RONALD H. NASH

Three Kinds of Individualism

F. A. HAYEK has drawn a justly famous distinction between two types of political individualism. In 1948, he referred to these types as True and False Individualism.1 In the intervening years, Hayek has continued to refine and improve this distinction between two radically different ways of viewing society, politics, and economics.2 I wish to suggest that it is time to take note of a third tradition of individualism which, while hinted at by Hayek, is certainly one that differs from his own in several key respects. Some of these distinctions are to be found in the writings of the late Frank S. Meyer.

One of the difficulties encountered by anyone who wishes to distinguish these three movements is the lack of a totally satisfactory terminology. Exception could be taken to any terminology I might use, but since I know of no better way to make the distinction, I shall refer to these movements as the British, French, and American traditions of individualism. My designations for the first two movements are, of course, borrowed from Hayek who has discussed the historic grounds for these labels.3 I have two reasons for identifying the last type of individualism as the American tradition. First, to a certain extent, the basic features of this tradition occupy an important place in the writings of the American Founding Fathers. Secondly, the major contemporary proponents of this last tradition are American conservatives.

To be sure, there are also American descendants of the French tradition. The history of the French tradition has taken many twists and turns, but all of the forms of collectivism in the contemporary Western world (including American liberalism) are its step-children. There are also 20th century heirs of the British tradition around as well, but there is no convenient and accurate way of referring to them. They would prefer to call themselves liberals (in the classic 19th century sense of the word) but, as they see it, the noble term "liberalism" has been captured and perverted by men and movements that are in fact the enemies of freedom. Hayek himself illustrates the terminological dilemma of those who belong to the British tradition. He cannot use the name "liberal" because its contemporary connotations are too misleading. Since he feels uncomfortable with the label of conservative,4 Hayek finally settles for the less than satisfactory term, "Old Whig."

Throughout much of this paper, I shall speak of British–American individualism.

This will permit me both to indicate the numerous agreements between these closely related movements and to define the nature of the French tradition to which they are both so radically opposed. Later, I shall discuss some of the more important disagreements between the British and American traditions.

Hayek has made clear how Western political philosophy for the past two hundred years has been dominated by the conflict between the British–American and the French views of human society and their correspondingly different bases for social action. The British tradition includes David Hume, Adam Smith, Adam Ferguson, Josiah Tucker, Edmund Burke, and William Paley. Hayek also included John Locke's name in this list. There is a debate about precisely which tradition Locke belongs to. I concur with Willmoore Kendall that Locke actually belongs to the French tradition. The French tradition (with a strong assist from an application of Cartesian Rationalism to the social sciences) includes the Encyclopedists, Rousseau, the Physiocrats, and Condorcet. Hayek acknowledges the quite separate and independent appearance of many elements of the British tradition in the American Founding Fathers. "In its pure form," he states, "the British tradition" is represented in the United States, not by the radicalism of Jefferson, nor by the continental conservatism of Hamilton or even John Adams, but by the ideas of James Madison, the father of the Constitution."

There are several major respects in which the British and American traditions agree in opposition to the French tradition. After I have discussed these agreements, I shall indicate the important ways in which the British and American movements differ.

Collectivism

The British and American traditions concur in their opposition to political collectivism. The collectivist error in thinking that a set of relationships among individual human beings constitutes in some way a kind of existing entity, an organism, that has its own life, moral duties, and rights. "This hydropathization of the sum of relations between men, this calling into being of an organism as the value-center of political theory, is the essential note of the doctrines which underlie and inspire every powerful political movement of the 20th century and all the effective transformations of political institutions which have

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3. See Kendall's important article, "John Locke Reconsidered," The Intercollegiate Review, Jan.–Feb., 1966, pp. 217–234 and his book, The Conservative Affirmation (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1983). According to Kendall, Locke was a revolutionary whose political theory was based on a concept of law similar to that of the ancient Sophists. For Locke and the Sophists, all law is relative; it is the result of human convention and caprice. Law does not imitate eternal standards. Because Locke came close to conferring complete sovereignty on the majority of people within a particular society, the individual is left without any rights other than the right of self-preservation. It is wrong to think of Locke as an individualist; he was a collectivist, a "majority-rule democrat" who advocated a principle of majority rule which endangered the rights of individuals. It is wrong to think of Locke as an opponent of Hobbes; he actually out-Hobbesed Hobbes. Leo Strauss has also pointed out the affinities between Locke and Hobbes in his Natural Right and History (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1935). According to Kendall, "The Lockeans in America ... are the Liberals, and the Conservatives, who disagree and must disagree with the Liberals on all the crucial points, must learn to understand themselves as the anti-Lockeans." Conservative Affirmation, op. cit., p. 99.

6. Hayek recognizes the few exceptions that raise questions about his attempt to make this distinction in terms of national labels. For example, Thomas Hobbes clearly belongs in the French tradition as does the "American" Thomas Paine (at least following his stay in Paris). Frenchmen like Montesquieu and Tocqueville clearly belong to the British tradition. Adding to the confusion is the unfortunate and illegitimate union of these two traditions in such late 19th century liberals as John Stuart Mill, a union which eventually gave the collectivist tendencies of the French tradition the upper hand in late British liberalism. See "The Collective Character of 19th Century Liberalism," op. cit., p. 409.
taken place in the 20th century." The social wholes or entities that the collectivist is so concerned about are only logical constructs. The collectivist not only assumes the existence of society as an organism, he then treats this organism as the end or standard which decides all moral and political problems.

The conservative's opposition to collectivism should not, however, be interpreted as an endorsement of social atomism. Political and social institutions simply could not exist nor could political theory have any meaning if men were to live their lives in isolation from each other. For the conservative—individualist, man is a social animal who necessarily exists in many vital and varied relationships with other human beings.

Social Engineering and Political Rationalism

The British—American tradition of individualism also opposes social engineering. Whether or not the social engineer is motivated by noble and altruistic ideals, he is convinced that society can and must be redesigned in his own image. Nothing must stand in the way of "progress." Social engineering is usually accompanied by one or more of several more fundamental errors: (1) the social engineer may ignore the limitations of human reason in the area of the social sciences or he may overestimate the power of human reason to achieve genuine improvements in society. (2) He may overestimate man's propensities for good and thus be infatuated with the basic error of all utopians, viz., the perfectibility of man and the possibility of a perfect society. (3) He may be captivated by the error of Political Cyrenicism. Chances are that all of these errors are operative when a social engineer goes to work, but they finally lead him to his last mistake, that of statism. In his desire to achieve his social goals by the quickest means, he concentrates as much power as possible in the one institution with the authority to override all obstacles, the state.

(1) The liberal assumes that human reason is sufficient, in spite of the complicated relationships that exist between the infinite number of variables, to identify social programs that will succeed in improving society as a whole. The social engineer thinks he has a more complete picture of how various human actions will affect the whole of society. He forgets, however, that both man's knowledge and the range of his emotions are limited. The extent to which any given man can care is only a tiny part of the whole. Given the nature of his enterprise, the social engineer must lay claim to a greater degree of knowledge and concern than the rest of us. In fact, to warrant the confidence he desires, he must believe that his knowledge and concern extend over the whole of society. The conservative—individualist regards this as arrogant nonsense. The social engineer is not only blind to the limits of his own knowledge, he is also blind to the complexities of the social units (i.e., individual human beings) he seeks to manipulate. He must forget that men not only act; they also react when pushed or pulled; and their reactions are often surprisingly unpredictable. He must treat men as faceless and windowless monads, to be shuffled like pieces on a game board (or like children on a school bus). He thinks that change A will produce effect B and that C will produce D, and that E will produce F. He believes he has several separate elements, each one of which is an improvement on a prior situation, and thinks he can build a better society by simply joining these elements together. What he forgets, given the chemistry of human action and reaction, is that the forcing of the A/B, C/D, and E/F relations together may produce an explosion. But he also has an

answer for that: Unleash the power of the state and force the people to accept his will. After all, he knows what's best for them; he knows what they really want. Even a frequent critic of conservatism like Stephen Monksma sees this fault in liberalism's tendency "to underestimate the complexities and difficulties of the problems it seeks to correct and to overestimate the ease with which they can be corrected. A liberal tends to feel that no problem is so intractable, no challenge so great, but that with enough will and enough intelligence an answer can be found and implemented."19

The liberal-collectivist also overestimates the role that reason has played and can play in social progress. While the collectivist assumes "that man was originally endowed with both the intellectual and the moral attributes that enabled him to fashion civilization deliberately," the conservative believes "that civilization was the accumulated hard-earned result of trial and error; that it was the sum of experience, in part handed from generation to generation as explicit knowledge, but to a larger extent embodied in tools and institutions which had proved themselves superior—"institutions whose significance we might discover by analysis but which will also serve men's ends without men's understanding them."21 Hayek's critique of political rationalism is neither an attack on reason itself nor a plea for irrationalism or mysticism in politics.22

What he urges is not an abandonment of reason but a recognition of its proper limits in social and political thought.

(2) Social engineering is frequently based on a faulty understanding of human nature, a view we might term Political Pelagianism. Both the French tradition and its 20th century followers tend toward an overly optimistic assessment of man's social propensities and capacities. The liberal-collectivist is bewitched by the Pelagian delusion that man is not really inherently evil. He believes that when a man errs, it is only because he has been corrupted by society. A self-confessed liberal-collectivist admitted as much when he wrote: "Man, according to liberalism, is born ignorant, not wicked. . . . Man was also naturally inclined to be good, unless corrupted by ignorance and prejudice."23 According to this view, the major hindrances to the achievement of a good society are human ignorance and inadequate social institutions. Evil is a result either of improper conditions in man's environment or of human ignorance (which is again the responsibility of society since it is supposed to alleviate this ignorance through education).

The British-American individualist will have none of this utopianism. While conservatives are no less interested in improving man's condition and his social institutions, they reject absolutely

the idea that society or men generally are perfectible. In particular, [they are] perennially suspicious of the utopian approach that attempts to design society and the lives of human beings, whether in the light of abstract rationalist ideas or operational engineering concepts. [They] therefore reject the entire Liberal mystique of "planning," which, no matter how humanitarian the motives of the planners, perchance treats human beings as faceless


12. Hayek writes elsewhere: "By tracing the combined effects of individual actions, we discover that many of the institutions on which human achievements rest have arisen and are functioning without a designing and directing mind. . . . and that the spontaneous collaboration of free men often creates things which are greater than their individual minds can ever fully comprehend." Individualism, op. cit., pp. 6, 7.

units to be arranged and disposed according to a design conceived by the planner. 14

It was because the framers of the Constitution believed that human nature could not be trusted that they created a complicated and cumbersome system of government in which various checks and balances serve to make the attainment of absolute power by any one man or group of men extremely difficult. "To expect self-denial from men," John Adams wrote, "when they have a majority in their favor and consequently power to gratify themselves is to disbelieve all history and universal experience; it is to disbelieve Revelation and the Word of God, which informs us the heart is deceitful in all things and desperately wicked." How then, given this view of man, can a free and orderly republic be maintained? Adams' answer was a series of checks and balances: "The essence of a free government consists in an effective control of rivalries." Unchecked government is to be rejected regardless of whether it is the government of a king, an aristocracy, or an unrestrained majority. Even though government is necessary to control human passions and selfishness, government itself can become a menace should it grow too strong. As James Madison observed in The Federalist (#51):

It may be a reflection on human nature, that such devices [as checks and balances] should be necessary to control the abuse of government. But what is government itself, but the greatest of all reflections on human nature? If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary.

But, of course, men are not angels, and since a government must be established, it must be a government which cannot abuse its authority. In Madison's words, "You must first enable the government to control the governed; and in next place oblige it to control itself."

Nineteenth century liberals like John Stuart Mill believed government should be limited because men are essentially good. Conservatives in the British-American tradition believe that government should be limited because men are evil. The conservative individualist is concerned to find a political system in which men can do the least amount of harm.

(3) Society is frequently victimized by the social engineer's commitment to Political Cynicism. Like the ancient Cynics, the collectivist-liberal insists on ignoring the long range consequences of his social policies and concentrates on what he takes to be an immediate solution. As an example, imagine a state that wants to make it possible for more people, especially poor people, to buy eggs. Suppose that eggs are selling at a dollar a dozen and the state decides that the quickest way to make eggs easier to buy is to pass a law making it illegal to sell eggs for more than 75¢ a dozen. The state-imposed ceiling on the retail price of eggs means there must be a lower ceiling on the price the farmer can receive for his eggs. But suppose, as will undoubtedly be the case, the farmer's costs (for chicken feed, electricity, gasoline, etc.) mean that the state's intervention into the market will result in his losing money on his eggs. If the farmer has any sense, he'll sell his chickens to Colonel Sanders and find something more profitable to produce. Perhaps he'll even give up farming altogether and move to the city where he can do just as well on welfare. Many marginal farmers then will be forced out of the egg business which means there will be fewer eggs, but this is precisely the opposite result from what the state bureaucrats wanted. They thought their intervention into the market would make eggs more available. But as things have turned out, their action has only made eggs more scarce. At this point, the state

has two choices. It may decide to regulate prices all the way down the line. That is, it may decide that if the marginal farmer can't stay in business because of the high cost of grain, the way to solve this problem is to impose price controls on chicken feed. But this simply pushes the problem back to the level of the grain farmer. If he cannot make a profit growing grain, he'll turn to something else. It soon becomes obvious that the only way governmental intervention into the market place can succeed is if it becomes total control. Fortunately, our state still feels pressure sufficient to deter it from attempts at total control of the economy. But this is also the reason why statist intervention into the economy proves to be self-defeating. Sooner or later, the bureaucrats decide the controls are not working, the controls are lifted, and most people suffer until the disastrous effects of the government's intervention are overcome. In the case of the chicken farmers, once the price controls are lifted, the price of eggs will rise dramatically (say, to $1.50 a dozen) because demand outstrips supply. Since the higher price means more farmers can make a profit, they begin to raise more chickens which will eventually mean enough eggs to supply the market demand. But all this takes time and during that time, more poor people are forced to go without eggs than before.

A less hypothetical example of Political Cyreniaism is George Meany's recent demand that the state take immediate action to reduce the high rate of unemployment. Meany appears to be unaware of the extent to which our recent inflation has contributed to this unemployment. He certainly doesn't know or doesn't care about the extent to which the huge federal deficits in recent years have been funded by increases in the money supply which have brought about the higher prices that have brought about the consumer's inability to spend which has helped produce the unemployment. And so Meany's "solution" is for the federal deficit to be increased by another 20 billion dollars. Completely overlooked is the even greater round of inflation and unemployment that would follow Meany's cure.

Undoubtedly, the most dramatic illustration of the evils of Political Cyreniaism is the budget crisis of New York City. For years, the liberals in control of New York refused to risk the anger of the electorate by trimming city services to meet tax revenues. Their method of governing New York was to keep pushing the problems of the city into the future. That future has finally arrived and the working citizens of New York City must assume an awesome tax burden. In its own way, the federal government has pursued the same kind of reckless and insane fiscal policy. The major difference, of course, is that the federal government can print its own money, and so much of the federal deficit has been "covered" by flooding the economy with billions in increasingly worthless money.

The conservative-individualist certainly believes that poverty and unemployment are social evils. But, he insists, it does a nation no good to deal with these evils in ways that will only produce greater problems in the long run. Inflation is a social evil just like poverty and unemployment. It may even be worse since it is a contributing factor to higher rates of poverty and unemployment in the future. Inflation hits hardest at those who can least afford it — the poor, the elderly, the retired, people on fixed incomes. It cheats the thrifty and industrious by diminishing the value of savings, pensions, and annuities. It is a monstrous social evil that has resulted in large part from the short-sighted, thoughtless, and self-seeking actions of politicians who acted under the guise of solving other social problems. The other social evils are still with us. We have not driven out the old devils but they have been joined by new ones of our own making.

**Statism**

The British-American tradition is opposed to statism. It believes the
power of the state must be limited. Since the collectivist believes an uncontrolled society is tantamount to chaos, he believes that society must, for its own good, be controlled. And naturally, the most qualified people to control society are those whose ends agree with his own. The essence of liberalism is the desire for power, the power to use the state to control individual lives in the pursuit of the liberal’s ends. In the words of Frank Meyer, collectivism “attributes virtue in strict proportionality to power. Actions are best, and best performed, when the state performs them; and within the governmental structure, best when the act of the Federal government rather than of the several states.”

Stephen Monsma misunderstands this individualist thesis. He writes,

To the extent American conservatism holds to the classical liberal idea of weak (my emphasis) government, it holds to an archaic ideal that...is totally inappropriate to the twentieth-century’s liberal-democratic governments and interdependent, industrialised societies...Weak government is one of the biggest enemies of freedom.

The British–American individualist would agree with Monsma that weak government is an enemy of freedom. For one thing, a weak government would be unable to protect its citizens from the threat of foreign invasion. But Monsma confuses a weak state with a limited state. A limited government is one powerful enough to perform its constitutional functions; but it is also checked in various ways to prevent its growth into a Leviathan.

Monsma also observes that just as the state’s actions can pose a threat to individual freedom, personal liberty can also be threatened by the state’s failing to act in certain cases. The conservative–individualist does not object to this point in principle. He does object to the way collectivists use it as a justification for continued expansion of the state.

The Rule of Law

The British–American tradition supports what Hayek has called “The Rule of Law.” The Rule of Law is found whenever the agents and arbiters in a situation are bound in advance by fixed and stated rules or laws. Within the limits of the rules, men are free to act to the best of their ability. Of course, some play the game better than others and are rewarded more lucratively. Our freedoms come into conflict with the liberties of others and with the limitations of our circumstances and abilities. In order to preserve order amidst these conflicting claims, the state is given the monopoly of coercive power within its sphere of control, but it is vital in a free society that the power of the state be limited to laws which the citizen knows in advance. When the actions of the government are not announced in advance in the form of laws, it is impossible for the citizen to predict what the government will do or demand in any given situation. Thus the citizen’s liberty is restricted because he cannot plan his own future actions, given his uncertainty about what the state will approve or condemn the next hour, day, or week. Where governments observe the Rule of Law, individuals can predict how the state will use its coercive powers in given circumstances and can thus govern their lives in a manner that will enable them to avoid penalties for improper conduct. Once the individual knows the rules of the game, he is free to pursue his personal ends so long as they do not conflict with the pre-announced rules. The Rule of Law prevents the state from taking ad hoc, arbitrary, and discriminatory action.

While the liberal–collectivist may profess concern for the Rule of Law, he persists in taking actions that are not only


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inconsistent with it but also destructive of it. In the real world, natural inequalities exist. Driven by egalitarian concerns, the liberal–collectivist wants to overcome these natural differences. But this means that in his desire to make unequal people equal, he must treat them unequally. He must apply the rules in some cases and not in others. Or else he must have one set of rules for the people he identifies as disadvantaged and another set of rules for the rest. A good example of how the collectivist abandons the Rule of Law is seen in his pursuit of what is called, euphemistically, social justice. As Hayek has observed many times, the Rule of Law is incompatible with the quest for distributive justice.

Distributive justice requires an allocation of all resources by a central authority; it requires that people be told what to do and what ends to serve. Where distributive justice is the goal, the decisions as to what the different individuals must be made to do cannot be derived from general rules but must be made in the light of the particular aims and knowledge of the planning authority. As we have seen before, when the opinion of the community decides what different people shall receive, the same authority must also dictate what they shall do. . . . Those who pursue distributive justice will in practice find themselves obstructed at every move by the rule of law. They must, from the very nature of their aim, favor discriminatory and discretionary action. But, as they are usually not aware that their aim and the rule of law are in principle incompatible, they begin by circumventing or disregarding in individual cases a principle which they often would wish to see preserved in general.  


Distributive justice then is not the justice of a free society. It is the “justice” of an hierarchic organization. It is a program incompatible with the Rule of Law and with individual liberty.

The American Tradition

Up to this point, I have been discussing the basic agreements between the British and American traditions of individualism. I have noted several ways in which these traditions oppose the French tradition and its 20th century heirs. I wish now to consider several major respects in which the American and British traditions differ. I have selected the late Frank S. Meyer to represent the American tradition, much as I used F. A. Hayek to speak for the British tradition.

Meyer acknowledged his personal debt to the writings of Hayek, especially Hayek’s The Road to Serfdom, 18 which played a decisive role in freeing him from the Marxist ideology to which he had been committed during the 1930s. Meyer found Hayek’s commitment to freedom admirable, but he also found Hayek’s defense of liberty inadequate. Like most 19th century liberals, Hayek sought to defend freedom on utilitarian grounds, a defense that would only work. Meyer believed, for those who shared Hayek’s preferences for the ends of individual men over the ends of society. And while Meyer certainly shared Hayek’s preferences, he believed there was a stronger case for freedom.

Freedom as an essential right of men is founded not upon preferences, but upon the nature of men and the very constitution of being. [Freedom] is inalienable and infeasible as a right, not for any reasons of utility but because it is the true condition of men’s created being. In the argument with collectivism, utilitarian reasons can always

be answered with alternative utilitarian reasons. The final struggle with collectivism . . . can only be waged in terms of an understanding of the nature of man. It is because freedom is the truth of the order of things, that the conservative, who is first of all one who respects the inherent constitution of creation, stands for freedom.20

Meyer came to see that freedom should not be viewed simply as a means to preferred ends. Rather, freedom must be grounded on a Christian view of being and man. Man's essential freedom and his right to exercise that freedom are his by virtue of his creation in God's image. To be truly human, to be most expressive of the image of God, man needs to be free, to be able to choose. When the state deprives man of his liberty, man loses an essential part of his humanness.

While Hayek's first error was his failure to ground man's freedom on the very nature of man's created being, his second was the typical 19th century Whig fear of acknowledging an objective and transcendent ground of values. Since Hayek's utilitarianism is incompatible with unchanging moral ends, his view lacks an "ultimate sanction for the inviolability of the person" and is left without any foundation for "its defense of the person as primary in political and social matters."21 As M. Stanton Evans observes, "If there is no value system with which we may rebuke the pretensions of despots, what is to prevent the rule of force in the world? If there are no objective standards of right and wrong, why object to tyranny?"22

The Christian understanding of the nature and destiny of man, which is the foundation of Western civilization, is always and everywhere what conservatives strive to conserve. That understanding accepts the existence of absolute truth and good and at the same time recognizes that men are created with the free will to accept or reject that truth and good. Conservation, therefore, demands both the struggle to vindicate truth and good and the establishment of conditions in which the free will of individual persons can be effectively exercised.23

Meyer, then, agreed with Christian theism that freedom can only be defended in a context where men acknowledge the existence of objective and unchanging moral laws.

One of Meyer's more important contributions to conservative thought was his recognition that, in spite of the diversity of conservative beliefs, American conservatism did have a center, a consensus, a mainstream.24

I ask the indulgence of my readers in accepting the word "conservative" as an overall term to include the two streams of thought that in practice unite to oppose the reigning ideologies of collectivist Liberalism. I believe that those two streams of thought, although they are sometimes presented as mutually incompatible, can in reality be united within a single broad conservative political theory, since they have their roots in a common tradition and are arrayed against a common enemy. Their opposition, which takes many forms, is essentially a division between those who abstract from the corpus of Western belief its stress upon freedom and upon the innate importance of the individual person (what we may call the "libertarian") position and those who, drawing upon the same sources, stress tradition and order (what we may call the "traditionalist") position.

But the source from which both draw, the continuing consciousness of Western civilization, has been specifically distinguished

24. An excellent account of the diversity of conservative thought can be found in M. Stanton Evans' article, "Varieties of Conservative Experience," Modern Age, Spring, 1971, pp. 130-137.
by its ability to hold these apparently oppo-
posed ends in balance and tension, and in
fact the two positions which confront each
other today in American conservative dis-
course both implicitly accept, to a large
degree, the ends of the other. 23

Conservatives like Meyer believe this
consensus of the libertarian and tradition-
aлист camps of conservative thought faith-
fully represents the view of the Founding
Fathers. They believe that the Constitu-
tion's program of protecting individual
freedom in an ordered society governed
by a limited state was the closest that
human beings have come to establishing a
policy which gives the possibility of main-
taining at one and the same time indi-
vidual liberty, underlying norms of law,
and necessary public order. 26

The American conservative has indeed a
special heritage, the discussions and the
achievements of the Founders of the
American Constitution (Madison preemi-
nently), men who established the highest po-
litical form the West has yet created to
express the tension of transcendent truth
and human freedom. The political struc-
ture they left us has its contradictions, no
doubt, but... they reflect the imperfection
state of man and the tension within which
he must live if he is to be true to his nature,
striving towards transcendent ends in free-
dom. 27

This brings me finally to the American
individualist's view of the state. The con-
servative-individualist is not an anarchist.
While he agrees with the anarchist that the
power vested in the state is a threat to indi-
vidual liberty, it is still a necessary evil.
There are legitimate, important, and
necessary functions in society that indi-

25. Frank Meyer, "Freedom, Tradition, Conserva-
26. Ibid., pp. 7-8. Compare also the following: "For ours is the most effective effort ever made to articulates in political terms the Western understanding of the interrelation of the freedom of the person and the authority of an objective moral order." Meyer, Defense, op. cit., p. 8.
27. Meyer, Mainstream, op. cit., p. 36.
28. Milton Friedman, Capitalism and Freedom
23. See also page 34.
29. This does not rule out the possibility that the elite
may rule for what they take to be the good of the
people. Where that situation prevails, it is still true that the elite are using the state to attain their
ends: it just so happens that in this case the ends of
the elite coincide with what they (correctly or
incorrectly) believe to be the good of the people.
remains thus set off, separate, whether it governs with or without the consent of the governed, with or without their participation in the choice of the governors. Even in a democratic polity, the state is not "we," identical with all the people, as is so often claimed; it is "they," those who hold state power. 30

There are two erroneous ways of viewing the relationship of the state to the individual that deserve special attention. First, we need to avoid viewing the state as an organism to which men are related as cells. This is a view from which the ancient Greeks could never free themselves. But, as Meyer points out, Christianity produced a distinctly different view of the individual-state relationship.

The incarnation, and the Christian doctrine of the person that flows from it, breaks finally and forever the unity of cosmos and person. The offer of grace through the penetration of the divine into the immanent world overcomes the lonely horror implicit in a clear and sharp separation between the world and the transcendent. . . . God's sacrifice in love bridged that gulf and made it possible for men to face each his indissoluble identity and accept its responsibilities. It now becomes clear . . . that only the person can be the earthly pole of the discharge between the transcendent and the immanent. The sanctity is drained out of all institutions of an earthly nature. For no community, no state, no association—only persons, individual human beings—can receive the beatific vision or be redeemed by the divine sacrifice of love. 31

Because Western political thought is still distorted by the presuppositions of the Greeks, we have yet to see a political theory "raised to the height that the Christian sense of the value of the person makes possible." 32

Meyer's second warning concerns viewing the state as an end instead of a means. As we have seen, the state is a necessary condition for man's existence. Man cannot exist without social order and social order cannot exist without the state. The collectivist, however, views the state not as a means or condition but as the end of the individual person. He sees the state as a determining cause of man's existence. Since the state is only a condition necessary for men to live their lives freely, Meyer insists that the state be judged by the criterion of the place it gives to individual freedom. The best state is that which can maintain social order at the same time that it guarantees each person within its sphere of sovereignty the greatest amount of liberty possible short of that liberty's interfering with the freedom of others.

Earlier, I noted Meyer's claim that the state is always ruled by an elite. Meyer's expansion of that point throws a great deal of light on the collectivist nature of contemporary American society. He contends that the contemporary state is controlled by a bureaucratic elite which is "a composite of several groups with different functional positions and some different parochial interest, but with an essential unity of ideological outlook and underlying interest that becomes greater year by year." 33 Meyer referred to this as the Quadripartite Bureaucracy because it manifests itself in four different ways: (1) the governmental bureaucracy; (2) the salaried manageriat of both the trade unions and the big corporations; 34 (3) the mass-communications bu-

30. Meyer, Defense, op. cit., p. 82.
31. Ibid., pp. 87, 88.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid., p. 105.
34. Note two interesting points here. (1) Conservatives are, given the prevailing mind-set of our society, accused of being subservient to the interests of big business, but the literature of conservatism unmasks this lie. The managers of the big corporations pose as great a threat to individual liberty as any other member of the bureaucracy. (2) While their interests often clash, Meyer insists there is little if any difference between the men who run the labor unions and the managers of the corporations. Interested readers should consult James Burnham's prophetic discussion of the rise of this movement in his 1941 book, The Managerial Revolution.
reacocracy; and (4) finally, the academic bureaucracy. Radicals should take note of Meyer's attack on the Establishment. There is an Establishment and it is a liberal-collectivist establishment.

The rise of the bureaucratic elite (at least, the Quadripartite Bureaucracy) is a fairly recent phenomenon. None of these bureaucracies existed or at least had the power they presently have fifty years ago.

The liberal-collectivist bureaucratic elite has little direct resemblance to the conscious unity of, say, a Communist Party. It is quadripartite, not unified. Its four parts (governmental, corporate-trade union, mass communications, and academic) are often more conscious of their differences and rivalries than of their common aims. But the identity of their underlying ideology impels them to a common front whenever and wherever basic issues are raised that would tend towards the restoration of the conditions of freedom. When they struggle among themselves, it is to gain some particular advantage for one group or another within the general bureaucratic system. Any radical challenge to the basic concepts upon which the power of the state is based, they unite instinctively to oppose with all the resources of their immense power. The state is their hope and their future. Without it their very function would cease to be bureaucrats engineering their segment of the grand design to reconstruct mankind. 35


I have been arguing that there is a political tradition in America deserving of the name, "Individualism." It is a tradition similar in many respects to the British tradition that includes Adam Smith and Edmund Burke; but contrary to the prevailing orthodoxy, it is neither Lockean, egoistic, or anarchistic. The American tradition originated with the Founders of the Constitution, most notably, James Madison. 36 Its contemporary proponents belong to the mainstream of conservative thought which avoids the excesses and errors both of classic libertarianism and continental authoritarianism. While America continues to be threatened by collectivist tyrannies abroad, perhaps the greatest threat to the freedom of its citizens are the collectivists within its borders, namely, the members of the quadripartite bureaucracy that controls the state. In the eyes of the American Individualist, these purveyors of "progress" have promised us a paradise. But their delusive utopian dreams have only compounded our problems while robbing us of important liberties. We have gotten into our present fix because we have insisted on supplanting the God-ordained supremacy of the individual person in the political order with the Leviathan state. It is time that we reversed this order.


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