

Concepts of the Role of Intellectuals in Social Change Toward Laissez Faire*

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The creed of laissez faire—individual liberty, inviolate rights of property, free markets, and minimal government—is virtually bound to be a radical one. That is, this libertarian creed is necessarily set in profound conflict with existing forms of polity, which have generally been one or another variety of statism. In this paper, we concentrate, not on examining or justifying the laissez-faire doctrines of various thinkers, but, given those doctrines, how these writers and theorists proposed to try to bring about their ideal polity. In short, having adopted a profoundly radical creed at odds with the ruling dogmas of their day, what, if anything, did these theorists offer as a strategy for social change in the direction of liberty? We are familiar with how Marx and the Marxists met this challenge of how to proceed in the direction of a radical ideal. How did laissez-faire thinkers meet their own particular challenge, in some ways similar and in some ways quite different? In this paper, we do not presume to be comprehensive; we select several important laissez-faire intellectuals and groups of intellectuals, over the centuries, and see what solutions they could offer to the problem of libertarian social change.

To their credit, the Marxists have spent an enormous amount of their time and energy grappling with problems of strategy and tactics, much more so than have laissez-faire thinkers. On the other hand, the libertarians have not enjoyed the luxury of having a readily identifiable social class to ordain as the preferred agent of change (the “proletariat” for classical Marxists; the peasantry for Leninists-Maoists, and the lumpen proletariat and the “student class” for the short-lived New Left in the United States of the late 1960s.) Neither did the libertarians have the comfort of knowing that their triumph has been made inevitable by the “scien-

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tific laws of history," and by the irresistible if murky workings of the materialist dialectic.

All new, radical ideas and ideologies begin necessarily with one or a handful of lone intellectuals, and so through history such intellectuals, finding themselves in possession of a radical political creed, have realized that, if social change is ever to occur, the process must begin with themselves. Most classical liberal or laissez-faire activists have adopted, perhaps without much thoughtful consideration, a simple strategy that we may call "educationism." Roughly: We have arrived at the truth, but most people are still deluded believers in error; therefore, we must educate these people—via lectures, discussions, books, pamphlets, newspapers, or whatever—until they become converted to the correct point of view. For a minority to become a majority, a process of persuasion and conversion must take place—in a word, education.

To be sure, there is nothing wrong with this strategy so far as it goes. All new truths or creeds, be they scientific, artistic, religious, or political, must proceed in roughly this way: the new truth rippling out from the initial discoverers to disciples and proteges, to writers and journalists, to intellectuals and the lay public.¹ By itself, however, pure educationism is a naive strategy because it avoids pondering some difficult problems, e.g., how are we to confront the problem of power? Do we have to convert a large majority, a narrow one, or merely a critical mass of an articulate and dedicated minority? And if we perform such a conversion, what will happen to the State? Will it wither away (or wither to an ultraminimal nugget) by itself, automatically, as it were? And are there one or more groups that we should concentrate on in our agitation? Should we invest our necessarily scarce resources on one more likely group of converts rather than another? Should we be consistent and overt in our agitation, or should we practice the arts of deception until we are ready to strike? Are we most likely to make gains during one state of affairs in society rather than another? Will economic, military, or social crisis benefit our movement or hurt it? None of these problems is an easy one, and unfortunately the general run of laissez-faire thinkers and activists has devoted very little time to considering, let alone solving, them.

In this essay, we consider some outstanding laissez-faire intellectuals of the past, and how they went about pondering the problems of social change. And, in particular, as intellectuals, what they thought the role of intellectuals (perhaps including themselves) should be in fostering such change.

1. Retreatism: Taoism in Ancient China

The first libertarian intellectual was Lao-tzu, the founder of Taoism. Little is known about his life, but apparently he was a personal acquaintance of Confucius in the late sixth century B.C. and like the latter came from the state of Sung and was descended from the lower aristocracy of the Yin dynasty. Unlike the notable

apologist for the rule of philosopher-bureaucrats, however, Lao-tzu developed a radical libertarian creed. For Lao-tzu the individual and his happiness was the key unit and goal of society. If social institutions hampered the individual's flourishing and his happiness, then those institutions should be reduced or abolished altogether. To the individualist Lao-tzu, government, with its "laws and regulations more numerous than the hairs of an ox," was a vicious oppressor of the individual, and "more to be feared than fierce tigers." Government, in sum, must be limited to the smallest possible minimum; "inaction" was the proper function of government, since only inaction can permit the individual to flourish and achieve happiness. Any intervention by government, Lao-tzu declared, would be counterproductive, and would lead to confusion and turmoil. After referring to the common experience of mankind with government, Lao-tzu came to this incisive conclusion: "The more artificial taboos and restrictions there are in the world, the more the people are impoverished. . . . The more that laws and regulations are given prominence, the more thieves and robbers there will be."

The wisest course, then, is to keep the government simple and for it to take no action, for then the world "stabilizes itself." As Lao-tzu put it, "Therefore the Sage says: I take no action yet the people transform themselves, I favor quiescence and the people right themselves, I take no action and the people enrich themselves. . . ."

Lao-tzu arrived at his challenging and radical new insights in a world dominated by the power of Oriental despotism. What strategy to pursue for social change? It surely was unthinkable for Lao-tzu, with no available historical or contemporary example of libertarian social change, to set forth any optimistic strategy, let alone contemplate forming a mass movement to overthrow the State. And so Lao-tzu took the only strategic way out that seemed open to him, counseling the familiar Taoist path of withdrawal from society and the world, of retreat and inner contemplation.

I submit that while contemporary Taoists advocate retreat from the world as a matter of religious or ideological principle, it is very possible that Lao-tzu called for retreat not as a *principle*, but as the only strategy that in his despair seemed open to him. If it was hopeless to try to disentangle society from the oppressive coils of the State, then he perhaps assumed that the proper course was to counsel withdrawal from society and the world as the only way to escape State tyranny.²

That retreat from the State was a dominant Taoist objective may be seen in the views of the great Taoist Chuang-tzu (369–c. 286 B.C.) who, two centuries after Lao-tzu, pushed the master's ideas of laissez faire to their logical conclusion: individualist anarchism. The influential Chuang-tzu, a notable stylist who wrote in allegorical parables, was a highly learned man in the state of Meng, and also descended from the old aristocracy. A minor official in his native state, Chuang-tzu's fame as a writer spread far and wide throughout China, so much so that King Wei of the Ch'u kingdom sent an emissary to Chuang bearing great

gifts and urging him to become Wei's chief minister of state. Chuang-tzu's scornful rejection of the king's offer is one of the great declarations in history on the evils underlying the glittering trappings of State power; it was a fitting declaration from the man who was perhaps the world's first anarchist:

A thousand ounces of gold is indeed a great reward, and the office of chief minister is truly an elevated position. But have you, sir, not seen the sacrificial ox awaiting the sacrifices at the royal shrine of state? It is well cared for and fed for a few years, caparisoned with rich brocades, so that it will be ready to be led into the Great Temple. At that moment, even though it would gladly change places with any solitary pig, can it do so? So, quick and be off with you! Don't sully me, I would rather roam and idle about in a muddy ditch, at my own amusement, than to be put under the restraints that the ruler would impose. I will never take any official service, and thereby I will satisfy my own purposes.

Chuang-tzu reiterated and embellished Lao-tzu's devotion to *laissez faire* and opposition to state rule: "There has been such a thing as letting mankind alone; there has never been such a thing as governing mankind [with success]." In fact, the world simply "does not need governing; in fact it should not be governed." Chuang-tzu was also the first to work out the idea of "spontaneous order," developed particularly by Proudhon in the nineteenth and by F. A. Hayek of the Austrian School in the twentieth century: "Good order results spontaneously when things are let alone."

Chuang-tzu, moreover, was perhaps the first theorist to see the State as a brigand writ large: "A petty thief is put in jail. A great brigand becomes a ruler of a State." Thus the only difference between State rulers and out-and-out robber chieftains is the size of their depredations. This theme of ruler-as-robber was to be repeated, independently of course, by Cicero and then by St. Augustine and other Christian thinkers in the Middle Ages.³

2. La Boétie: Philosopher and Strategist of Civil Disobedience

The first modern libertarian political philosopher was a young French aristocrat of the mid-sixteenth century, Étienne de La Boétie (1530–1563). La Boétie's father was a royal official in the Perigord region in southwestern France; his mother was the sister of the president of the Bordeaux Parlement. Orphaned at an early age, Étienne was brought up by his uncle and namesake, the curate of Bouilhonnas. Receiving his law degree from the University of Orleans in 1553, La Boétie promptly gained a royal appointment to the Bordeaux Parlement, where he pursued a distinguished career as judge and diplomat until his untimely death in 1563 at the age of thirty-two. La Boétie was also known as a distinguished poet and humanist, translating Xenophon and Plutarch, and closely connected with the *Pléiade*, the leading group of young poets in France.

There was nothing libertarian about La Boétie's public career. Indeed, shortly before he died, he wrote but did not publish a manuscript, a "Memoir Concerning the Edict of January, 1562," in which La Boétie urged the French state to punish Protestant leaders as rebels and enforce Catholicism on France.⁴

La Boétie's great contribution to libertarian thought came while he was an unhappy law student, going through the sixteenth-century equivalent of a modern bohemian or "hippie" period of discontented youth. In addition, the University of Orleans was going through an intellectually exciting era of free inquiry and religious ferment. La Boétie's major mentor at the university was the fiery Anne du Bourg, not yet a Protestant but tending rapidly in that direction; only six years after La Boétie's graduation, du Bourg was to become a Huguenot martyr, burned at the stake for heresy. It was in this period of ferment that La Boétie composed his brief, but scintillating, profound, and deeply radical *Discourse of Voluntary Servitude* (*Discours de la Servitude Voluntaire*.) The *Discourse* was never published by La Boétie, but circulated widely in manuscript, *samizdat*-style form, and gained considerable fame in Perigordian intellectual circles.⁵

In the first place, a century before Hobbes and Locke, La Boétie used abstract, deductive reasoning to argue for the absolute, universal natural rights of liberty for every individual. Whereas the later radical Huguenot monarchomachs of the 1570s and 1580s used narrowly legal and historical arguments on behalf of French liberties, La Boétie dealt in timeless and general principles discoverable by reason, taking his historical examples solely from classical antiquity.

Secondly, La Boétie widened the classical and medieval concept of "tyranny" from vaguely defined one-man misrule to any State that violated the natural rights of the individual. Moreover, in another outstanding contribution, "tyranny" was broadened from the misrule of one despot to a State apparatus that serves the despot and shares in the privileges and exactions of State rule.

Third and most significant, La Boétie, two centuries before David Hume, saw that all tyranny, regardless how coercive or despotic, must rest in the long run on the consent of the majority of the people, since neither one man nor even a minority constituting the State apparatus can physically coerce the majority for very long. While, as La Boétie pointed out, every State rule originated in coercion and conquest, for the ruler to *remain* in power there must be consent by the general public.

If, then, State tyranny is kept in power by popular consent, the way to get rid of that power, the strategy for the achievement of liberty, becomes crystal clear. For the first time in the history of political thought, La Boétie concluded that the way to get rid of State tyranny is simple: a mass refusal to obey the orders of the State, especially the payment of the State's coerced taxes and exactions. There is no need to overthrow tyrants by force, La Boétie pointed out: "Obviously there is no need of fighting to overcome this single tyrant, for he is automatically defeated if the country refuses consent to its own enslavement." All that need

happen is for the tyrants to be deprived of the public's continuing supply of funds and resources. If they "are simply not obeyed," the tyrants become "undone and as nothing." La Boétie stirringly exhorts the "poor, wretched, and stupid peoples", blind to their own good, deprived and plundered of their properties and homes, to cast off their chains by refusing to supply the tyrants any further with the instruments of their own oppression. The tyrant, he points out, has

nothing more than the power that you confer upon him to destroy you. Where has he acquired enough eyes to spy upon you, if you do not provide them yourselves? How can he have so many arms to beat you with, if he does not borrow them from you? The feet that trample down your cities, where does he get them if they are not your own? How does he have any power over you except through you?

The answer, then, is not upheaval and bloodshed, but merely "willing to be free." In short,

Resolve to serve no more, and you are at once freed. I do not ask that you place hands upon the tyrant to topple him over, but simply that you support him no longer; then you will behold him, like a great Colossus whose pedestal has been pulled away, fall of his own weight and break in pieces.⁶

But if tyranny necessarily rests on popular consent, *why* do the masses customarily give such consent, and thereby support their own misery and destruction? Logically, then, La Boétie was led to what he considered the central problem of political theory, what we might call "the mystery of civil obedience." Or, why in the world do people continue to consent to their own enslavement? Why do people, in all times and places, obey the commands of a small minority of society that constitutes the government? Why, La Boétie cries out in anguish, why, when reason teaches us the justice of natural rights and equal liberty for all, why, when even animals display a natural instinct to be free, is man, "the only creature really born to be free, [lacking] the memory of his original condition and the desire to return to it?"⁷ Why, in short, are people steeped in such a "vile" and "monstrous vice" as consenting to their own subjection?

La Boétie answers, first, that the difficult act of initially establishing tyrannical State power is accomplished through some form of conquest, either by a foreign power, an internal coup, or by the use of a wartime emergency as an excuse to fasten a permanent despotism upon the public. And why then do people continue to consent?

In the first place, explains La Boétie, there is the insidious power of habit, which quickly accustoms and inures the public to any institution, including its own enslavement.

It is true that in the beginning men submit under constraint and by force; but those who come after them obey without regret and perform willingly what their predecessors had done because they had to. This is why men born

under the yoke and then nourished and reared in slavery are content, without further effort, to live in their native circumstance, unaware of any other state or right, and considering as quite natural the condition into which they are born. . . .

Thus humanity's natural drive for liberty is overpowered by the force of custom, "for the reason that native endowment, no matter how good, is dissipated unless encouraged, whereas environment always shapes us in its own way. . . ." Hence, people will

grow accustomed to the idea that they have always been in subjection, that their fathers lived in the same way; they will think they are obliged to suffer this evil, and will persuade themselves by example and imitation of others, finally investing those who order them around with proprietary rights, based on the idea that it has always been that way.⁸

And so consent of the public need not be eager or enthusiastic, but rather of the resigned "death and taxes" variety. But second, the State apparatus need not wait for the slow workings of custom; consent can also be engineered. La Boétie proceeds to discuss the various devices by which rulers engineer such consent. One time-honored device is circuses, for the entertainment of the masses:

Plays, farces, spectacles, gladiators, strange beasts, medals, pictures and other such opiates, these were for ancient peoples the bait toward slavery, the price of their liberty, the instruments of tyranny. By these practices and enticements the ancient dictators so successfully lulled their subjects . . . that the stupified peoples, fascinated by the pastimes and vain pleasures, . . . learned subservience as naively, but not so creditably, as little children learn to read by looking at bright picture books.⁹

Another important device for gaining the consent of the public is duping them into believing that the rule of the tyrant is wise, just, and benevolent. In modern times, La Boétie notes, rulers "never undertake an unjust policy, even one of some importance, without prefacing it with some pretty speech concerning public welfare and common good." Reinforcing ideological propaganda is deliberate mystification. Thus the ancient kings set up the idea in the minds of the public that they were above ordinary humans and close to gods. Symbols of mystery and magic were woven around the Crown, so that "by doing this they inspired their subjects with reverence and admiration." Sometimes tyrants have gone so far as to impute to themselves the very status of divinity. In this way, "tyrants, in order to strengthen their power, have made every effort to train their people not only in obedience and servility toward themselves, but also in adoration."¹⁰

Circuses, specious ideology, mystery—in addition to these purely propagandistic devices, rulers have used another stratagem to obtain the consent of their subjects: purchase by material benefits, bread as well as circuses. The distribution of largesse to the people is a particularly cunning method of duping them into believing that they benefit from tyrannical rule. For

the fools did not realize that they were merely recovering a portion of their own property, and that their ruler could not have given them what they were receiving without having first taken it from them. . . . The mob has always behaved in this way—eagerly open to bribes.¹¹

Finally, La Boétie comes to another highly important and original contribution to political theory: the broadening of the concept of tyranny from one man to an entire State apparatus. This is the establishment, as it were, by permanent and continuing purchase, of a stable hierarchy of subordinate allies, a loyal band of retainers, praetorians, and bureaucrats. La Boétie considers this factor “the mainspring and secret of domination, the support and foundation of tyranny.” For here is a large sector of society that is not merely duped with occasional negligible handouts from the State; but who make a handsome and permanent living out of the proceeds of despotism. Hence, *their* stake in despotism is not dependent on illusion, habit, or mystery, but is all too great and real. In this way, an elaborate hierarchy of patronage from the fruits of plunder is created and maintained. A large number of men thus permeate down through the ranks of society, and “cling to the tyrant by this cord to which they are tied.” In short, “all those who are corrupted by burning ambition or extraordinary avarice, these gather around him and support him in order to have a share in the booty and to constitute themselves petty chiefs under the big tyrant.” It is true that they, too, are subjects and suffer at their leader’s hands, but in return for that subjection, these subordinates are permitted to oppress the remainder of the public.¹²

On deeper reflection, then, the strategy for the achievement of liberty is not so simple; for even though mass civil disobedience is the master key, how is the public to be brought to such an action, blinded as they are by a network of habit, propaganda, and special privilege? But La Boétie does not despair. For one thing, not *all* the public is deluded or sunk into habitual submission. Environment may influence, but it does not determine; for, in contrast to “the brutish mass,” there is always a more percipient remnant, an elite who will understand the reality of the situation: “There are always a few, better endowed than others, who feel the weight of the yoke and cannot restrain themselves from attempting to shake it off.” These are people who possess clear and far-sighted minds, who will never disappear from the earth: “Even if liberty had entirely perished from the earth, such men would invent it.” It is true that rulers invariably attempt to control and suppress genuine education in their realms, depriving the elite of freedom of speech and action, and thereby of making converts. But still, there are always heroic leaders who can arise from the mass, leaders who will not fail “to deliver their country from evil hands.” This knowledgeable and valiant elite, then, will form the vanguard of the revolutionary resistance movement. Through a process of educating and rousing the public to the truth, they will give back to the people knowledge of the blessings of liberty and expose the myths and illusions fostered by the State. Furthermore, they will be helped, as La Boétie indicates, by the

fact that even the privileged courtiers and favorites lead miserable, cringing lives and that therefore at least some of them will join the popular resistance and thereby split the ruling elite.¹³

Étienne de La Boétie was therefore the first modern libertarian theorist, who also—and remarkably—offered a strategic theory that stemmed logically from his analysis of the groundwork of State power. But what did he personally do about it? Did he, to use Marxian jargon, unite theory and praxis in his own life?

Certainly not; ironically, La Boétie demonstrated that he may have been a member of a knowledgeable elite but scarcely a valiant one. Not publishing the *Discourse*, he took his appointed place in the ruling elite; and as Professor Keohane states, “Whether he ever mused on the irony of finding himself a prominent part of the network he had once condemned so scathingly, we cannot know.”¹⁴

It is not uncommon, of course, for ardently radical university students to settle quickly into a comfortable and respectable conservatism, once entrenched in the privileges and emoluments of the status quo. But there is a bit more here than that. For even the brilliantly radical argument of the *Discourse* contained the seeds of its own decay. The very abstractness and universality of its methodology, the failure to apply the doctrine to concrete conditions of sixteenth-century France, meant that when La Boétie’s own interests shifted inevitably from the abstract to the concrete in his busy adult career, it was all too easy for him to drop his youthful and abstract radicalism. His original failure to integrate theory and practice, general doctrine and concrete application, paved the way for the theory’s demise, at least in La Boétie’s own life.

But the ultimate fate of the *Discourse* furnished a counter-irony. For if his abstract method permitted La Boétie to abandon his radicalism swiftly in the real world, it had an opposite effect on later readers. Its very timelessness makes the work eternally available—to be applied concretely in a radical manner to later institutions and generations. Thus the *Discourse* was first published, not by La Boétie or his heirs or assigns, but anonymously and incompletely in the radical Huguenot pamphlet *Le Reveille-Matin des François* (1574) probably written by a member of the late Admiral Coligny’s staff with the collaboration of the great Calvinist Theodore Beza. The full text of the *Discourse*, this time with the author’s name included, appeared for the first time two years later, in a collection of radical Huguenot essays compiled by a Calvinist minister at Geneva, Simon Goulart.¹⁵

La Boétie’s close friend, the essayist Michel de Montaigne, who had intended to publish the *Discourse* himself, was furious at its appropriation by the radical Huguenots. Montaigne now refused to carry on his project, and, to counter the Huguenots, launched a disinformation campaign, claiming that his friend had only been eighteen, and then finally sixteen, years old when he wrote the essay. In that way, Montaigne could defuse the embarrassing radicalism of the *Discourse* by passing it off as a juvenile, though precocious, flight of rhetorical fancy, meaningless in content. And even the Huguenots used the radical pamphlet somewhat

gingerly. It is true that the Huguenot pamphlet *La France Turquie* (1575) picked up La Boétie's call for mass civil disobedience by advocating an association of towns and provinces to refuse to pay all taxes to the State. But, overall, as Laski wittily wrote, "Attractive as was the spirit of La Boétie's essay, avowed and academic republicanism was meat too strong for the digestion of the time. Not that La Boétie was entirely without influence; but he was used as cautiously as an Anglican bishop might, in the [eighteen]-sixties, have an interest in Darwinism."¹⁶

Almost completely forgotten in the more peaceful days of seventeenth century France, the *Discourse* became known, though not very influential, in the eighteenth century by being printed as a supplement to Montaigne's essays. Unsurprisingly, however, the *Discourse* found its audience in the stormy times of the French Revolution, when it was twice reprinted. The fiery Abbé de Lamennais later reprinted the *Discourse* with a "violent" preface of his own, and the same was done by another writer in 1852 to strike back against the *coup d'état* of Napoleon III. Later in the nineteenth century, La Boétie's essay inspired the non-violent wing of the anarchist movement. Indeed, Leo Tolstoy, in setting forth his doctrine of civil disobedience and nonviolent anarchism, cited a lengthy passage from the *Discourse* as the source for the development of his argument. Furthermore, Tolstoy's *Letter to a Hindu*, which played a central role in shaping Gandhi's thinking toward mass nonviolent action, was heavily influenced by La Boétie.¹⁷ In the early twentieth century, the leading German anarchist Gustav Landauer, after becoming converted to a pacifist approach, made a rousing summary of La Boétie's *Discourse* the central core of his work, *Die Revolution* (1919). And the leading Dutch pacifist-anarchist of the twentieth century, Barteley de Ligt, devoted several pages of his *Conquest of Violence* to discussion and praise of the *Discourse* and translated it into Dutch in 1933.¹⁸ Thus, as the centuries went on, the speculative doctrines of the young Orleans law student were able to take posthumous revenge on the respectable and eminent official of the Bordeaux Parlement.¹⁹

3. Converting the Monarch: Revolution from the Top

Retreatism was a counsel of despair rather than a strategy, while mass civil disobedience seemed to appeal only to a heroic minority. Neither appeared to be a viable strategy for social change toward liberty and *laissez faire*. The victory of the centrist *politiques* at the end of the sixteenth century in France paved the way for a growing and centralizing royal absolutism. And that absolutism grew apace with the crushing of the Fronde and other popular rebellions during the mid-seventeenth century. Finally, absolutism reached its apogee in the reign of the Sun King, Louis XIV. However, opposition to royal absolutism and mercantilist statism began to grow in the 1680s and 1690s among merchants and aristocrats, and some leading bureaucrats, churchman, and theorists.

A new and more pragmatic viewpoint began to develop. Why not abandon the fruitless idea of organizing mass opposition to the king? Why not short-circuit the problem of social change by converting the king and have him impose liberty from the top down, thus avoiding any radical change in the nation's political institutions? To effect this strategy, the new oppositionists and libertarians had to employ basically utilitarian arguments. Even proponents of natural rights, such as the Physiocrats in the mid- and later eighteenth century, employed utilitarian arguments to convince the king and the ruling aristocracy of the overriding importance of such rights. Basically, the theme, employing both natural rights and free-market approaches, was that property rights and laissez faire would benefit the entire nation, would advance the happiness and prosperity of everyone. And if the nation would benefit, so too would the king.

a. Archbishop Fénelon and the Burgundy Circle

One of the most influential centers of libertarian opposition to the absolutism of Louis XIV was headed by the highly devout François de Salignac de la Mothe, Archbishop Fénelon of Cambrai (1651–1715). Fénelon was a friend and student of Abbé Claude Fleury (1640–1723) who, as a young theologian, had launched the anti-statist opposition in the early 1670s. Young Fénelon found that he could exercise maximal influence on the Court by getting appointed to the post of religious confessor and instructor to the king's mistress, the Madame Françoise d'Aubigné, the Marquise de Maintenon (1635–1719). From this position during the 1680s Fénelon got himself appointed in 1689 as preceptor to the royal children, in particular the young Duke of Burgundy, grandson of Louis XIV, who seemed destined one day to be king.

Fénelon's strategy to achieve liberty, then, was to organize a group of tutors to the young dauphin, to convert the future king to the libertarian creed, and, then, when he assumed power, to achieve the libertarian revolution from the top down. Assisted by Fleury, Fénelon indeed succeeded in making a disciple of the Duke of Burgundy, and his Burgundy Circle became an active and knowledgeable focus of opposition to the statism and mercantilism of Louis XIV. Fénelon was particularly incensed at the continuing wars and their attendant crushing burden of taxation and ruin of trade. In an anonymous letter to the king in 1693, which he probably sent only to Madame de Maintenon, Fénelon denounced the unending "bloody" wars, which with their taxes have destroyed trade and crippled the poor, driving the people to desperation, "by exacting from them for your wars, the bread which they have endeavored to earn with the sweat from their brows."

In his political novel, *Aventures de Télémaque*, written for the instruction of the young duke, Fénelon spoke through Mentor, a wise man among the Phoenicians, who explained to young prince Télémaque how the Phoenicians were able to flourish so remarkably in world trade:

Above all never do anything to interfere with trade in order to turn it to your views. The Prince must not concern himself with trade for fear of hindering it. He must leave all profits to his subjects who earned them, otherwise they will become discouraged . . .²⁰

The Burgundy Circle seemed close to the achievement of their cherished goals when the Grand Dauphin, son of Louis XIV, died in 1711 and the Duke of Burgundy became first in line for the throne. But tragedy struck again the following year, when the duke, his wife, and eldest son died of measles. In despair, Fénelon wrote to a friend, "Men work by their education to form a subject full of courage and ornamented by knowledge; then God comes along to destroy this house of cards . . ."

The sudden and tragic end of the Burgundy Circle illuminates one problem with the idea of converting a king (in this case a future king): If that one person dies or disappears, the entire strategy for liberty disappears with it.²¹

b. *Quesnay, Physiocracy, and Turgot*

Some fifty years after Fénelon's attempt, François Quesnay (1694–1774) organized a movement to convert the existing French king (as well as all others) and not merely a future one. In contrast to Fénelon's search for special influence at court, Quesnay had achieved his influence before becoming interested in social or economic ideas. A distinguished surgeon and physician, Quesnay had written widely on medicine as well as agricultural technology, his celebrity in medicine earning him the post in 1749 of personal physician to the mistress of King Louis XV, the Madame de Pompadour. A few years later, Quesnay became personal physician to the king himself.

It was in the late 1750's, when he was in his mid-sixties, that the court physician began to dabble in economic topics. The founding of Quesnay's physiocratic movement may be dated precisely at the moment in July 1757 that the guru met the man who would become his chief adept and propagandist, the restless, flighty, enthusiastic and slightly crackpot Victor Riquetti, Marquis de Mirabeau (1715–1789). Mirabeau had just achieved fame by publishing the first several parts of a multi-part work, that promptly became a best seller, the flamboyant, unsystematic and grandiloquently entitled *The Friend of Man* (*L'ami des hommes*).

The fateful meeting of the two meant that the seemingly harmless ruminations of the court physician became physiocracy, a school of thought. Bolstered by Quesnay's crucial place at court and by Mirabeau's fame and energy, physiocracy soon became a formidable and influential school, conducting operations through a succession of journals, as well as by regular Tuesday evening seminars, or salons, held at the home of Mirabeau. The physiocrats favored an absolute monarch who would install and enforce a system of absolute and natural property rights for all, as well as its corollary, a laissez-faire economic system. The physiocrats also

had a special concern for agriculture, reflecting the interests of their founder, including the view that only land was productive.

In many ways, the physiocratic school became a personality cult for Quesnay. His followers claimed, with little evidence, that Quesnay looked like Socrates, and they habitually referred to him as the “Confucius of Europe.” Indeed, Mirabeau went so far as to proclaim that the three greatest inventions in the history of mankind had been writing, money, and Quesnay’s famous diagram, The *tableau economique*.

Most physiocratic hopes in politics rested on the formidable figure of Anne Robert Jacques Turgot, the Baron de l’Aulne (1727–1781). But while he was a political ally of the physiocrats in their drive toward free trade and laissez faire, Turgot was by no means a physiocrat in economic theory. Believing neither in land as the only productive factor nor in the proto-Keynesian *tableau economique*, Turgot was in fact a brilliant and creative pioneer in what later would become the Austrian school of economics.²²

A. R. J. Turgot was born to a distinguished Norman family of royal officials and administrators, and then took his own place in the top levels of the royal bureaucracy. He learned administration as well as devotion to laissez faire from his great friend and mentor, Jacques Claude Marie Vincent, the Marquis de Gournay (1712–1759), a successful merchant who then became a royal inspector and minister of commerce. In addition, Turgot reported a family tradition that the phrase “laissez faire” had been invented by the wealthy Norman merchant, Thomas Le Gendre, a close friend of Turgot’s grandparents. When asked how Colbert could best help trade, Le Gendre had replied, “laissez-nous faire.”

Turgot’s strategy was to rise in the French bureaucracy, and then to effect laissez-faire reforms when he became Controller-General (finance minister). While this depended on the conversion of the king, Turgot did not really share the physiocrats’ enthusiasm for an absolutist king who could establish their reforms. One of Turgot’s most incisive epigrams, delivered to a friend, revealed both his political and religious views: “I am not an *Encyclopédiste* because I believe in God; I am not an *économiste* [physiocrat] because I would have no king.” Turgot had concluded that the best form of government, and the one most likely to lead to laissez faire and the protection of property rights, was a constitutional republic “in which all property owners have an equal right to participate in legislation.” But, in common with his young friend and disciple, the mathematician and *philosophe* Marie Jean Antoine Nicholas de Caritat, the Marquis de Condorcet (1743–1794), Turgot was willing to settle for influencing and converting an existent monarch. As Condorcet’s biographer writes, “the monarchical regime had the great advantage of offering a clear locus of power to be captured for the public good by men of reason and goodwill.” The biographer aptly calls this creed a “view of the redemption of monarchical power by reason, this eighteenth-century version of the withering away of the state.”²³

The laissez-fairists finally got the chance for their noble experiment in 1774, when Turgot was named Controller-General. Turgot gathered about him as top aides a galaxy of ideologues of the movement, including Condorcet and the youngest and last of the major physiocrats, Pierre Samuel Dupont de Nemours (1739–1817). The first act of the new administration was the edict of September 13, decreeing the freedom of import and export, internal and external, of all grain. The preamble of the edict, drawn up by Dupont, was designed to educate the public on the reasons for this crucial measure. The new free trade policy, declared the preamble, was designed

to animate and extend the cultivation of the land . . . to remove monopoly by shutting out private license in favor of free and full competition, and by maintaining among different countries that communication of exchange of superfluities for necessities which is conformable to the order established by Divine Providence.²⁴

Free trade in grain, however, ran into a storm of protest, from bureaucrats, restrictionists, and the masses of people who clamored for artificially cheap bread and failed to understand that these price controls brought about the very shortage of bread that drove them to riot and looting.

The undaunted Turgot pressed on, however, with his policy of sweeping laissez-faire reform. Egged on by the eager Condorcet, Turgot presented his Six Edicts, which included the abolition of the infamous *corvées*—the system of forced labor on the State roads. Since the replacement of forced by free labor meant an increase in property taxes, the aristocracy bitterly fought the abolition of the *corvées*. More ominously, this libertarian reform was resisted and intrigued against by none other than Trudaine de Montigny, head of the Department of Bridges and Roads, and Turgot's old friend and fellow laissez-faire reformer. Once Trudaine entered office, he began to feel the tug of bureaucratic interest more than what he admitted was the call of justice: employing forced and therefore cheap labor was very convenient to the Ministry, making it virtually independent of the limitations of the State's budgetary process.

After a month of fierce debate within the royal council, the Six Edicts were submitted to the Parlement of Paris in early February, 1776. There the edicts, in particular the abolition of the *corvées* and the guilds, ran into fierce opposition, scarcely mollified by anonymous (but transparent) and fiery pamphlets published by Condorcet, bitterly attacking the *corvées* and raising the explosive question of abolishing the feudal dues. The Parlement defended the existing order in the way that conservatives have traditionally argued against proposals for any substantive radical change, whether coming from libertarians or socialists. Invoking divine sanction and historical precedent, the Parlement denounced "a project stemming from an inadmissible system of equality" and the "uniform yoke of a land tax."²⁵ It makes a great deal of difference, of course, whether

the equality sought is of rights or taxation, on the one hand, or of income or wealth on the other.

For a fleeting moment, the king insisted on imposing the Six Edicts by his own absolute authority over the Parlement. But a combination of parliamentary resistance and ministerial intrigue at last did Turgot in, and he was forced to resign in mid-May, 1776. The Turgot reforms were promptly quashed by the exuberant defenders of the old statist order. The noble experiment in laissez-faire reform, the “reign of philosophy,” was over. From now on there was no drive for reform until the advent of the French Revolution.

The last hope of the philosophes and of the physiocrats was now shattered. Turgot’s reign was their last flourish. Already, they had begun to slip in influence with Quesnay’s loss of interest in physiocracy in the early 1770s, his restless mind moving on to works on mathematics, where he claimed to have solved the age-old problem of squaring the circle. Quesnay’s death in 1776 together with the public smear campaign heaped upon Mirabeau by his wife and children in a bitter family quarrel around the same time as Turgot’s ouster, helped shatter the physiocratic movement.

As for the philosophes, the head of their main salon (and the mistress to the great d’Alembert), Mlle. Julie de Lespinasse, warned Condorcet at the beginning of the experiment that “if it is impossible for him [Turgot] to do good we shall be a thousand times more miserable than we were before, because we shall have lost the hope that alone sustain the wretched.” And indeed when Turgot fell, Condorcet wrote in despair to his master, Voltaire, “This event has changed the whole of nature for me. I no longer take the same pleasure in this beautiful countryside, where he would have brought forth happiness. . . . How far we have fallen, my dear and illustrious master, and from such a height.” And so both Turgot and Condorcet retired from public life, Turgot contentedly to his study, and the younger Condorcet reluctantly to the world of academia. As Condorcet remarked to Voltaire, “We have had a fine dream but it was too short. I am going to apply myself again to mathematics and philosophy. But it is comfortless only to be able to work for one’s own petty glory, when one has imagined for a while that one was working for the public good.”²⁶ Condorcet, of course, returned to the political sphere upon the onset of the French Revolution, with disastrous consequences to himself.

The repeated failures of a century of attempts to convert the absolute monarch of France to laissez faire indicates a fundamental flaw of this seemingly simple strategy. For is it really true that it is to the king’s personal interest to protect the natural rights and freedom of his subjects? Certainly in the short run, and perhaps even in the long run, the king’s revenue (to say nothing of his power) may well be maximized by tyrannically sweating his subjects to attain the greatest possible income for himself and his political favorites and allies. In the final analysis, reliance on the altruism of an absolute monarch seems a highly shaky

basis for a strategy to promote laissez faire. And if the laissez-faire theorists had put more reliance on the thorny and much longer run strategy of leading a mass opposition movement from below, it is possible that they would have been able to guide the French Revolution into far more libertarian paths.

4. The Cadre Leading the Mass: the “Leninism” of James Mill

James Mill (1773–1836) is one of the most neglected and underrated figures in the history of social thought. Son of a poor Scottish shoemaker, Mill studied at Edinburgh under Adam Smith’s leading disciple, Dugald Stewart. Though trained for the Presbyterian ministry, Mill failed to find a ministerial post amidst an increasingly fundamentalist and antiintellectual Scottish climate, and from then until middle age Mill made his way in London as a chronically impoverished free-lance writer. Finally, after writing a mammoth *History of India*, Mill landed a full-time, major post at the East India Company.

James Mill may be designated as the “Lenin”—even the “Marx”—of the Philosophic Radicals. A cadre leader by temperament and personality, Mill was dedicated, energetic, and prodigiously productive. He wrote important books, journal articles, and newspaper articles on virtually every topic concerned with human action, including philosophy, psychology, political science, history, economics, and education. He organized everyone around him, friends, alleged mentors, acquaintances, and his team of Philosophic Radicals in Parliament. He even organized his son in one of the most famous—or infamous—feats in the history of education.

His enormous output was fueled and guided by his magnificently consistent, logical, and lucid mind, which fastened upon a set of hard-core axiomatic principles that he then applied to all of the human sciences as well as to political action. The muddle-headed have always denounced him, as they have other cadre leaders, as “dogmatic” and “doctrinaire.” Mill’s triad of basic axioms were utilitarianism, democracy, and laissez faire, and his writing and political maneuvers were pointed toward those principles and objectives.

James Mill is also rare in the history of thought in deliberating *underweighting* his own intellectual achievements. A refreshing trait indeed in a field where many men—e.g., Adam Smith—have been marked by a Columbus complex! And yet Mill always claimed to be only a humble number two man, a “Lenin” to two “Marxes”—Bentham in philosophy and Ricardo in economics. Hence his general dismissal as a mere vulgarizer of and propagandist for these two great men. Actually, it was Mill, in the course of his close relationship to Bentham as secretary and live-in aide, who converted the old man into adopting democracy and universal suffrage as the political-philosophic conclusion of his utilitarianism. Bentham, a former Tory, was ripe for such conversion, having become bitterly disgruntled with the existing aristocratic system for having failed to adopt his bizarre Panop-

ticon scheme, in which a major portion of the British population—the poor, schoolchildren, and prisoners, among others—would be incarcerated in “scientifically” designed concentration and slave labor camps, all for the proprietary profit of Bentham himself.²⁷ Bentham was therefore ripe for conversion to democracy, where his scheme could do no worse, and might do better.

On Ricardo, recent research is making it clear that Mill was the youngish retired stockbroker’s mentor and master, not only in general intellectual but also in economic matters. And so Mill happily organized his good friend, hectored, cajoled, prodded, and bullied him into becoming the “Marx,” the great economist that Mill for some reason did not propose to be. He pestered Ricardo into writing and finishing his *Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* (1817), looking over, editing, and probably adding to many drafts of this work. After that, Mill pressed Ricardo into entering Parliament to take an active role among the Radicals. It also turns out that Mill, not Ricardo, was probably responsible for much of the Ricardian system itself, including the justly famous Law of Comparative Advantage.²⁸

It is possible that James Mill’s excess of humility was caused, not by psychological traits, but by his financial position vis-à-vis his mentors. It may have been economically prudent for the free-lance Scottish immigrant on the brink of poverty to flatter his wealthy friends, Bentham and Ricardo, and to subordinate himself to their (alleged) overriding greatness.

While, as a high official of the East India Company, he could not run for Parliament himself, Mill was the unquestioned cadre leader of the small but important group of from ten to twenty Philosophic Radicals who enjoyed a brief day in the sun in Parliament during the 1830s. Although the Radicals proclaimed themselves Benthamites, the aging Bentham had little to do personally with the group. Most of the parliamentary Philosophic Radicals had been converted personally by Mill, beginning with Ricardo over a decade earlier, and including his son John Stuart, who, after Mill’s death in 1836, succeeded his father as Radical leader. James Mill had also converted the official leader of the Radicals in Parliament, the banker and historian of ancient Greece, George Grote (1794–1871). Grote, a largely self-educated and humorless man, soon became an abject disciple of James Mill. For Grote, in the words of Professor Joseph Hamburger, all of Mill’s dicta “assumed the force and sanction of duties.”

Charismatic, humorless, and didactic, Mill had all the strengths and weaknesses of the modern Leninist cadre type. The Millian circle also included a fiery cadre woman, Mrs. Harriet Lewin Grote (1792–1873), an imperious and assertive militant whose home became the salon and social center for the parliamentary Radicals. She was widely known as the “Queen of the Radicals,” and it was of her that Cobden wrote, “had she been a man, she would have been the leader of a party.” Harriet Grote testified to Mill’s eloquence and charismatic effect on his young disciples, most of whom were brought into the Millian circle by his son, John

Stuart. A typical testimony was that of William Ellis, a young friend of John's, who wrote in later years of his experience of James Mill: "He worked a complete change in me. He taught me how to think and what to live for."

We can now place in better perspective Mill's famous quasi-brainwashing education of his son, for which the bright young lad turned out not to be suited psychologically. The point is that Mill's fierce and fervent education of John Stuart was not simply the crotchets of an intellectual father trying out his theories of education; the education was specifically designed to train John for his presumptively vital and world-historical role as James's heir and successor as leader of the Radical cadre, the hoped for new "Lenin." There was considerable method in the madness.

James Mill's evangelical Calvinist spirit was tailor-made for his cadre role. During his days as a literary man in London, Mill lost his Christian faith and became an atheist, but, as in the case of many later Calvinist-trained atheist and agnostic intellectuals, he retained the grim, puritanical, crusading habit of mind of the prototypical Calvinist firebrand.²⁹ Mill's Calvinism was evident in his conviction that reason must keep stern control over the passions—a conviction that hardly fitted well with Benthamite hedonism. Cadre men are notorious puritans, and Mill puritanically disliked and distrusted drama or art; the actor, he complained, is "the slave of the most irregular appetites and passions of his species." Moreover, painting and sculpture were scorned by Mill—as by centuries of Calvinists—as the lowest of the arts, only serving to gratify a frivolous love of ostentation.

James Mill's passion for democracy stemmed from his libertarian theory of class analysis and class conflict, an ancestor, in a twisted way, of the more famous but hopelessly inconsistent Marxian one. Mill's theory, developed in the 1820s and 1830s, was either arrived at independently or was influenced by the early nineteenth-century theory of two French intellectuals, Charles Comte (son-in-law of J. B. Say and no relation to Auguste) and Charles Dunoyer. It is essentially a "two-class" theory of class conflict: The "ruling class" at any particular time is whatever group has managed to obtain control of State power; the "ruled class" are those groups who are taxed, regulated, and controlled by the rulers. Class interest, then, is defined by any group's relation to the State. All classes are harmonious and none conflict within the free market and free society; conflicts arise only in relation to who controls, or who is controlled by, the State.

Whether independent or not, Mill's analysis was devoid of the rich applications to the history of Western Europe that Comte, Dunoyer, and their young associate, the historian Augustin Thierry, had developed.³⁰ Mill was interested only in the general theory and in current applications.

Nevertheless, James Mill expressed libertarian class theory with great force and lucidity. All government, he pointed out, is run by a ruling class, necessarily the few, who dominate and exploit the ruled, the many. There are two conflicting

classes, he declared: "The first class, those who plunder, are the small number. They are the ruling Few. The second class, those who are plundered, are the great number. They are the subject Many." Or, as Professor Hamburger sums up Mill's position: "Politics was a struggle between two classes—the avaricious rulers and their intended victims."³¹

The great problem of government, then, is how to eliminate this system of plunder, to end the power "by which the class that plunder succeed in carrying on their vocation."

All groups, Mill contended, tend to act for their selfish interest, so that it is absurd to expect the ruling clique to act altruistically for the public good. Instead, they will use their opportunities for their own gain, which means to loot the Many and to favor their own or allied special interests against that of the public. Hence Mill's habitual use of the term "sinister" interests as against the public good. Hence, too, Mill's use of the term "the people" to characterize "the subject Many", since the people have become a ruled class with a common interest in removing oppression by the sinister interests of the rulers. It should be noted, too, that for Mill and the Radicals the public good meant *laissez faire*, government confined to the minimal functions of police, defense, and the administration of justice.

How then to arrive at the great desideratum: to curb or eliminate the plunder of the ruling class? Mill thought he saw the answer:

The people must appoint watchmen. Who are to watch the watchmen? [The classic problem of political theory.] The people themselves. There is no other resource; and without this ultimate safeguard, the ruling few will be forever the scourge and oppression of the subject many.

But how are the people themselves to be the watchmen? To this ancient problem Mill provided what is by now a standard answer in the Western world, but still a not very satisfactory one: by all the people electing representatives to do the watching. Hence Mill's passion for universal suffrage in frequent elections by secret ballot to put an end to the rule of the few, the aristocracy, the ruling elite.

Granted that the reign of The People would displace aristocratic rule, what reason did Mill have for thinking that they would exert their will on behalf of *laissez faire*? Here his reasoning was ingenious: While the ruling class enjoy in common the fruits of their exploitative rule, The People are a different kind of class, for their only interest in common is getting rid of the rule of special privilege. Apart from that, the mass of the people have no common class interest they could actively pursue by using the State. The interest of the people in ending the rule of sinister interests and insuring liberty is the universal interest of all.

How then account for the fact that no one can claim that the masses have always championed *laissez faire*? And, in fact, that the masses have often loyally supported the exploitative rule of the few? Clearly, because the people, in the complex field of public policy, have suffered from what the Marxists would later call "false

consciousness," an ignorance of where their interests truly lie. It was therefore up to the intellectual vanguard, to Mill and his Philosophic Radicals, to educate and organize the masses so that their consciousness would become correct and they would then exert their irresistible strength to bring about democracy and laissez faire.

With radical democracy and universal suffrage set as his long-term goal, Mill, in true Leninist fashion, was willing to settle for a far less but still substantially radical "transition demand" as a way station: the Reform Bill of 1832, which greatly widened the suffrage to the middle class. To Mill, extension of democracy was more important than laissez faire, since the latter was supposed to be a semiautomatic consequence of the truly fundamental process of dethroning the ruling class and substituting rule by all the people. Indeed, their concentration on democracy led the Radicals, in the 1840s after Mill's death to refuse collaboration with the Anti-Corn Law League, despite their agreement on free trade and laissez-faire. To the Radicals, free trade was too much a middle-class movement that detracted from the overriding importance of democratic reform. Ironically, by rejecting this middle-class movement, they rebuffed a successful one, and this refusal to support the Anti-Corn Law League in the 1840s helped eliminate Radicalism as a powerful force in British politics.

A tactically brilliant, if morally dubious, example of Mill as successful cadre organizer and maker of history was his role as the major force in driving through the Reform Bill of 1832. Mill was the behind-the-scenes Lenin and master manipulator of the drive for the Reform Bill. His strategy was to play on the fears of the timorous and centrist Whig government by spreading the myth that the masses were ready to erupt in violent revolution if the bill were not passed. (An early example of what Tom Wolfe would recently call "Mau-Mauing the Flak Catchers.") Mill and the Radicals knew full well that no such revolution was in the offing, but Mill, through friends and allies placed strategically in the press, was able to orchestrate a deliberate campaign of deception that fooled and panicked the Whigs into passing the bill. The campaign of lies was waged by important sectors of the press: by the *Examiner*, a leading weekly owned and edited by the Benthamite Radical Albany Fonblanque; by the widely read *Morning Chronicle*, a Whig daily edited by Mill's old friend John Black, who made the paper a vehicle for the Radicals; and by the *Spectator*, edited by the Benthamite S. Rintoul. The *Times* was also friendly to the Radicals at this point, and the leading Birmingham Radical, Joseph Parkes, owned and edited the *Birmingham Journal*. Not only that: Parkes was able to have his mendacious stories on allegedly revolutionary public opinion in Birmingham printed as factual reports in both the *Morning Chronicle* and the *Times*.

A decade and a half after passage of the bill, John Arthur Roebuck, one of Mill's top aides in the campaign and later a Radical M.P. and historian of the drive for reform, admitted that:

to attain our end, much was said that no one really believed; much was done that no one would like to own . . . often, when there was no danger, the cry of alarm was raised to keep the House of Lords and the aristocracy generally in what was termed a state of wholesome terror.

In contrast to the “noisy orators who appeared important” in the campaign, Roebuck recalled, were the “cool-headed, retiring, sagacious determined men . . . who pulled the strings in this strange puppet-show.” “One or two ruling minds, to the public unknown,” manipulated and stage-managed the entire movement. They “use(d) the others as their instruments. . . .” And the most cool-headed, sagacious, and determined puppet master of all was James Mill.³²

Ever the unifier of theory and praxis, James Mill paved the way for the organized campaign of disinformation by writing in justification of lying for a worthy end. While truth was important, Mill conceded, there are special circumstances “in which another man is not entitled to the truth.” Men, he wrote, should not be told the truth “when they would make a bad use of it.” Ever the utilitarian! Of course, as usual, it was the Utilitarian who was to decide on the goodness or badness of the other man’s expected use of the knowledge.

Applying his doctrine to politics, Mill escalated his defense of lying. In politics, he asserted that deliberately disseminating “wrong information” is “not a breach of morality, but on the contrary a meritorious act . . . when it is conducive to the prevention of misrule. In no instance is any man less entitled to right information, than when he would employ it for the perpetuation of misrule.”

In the late years of the twentieth century it is impossible to assemble much fervor for a Millian faith in radical democracy and the rule of the masses as a virtually automatic highroad to *laissez faire*. There is simply too much evidence to the contrary. A grave problem is that the very existence of the democratic institutions exacerbates the false consciousness of the masses in identifying themselves with the government in all of its actions. The concept “we *are* the government” is far more likely to arise in a democracy than in a monarchy or oligarchy, for all the manifold sins of these other forms of government. Furthermore, the Millian analysis ignores the difference made by the Iron Law of Oligarchy and by the coercive nature of government itself. A ruling class is still bound to emerge even if sanctified by the *form* of the democratic process that leads people to blur the crucial distinction between state and society.

As for the Radicals themselves, they came to a speedy end in the early 1840s. In addition to failure to latch on to the free trade movement, a split among the formerly anti-imperialist Radicals on cracking down on dissent and rebellion in Canada, put an end to Radicalism in politics—especially since John Stuart Mill, his father now safely interred, led the desertion from the Radical cause. Ironically enough, while proclaiming their weariness with politics *per se* and a return to the pursuits of theory and the academy, such Radical leaders as John Mill and the Grotes in reality gravitated with astonishing rapidity toward the cozy Whig

center that they had formerly scorned. Their proclaimed loss of interest in politics was only a loss of interest in politics as an arena for changing the world in the direction of a principled ideal. Perhaps, in the final analysis, the Radical cadre could not long survive the death of its great founder.

5. Epilogue: Lessons for Strategy?

We have described in this paper several important libertarian intellectuals and their varying ideas of strategy for realizing the social ideal of liberty and *laissez faire*. Can we say that any insights or lessons have been obtained for a strategy for social change beyond simply spread the word and hope for the best? Without being dogmatic about strategy, I think we can. Apart from the various insights of these thinkers and writers about the nature of the State and of liberty, we can surely conclude that retreatism, whatever its other consolations, provides no strategy whatever for successful change. And neither, except in special circumstances, does the idea of mass civil disobedience. The only revolutions I can think of that largely succeeded by a tactic and strategy of mass civil disobedience was the Gandhi movement in India and the general strike of 1979 that toppled the Shah of Iran. In both cases the motivation and direction were sectarian and religious, and in neither case was the *result* of the revolution in any conceivable sense either nonviolent or libertarian.

The seemingly easy route of converting an absolute monarch (or modern dictator) seems fraught with too much potential for disaster. The underlying flaw is that only royal opinion, or at best the opinion of the top ranks of the elite, has been won over, without in any sense convincing the public or the masses. A revolution from the top seems doomed as a long-run strategy.

The Millian cadre concept seems the most promising of these strategic lines, but here again considerable caution is in order. Apart from the error of Mill's hyperoptimism on democracy, all movement cadre seem to fall prey to unpleasant and even counter-productive personality types and actions. There seems to be something in cadre work that attracts or nurtures humorless and puritanical fanatics. Perhaps that could be tempered by conscious efforts to cultivate humor and perspective and associate with well-rounded colleagues who appreciate sense-enjoyment as part of the truly good life. Even libertarian ideological movements in recent years have fallen prey to a cult of personality, of abject surrender to the whims and dictates of a leader, and to a willingness to commit patently immoral acts—such as systematic deception—to advance the cause. And even tiny libertarian ideological movements have sanctioned gross violations of libertarian principle as a method of advancing or maintaining their own wealth or power.

We are left with the basic strategic problem: How can a libertarian movement develop effective cohesion and leadership without falling prey to abject intellectual surrender to a glorified elite? How can we preserve a lifelong commitment

and a sense of “protracted struggle” while avoiding single-minded fanaticism and neglect of personal goals? How can we build institutions without losing sight of the libertarian principles and goals for which we build them?

While such problems are extraordinarily difficult to solve, they clearly can never be solved unless they are thought about. While Marxists devote about 90 percent of their energies to thinking about strategy and only 10 percent to their basic theories, for libertarians the reverse is true. Little thought or discussion has been devoted to strategic or tactical problems. Perhaps this paper will stimulate thinking in this vital field.

NOTES

1. On this process, see the classic article by F. A. Hayek, “The Intellectuals and Socialism,” in *Studies in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 178–94.
2. In short, modern Taoists, neglecting the crucial libertarian content of the master’s doctrine, may have mistakenly converted a desperate strategy into a matter of high principle.
3. The outstanding work on the Taoist as well as the other schools of ancient Chinese political thought is Kung-chuan Hsiao, *A History of Chinese Political Thought, Vol. I* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979). For more on Chuang-tzu, see Elbert D. Thomas, *Chinese Political Thought* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1927); E. R. Hughes, *Chinese Philosophy in Classical Times* (1942, rev. ed., 1954); and Sebastian de Grazia, ed., *Masters of Chinese Political Thought* (New York: Viking Press, 1973).
4. La Boétie’s *Memoir* was long forgotten until recent years. See Donald Frame, *Montaigne: A Biography* (New York: Harcourt Brace & World, 1965), 72–73, 345.
5. Thus Michel de Montaigne had read the unpublished *Discourse* long before he met La Boétie as a fellow member of the Bordeaux Parlement in 1559. The date of writing the manuscript is not precisely known, but it is most likely, and so accepted by recent authorities, that La Boétie wrote the *Discourse* in 1552 or 1553, at the age of twenty-two. See Frame, *Montaigne*, p. 71; and Pierre Mesnard, *L’Essor de la philosophie politique au XVIe siècle* (Paris: Boivin et Cie, 1936), 390–391.
6. Etienne de La Boétie, *The Politics of Obedience: The Discourse of Voluntary Servitude* (New York: Free Life Editions, 1975), 51–53.
7. La Boétie, *Discourse*, 58.
8. La Boétie, *Discourse*, 60–65. As David Hume was to put it two hundred years later: “Habit soon consolidates what other principles of human nature had imperfectly founded; and men, once accustomed to obedience, never think of departing from that path, in which they and their ancestors have constantly trod. . . .” Hume, “Of the Origins of Government,” in *Essays, Moral, Political and Literary* (Oxford University Press, 1963).
9. La Boétie, *Discourse*, 69–70.
10. La Boétie, *Discourse*, 71–75.
11. La Boétie, *Discourse*, 70.
12. La Boétie, *Discourse*, 77–80. John Lewis considered this insight to be the most novel and important feature of the *Discourse*. John D. Lewis, “The Development of the Theory of Tyrannicide to 1660,” in Oscar Jaszi and Lewis, *Against the Tyrant: The Tradition and Theory of Tyrannicide* (Glencoe, Ill: the Free Press, 1957), 56–57.
13. La Boétie, *Discourse*, 65–68, 79–86.
14. Nannerl O. Keohane, “The Radical Humanism of Etienne de La Boétie,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 38 (January–March 1977): 129.
15. As the third volume of the *Memoires de l’etat de France* (1576). See J. H. M. Salmon, *The French Religious Wars in English Political Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), 19 n., corrected by Donald R. Kelley, *Francois Hotman: A Revolutionary’s Ordeal* (Princeton Univer-

- sity Press, 1973), 234. For a complete account of the early pirated versions of the *Discourse* used by the Huguenots, see Paul Bonnefon, "Introduction" to his edition of the *Oeuvres Complètes d'Estienne de La Boétie* (Paris: J. Rouam et Cie, repr. Geneva, 1967), xlix-1.
16. Harold J. Laski, "Introduction," *A Defense of Liberty Against Tyrants* (Gloucester, Mass: Peter Smith, 1963), 24, 29.
 17. Leo Tolstoy, *The Law of Love and the Law of Violence* (New York: Rudolph Field, 1948), 42-45; Bartelemy de Ligt, *The Conquest of Violence* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1938), 105-106.
 18. See De Ligt, *Conquest of Violence*, 104-106, 189. Also see George Woodcock, *Anarchism* (Cleveland, Ohio: World Publishing Co., 1962), 432.
 19. For more on La Boétie, see Murray N. Rothbard, "Introduction: The Political Thought of Etienne de La Boétie," in La Boétie, *Discourse*, 9-42.
 20. Quoted in Lionel Rothkrug, *Opposition to Louis XIV: The Political and Social Origins of the French Enlightenment* (Princeton University Press, 1965), 270.
 21. For more on the Burgundy Circle see, in addition to Rothkrug, *Opposition*; Nannerl O. Keohane, *Philosophy and the State in France: The Renaissance to the Enlightenment* (Princeton University Press, 1980), 332 ff.
 22. See the collection of Turgot's economic writings, in addition to thorough introductions and annotations, in P. D. Groenewegen, ed., *The Economics of A. R. J. Turgot* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977).
 23. Keith Michael Baker, *Condorcet: From Natural Philosophy to Social Mathematics* (University of Chicago Press, 1975), 56. Condorcet himself published a life of Turgot in 1787.
 24. Quoted in Henry Higgs, *The Physiocrats* (1897); rpt., New York: The Langland Press, 1952), 62.
 25. See Baker, *Condorcet*, 72.
 26. Baker, *Condorcet*, 80.
 27. The Panopticon, central to Benthamite political thought and understandably swept under the rug by Bentham's apologists, was utilitarianism to the hilt and beyond, a genuine example of utilitarian trampling on the rights of the individual for the sake of an alleged social utility. On the Panopticon, see the properly sardonic essay of Gertrude Himmelfarb, "The Haunted House of Jeremy Bentham," *Victorian Minds* (1968, rpt., Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1975), 32-81; Himmelfarb, "Bentham's Utopia: the National Charity Company," *Journal of British Studies*, 10 (November 1970): 80-125; and Douglas Long, *Bentham on Liberty: Jeremy Bentham's Idea of Liberty in Relation to his Utilitarianism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977).
 28. For Mill's pervasive influence on Ricardo and Ricardian economics, see T. W. Hutchison, "James Mill and Ricardian Economics: A Methodological Revolution?," *On Revolutions and Progress in Economic Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978). On Mill and the Law of Comparative Advantage, also demonstrating Ricardo's lack of interest in this doctrine, see William O. Thweatt, "James Mill and the Early Development of Comparative Advantage," *History of Political Economy*, 8 (Summer 1976): 207-234.
 29. Professor Thomas perceptively writes: "This is why Mill, a sceptic in later life, always got on well with [Protestant] dissenters [from the Anglican Church]. . . . He may have come to reject belief in God, but some form of evangelical zeal remained essential to him. Scepticism in the sense of non-commitment, indecision between one belief and another, horrified him. Perhaps this accounts for his long-standing dislike of Hume. Before he lost his faith, he condemned Hume for his infidelity; but even when he had come to share that infidelity, he continued to undervalue him. A placid scepticism which seemed to uphold the *status quo* was not an attitude of mind Mill understood." William E. S. Thomas, *The Philosophic Radicals: Nine Studies in Theory and Practice, 1817-1841* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 100.
 30. The French theorists developed the insight that Europe had originally been dominated by a ruling class of kings, or of feudal nobility. They believed that with the rise of capitalism and free markets, of "industrialisme", there would be no ruling class, and the class-run State would wither away, resulting in a "classless," Stateless, free society. Saint-Simon was originally a Comte-Dunoyer libertarian, and then in later life he, and particularly his followers, changed the class analysis while keeping the original categories, to maintain that employers somehow rule or exploit the workers in a free-market wage relationship. Marx adopted the Saint-Simonian class analysis so that Marxism to this day maintains a totally inconsistent definition of class: On Asiatic despotism and feudalism, the old libertarian concept of ruling class as wielder-of-State power is maintained;

then, when capitalism is discussed, suddenly the definition shifts to the employers forming a “ruling class” over workers on the free market. The alleged capitalist class rule over the State is only extra icing on the cake, the “super-exploitation” by an “executive committee” of a ruling class previously constituted on the market. For a brilliant critique of the inconsistencies of Marxian class theory, see Ludwig von Mises, *Socialism* 3rd ed. (Indianapolis, Ind: Liberty Classics, 1981), 292–307.

31. Joseph Hamburger, *Intellectuals in Politics: John Stuart Mill and the Philosophic Radicals* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), 44. Despite its title, this book deals far more with James than John Stuart.
32. On James Mill as manipulator of the agitation for the Reform Bill, see Joseph Hamburger, *James Mill and the Art of Revolution* (Yale University Press, 1963).

Politics after a Nuclear Crisis

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Contained in the legal systems of almost all modern liberal democratic states is the provision for extraordinary executive power to be exercised in emergencies. This power is variously called martial law, state of seige, constitutional emergency powers, and constitutional dictatorship. This power is designed for use both in the event of war and in the face of civil unrest, and many governments make extensive preparations for these contingencies.

Considering the scope and impact of constitutional emergency powers, remarkably little attention has been given to them by either supporters or critics of state power. One of the main reasons is that the problem seems remote in the lulls between emergencies, and also disturbing: Politicians certainly have nothing to gain by raising the issue.¹

The 1980s saw an enormous upsurge in attention to the problem of nuclear war. Yet while accounts of the physical effects of nuclear war have been innumerable, there has been little mention of the likely political aftermath of a nuclear crisis or war: the problem of constitutional dictatorship in the nuclear age. This topic is my concern here.

To justify the examination of politics during and after a nuclear crisis or war, it is first necessary to show the significant possibility that these can occur without total destruction of human society. That is my first task. After a mention of some of the connections between war and political economy, I focus on "war dictatorship," namely, the subordination of societies to authoritarian states, which is a likely political consequence of nuclear crisis. Finally, I spell out a few implications of the analysis for social action to avoid the worst political consequences of nuclear crisis and war.

Can the World Survive a Major Nuclear Crisis?

Especially in the past several years, an enormous amount of attention has been given to the physical consequences of nuclear war, much of it emphasizing the