
FUTURE OF FREEDOM

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*The greatest thing in the world is to know how to
belong to oneself.*

— *Michel Eyquem de Montaigne*

FUTURE OF FREEDOM

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The Future of Freedom Foundation is a nonprofit educational foundation whose mission is to advance liberty and the libertarian philosophy by providing an uncompromising moral, philosophical, and economic case for individual liberty, free markets, private property, and limited government.

Believing in the power of ideas on liberty to shift the course of society toward freedom, our methodology is based on sharing sound principles of liberty with others.

- Our monthly journal, *Future of Freedom*, contains timeless and uncompromising essays on liberty. The price is \$25 for a one-year print subscription, \$15 for the email version.
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- Our Libertarian Angle weekly Internet video show provides viewers with libertarian perspectives on the burning issues of the day.
- Our website, fff.org, contains all the articles and videos we have published since our inception in 1989.

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<i>9/11, Afghanistan, and Iraq, Part 2</i>	2
Jacob G. Hornberger	
<i>Liberals' Love Affair with Leviathan</i>	9
James Bovard	
<i>Time to Put Uncle Sam on a Diet</i>	15
Laurence M. Vance	
<i>The Social Engineer as Ethical Authoritarian</i>	25
Richard M. Ebeling	
<i>How Government Meddling Ruined Higher Education, Part 1</i>	36
George C. Leef	

9/11, Afghanistan, and Iraq, Part 2

by Jacob G. Hornberger



Prior to the 9/11 attacks, The Future of Freedom Foundation was publishing articles warning that the U.S. government's deadly and destructive interventionism in the Middle East would likely end up producing a retaliatory terrorist attack on American soil. We weren't the only ones. The noted analyst Chalmers Johnson's excellent book *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire*, which was published before the 9/11 attacks, warned the same thing.

It didn't take a rocket scientist to make such a prediction. In 1993, there was a terrorist attack on the World Trade Center. When one of the terrorists in that attack, Ramzi Yousef, was arrested and brought

back for trial to the United States, he angrily told the federal judge at his sentencing hearing that he had been motivated by the massive deaths that the U.S. government had been inflicting in the Middle East.

The 1993 terrorist attack on the WTC was followed by the terrorist attacks on the USS Cole and on U.S. embassies in East Africa. When Osama bin Laden issued his pre-9/11 fatwa against the United States, he cited U.S. interventionism, not hatred for America's freedom and values and not a quest to establish a worldwide Islamic caliphate, as his motive for declaring war on the United States.

None of this caused U.S. officials to change course. In conscious disregard of the likely consequence of a major U.S. attack on American soil, they continued their policy of wreaking death, destruction, and humiliation in the Middle East.

A new official enemy

Thus, there is no way that U.S. officials could have been surprised by the 9/11 attacks. But they now had their new official enemy — terrorism — and, to a certain extent, Islam — that they used to replace “godless communism.” They now had their justification for another

several decades as a national-security state, with its ever-growing power, influence, and tax-funded largess. Their “war on terrorism” was certain to be longer-lasting than their 45-year “war on communism.”

It was possible to condemn both the 9/11 attacks and the interventionist foreign policy that brought them about.

They then used the 9/11 attacks to justify their attack on Afghanistan and then, a year later, their attack on Iraq. As FFF was pointing out, however, those invasions and occupations were only going to add fuel to the interventionist fire that had been lit before 9/11. The invasions and occupations would end up killing, destroying, and humiliating people on a continuous basis, which would bring endless anger and rage, which, in turn, would mean a constant threat of terrorist retaliation. As I stated several times, the invasions and occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq were the greatest terrorist-producing machine in history. With each new person that U.S. officials killed in those two countries, ten more family members, friends, or countrymen became motivated to retaliate.

What is amazing is that there was absolutely no indignation or anger among interventionists for the U.S. government’s role in bringing about the 9/11 attacks. After all, at the risk of belaboring the obvious, it was possible to condemn both the 9/11 attacks and the interventionist foreign policy that brought them about.

That was our position here at FFF. Our position was to put out a big reward for the arrest and conviction of bin Laden and not to invade Afghanistan and Iraq, which would end up killing countless people who had nothing to do with the 9/11 attacks. We also warned that the invasions and occupations of those countries would inevitably bring a crackdown on civil liberties of the American people, like with the USA PATRIOT Act.

Killing in wars of aggression

That brings up the role of U.S. soldiers in those two invasions. Let’s begin with Iraq, because it is easier to see what happened to U.S. troops in that country.

As everyone knows, Iraq never attacked the United States or even threatened to attack the United States. That means that the U.S. government was the aggressor in that conflict. Iraqi forces were al-

ways the defending power in that war. The Iraqi people were always defending their country against an unlawful aggressor.

President George W. Bush justified his invasion of Iraq by citing supposed plans by Saddam Hussein to attack the United States with weapons of mass destruction. An alternative justification cited by Bush was that Saddam Hussein was violating UN resolutions regarding WMDs. Still a third justification was to bring freedom to the Iraqi people. It was like an invasion cafeteria, one in which U.S. soldiers were free to select their own personal justification for killing Iraqis and destroying their businesses, homes, and infrastructure.

The problem is that Bush's first justification was a lie. This was later confirmed when no WMDs were found in Iraq. If Bush had been telling the truth, he would have apologized profusely for his mistake and ordered U.S. forces to return home. Instead, when it became clear that no WMDs were going to be found, U.S. forces were ordered to remain in Iraq, where they continued killing people and destroying the country for several more years.

The problem with Bush's second justification was that only the UN had authority to enforce its own

resolutions. The United States certainly was the most powerful member of the UN, but that didn't mean that it had the legal authority to unilaterally enforce UN resolutions.

When it became clear that no WMDs were going to be found, U.S. forces were ordered to remain in Iraq.

The problem with Bush's third justification was that under international law, the United States was prohibited from invading another country for the sake of bringing "freedom" to the citizenry of that country. In fact, that sort of war was condemned as a war crime at Nuremberg. Moreover, at the risk of belaboring the obvious, the many people who would be killed as part of such a war would not experience the "freedom" that U.S. forces were supposedly bringing to the country.

There is another factor to consider in all this — the U.S. Constitution, which requires a congressional declaration of war before the president can order his army to wage war against another nation. Bush went to war against Iraq without such a declaration. That made the war illegal under our own form of government.

In the middle of the Iraqi occupation, I wrote to a Catholic priest who was a friend of mine. He was a libertarian. I asked him whether it would be permissible under Catholic doctrine for a Catholic soldier to kill Iraqis. He responded, “Absolutely not!” He said that since the U.S. government was the aggressor, no U.S. soldier could legitimately kill anyone in Iraq. I asked, “But what if a soldier is placed in a position of kill or be killed.” He responded that under God’s law, the soldier could still not legitimately kill any Iraqi, including one that was firing at him. He said that his only religious recourse would be to escape or be killed. He could not fire back in “self-defense.”

Aggression is not self-defense

Imagine a burglar who has broken into a family’s home in the middle of the night. The father discovers his existence and begins firing at him. He fires back and kills the father. He cannot later claim that he was firing in self-defense because he had no right to be inside that home.

The same principle applies to U.S. soldiers in Iraq. They never had any legal, moral, or religious justification for killing anyone because they had no right to be in Iraq in the

first place. Every person they killed was killed wrongfully.

The same principle also applies to Afghanistan. Some people have tried to draw a distinction between the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, but actually the principle is the same.

First of all, there was never a congressional declaration of war against Afghanistan, which made the U.S. invasion and occupation illegal under our form of government, just like with Iraq.

Second, some people claim that Afghanistan is different from Iraq because, they say, the Taliban regime “harbored” bin Laden and al-Qaeda. Therefore, they say, it was entirely legitimate for Bush to order his army to wage war against the Taliban regime.

U.S. soldiers never had any legal, moral, or religious justification for killing anyone because they had no right to be in Iraq.

But notice something important: They never define the term “harbor.” They simply skate over that important issue.

The U.S. government never produced any evidence that the Taliban regime knowingly participated in the 9/11 attacks or even that it had

foreknowledge of the attacks and knowingly let them happen.

What actually occurred is that Bush asked the Taliban regime to extradite bin Laden to the control of the Pentagon and the CIA, where he undoubtedly would have been given the Gitmo treatment — i.e., torture and indefinite detention without trial and, perhaps ultimately, a kangaroo military tribunal that would have found him guilty and ordered his execution.

The Taliban expressed a willingness to deliver bin Laden to an independent third-party nation.

The problem Bush faced though was that there was no extradition treaty between the United States and Afghanistan. That meant that there was no legal requirement that the Taliban regime comply with Bush's extradition demand.

Nonetheless, concerned with the fact that the United States would torture bin Laden or simply kill him, the Taliban expressed a willingness to deliver bin Laden to an independent third-party nation, where he could be guaranteed a fair trial.

Bush, the Pentagon, and the CIA were not interested in that proposal. They demanded uncondi-

tional compliance with their extradition demand. When the Taliban refused, Bush ordered U.S. troops to invade Afghanistan, an invasion in which U.S. soldiers would end up killing countless people who had nothing to do with the 9/11 attacks.

Thus, what interventionists and some liberventionists fail to realize is that when Bush alleged that the Taliban “harbored” bin Laden, what he meant by that term was that the Taliban had refused to hand over bin Laden, not that the Taliban was somehow complicit in the 9/11 attacks.

Some interventionists say that Bush was still justified in waging war against the Taliban based on its refusal to comply with Bush's extradition demand. Of course, they are unwilling to extend their reasoning to other nations. Suppose, for example, a Cuban-American sneaks into Cuba and bombs a hotel, killing hundreds of people. He then escapes back to the United States. Cuba demands his extradition. Since there is no extradition treaty between the United States and Cuba, and since the terrorist is a prominent and influential citizen, U.S. officials reject the extradition demand. Cuba then invades the United States in an effort to kill or capture the terrorist, killing hun-

dreds or thousands of Americans in the process and destroying homes, businesses, and infrastructure. Would interventionists say that Cuba has the legitimate authority to invade and occupy the United States and kill American citizens and destroy property in the process? I think not.

The power of conscience

When a serial killer murders people, there appears to be no guilt or remorse. It's as if the killer has no conscience or as if his conscience is so deeply submerged as to be of no consequence.

While there are certainly soldiers within the U.S. military who didn't give a second thought to killing Afghans or Iraqis, the fact is that most soldiers are just like the rest of us. They are regular people. They have families. They go to church. They enjoy hobbies. They have consciences.

Even though U.S. soldiers were given a smorgasbord of justifications from which to choose to justify their killing of Afghans and Iraqis, a fully operating human conscience cannot be so easily fooled. When a regular person wrongfully kills another person, his conscience begins eating at him like an acid.

If the soldier, however, has been persuaded on the conscious level that he was justified in killing his victims, he becomes tormented without being able to figure out why. On the conscious level, he is made to feel proud for "defending America from the terrorists." On the subconscious level, his conscience is telling him that he has engaged in the wrongful killing of people.

Persuaded on the conscious level that he was justified in killing his victims, the soldier becomes tormented without being able to figure out why.

When he goes to a therapist, the therapist gets the analysis all wrong. He tells his patient that he's a hero who simply is suffering from PTSD. Thus, the soldier is never made to confront the true cause of his torment — guilt over his wrongful killing of other human beings.

Throughout the occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq, many Americans played their role in this process by constantly thanking the troops for "their service." Airlines would give soldiers preferential treatment for what they were doing in Afghanistan and Iraq. Church ministers would exhort their con-

gregation to “pray for the troops, especially those in harm’s way,” rather than pray that they be returned before having to kill one more person.

For soldiers to recover from what they did in Afghanistan and Iraq, it is necessary for them to confront the fact that they wrongfully killed multitudes of people. Only by acknowledging what they have done and dealing with it honestly, directly, and forthrightly can true recovery take place.

By the same token, it is imperative that the American people en-

gage in that same type of deep soul-searching. Only in that way can we recover as a nation.

Jacob G. Hornberger is founder and president of The Future of Freedom Foundation.

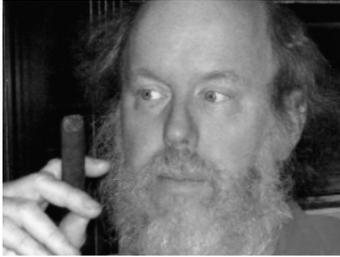
NEXT MONTH:
“The Power to Assassinate”
by Jacob G. Hornberger

The will of man is not shattered, but softened, bent, and guided; men are seldom forced by it to act, but they are constantly restrained from acting: such a power does not destroy, but it prevents existence; it does not tyrannize, but it compresses, enervates, extinguishes, and stupefies a people, till each nation is reduced to be nothing better than a flock of timid and industrious animals, of which the government is the shepherd.

— Alexis de Tocqueville

Liberals' Love Affair with Leviathan

by James Bovard



The election of Joe Biden as president magically transformed all federal agencies, ensuring that their iron fists no longer posed any peril to the American people. Or at least that seems to be what many Biden supporters, liberals, and Democrats now believe.

I stumbled upon that new catechism on a cold morning last November. I ambled online after breakfast and saw that “Deep State” was a Twitter trending topic. I tossed out my two cents: “Don’t forget how NYTimes & many liberals heaped praise on the Deep State in 2019 for its role in the first Trump impeachment.” I attached a link to my 2019 *USA Today* article headlined, “As the deep state attacks Trump to rave media reviews, don’t forget its dark side.” *New York Times*

editorial writer Michelle Cottle had hailed the Deep State as “a collection of patriotic public servants,” and *Washington Post* columnist Eugene Robinson captured the Beltway’s verdict: “God bless the Deep State!”

The mob rules on social media

Alas, I quickly learned that I was a hopeless reactionary. Apparently, since President Trump condemned the Deep State, that proves that it doesn’t exist. And since a Democrat now occupies the White House, any mention of the Deep State is apparently a grave offense. Twitter user DoinTimeOnEarth responded to my tweet: “Why don’t you shut up & do some good instead of spreading lies?”

Twitter is a fount of wisdom because so many of its users are omniscient. Someone with the Twitter name “What?” howled: “USATO-DAY has gone crazy.... And no, I am not going to read a bunch of jackass nonsense before re-tweeting with this comment.” My story had 23 links to news stories, analyses, and government reports on the Deep State scandals, including Bush-era torture, National Security Agency abuses, drone killings of innocent foreigners, and other abuses of power and secrecy. The piece in-

cluded links to three *New York Times* articles confirming the Deep State's role in spurring the first impeachment of President Trump.

“So being a smug ‘educated’ liberal means believing federal agencies don’t pervasively violate the law & Constitution?”

Twitter user herself “Nom of the Plume” huffed: “Liberals don’t believe in the ‘deep state.’ It goes against our radical values of being sane and educated.” I replied: “So being a smug ‘educated’ liberal means believing federal agencies don’t pervasively violate the law & Constitution? When did gullibility become a badge of political sophistication?” My response failed to placate my critics. Nom of the plume commented: “No I won’t try to have a rational conversation with irrational people.... You are extremists and terrorists.” The fact that the Justice Department Inspector General concluded that FBI agents deceived the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court to justify illegally surveilling the 2016 Trump presidential campaign had apparently been expunged from all historical memory — at least among progressives.

On Twitter, “likes” are the highest form of logic, and re-tweets are

irrefutable truth. Some Twitter users refuted my articles by posting rows of laughing emojis. Others debunked my errors with meme photos such as a photo of a screw next to a baseball. Some of the names of Twitter respondents reeked of piety. “Covfefe_au_lait is FULLY VAXXED+BOOSTER” sneered that “anyone who uses the phrase [Deep State] sounds ridiculous.” Mike Burrridge scoffed: “I see the Right has no supply chain disruptions for stupidity. Shelves fully stocked with ignorance.” Another user growled: “Did you brew your coffee with paint thinner this morning? This is the most absolutely ridiculous thing I’ve seen this week.”

Facts don’t matter on Twitter

But it wasn’t simply that I was ignorant. Instead, my comment on the Deep State was sufficient proof of my mental illness. Almost 40 people liked a reply declaring: “It does not exist. It is a construct of your collective imagination lead by a diseased mind.” @NygrooveX smirked: “It must be ‘Deep State Day’ in Crazytown Today.” Mindy-LouAgain scoffed: “you are deranged.” Gerald Slaby summed up: “Don’t blame us [liberals] for your ignorance and insanity.” DocB wrote “don’t forget to take your

medication or you end up like this.” Twitter user @antifashyst cackled: “Get professional help, Jimmy.” Where is Thomas Szasz when you need him?

After Donald Trump was elected president, Democrats swooned for secretive, nearly all-powerful federal agencies.

I would not be surprised if almost none of the hostile respondents clicked through to read that 2019 *USA Today* piece. @PupperMum declared: “Please share examples. Should be easy.” You mean aside from the 20+ links in the first article? I replied to her by posting a link to an *American Conservative* article I wrote in February 2021 that detailed the FBI’s machinations with the Steele dossier (condemned by the Justice Department Inspector General) and the CIA’s skulduggery bankrolling terrorist groups to fuel the Syrian Civil War (Trump’s attempts to withdraw from Syria were covertly torpedoed by his Pentagon appointees). That piece concluded: “Vast secrecy means that the political system ... is based on blind trust in officialdom. Pervasive secrecy defines down self-government: people merely select their Supreme Deceivers.” That received

zero substantive responses from the Twitter mob.

From anti-government to pro-Deep State

That Twitter throng symbolized the sea change among Democrats in the last five years. In the 1970s, a Senate Select Committee chaired by Sen. Frank Church (D-Idaho) courageously exposed shocking abuses by the FBI COINTELPRO program and CIA spying on American citizens. In the wake of the 9/11 attacks, Sen. Russ Feingold (D-Wis.) was one of the most penetrating critics of the Bush administration’s civil liberties violations and its attempts to exempt federal law enforcement agencies from almost any restraint. In 2014, Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) valiantly defeated the Obama White House suppression effort to publish the summary of a Senate Intelligence Committee report exposing the CIA’s post-9/11 torture regime. Feinstein was vilified by many Republicans for exposing U.S. government crimes, but she persisted regardless.

But after Donald Trump was elected president, Democrats changed their stripes and swooned for secretive, nearly all-powerful federal agencies. A 2018 Pew survey

found that 77 percent of Democrats now approve of the FBI, and 63 percent approve of the CIA. I wondered how many of the folks enraged by my tweet had bought those votary candles to pray for former FBI chief and Special Counsel Robert Mueller, whose investigation failed to prove that Trump was a Russian tool.

The fact that top CIA and FBI officials had made false allegations against the Trump presidential campaign was irrelevant as long as the resulting investigations undercut the most hated president since Richard Nixon.

The rise of the COVID gods

The same pro-Leviathan bias has radiated in liberals' response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Government officials vastly overstated the mortality risk and then exploited COVID fears to inflict "previously unimaginable restrictions on individual liberty," as Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito declared. Governors in state after state effectively placed hundreds of millions of citizens under house arrest — dictates that former Attorney General Bill Barr aptly compared to "the greatest intrusion on civil liberties" since the end of slavery. The *New York Times* set the tone for media cover-

age when it announced that the task for government was to "learn how to frighten [citizens] into acting for the common good." Shutting down entire states was the equivalent of burning witches or sacrificing virgins to appease angry viral gods.

The fact that Biden's order had no basis in the Constitution or federal law was irrelevant.

Joe Biden was elected president in part because liberals wanted a more forceful response to the pandemic. Last August, Biden decreed that any employee of a private company with more than 100 employees must be injected with a COVID vaccine. The response from liberals and Democrats was almost entirely supportive. The fact that Biden's order had no basis in the Constitution or federal law was irrelevant: instead, all that mattered was that the president was coming to the rescue. *Washington Post* editorials praised the mandates for "working" because they resulted in many individuals submitting to getting vaccinated in order not to lose their jobs. Federal appeals court rulings striking down the mandates as illegal and unconstitutional were derided or ignored by Democrats.

Similarly, Democrats have been prone to confer sainthood on COVID Czar Anthony Fauci, regardless of his endless flip-flops and his false congressional testimony about federal funding of dangerous research at the Wuhan Lab in China. Early in the pandemic, Fauci became the incarnation of coercive good intentions. Liberals posted lawn signs proclaiming “I believe in science” — implying that anyone who did not venerate Fauci and cheer politicians’ COVID crack-downs was a hopeless Neanderthal. On November 28, Fauci announced on a Sunday talk show that Republican senators who criticized him were “really criticizing science because I represent science. That’s dangerous.” On the day after Fauci effectively proclaimed “L’Science, C’est Moi,” FDA’s former top vaccine experts warned in the *Washington Post* that “the push for boosters for all could actually prolong the pandemic.” But liberal supporters of Fauci and Biden ignored the split in scientific opinion on COVID policy. Instead, Fauci’s job title apparently was the highest scientific evidence imaginable.

Fauci and other policymakers chose to pretend that natural immunity did not exist in the 150 million Americans who had had COVID

and recovered. Instead, the federal response to COVID became like a socialist command-and-control economic plan in which the only thing that mattered was how many arms had received multiple injections. Even though federal and state policies failed to stop the continued spread of the virus, anyone who opposed the policies was presumed to be either idiotic or misanthropic.

Liberal organizations and Democratic candidates profited massively from opposing President Trump. But was “Orange Man Bad” the sum of their political philosophy? Did the antipathy to Trump erase all historical memories?

The federal response to COVID became like a socialist command-and-control economic plan.

The liberal devotion to Leviathan is especially peculiar considering the current president’s role in spawning some of the worst law enforcement abuses and prosecutions of the modern era. When he was chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, Biden co-wrote the 1994 crime bill, which the *New York Times* noted in 2019 “contributed to the explosion of the prison population.” Biden had no sympathy for anyone who violated any law Con-

gress decreed: “Lock the S.O.B.s up!” Biden boasted in 1994 that “every major crime bill since 1976 that’s come out of this Congress ... has had the name of the Democratic senator from the State of Delaware: Joe Biden.” But Biden’s role in the arrest and jailing of hundreds of thousands of Americans vanished into the Memory Hole for liberals anxious to bow to the feds.

Perhaps nothing symbolizes the new liberal creed more vividly than the New York City Council’s recent unanimous vote to remove the statue of Thomas Jefferson from New York City Hall, where it had resided for more than a century. In 1799, Jefferson warned fellow Americans: “Let no more be heard of confidence in man, but bind him down from mischief by the chains of the

constitution.” It is regrettable that many liberals now have as much hostility to constitutional restraints on presidents and federal agencies as they had to that statue of Jefferson.

James Bovard is a policy advisor to The Future of Freedom Foundation and the author of the ebook Freedom Frauds: Hard Lessons in American Liberty, published by FFF, Public Policy Hooligan, Attention Deficit Democracy, and eight other books.

NEXT MONTH:
**“Corrupt Federal Statistics
Cover Endless Cons”**
by James Bovard

If ye would go up high, then use your own legs! Do not get yourselves carried aloft; do not seat yourselves on other people’s backs and heads!

— Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche

Time to Put Uncle Sam on a Diet

by Laurence M. Vance



A report issued a decade ago by the National Cancer Institute on the status of the American diet found that “three out of four Americans don’t eat a single piece of fruit in a given day, and nearly nine out of ten don’t reach the minimum recommended daily intake of vegetables.” The report concluded that “nearly the entire U.S. population consumes a diet that is not on par with recommendations.” I was among the guilty then, and — like most Americans — am among the guilty now.

The outward result of a bad diet is weight gain. As a consequence — and especially after the widespread gluttony that takes place from Thanksgiving through New Year’s Day — millions of Americans begin the new year with a resolution to go

on a diet. Unfortunately — and again, I plead guilty here — by the time February comes around, many dieters have already given up.

Americans who do choose to try and shed a few holiday pounds have many diets to choose from: Paleo, Atkins, Mediterranean, South Beach, Zone, Sirtfood, Dukan, Beverly Hills, Keto, Pritikin, Body Type, Dubrow, Ornish, Weight Watchers, Nutrisystem, Jenny Craig. *Parade* magazine last year put together an annotated list of 100 diets. According to the Boston Medical Center: “An estimated 45 million Americans go on a diet each year, and Americans spend \$33 billion each year on weight loss products. Yet, nearly two-thirds of Americans are overweight or obese.” This is why one of the fastest growing elective surgeries in America is bariatric surgery. According to the World Health Organization, the United States ranks eighteenth on the list of the most overweight countries.

One thing is abundantly clear: if you want to improve your diet and lose weight, the free market can provide you with not only an abundance of diets and weight-loss plans but also nutrition information, recipes, meal plans, exercise regiments, fitness equipment, gyms, dietary counseling, and weight-loss supple-

ments. So why does the U.S. government need 200 different diet-related programs?

Government diet programs

Last year marked the 100th anniversary of the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), formerly known as the General Accounting Office. It claims to be “the independent, non-partisan ‘congressional watchdog’” that oversees how “the federal government operates and spends its money — pointing out where it is doing well and where it can improve.” Over the years, the GAO “has made thousands of recommendations based on facts to improve services and save taxpayers billions of dollars.” After the agency’s name change in 2004, the GAO “began conducting performance audits — examining how government programs were performing and whether they were meeting their objectives.”

The GAO last year undertook one of its most unusual performance audits: an investigation of federal agencies’ efforts to address diet as a factor of chronic health conditions. The result was the publication of the report titled *Chronic Health Conditions: Federal Strategy Needed to Coordinate Diet – Related Efforts* (GAO-21-593). The report

examines: “(1) federal data on prevalence, mortality, and costs of selected diet-related chronic health conditions; (2) federal diet-related efforts to reduce Americans’ risk of chronic health conditions; and (3) the extent to which federal agencies have coordinated their efforts.”

The GAO undertook an investigation of federal agencies’ efforts to address diet as a factor of chronic health conditions.

Turns out that to improve Americans’ diets, 21 federal agencies manage over 200 different efforts that “include scientific research, education outreach, assistance with accessing healthy foods, and regulation of the food industry.” This includes 119 research efforts to “collect and monitor data, conduct or fund studies, review research to develop guidelines on healthy eating”; 72 education and clinical service efforts to “inform program beneficiaries, counsel health care patients, inform the public with mass communication”; 27 food assistance and access efforts to “provide food or assistance in purchasing food, improve community access to healthy food”; and 6 regulatory actions efforts to “issue requirements or recommendations

for food producers, manufacturers, and retailers.” (Effort numbers add up to more than 200 because some efforts fall into multiple categories.)

The 21 agencies are led by four departments and include 17 components of five other departments. The Health and Human Services (HHS) National Institutes of Health leads the greatest number of efforts (49), followed by the Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (21), and the Department of Defense (DOD) (19). Two or more agencies co-lead 19 of the efforts, which include such things as the Food Protein Allergen Program, the Infant Feeding Practices Study, and the Multi-Ethnic Studies of Atherosclerosis.

There’s just one problem: “Neither the White House nor any federal agency is responsible for leading or coordinating diet-related efforts across the government. While the 21 agencies work together on multiple efforts, they are not guided by a government-wide strategy, the absence of which could potentially lead to overlap and duplication of these efforts.” This “fragmentation has impacted the agencies’ ability to achieve certain outcomes.” The GAO recommends that the Congress “consider identifying and directing a federal entity

to lead development and implementation of a federal strategy for diet-related efforts aimed at reducing Americans’ risk of chronic health conditions.”

Obesity

The dangers of obesity are well known. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

- The U.S. obesity prevalence was 42.4% in 2017–2018.
- From 1999–2000 through 2017–2018, U.S. obesity prevalence increased from 30.5% to 42.4%. During the same time, the prevalence of severe obesity increased from 4.7% to 9.2%.
- Obesity-related conditions include heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, and certain types of cancer. These are among the leading causes of preventable, premature death.
- The estimated annual medical cost of obesity in the United States was \$147 billion in 2008. Medical costs for people who had obesity was \$1,429 higher than medical costs for people with healthy weight.

Individuals with a body mass index (BMI) of 30 or higher are

considered to be obese. Obesity is usually divided into three classes depending on its severity. Class 3 — a BMI of 40 or higher — is considered to be severe or morbid obesity. According to the Obesity Medicine Association, this can lead to high blood pressure, congestive heart failure, sleep apnea, shortness of breath, nerve pain, arthritis, back pain, heartburn, leg swelling, varicose veins, blood clots, infertility, asthma, fatty liver disease, gout, and/or physical disability.

Uncle Sam is morbidly obese.

Uncle Sam is morbidly obese. He is far more obese than any of the cast members on the TLC show *My 600-lb Life* or anyone listed in the *Guinness Book of World Records*. And just how obese is Uncle Sam?

The federal government contains hundreds of agencies, bureaus, corporations, commissions, administrations, authorities, offices, and boards organized under 15 departments. For example, the Department of Justice includes not only the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP), and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF),

but also many other agencies, programs, and initiatives under its umbrella that most Americans have never heard of.

There is also the alphabet soup of independent agencies of the federal government, each of which has its own budget. This includes agencies like the Social Security Administration (SSA), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), the Small Business Administration (SBA), the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and the National Security Agency (NSA).

And then there are the federal corporations like the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), the Corporation for National and Community Service (AmeriCorps), the Legal Services Corporation, the National Railroad Passenger Corporation (Amtrak), the Export-Import Bank of the United States (EXIM), and the United States Postal Service (USPS).

According to a report on the federal workforce by the Congressional Research Service, over 2.1 million federal civilian employees work at these departments, agencies, and corporations, not counting the Postal Service (about 580,000 people) or the legislative and judicial branches (about 64,000 people). And then there are the 1.4 million active-duty uniformed military personnel spread out all over the world.

There is only one diet plan that will work for Uncle Sam: the Constitution diet plan.

President Biden’s budget request for fiscal year 2022 (Oct. 1, 2021, to Sept. 30, 2022) was over \$6 trillion. In fiscal year 2021, the federal government ran a \$2.77 trillion budget deficit. In fiscal year 2020, the deficit was \$3.13 trillion. The national debt is now around \$29 trillion. The interest paid on this debt in fiscal year 2021 was over \$562 billion. Even before the “pandemic,” the Trump administration ran a \$984 billion deficit in fiscal year 2019 — the fifth largest in history at the time. The national debt increased by almost \$4 trillion during Trump’s first three years as president. Again, that was before the “pandemic.” The

debt increased by about \$5 trillion during George W. Bush’s two terms as president. To put all of this in perspective, it should be noted that the federal budget was “only” \$2 trillion in 2002, and had “only” reached the trillion dollar mark in 1987.

It is long past time to put Uncle Sam on a diet.

The diet plan

Unlike the scores of diet plans that people have to choose from, there is only one diet plan that will work for Uncle Sam: the Constitution diet plan. Americans, even those of the same political persuasion, will disagree on the proper role of government. Some think that the government should pay for everyone’s college education and health care. Others would limit government funding to just K-12 education and health care for the poor but at the same time think that the government should spend billions to explore outer space. Supporters of the current administration act as though they believe there is nothing that the government shouldn’t do or can’t do. Even libertarians argue incessantly about anarchism and minarchism.

But isn’t the Constitution both flawed and ignored? True on both

counts. Among other things, the Constitution assumes the right of eminent domain, gives the government broad taxing power, and has notoriously ambiguous clauses. And as Thomas Woods and Kevin Gutzman explain in *Who Killed the Constitution? The Fate of American Liberty from World War I to George W. Bush* (2008):

Every branch of the federal government has trampled on the Constitution, and has done so for close to a century. The crisis we face today is the culmination of decades of offenses against the Constitution by Democrats and Republicans, justices, presidents, and congresses alike, all of whom have essentially rejected the idea that the Constitution possesses a fixed meaning limiting the power of the U.S. government. That idea was not a minor aspect of the Constitution; it was the *very purpose* of the Constitution.

But what is the alternative? There isn't one. And the Constitution is still the supreme law of the land that the federal government is supposed to follow. So, as Woods and Gutzman conclude: "The Constitu-

tion contains the very rules that federal officials swear to abide by, and if we are going to have a central government at all, liberty will be best protected in the long run if the Constitution limits federal officials' power. There can be no enduring freedom where government is not bound by a constitution."

The Constitution was drafted in 1787, ratified in 1788, and took effect in 1789. It established the United States as a federal system of government where the states, through the Constitution, granted a limited number of powers to a central government. As James Madison, the father of the Constitution, so eloquently explained in *Federalist* No. 45:

The powers delegated by the proposed Constitution to the Federal Government, are few and defined. Those which are to remain in the State Governments are numerous and indefinite. The former will be exercised principally on external objects, as war, peace, negotiation, and foreign commerce; with which last the power of taxation will for the most part be connected. The powers reserved to the several States will extend to all the ob-

jects, which, in the ordinary course of affairs, concern the lives, liberties and properties of the people; and the internal order, improvement, and prosperity of the State.

There are about 30 enumerated congressional powers listed throughout the Constitution. That's all. Most of them are found in the eighteenth paragraph of Article I, Section 8. Six of them concern the militia and the military. Four of them concern taxes and money. The rest relate to commerce, naturalization, bankruptcies, post offices and post roads, copyrights and patents, the federal courts, maritime crimes, and the governance of the District of Columbia. The ten amendments known as the Bill of Rights were added to the Constitution in 1791. The first eight protect civil liberties and fundamental rights. The Ninth Amendment emphasizes that the list of enumerated rights in the Constitution is not all-inclusive. The last amendment makes it clear that the powers not delegated to the federal government are retained by the people and the states.

An example

The cabinet-level federal Department of Education did not offi-

cially begin operation until 1980. It was established by the Department of Education Organization Act of 1979 that split the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare into the Departments of Education and Health and Human Services. Headquartered in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Building in Washington, D.C., the Department of Education employs about 4,400 people in the nation's capital and other locations. Its most recent budget was about \$68 billion. This is the third-largest budget of the 15 federal departments, behind only the Department of Defense and the Department of Health and Human Services.

There are about 30 enumerated congressional powers listed throughout the Constitution. That's all.

The Department of Education is overseen by the Office of the Secretary. Underneath this are the Institute of Education Sciences; Office of Inspector General; Office for Civil Rights; Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development; Office of the General Counsel; Office of Legislation and Congressional Affairs; Office of Communications and Outreach; Faith-Based and

Neighborhood Partnerships; the White House Initiative on American Indian and Alaskan Native Education; the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics; and the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for African Americans. There are also the Office of the Deputy Secretary, which oversees Office of Finance and Operations; Office of the Chief Information Officer; Office of Elementary and Secondary Education; Office of English Language Acquisition; and Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services. And then there are the Office of the Under Secretary, which oversees the Office of Postsecondary Education; Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education; Federal Student Aid; and the White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

The Department of Education's mission is "to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access." To this end, it "operates programs that touch on every area and level of education." Its programs "annually serve nearly 18,200 school districts and over 50 million students attending roughly 98,000 public schools and 32,000 private

schools" and "also provide grant, loan, and work-study assistance to more than 12 million postsecondary students." There are "approximately 200 Department programs authorized and funded under federal law."

Every employee of the Department of Education is just a federal bureaucrat.

Yet, there is no such thing as a federal school or a federal school teacher. There is not a single employee in any one of the Department of Education's offices that teaches a single student in elementary, middle, or high school, or at a college or university. Every employee of the Department of Education is just a federal bureaucrat. They could all be fired tomorrow and it wouldn't have any effect on the education of any student in any school in any state. Every state has a provision in its constitution for the operation of K-12 schools, colleges, and universities. They don't need the assistance of the federal government.

And not only that, the Constitution doesn't mention education, schools, teachers, tutors, students, classrooms, curriculum, or accreditation. And neither does the Con-

stitution authorize the federal government to spend one penny on education. This means that, *on the federal level*, there should be no Elementary and Secondary Education Act, no Title IX mandates, no Higher Education Act, no Head Start, no Common Core standards, no Pell Grants, no FAFSA forms, no student loans, no No Child Left Behind Act, no Race to the Top funds, no school breakfast or lunch programs, no Education for All Handicapped Children Act, no bilingual-education mandates, no special-education mandates, no research grants to colleges and universities, no math and science initiatives, no vouchers, and no busing mandates.

The federal government should have absolutely nothing to do with education. Just like it should have nothing to do with Americans' diet,

weight, or health. It is Uncle Sam himself who needs to be put on a diet, shed weight, and be restored to health.

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NEXT MONTH:
“The Libertarian Brand”
by Laurence M. Vance

Safety from external danger is the most powerful director of national conduct. Even the ardent love of liberty will, after a time, give way to its dictates. The violent destruction of life and property incident to war — the continual effort and alarm attendant on a state of continual danger, will compel nations the most attached to liberty, to resort for repose and security, to institutions, which have a tendency to destroy their civil and political rights. To be more safe they, at length, become willing to run the risk of being less free. The institutions alluded to are STANDING ARMIES, and the correspondent appendages of military establishments.

— Alexander Hamilton

The Social Engineer as Ethical Authoritarian

by Richard M. Ebeling



Since the start of the coronavirus crisis, advocates of greater government planning and redistribution have used “following the science” as the rhetorical cover to rationalize the growth in political paternalism. Now, however, some of them are coming out of the closet and insisting that economists, for example, must explicitly adopt an authoritarian ethic that requires the end to any free-market society.

Diane Coyle is a prominent professor of public policy at Cambridge University in the United Kingdom and has long been on a mission to justify increased government control over social and economic affairs. In the past, she has usually argued her case on pragmatic or utilitarian grounds. That is, markets

are inefficient or cannot adapt to changing technologies that modern society needs to more fully organize, including centralized collection of “big data” for better government-guided economic outcomes.

Economists as government policy advisors

But in an opinion piece a while back in the pages of the *Financial Times* (October 4, 2021), Professor Coyle wrote an article entitled “Change Is Needed in the Next Generation of Economists.” Economists have done important work, she states, in advising and consulting with governments over the collection and use of statistical data and the analysis of public-policy options in terms of likely outcomes. It is for this reason, she explains, that “many economists think of themselves as engineers, or plumbers (as described by Nobel laureate Esther Duflo), or (in Keynes’s famous quote) dentists,” fixing and correcting the problems of society.

Economists’ proposals on how to raise taxes “efficiently,” for example, or how infrastructure investments supposedly would most boost productivity, or what university degrees people should pursue for the best social gain for the education money spent. These have all

been important contributions, Professor Coyle claims, in making a better society.

What, precisely, is this moral framework that Professor Coyle wants economists to more explicitly adopt?

But in spite of how significant and beneficial this has been, there are challenges now facing the world that require economists to go beyond their role as policy technicians. Climate change and the “excessive power of big corporations” make it necessary for economists to now step out of their presumed “value-free” posture of merely analyzing social problems in the seemingly neutral framework of “if this, then that.”

Economists as ethical social engineers

If economists are to assist in the social engineering of society, which they have been already doing for a long time, it's time for them to understand the “implicit moral framework” behind the grand endeavor to remake a better and sustainable society. Economists need to step out of their own analytical world and “work with (real) engineers, climate scientists, computer scien-

tists or ecologists for an integrated analysis of societal challenges.” After all, she says, “Engineering society is inherently value-laden and economists are part of society.”

Economists need to stop looking at people as “individual maximizers, with fixed preferences uninfluenced by others,” Professor Coyle argues. “The benchmark needs to flip to reflect mutual interactions,” especially in a world with social media and profit-driven advertising. In addition, economists have to think of “markets as ecosystems vulnerable to collapse.” She concludes her article by saying that the sooner economists make this change to an explicit moral framework, the better.

But what, precisely, is this moral framework that Professor Coyle wants economists to more explicitly adopt? I would suggest that it comes out fairly clearly if one teases out the implications from her presented view of the world.

Freedom cannot be trusted, so paternalists are needed

People are malleable material, she reasons, not just individual utility maximizers pursuing their own chosen ends and goals. No, they are subject to being manipulated and influenced by numerous others try-

ing to get them to believe things, want things, and act in ways that benefit the persuaders who are out for nothing but their own personal profit.

In such a world, Professor Coyle believes, there must be those who will control or correct what people hear or read from the nefarious knowledge and information influencers. Ordinary people just cannot be trusted to sort out for themselves fact from fiction, real wants from artificial desires, or true social needs and objectives from the ones that would only benefit the ones in pursuit of do their own private gain.

That's why society — which means all the rest of us — needs those social engineers. You know, the “real” engineers and scientists and the climate and computer experts who have the objective knowledge and perspective to know what “the science” is telling us about the dangers facing the world. They know what needs to be done and why doing it would be the ethically and socially correct things to do.

The arrogance of the social engineer

Notice the implied arrogance. “They” understand things that the rest of us cannot or have not been trained to properly master and comprehend. We are mentally and

morally weak. We easily fall into the traps of advertising gimmickry and the word and emotional manipulations of a tweet. We need a band of “science” and social engineering messiahs to lead us through the wilderness of everyday ignorance and misinformation to a collectivist paradise just waiting ahead of us.

Coyle believes there must be those who will control or correct what people hear or read.

They will lead, and we should follow. Where to? To the politically correct promised land of a planned and controlled socio-economic system, with these experts keeping their hands on the regulatory knobs and dials. They will determine how we will work, how we will live, how we will travel, and how we will shop, and for what. This will be based on the relative incomes they will determine to be our respective “fair shares” after a socially equitable tax system has been “efficiently” put into place.

Quesnay and interdependency of the economic “body”

Without “them,” you see, the market economy, conceived as an interdependent “ecosystem,” is vulnerable to collapse at any time, Pro-

fessor Coyle warned. This is not the first time that the economic system has been analogized as a biological system or complex living organism. Indeed, near the beginning of “economics” as a field of systematic study, the French Physiocrat Francois Quesnay (1694–1774) published his *Tableau Economique* (*The Economic Table*) in 1758 precisely to bring out the interconnections of the specialized branches of a social order based on a division of labor. (Almost every student taking their first economics class learns a modernized and simplified version of Quesnay’s “economic table” in the form known as the “circular flow” diagram.)

The Physiocrats emphasized that a free economic system was a “robust” and hearty “organism.”

Quesnay was one of the royal physicians serving Louis XV, king of France. As a medical doctor, he appreciated the interdependency of the various organs of the human body. Each was dependent on the other, and the system as a whole had evolved networks of checks and balances when any part of the body was not functioning properly. Could the human “system” fall out of order? Yes, but this had more to

do with failures on the part of the human agent to properly care for himself or from an external attack on one of the organs.

The Physiocrats emphasized that a free economic system — through the workings of supply and demand, prices and costs, and institutional supports such as property rights and market competition — was a “robust” and hearty “organism” able to withstand and correct almost any imbalances impinging to it. The best way to assure this was for government to intervene in the market as little as possible. In other words, policy advice the exact opposite from Professor Coyle’s.

Adam Smith’s invisible hand as social order without planning

This was also much of the reasoning behind Adam Smith’s notion of the “invisible hand” in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776). He demonstrated that individuals pursuing their respective self-interests, in a setting of established and protected property rights and an ethical and legal system of voluntary exchange and freedom of association, would help improve the interests of others in the pursuit of their own betterment.

With the emergence of specialization and the division of labor, we are all dependent on numerous

neighbors, far and wide, for the satisfaction of our wants. If we are to acquire the financial means to have multitudes of others serve us at the table of global exchange, we must apply our knowledge, talents, and resources to, in turn, serve the ends of some of those others.

The competitive price system and open markets assured the balancing and rebalancing of the delicate specialized parts of this complex socio-economic order. Government needed to primarily assure what Adam Smith called a “system of natural liberty,” under which police, courts, and national defense were provided by the political authority. Most all other social and economic matters could be safely and confidently left to the private hands of the citizenry and their networks of free association and market exchange.

Viewing people as pawns on a societal chessboard

Adam Smith also warned about the very type of mentality that Diane Coyle wishes to raise to an ethical requirement: the paternalist mindset that cannot image leaving people alone to plan and guide their own lives. In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), Adam Smith wrote:

The man of system ... [who] is apt to be very wise in his own conceit, and is often so enamored with the supposed beauty of his own ideal plan of government, that he cannot suffer the smallest deviation from any part of it ... he seems to imagine that he can arrange the different members of a great society with as much ease as the hand arranges the different pieces upon a chess-board; he does not consider that the pieces upon the chess-board have no other principle of motion besides that which the hand impresses upon them; but that, in that great chess-board of human society, every single piece has a principle of motion of its own, altogether different from that which the legislature might choose to impress upon it.

Folly of a person who views himself fit to plan society

The social engineers who attempt to take on the task of planning society have no understanding that not only is such direction of human affairs unnecessary but it reflects a hubris that is altogether dangerous to the freedom and prosperity of all. Said Adam Smith in

The Wealth of Nations:

What is the species of domestic industry which his capital can employ, and of which the produce is likely to be of the greatest value, every individual, it is evident, can in his local situation, judge much better than any statesman or lawgiver can do for him. The statesman, who should attempt to direct private people in what manner they ought to employ their capitals, would not only load himself with a most unnecessary attention, but assume an authority which could safely be trusted, not only to no single person, but to no council or senate whatever, and which would nowhere be so dangerous as in the hands of a man who had folly and presumption enough to fancy himself fit to exercise it.

It is almost embarrassing to remind a fellow economist such as Diane Coyle that a market's delicate interdependency and interconnectiveness has been understood since the beginning of the discipline in the 1700s. Those early writers also understood that when the economic system becomes imbalanced or

cannot fully function effectively, more times than not the origin is to be found in the imposition of the type of social engineering schemes that she wishes to see established around the world today.

A market's delicate interdependency has been understood since the beginning of the discipline in the 1700s.

It is why these earlier economists wisely understood that a general laissez-faire system should be the default position for any society. Any significant government interventions of any type were to be considered the exception, and only after a thorough justification could be offered as to why. They also understood the corrupting temptations from all such political infringements on the citizens' freedoms of personal choice and voluntary association.

The more that governments had the power and authority to control the economic affairs of any society, the more having such power goes to the heads of those possessing it. Or as the nineteenth-century French liberal economist Jean-Baptiste Say observed:

Moreover, arbitrary regulations are extremely flattering

to the vanity of men in power, as giving them an air of wisdom and foresight, and confirming their authority, which seems to derive additional importance from the frequency of its exercise.

Those in power, in other words, come to think of themselves as not only essential but indispensable. How can society even survive and thrive without their expert guidance?

How economists view people's choice-making

One other point needs to be made in response to Professor Coyle's criticisms of how economists often analyze human choice-making. It is true that economic theorists often take the actor's preferences as "given." This is for at least two reasons. First, it is precisely not to falsely and confusedly blur the distinction between what the economic actor being studied happens to believe and want and the beliefs and wants of the economic analyst, whose own ideas and values may or may not match those of the economic subject whose actions are being studied.

Second, by taking the actor's preferences as "given," the econo-

mist can more properly derive the logical implications of what follows from them. He can more easily trace out the marginal evaluations of available goods that come the actor's way, the opportunity costs and trade-offs that he might hypothetically be willing to make, and the terms of trade under which he might enter into exchanges with others.

Few economists have presumed that individuals think, choose, and act in hermetically sealed off boxes uninfluenced by events or people around them.

But few economists have presumed that individuals think, choose, and act in hermetically sealed off boxes uninfluenced by events or people around them. Indeed, some economists have highlighted that among the benefits of international trade have been more than merely the greater and wider variety of marketable goods made available to all in the global division of labor. They have also emphasized the information about other people's cultures, ideas, and knowledge from which to learn and modify one's own life.

The classical economists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centu-

ries understood and valued the importance of shared ideas and experiences to enrich and better the minds and possibilities of all. To quote from Jean-Baptiste Say once again, this time from a 1789 essay on the benefits from the exchange of knowledge that the printing and freedom of the press offered to all mankind:

By printing, it became possible for a man to speak to all times and countries; and by an easy exchange of ideas everyone is enriched. Two men may each have one idea; by exchange, each has two; and by the thousand voices of the press they are communicated to a hundred thousand persons.... Thought is destined to fly from one mind to another. Yet among us, and in our time, a man of genius must still submit his broad conceptions to the compass of a censor, who may be inept and is always self-interested and timid....

Since to print is only to speak more loudly, so as to be heard by a greater number, do not tie the hand that traces signs more than the tongue that voices sounds.... Then, how many ideas will be ex-

pressed! If useless, they will be forgotten; if harmful they will be scorned; but those that are beneficial will germinate, prosper, and spread among us all the good things that a perfected human spirit can produce.

International trade increases new and useful knowledge

In *The Commerce of Nations* (1899), Irish economist Charles Bastable (1855–1945) pointed out that besides the enlargement of material prosperity due to international trade, the growing intercourse among nations had excitedly brought people together culturally and intellectually:

One of the most striking features of modern times is the growth of international relations of ever-increasing complexity and influence. Faculties for communications have brought about closer and more constant intercourse between the different countries of the world leading to many unexpected results. This more intimate connection is reflected in all the different sides of social activity.... Literature, Science, and Art have all been

similarly affected; their followers are engaged in keenly watching the progress of their favorite pursuits in other countries, and are becoming daily more and more sensitive to any new tendency or movement in the remotest nation.

But no doubt, Professor Coyle is more focused on the notion of people being the mind puppets of those intentionally trying to manipulate them for “selfish” personal or ideological purposes through social media outlets and advertising in general. It is true that people can sometimes be manipulated to believe in the strangest and most fallacious things. Like the idea that self-proclaimed wise and knowledgeable people who say they understand and are simply “following the science” really know enough and can be trusted to command and control how everyone else lives and interacts in society!

One of the purposes and values of competition is for an open rivalry of ideas and arguments.

One of the purposes and values of competition, besides effectively and efficiently “delivering the goods,” is for an open rivalry of

ideas and arguments. This way, people may listen to, judge, and even participate in the controversies of the day and to more effectively separate the intellectual and asserted “scientific” wheat from the chaff. Once there is a presumption that some elite must insert themselves into the process as the imposers of correct interpretations of real from fake news, we are on the way to a political closing of the public mind.

Only competitive markets ensure balanced coordination

It is interesting to note that neither in this article nor in her recent book *Cogs and Monsters: What Economics Is, and What It Should Be* (2021) does Professor Coyle explain in any meaningful detail how and on what basis her social engineers will choose from among any relevant economic principles the answers to the questions: what should be produced, how it should be produced, where it should be produced, and to whom and in what relative amounts those outputs should be distributed among the members of the society?

The great advantage of a free market is precisely that all the people in the society get to participate in the decision-making that deter-

mines all of this. As consumers, we inform our fellow global economic citizens what it is we want and what we might be willing to pay to get some of it. As producers, we inform those same fellow global economic citizens what we might be able to produce and supply and the (opportunity) costs of doing so, given all the competing uses for the same scarce means of production that we and others might want to employ them for.

We communicate and convey all this information through the worldwide price system that interconnects everyone participating in that social system of division of labor anywhere on the planet where production and trade occur. If we see disruptions and imbalances today in the global supply chains, we do not need to look any farther for its cause than the government policies that have locked down and shutdown multitudes of people, along with disruptions to the patterns of international trade through additional regulatory restrictions.

If governments would simply get out of the way, in short order, a natural rebalanced coordination of the economic system would soon occur. If, on the other hand, we want to preserve or worsen these imbalances, following the type of

policy outlook proposed by Professor Coyle would assure that as the outcome.

Beware the “ethical” social engineer

Diane Coyle’s normative proposal for economists is for an ethics of paternalist elitism. They are the shepherds, and everyone else make up the sheep. It oozes with the hubris of Adam Smith’s “man of system” who suffers the folly and conceit of someone who believes that they have the knowledge and wisdom to be an economic dictator over the future of the world.

Diane Coyle’s normative proposal for economists is for an ethics of paternalist elitism.

Critics of political paternalism and government planning have often been accused of exaggeration and taking things to unwarranted extremes. But is it not an economic dictatorship when self-appointed “scientific” social engineers declare that they must have the power and authority to set the world right, since freedom cannot be trusted to result in what they consider the “objectively” correct outcomes?

And what do we call it other than ethical authoritarianism when someone like Diane Coyle insists

that economists must view themselves on a moral mission to work with other self-appointed social engineers to use the power of government to reshape the social landscape? Which, of course, means reshaping humanity according to a preconceived design considered to be the ethically right one for the entire human race.

Few things are as dangerous as religious fanatics confident that they are on a mission from God that justifies almost anything they decide to do to bring mankind to salvation. Here we see the economist social engineer insisting that “science” and the economist’s technical expertise, along with that of other technocrats, provides them with the ethical right and duty to remake the secular world in the name of “saving the planet” and bringing equity justice to all humankind.

Welcome to what can only be viewed as the new version of “scien-

tific” socialism with its revolutionary vanguard of “ethical” social engineers. Diane Coyle wants to see this happen. And as she ends her article, “the sooner this change happens, the better.” We are living in dangerous times.

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NEXT MONTH:
**“Paternalists Plan a
New International Political
Consensus”**
by Richard M. Ebeling

How Government Meddling Ruined Higher Education, Part I

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by George C. Leef



There is no need whatsoever for government to provide, subsidize, or control education. As with all other services, people can voluntarily offer to provide teaching or training, and those who are interested in such services can choose among the individuals and institutions offering them in the market. That is true for primary and secondary education (and during the COVID disruption, many parents are discovering that they can organize “learning pods” that are proving so effective that the public school monopoly feels the need to denounce them), as well as for post-secondary education — college and grad school.

The United States would be a far better educated country if government had kept entirely out of education. Unfortunately, it did not.

In this article, I’m going to focus on the damage government meddling has done in higher education. Owing to interference (mainly by the federal government) in the higher education market, today we have prodigiously expensive but largely ineffectual colleges and universities. Students often spend more than four years in pursuit of a degree that betokens scant learning, but in doing so, they amass huge debts. Often they are unable to repay those debts, despite “lenient” policies, thus leaving the taxpayers stuck with the cost.

It wasn’t always that way. In fact, college education was not at all expensive, and academic standards were quite rigorous — until the government stepped in.

Education — at all levels — is a service that can be provided through voluntary action by individuals or organizations. Government action to create and fund schools is not necessary. Those who want to learn have always been able to make arrangements with those who want to teach, going far back into antiquity. In America, there were no “public schools” until the

1830s and yet the populace was highly literate and enjoyed the benefits of great scientific and technological advances.

The drafters of the U.S. Constitution did not see fit to give the federal government any role at all in education. Read the document and you will search in vain for any hint that it was supposed to finance or control schools or colleges. Unfortunately, like so many other constitutional limits on the power of the government, this too has given way to demands that Washington must do something for “the general welfare.” (That vague clause in Article I, Section 8, has done immeasurable harm to the Constitution’s system of limited government ever since it was first used in the 1930s to justify federal spending for things not specifically enumerated.)

The federal government and higher education

So, how did the federal government get into higher education? As has so often been the case, war provided the opening. In 1944, the “G.I. Bill” included in its provisions a subsidy for returning soldiers allowing them to go to college at taxpayer expense. Advocates said that having lots more Americans go to college would provide a great economic

boost to the nation, on the assumption that people with more education would be more productive. The fact of the matter is that prior to the war, the United States never lacked for superb professionals, but nearly all of them learned what they needed through on-the-job training rather than sitting in college classrooms. The rapid expansion of the American economy in the nineteenth century, long before there were college subsidies, is strong evidence against the claimed benefit of boosting college attendance.

The drafters of the U.S. Constitution did not see fit to give the federal government any role at all in education.

The G.I. Bill allowed the camel of federal intervention to get its nose under the tent. It was followed by another war-related scare in 1958 — National Defense Educational Loans, inspired by the Cold War hysteria over Sputnik. The idea, pushed by Republicans and Democrats alike, was that the United States must be dangerously behind the Soviet Union in science — how else could the Reds have beaten us to putting the first satellite into space? — and therefore we

needed to start training more scientists and mathematicians. The new law sought to induce more students into those fields by offering them easy government loans.

At this point, the impact of federal involvement with higher education was still minimal. A very small additional number of students were being lured into colleges. The expense was tiny (at least in terms of the federal budget), and the nature of higher education hadn't been affected. The precedent for federal meddling had been set, however, and the dam was about to burst.

Student ranks swelled with young people who weren't very serious about their courses but were very serious about partying.

In 1964, Lyndon Johnson was elected president with large Democratic majorities in the House and Senate. Johnson was an old-line New Dealer, eager to use government for a host of what he thought were good programs — his so-called Great Society. Johnson, who had been trained as a teacher in Texas, thought that more education was the solution to most of the country's troubles. Accordingly, he pushed Congress to enact the High-

er Education Act of 1965. It opened the door to government financial aid for all students. Easy loans (and later grants) for any high school graduate who wanted to give college a try began a radical transformation of higher education, one that continues to this day.

The most predictable result of this unconstitutional foray into college financing (not only does the Constitution give Congress no authority over education, but it also gives it no authority to lend money to students, or anyone else) was a steady rise in the percentage of high school graduates who enrolled in college. Back when Americans had to either directly pay the costs of college or arrange to borrow the money from people who could say “no” if they doubted that they'd get it back, relatively few thought that college was worth the expense. But with the government making it easy to get college funds at low rates (initially through private loans that the feds backed, but after 2010, direct federal loans), far more students chose to enroll.

As more students did so, the average level of academic ability declined. More and more, students who previously weren't regarded as “college material” because of their weak skills, poor motivation, or

both, were enrolling. Borrowing was easy and inexpensive. The payments were years in the future, so why not go? Besides, college was fun. Student ranks swelled with young people who weren't very serious about their courses but were very serious about partying.

The influx of such students put faculty members in a difficult position. If they maintained traditional academic standards, many of their students would get bad grades. Bad grades would result in bad evaluations from students, who expected college to be fairly easy. And bad student evaluations could harm careers. Therefore, many professors began easing up — giving higher grades and watering down course content.

At the same time, college administrators realized that they would have more money if they succeeded in enrolling and keeping more of those academically marginal students. Many decided that they cared more about maximizing the money rolling in than about

their standards. Accordingly, they began to pressure professors who graded students “harshly” (that is to say, based on an objective assessment of how much they had learned) to inflate grades in order to keep students happy. Also, they began to undermine the integrity of the school's curriculum. Demanding courses that were formerly required were made optional, and many new courses that would appeal to students — for example, on pop culture — were added.

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NEXT MONTH:
**“How Government
Meddling Ruined Higher
Education, Part 2”**
by George C. Leef

[We considered the Alien and Sedition] acts as so palpably against the Constitution as to amount to an undisguised declaration that that compact is not meant to be the measure of the powers of the General Government, but that it will proceed in the exercise over these States of all powers whatsoever.... [We] view this as seizing the rights of the States and consolidating them in the hands of the General Government, with a power assumed to bind the States, not merely as [to] cases made federal (casus foederis), but in all cases whatsoever, by laws made, not with their consent, but by others against their consent.... This would be to surrender the form of government we have chosen and live under one deriving its powers from its own will and not from our authority.

— Thomas Jefferson

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