. The original reference numbering has been retained.

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[8] Professor R.J. Rummel *Death By Government* (Transaction Publishers, 1996), pp.70-71.

[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).

[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).

[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).

[51] 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', 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).

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

[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 *The Theme Is Freedom: religion, politics and the American tradition* (Washington DC: Regnery, 1994), chapter 3, 'The Age of the Despots'.

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

[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).

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[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.

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[67] *Ibid.*

[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.

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[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).

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

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