
FUTURE OF FREEDOM

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We are all dwarfs mounted upon the shoulders of giants.

— Fulbert of Chartres

FUTURE OF FREEDOM

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America's Culture of Death

by *Jacob G. Hornberger*



In the wake of another mass shooting, this one in Uvalde, Texas, there have been the standard, predictable calls for gun control. The idea is that if more stringent gun-control laws are enacted, there will be fewer mass shootings.

That's simply ludicrous reasoning. When a person wants to kill a lot of people, he is going to be able to get his hands on a gun, even if he has to go into the black market to do so. After all, drug possession is illegal, and no one has any problem getting his hands on drugs in the black market.

Instead, what gun-control laws do is disarm the victims. The gun-control laws prevent them from defending themselves. Who wants to take the chance of a felony conviction

for unlawfully carrying a concealed weapon?

There are plenty of gun shows in Texas. Why didn't that mass murderer choose a gun show to initiate his killing spree? Because he wasn't stupid. Mass murderers traditionally look for gun-free zones to commit their mayhem. That's because there is less chance of someone firing back in a gun-free zone.

But there is a more fundamental issue that I wish to address — the underlying causes of mass murders in America. Until we get a handle on that issue — why it is that there are so many such occurrences here in the United States — we will continue to experience them.

After all, there are lots of guns in Switzerland. In fact, most families are armed to the teeth. If widespread gun ownership was the cause of mass murders — as the gun-control crowd here in the United States claims — then we would naturally expect to see the same large number of mass murders in Switzerland that we do here. But we don't. Unlike the United States, Switzerland is not besieged by a large number of mass killings.

The difference is that America has developed a deep culture of death through killings by the state. I submit that when a nation develops

such a culture, it produces aberrant and violent behavior by people who are a bit off-kilter.

Whenever there is a mass killing, such as those in Uvalde, Buffalo, or Columbine, everyone is, quite naturally, shocked. How could anyone with a conscience do such a thing, especially to children? The killing shocks the conscience of any reasonable person.

Yet, when we consider the killing of people by federal officials, the reaction among the American people is completely different. There are few shocked consciences. The culture of death at the hands of the state has become a normal and regular part of American life. Hardly anyone gives it a second thought.

Immigration deaths

Consider, for example, America's system of immigration controls. We have had this system since I was born more than 70 years ago. The way I look at it is that when a governmental system is producing deaths of lots of innocent people, it's a virtual certainty that that is one no-good, rotten system.

And there is no question but that America's system of immigration controls produces a massive number of deaths. There are people who have drowned crossing the Rio Grande,

such as Óscar Alberto Martínez Ramírez and his 23-month-old daughter, Valeria, whose bodies were found on the river's shore. There are those who have died of thirst crossing lonely deserts in the American Southwest. There are those who have died of suffocation in the backs of 18-wheelers. There are those who have died from being shot by the Border Patrol.

The culture of death at the hands of the state has become a normal and regular part of American life.

It's been estimated that in 2021 alone, almost 600 migrants died trying to enter the United States. That's a lot of people, and most people believe it's a low estimate. Imagine a mass shooting in which 600 people were killed.

Where is the moral outrage? It is virtually nonexistent. Deaths arising from immigration controls have simply become a part of America's culture of death.

Drug-war deaths

Consider the drug war. That's another government program that has produced lots of deaths from acts of violence. In fact, in Mexico drug-war deaths in the past 10 years number in the high tens of thou-

sands. Imagine, once again, a mass shooter in the United States killing thousands of people. Imagine the uproar if that were to happen. Not so with respect to drug-war killings.

The drug war has become part of our national culture of death.

There are also all the deaths that take place among drug users who consume corrupted drugs in the black market. That wouldn't happen if they were able to purchase their drugs in a reputable place, like a pharmacy.

Nonetheless, life goes on, and so does this deadly government program. The massive number of drug-war deaths does not shock the consciences of very many people. The drug war has become part of our national culture of death.

Invasion deaths

Consider the invasions and occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq, which succeeded in killing untold numbers of people. We don't know the exact number because the Pentagon decided early on that they weren't worth counting. Only American deaths were worth counting. Estimates of deaths range in the high hundreds of thousands. That's a lot of dead people. Imagine

if a mass killer here in the United States went on a killing spree in which he killed hundreds of thousands of people. Imagine how people would react.

But there was no such reaction to those deaths among most Americans. It was all considered normal. It's part of our culture of death. We've all been ingrained with the notion that if our government officials deem it necessary to kill people, then that's the end of the matter. We have all been taught to defer to their judgment.

Ironically, when it was Russia invading Ukraine, the reaction among Americans was totally different. As soon as U.S. officials began condemning the invasion, there was a massive outpouring of anger, outrage, and indignation among the American people, especially as a growing number of Ukrainians began being killed.

One of the interesting aspects of the U.S. invasions and occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq is how the mainstream press treated the deaths of foreign combatants and civilians. Whenever they would write articles about battles, they would operate under the assumption that killing foreign combatants was acceptable even if sometimes civilians were inadvertently killed in the process.

In other words, the killing of all those Afghan and Iraqi combatants was considered to be no big deal. After all, they were combatants, the argument went. They should never have resisted the foreign invasion and occupation of their country. They should have just accepted U.S. conquest and rule. The fact that they were killed was their fault, the reasoning went.

Yet, it is important to note that every one of those combatants had families and friends. Every death undoubtedly produced deep suffering and grief among those family members and friends.

NATO deaths

Consider what's happening in Ukraine. When the Cold War ended, the NATO mission of protecting Western Europe from a Soviet invasion was now moot. At that point, NATO should have gone out of existence. Instead, unable to let go of its extreme Cold War, anti-Russia, anticommunist mindset, the Pentagon began using NATO to move eastward, absorbing former members of the Warsaw Pact in the process.

It has now become clear that the Pentagon has been maneuvering into giving Russia another “Vietnam,” just as it lured the Soviet

Union into invading Afghanistan in 1979. For the past 25 years, Russian officials have been telling the United States that their “red line” was Ukraine. If NATO were to absorb Ukraine, that would entitle the Pentagon to install its nuclear missiles on Russia’s border, pointed at Moscow, St. Petersburg, and other Russian cities. Russia’s position was made clear: It would never permit that to happen. To prevent it from happening, Russia’s officials repeatedly stated, Russia would invade Ukraine to effect regime change.

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another “Vietnam.”**

Knowing this, U.S. officials continued on course, knowing full-well that Russia wasn’t bluffing. In fact, it is now clear that U.S. officials have been training and arming the Ukrainian military for years in preparation for what they knew was coming — the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

The result has been a massive number of deaths, not only among the Ukrainian military and civilians but also among the Russian military. Not surprisingly, there has been a tremendous amount of exal-

tation among U.S. officials and the mainstream press over the thousands of Russian soldiers who have been killed in the conflict. They call the deaths of those soldiers “degrading Russia,” which has obviously been the aim from the beginning.

But it's important to keep two things in mind. First, every one of those Russian soldiers has family members and friends back home who have been left suffering and grieving the loss of their loved one. Second, the war was entirely unnecessary, in that there was absolutely no reason for NATO to absorb Ukraine or even to continue remaining in existence.

Invading Cuba

In fact, there is another reason why U.S. officials were certain that NATO's threat to absorb Ukraine would cause Russia to invade Ukraine. That reason is that that is precisely what U.S. officials would do if Russia, North Korea, or China threatened to install nuclear missiles in Cuba, which is 90 miles away from the United States.

In fact, that is precisely what occurred during the Cuban Missile Crisis. The Soviet Union, whose principal member was Russia, installed nuclear missiles in Cuba to

deter against another U.S. invasion of the island or, in the event of another invasion, to defend against it. The position of the U.S. government was the same as the Russian position on Ukraine: Get those missiles out of there or U.S. forces will invade.

The war was entirely unnecessary, in that there was absolutely no reason for NATO to absorb Ukraine.

In fact, throughout the crisis, the Pentagon and the CIA were doing everything they could to pressure President Kennedy into doing precisely what Russia is doing in Ukraine. They were telling Kennedy that he could not permit communist-controlled nuclear missiles pointed at American cities to be installed only 90 miles away from the United States.

As I point out in my new book, *An Encounter with Evil: The Abraham Zapruder Story*, President Kennedy had a remarkable ability to put himself into the shoes of an adversary to determine what it was that was motivating him to act. Kennedy figured out that what the Soviets and Cubans were trying to do was prevent the United States from again invading Cuba in an ef-

fort to oust the Castro regime from power. He figured that if he guaranteed that the United States would not invade Cuba again, the Soviets would be willing to remove their weapons. His offer was accepted by the Soviets, except for one thing: The Soviets wanted the United States to remove its missiles in Turkey that were pointed at Russia. Understanding the hypocrisy of the United States' position, Kennedy agreed to remove the missiles. The crisis was resolved.

That's what could have been done in Ukraine to avoid all those deaths of Ukrainians and Russians alike. All that needed to be done to avoid the conflict was an agreement in which NATO would not absorb Ukraine. But unfortunately, Joe Biden is no John Kennedy. The result has been thousands of unnecessary deaths, including both Ukrainians and Russians.

Sanctions deaths

Consider all the deaths that have come from U.S. sanctions and embargoes. The sanctions against Iraq brought about the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi children. Yes, children! Recall the outrage arising out of the deaths of those 19 children in Uvalde. There was never any such outrage for the

killing of those hundreds of thousands of children in Iraq. There is a simple reason for that: The killings of the Iraqi children are part of our national culture of death.

In fact, recall what Madeleine Albright said when *Sixty Minutes* asked her if the deaths of half-a-million Iraqi children were "worth it." At the time, she was U.S. ambassador to the United Nations. As such, she was our country's official spokesperson to the people of the world. She responded that, yes, the deaths of all those children were, in fact, "worth it."

There was never any such outrage for the killing of those hundreds of thousands of children in Iraq.

Imagine that! By "it," she meant regime change. The deaths of the Iraqi children from the sanctions were intended to induce Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein to resign his position in favor of pro-U.S. Iraqi dictator. That's why Albright said that the sanctions were "worth it," even if they never achieved their goal.

Was there any public outrage in America to Albright's statement, including by President Clinton and other federal officials? Of course not. That's because most everyone

agreed with her sentiments. So what if hundreds of thousands of Iraqi children had to die. Isn't that worth regime change?

Consider all the suffering and death that have been inflicted on people in Cuba, North Korea, Iran, China, and elsewhere.

Consider all the suffering and death that have been inflicted on people in Cuba, North Korea, Iran, China, and elsewhere as a result of U.S. sanctions and embargoes. Any outrage there? Not in the least. It's all just part and parcel of America's culture of death.

Assassination deaths

Oh, and let's not forget the federal government's official program of state-sponsored assassinations, a program that came into existence when the federal government was converted from a limited-government republic to a national-security state after World War II. In the early days back in the 1950s and the 1960s, this deadly program was kept secret. Now, it's mostly out in the open as part of the "global war on terror." I say "mostly" because while everyone now knows that the program exists, many of the assassinations are still being carried out

in secret, so as not to unnecessarily disturb the peace and happiness of the American people.

Recall Operation Condor, the top-secret international rightwing assassination ring in which the CIA secretly served as a partner. We still don't know how many people were assassinated as part of that operation.

A culture of life and liberty

The assumption, of course, is that the massive culture of death and indifference has had no impact on America. But that is folly. How can a culture of death, destruction, suffering, and killing not adversely affect the people of that nation? Ultimately, it seeps into the fiber of society and infects the populace. Over time, most everyone becomes more tense, irritable, unfriendly, and unkind toward others.

But I submit that the biggest adverse impact of America's culture of death has been among off-kilter people. I submit that there is a certain percentage of those people whose propensity for violence is triggered by the culture of death that the federal government has brought to our land and to foreign lands. When those off-kilter people initiate killing sprees for no ostensible reason, in their minds they are

simply modeling what U.S. officials do both here at home and abroad. Their lack of concern for the value of human life mirrors the mindset of those who enforce the federal government's assassination program, drug war, and war on immigrants as well as those who initiate America's endless foreign wars, coups, and interventions.

As I point out in my new book, *An Encounter with Evil: The Abraham Zapruder Story*, what we need in America is a revival of consciousness and conscience, one that motivates the American people to rise up against the culture of death that pervades our land and that puts our nation back on the right road — the

road of a limited-government republic — the road to liberty, life, peace, prosperity, and harmony with the people of the world.

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

NEXT MONTH:

“Why the JFK Assassination Should Matter to Everyone, Part 1”

by Jacob G. Hornberger

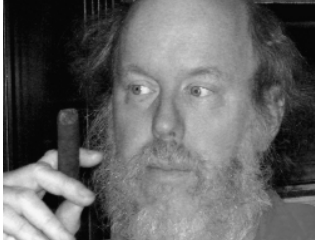
“Thank Joe Biden for Your COVID-Positive Nurse”
by James Bovard

To think we are able is almost to be so; to determine upon attainment is frequently attainment itself; earnest resolution has often seemed to have about it almost a savor of omnipotence.

— Samuel Smiles

Lessons from Biden's Disinformation Board Debacle

by James Bovard



President Biden's campaign to banish (or maybe outlaw) political paranoia took a wallop last spring. In April, the Department of Homeland Security proudly announced that it had created a new Disinformation Governance Board. The following month, the board's chairman resigned, and Biden administration officials claimed the board was being "paused." But it remains in the wings awaiting the White House summons for an encore performance.

Thought police by another name

From the start, the Disinformation Governance Board looked like a political caricature dreamed up by people who never appreciated either Monty Python or Orwell's

1984. Given the Biden record, it was unclear whether the new board will be fighting or promulgating "disinformation." After controversy erupted, an unnamed DHS spokesperson told the *Washington Post*: "The Board's purpose has been grossly mischaracterized; it will not police speech.... Its focus is to ensure that freedom of speech is protected." Geez, why didn't the Founding Fathers think of adding a clause to the First Amendment creating a nefarious-sounding government agency to ride shotgun on the nation's media?

Team Biden expected applause and deference when they announced the first disinformation czar for the board, Nina Jankowicz, a 33-year-old Bryn Mawr college graduate who was hailed as an "information warfare expert." Jankowicz had the type of resume that made the *Washington Post* swoon — a Fulbright scholar, a graduate degree from Georgetown University, and "stints at multiple nonpartisan think tanks" — all of which were coincidentally progovernment — thus proving that Jankowicz herself was trustworthy.

Team Biden's vetting operations didn't win any kudos on this appointment. They failed to ask a critical question: Does she sing? After

Jankowicz's name hit the headlines, activists were soon whooping up some of her greatest performances discovered online. There was her TikTok version of a "Mary Poppins" song warning "Information laundering is really quite ferocious." More surprising was her YouTube Christmas parody song performance, "Who do I f-k to be famous and powerful?"

Jankowicz believes that "trustworthy experts" should be empowered to "edit" other people's tweets to "add context."

More troubling was her long record of cheerleading for political propaganda. Jankowicz previously worked for StopFake, a federally funded media-influence operation that in 2018 "began aggressively whitewashing two Ukrainian neo-Nazi groups with a long track record of violence, including war crimes," even dabbling "with Holocaust distortion, downplaying WWII-era paramilitaries who slaughtered Jews as mere 'historic figures' and Ukrainian nationalist leaders," as *The Nation* reported. She also worked for the National Democratic Institute, which is heavily funded by the National Endowment for Democracy, which

has spurred perennial controversy for interfering in foreign elections.

A long record of censorship

When Jankowicz testified in Britain on the UK's Online Safety Bill, which entitled the government to ban any content with "the potential to cause harm," she endorsed banning "misogyny" (bad news for old videos of Benny Hill shows). She also derided free speech as on par with "fairy dust." As Paul Joseph Watson reported in *Summit News*, "Jankowicz asserted that social media platforms should utilize algorithms that would 'allow us to get around some of the free speech concerns' by demoting content so few people saw it." Jankowicz assured the legislators: "You can shout in the black void, but you do not get a huge audience to do that." And people like her should have the prerogative to covertly determine how much audience each idea deserves, right?

Jankowicz believes that "trustworthy experts" such as herself (she boasts that she is "verified" by Twitter) should be empowered to "edit" other people's tweets to "add context." She denounced Loudoun County, Va., parents who complained about left-wing school curriculum for "disinformation" and "weaponizing people's emotion."

In October 2020, after the *New York Post* exposed damning emails and other information in Hunter Biden's laptop, Jankowicz scoffed at the laptop controversy: "We should view it as a Trump campaign product." She supported the 50 former intelligence officials and other honchos who vouched that the laptop should not be trusted, thereby helping Biden win the 2020 election (according to former attorney general Bill Barr).

Political overlords need power to shape Americans' beliefs by discrediting, if not totally suppressing, disapproved opinions.

Jankowicz never complained when Twitter suppressed all links to *New York Post* articles before the 2020 election. But when rumors circulated in April that Elon Musk might buy Twitter, she fretted to National Public Radio: "I shudder to think about if free speech absolutists were taking over more platforms."

That line is the Rosetta stone for understanding the new Disinformation Governance Board. The goal is not "truth" — which could arise from the clash of competing opinions. Instead, political overlords need power to exert pressure

and pull to shape Americans' beliefs by discrediting, if not totally suppressing, disapproved opinions.

The swamp circles the wagons

When DHS revealed that the disinformation board was being placed on hold, it also announced that former DHS Secretary Michael Chertoff was brought in to review and assess the board's mission. Chertoff was assistant attorney general helping organize the mass roundup of 1,200 Muslims after the 9/11 attacks. On November 28, 2001, Chertoff testified to the Senate Judiciary Committee: "Nobody is held incommunicado. We don't hold people in secret, you know, cut off from lawyers, cut off from the public, cut off from their family and friends." That was total disinformation, and the Bush administration's secrecy was later condemned. In August 2002, Chertoff condemned Bush administration critics: "You should not think you're dealing with a bunch of barbarians.... We need to be sober about what is a threat to civil liberties." But, as *The Nation* magazine noted, "Chertoff is notorious for enabling some of the most egregious offenses of the War on Terrorism — from federal surveillance, to unlawful detention, to torture. Indeed, his previous gov-

ernmental appointments were met with vociferous opposition from groups like Human Rights Watch and the ACLU.” When he was DHS boss, Chertoff championed REAL ID and portrayed it as a total surveillance system — even for babysitters. *The Nation* magazine declared that placing “a man as deeply tainted as Chertoff into a leadership position smacks of a particularly indolent kind of contempt.”

Disinformation a longtime tool of the state

“Disinformation” is often simply the lag time between the pronouncement and the debunking of government falsehoods. In early 2003, anyone who denied that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction was guilty of disinformation — until after George W. Bush’s Iraq invasion found no WMDs. It was disinformation that Obama’s drone assassination program was killing large number of innocent civilians — until Daniel Hale courageously leaked internal documents proving the killing spree. (Hale will spend years in federal prison as a reward for undermining the credibility of this particular disinformation.)

Federal agencies have deluged Americans with malarkey for de-

acades. We don’t need a disinformation czar to hector us to submit to the latest Washington catechism.

**Jankowicz’s arrogance
was invisible to the Biden team
because that arrogance is so
pervasive.**

The core of the media defense of Jankowicz was that only right-wing nuts fear the U.S. government would censor Americans. But it is already happening. The Biden White House threatened antitrust investigations against social media companies that failed to suppress “disinformation” about COVID vaccines. On March 3, Surgeon General Vivek Murthy “demanded that the tech companies turn over information about individuals who spread” COVID “misinformation,” the New Civil Liberties Alliance reported. Last year, it was “disinformation” to claim that vaccines fail to prevent contracting or transmitting COVID. But after the Omicron wave, the phrase “breakthrough infection” became almost redundant.

The Disinformation Governance Board debacle could not have occurred unless many policymakers felt entitled to control the information Americans receive. Jankowicz’s arrogance was invisible

to the Biden team because that arrogance is shared by them. She is part of a niche that assumes they are so superior that they have the right to censor — or at least the right to control what other people think. In the 1960s, the “best and the brightest” had the right to lie Americans into the Vietnam War — for the good of the world. The same type of people now infest Washington and believe they have the right to censor.

The new Cold War — in Ukraine

Targeting Russian issues would have been a prime topic for the new board. After she resigned, Jankowicz touted the disinformation fight by other federal agencies: “Take a look at the recent work to prebunk [pre-debunk] Russian narratives about Ukraine. It focused on raising awareness of the falsities coming out of the Kremlin so Americans wouldn't buy into them. It worked.”

It “worked” in the sense that the vast majority of the American media has uncritically recited what they have been told about the conflict by U.S. government and Ukrainian officials. But the U.S. government has withheld almost all information it possesses on the battlefield losses of the Ukrainian army, thus helping perpetuate

“Ghost of Kiev” types of fantasies about how the conflict is going. On May 27, the *Washington Post* reported that Ukrainian military “casualties here are largely kept secret to protect morale among troops and the general public” — and American citizens. U.S. officials have also passed on information to the media regarding the conflict that was unverified or even doubtful. At the same time, many politicians have joined a media chorus to denounce as Russian propaganda any suggestion that the war is something less than a glorious triumph of good over evil.

Few Americans recognize how surreal the notion of “truth” has become inside the Beltway.

U.S. government agencies poured money into the coffers of Ukrainian government agencies, including the office of Lyudmila Denisova, the commissioner for human rights. Denisova spurred hundreds of lurid western media reports about Russian troops on rape rampages, targeting even young babies. But on May 30, the Ukrainian parliament tossed her out of her job because there was no evidence for many of her allegations. Until the moment that Den-

isova was fired, denying Russian troops were mass raping Ukrainian females was “disinformation.”

Few Americans recognize how surreal the notion of “truth” has become inside the Beltway. On April 28, the White House appealed to Congress to provide another massive aid package to Ukraine, including hefty provisions to “support activists, journalists, and independent media to defend freedom of expression.” And how can we be sure that Ukrainian journalists are independent? Because U.S. government officials retain the sales receipt for their purchase. Unfortunately, the State Department, the National Endowment for Democracy, and other agencies have been avidly subsidizing “independent media” in foreign nations for years, assuring that there will be an “amen chorus” for U.S. intervention in their nations if deemed necessary. The absurdity of such grants doesn’t register in D.C., in part because so many policy-makers are blinded by the presumed righteousness of U.S. policy. As Secretary of State Madeline Albright said, “We are the indispensable nation.... We see further into the future.” Thus, handouts from the U.S. government are the truest source of independence — or some such hokum.

It remains to be seen if Biden’s disinformation campaigns on Ukraine and Russia succeed in dragging our nation into World War Three. The United States funds foreign propaganda operations that echo in American newspapers and cable news, and the White House exploits those stories to drag this nation further into an East European border dispute.

The federal government has long been the most dangerous source of disinformation threatening Americans. The trillions of pages of new secrets that the U.S. government creates each year is a disinformation entitlement program. In a city that already had hundreds of full-time political appointees whose task is to lie to the America public, why was another board needed? Admittedly, calling it the Disinformation Governance Board is more palatable than naming it the Keep Damn Federal Lies Sacrosanct Panel.

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.

The Anglo-Americans believe that the source of moral authority lies in universal reason, just as the source of political power lies in the universality of citizens, and they hold that consensus is the only guide to what is permitted or prohibited, true or false. Most of them believe that the man who properly understands his own self-interest has all the guidance he needs to act justly and honestly. They believe that every person is born with the faculty to govern himself and that no one has the right to force happiness on his fellow man. All share a strong belief in human perfectibility. They judge that the spread of enlightenment necessarily brings useful results and that ignorance leads to disaster. All consider society a body in progress and mankind a changing tableau in which nothing is or should be fixed forever, and they admit that what seems good to them today may be replaced tomorrow by something better but as yet hidden from view.

— Alexis de Tocqueville

It's Up to Them

by *Laurence M. Vance*



President Joe Biden has done it again. He's committed another gaffe. But this comes as no surprise since he acknowledged during a stop on his book tour in 2018 that he was "a gaffe machine," and has not stopped proving the truth of that statement ever since.

In late December of last year, Biden spoke with state governors on a call regarding potential strategies to manage the continued impact of COVID-19. After a Republican governor spoke about challenges his state was experiencing in responding to the pandemic and stated that he did not want federal solutions to stand in the way of state solutions, Biden unintentionally made the case for federalism when he then said that "there is no federal solution" to the COVID-19 pandemic and declared that it "gets solved at the state level." And now,

earlier this year, on the day after a federal judge struck down the public transportation mask mandate issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Biden told reporters in New Hampshire that "it's up to them" whether people wear masks on airplanes. So again, what the president unintentionally said was profound, with far-reaching implications.

The mask mandate

Shortly before the presidential election of 2020, Biden and a reporter had an exchange about face masks:

Reporter: "But, sir, you don't see, you had suggested there would be some sort of federal mandate about masks and now you're saying you would encourage people?"

Biden: "No, no. No, no. Here's what I suggested was: I would ask every person in authority. There's a question whether or not a president, under the Constitution, could mandate everyone to wear a mask. And remember all during the primary I would have a lot of people telling me, I would by executive order do — I am a

constitutionalist. You know, you can't do things the Constitution does not allow you the power to do. What I'd be doing is putting as much pressure as I could on every governor, every senator, I mean excuse me, every mayor, every county executive, every local official, and everyone in business, putting pressure on them, to say: What you're doing is irresponsible. Make sure you wear a mask and maintain social distancing. And the vast majority of the American people accept that notion."

After his election, but before his inauguration, Biden challenged Americans to wear a mask for "just 100 days" to help slow the spread of the coronavirus beginning on the first day of his term. Said the president-elect: "Wear a mask for just 100 days. It the easiest thing you can do to reduce COVID cases, hospitalizations, and death. Help yourself, your family, and your community. Whatever your politics or point of view, mask up for 100 days once we take office, 100 days to make a difference. It's not a political statement. It's a patriotic act." (It should be noted that President Donald Trump once tweeted an im-

age of himself wearing a mask and made the comment that it was "patriotic.") Soon after Biden took office in 2021, a federal transportation mask mandate was issued.

On January 21 — just one day after taking the oath of office — Biden issued executive order no. 13998, "Promoting COVID-19 Safety in Domestic and International Travel." It required the heads of the executive departments and agencies "to immediately take action, to the extent appropriate and consistent with applicable law, to require masks to be worn in compliance with CDC guidelines in or on: (i) airports; (ii) commercial aircraft; (iii) trains; (iv) public maritime vessels, including ferries; (v) intercity bus services; and (vi) all forms of public transportation as defined in section 5302 of title 49, United States Code."

The CDC issued its infamous mask mandate without allowing the usual public comment.

On February 3, the CDC issued its infamous mask mandate ("Requirement for Persons to Wear Masks While on Conveyances and at Transportation Hubs") without allowing the usual public comment because "it would be impracticable

and contrary to the public's health" to delay the mask mandate. The mandate required that "a person must wear a mask while boarding, disembarking, and traveling on any conveyance into or within the United States." This included public transportation (airplanes, trains, subways, buses, taxis, ride-shares, maritime transportation, trolleys, cable cars) and transportation hubs (commercial airports, bus terminals, commercial vessel terminals, train and subway stations, seaports, U.S. ports of entry, dedicated ride-share pick-up locations).

**Biden's comment still stands
— "it's up to them" whether
people wear masks on airplanes.**

The mask mandate originally had an expiration date of May 11, 2021. This was then extended through September 13, 2021, then March 18, 2022, and then April 18, 2022. But after 21 states sued the Biden administration in an attempt to get the mandate for travel eliminated, after eight Senate Democrats joined with Republicans to pass a bill rescinding the mandate, and after the mandate was extended for another two weeks (through May 3, 2022), U.S. District Judge Kathryn Kimball Mizelle — a Trump ap-

pointee — ruled that the CDC exceeded its statutory authority when it mandated that people wear masks when using public transportation. The Department of Justice appealed the district court's decision to "preserve that authority for the CDC to have in the future." Meanwhile, Biden's comment still stands — "it's up to them" whether people wear masks on airplanes — even though the White House insisted that it recommended that everyone wear masks on airplanes.

State decisions

The transportation mask mandate was just one of a myriad of things that the federal government decided to institute or fund that are not authorized by the Constitution. The list is endless: job training programs, a minimum wage, the war on drugs, antidiscrimination laws, public broadcasting, Medicaid, Medicare, student loans, Pell Grants, grants for art and culture, subsidies for scientific and medical research, gun control laws, abortion regulations, welfare programs, price gouging laws, family leave mandates, overtime pay requirements, gambling laws, travel restrictions, food stamps, Social Security, flood insurance, housing vouchers, school breakfast and lunch pro-

grams, Head Start, AMTRAK, the TSA, farm subsidies, business regulations, fuel economy standards, space exploration and research, nutrition guidelines.

If any of these things are to exist, they must exist on the state level. As James Madison — the father of the Constitution — so succulently and eloquently explained about our federal system of government in the *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.” This doesn’t mean that the states should decide to have any of these things. It just means that the federal government has no authority whatsoever to decide to do any of them since they are not among the enumerated powers delegated to the national government.

As far as the Constitution, federalism, and limited government are concerned, state decisions are better than federal decisions.

Personal decisions

But as we saw during the COVID-19 “pandemic,” state and local governments can be just as tyrannical as the federal government, especially when it comes to person-

al decisions. The city of Philadelphia banned all indoor dining at restaurants and indoor gatherings of any size, public or private, of people from different households. According to the National Restaurant Association, more than 110,000 restaurants have permanently closed in the United States because of state and local government restrictions due to the “pandemic.”

Governments have always attempted to prohibit people from engaging in private, voluntary, harmless, peaceful activity.

But even before the “pandemic,” state and local governments were arresting, fining, and/or jailing people for making personal decisions that they didn’t agree with: using or possessing drugs, engaging in prostitution, illegal gambling, practicing discrimination, price gouging, ticket scalping, not wearing a seatbelt or helmet, selling alcohol before or after a certain time, performing a service without an occupational license, serving alcohol to one’s adult children under 21, engaging in commerce on a Sunday, not recycling, and violating gun control laws.

Such is the nature of government. Governments throughout history have always attempted to

prohibit, prevent, and prosecute people from engaging in private, consensual, voluntary, harmless, peaceful activity because they deemed it to be wrong, bad, inappropriate, offensive, sinful, immoral, or just because. The conflict of the ages has always been between individuals who want to do something and governments that don't want them to do it. And the conflict has always been instituted by government.

Every real crime needs a victim who has suffered measurable harm to his person or measurable damages to his property.

But government should never penalize or punish individuals for engaging in private, consensual, voluntary, harmless, peaceful activity that does not aggress against the person or property of others. Only those who commit violence should be incarcerated, and no one should ever be restricted from or restrained for committing a victimless crime. Every real crime needs a tangible and identifiable victim who has suffered measurable harm to his person or measurable damages to his property. The solution to the conflict is a simple one: As long as people don't violate the personal or

property rights of others, and as long as their actions are peaceful, their associations are voluntary, and their interactions are consensual — the government should just leave them alone.

As H. L. Mencken put it, “Let people do whatever they please, so long as they do not invade the right and freedom of other persons to do the same.” And to paraphrase Leonard Read: “Let anyone do anything he pleases, so long as it is peaceful.” Yet, Read went out of his way to make it very clear that the principle of individual liberty is not a license to just do as one pleases:

It is incorrect to think of liberty as synonymous with unrestrained action. Liberty does not and cannot include any action, regardless of sponsorship, which lessens the liberty of a single human being. To argue contrarily is to claim that liberty can be composed of liberty negations, patently absurd. Unrestraint carried to the point of impairing the liberty of others is the exercise of license, not liberty.

So, how does this relate to the comment of Joe Biden? Consider the following.

What if people want to smoke marijuana, swallow pills, snort cocaine, shoot heroin in their veins, drop acid, eat magic mushrooms, consume crystal meth, or try fentanyl? What if they want to buy, sell, cultivate, or manufacture drugs? What if they want to get stoned out of their minds? It's up to them.

What if people want to gamble? What if they want to gamble even when the odds are stacked against them? What if they want to waste their money? What if they want to play poker for money with their friends or neighbors? What if they want to take out a loan or drain their savings in order to gamble? What if they want to open a casino? What if they want to bet on sports or elections? It's up to them.

What if people want to engage in prostitution? What if they want to provide sex for money? What if they want to pay for sex? What if they want to risk getting a venereal disease? What if they face the possibility of a divorce if their spouse finds out they hired a prostitute? It's up to them.

What if people want to sell or drink alcohol early in the morning, late at night, or on a Sunday? What if people want to distill their own spirits? What if people want to sell the beer they brew or the wine they

make? What if they want to get drunk with their adult children under 21? It's up to them.

What if people want to sell things for much more than they paid for them? What if they want to raise their prices during a natural disaster? What if people are willing to pay higher prices during a natural disaster to get the things they want? It's up to them.

What if people want to charge high interest rates on loans? What if people are willing to pay high interest rates in order to take out a loan? It's up to them.

Choosing to engage in risky behavior means that the doer is responsible for the consequences of his actions.

What if people want to discriminate against others? What if they want to discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, physical appearance, pregnancy, facial hair, or clothing? What if their discrimination is illogical, irrational, or nonsensical? What if their discrimination is based on stereotypes, conjectures, prejudice, bigotry, or racism? What if their discrimination is arbitrary, capricious, subjec-

tive, or inconsistent? It's up to them.

What if people want to travel to Cuba, North Korea, Venezuela, Myanmar, China, or Russia? What if they want to spend money in countries that don't respect the human rights of their citizens? What if they want to vacation in an authoritarian state? What if they want to visit a country that has jails full of political prisoners? What if they want to go to a country that doesn't allow its citizens to visit the United States? It's up to them.

What if people want to hire an "illegal immigrant?" What if people are willing to work for less than the minimum wage and not receive any benefits? It's up to them.

It is not up to the government or society to pay the bills or prevent people from harming themselves.

What if people want to smoke tobacco? What if they want to allow smoking in their bar or restaurant? What if they want to advertise tobacco products? What if they want to risk getting lung cancer? It's up to them.

What if people want to sell a concert ticket for much more than the face value of the ticket? What if people want to pay much more for a concert ticket than the face value of

the ticket? It's up to them.

What if people want to enter competitive eating contests? What if people want to be gluttons? What if people want to eat until they are obese? It's up to them.

What if people want to sell one of their kidneys? What if they want to sell both of their kidneys, their liver, or their heart upon their death? What if they are willing to pay for an organ to save their life? It's up to them.

What if people want to open their businesses on a Sunday? What if people want to buy or sell a car on a Sunday? What if people want to skip church and go shopping on a Sunday? It's up to them.

What if people want to provide a service without getting a government license? What if people want to purchase a service from an unlicensed service provider? It's up to them.

Personal responsibility

With freedom comes responsibility. Choosing to engage in addictive, harmful, unsafe, dangerous, unhealthy, immoral, or risky behavior means that the doer is responsible for the consequences of his actions. It is not up to the government or society to pay the bills or prevent people from harming themselves.

Gambling can be financially ruinous, just like getting too many payday loans. Discriminating against people may hurt your business and networking opportunities. If you overdose on drugs or lose your family or your job, then it is your problem. Rehab is expensive, so save your money and don't expect anyone else to pay for it. People have died after gorging themselves at competitive eating contests. Eat at your own risk. Americans who travel to a country with an authoritarian government travel at their own risk. They can't expect the U.S. government to send in the Marines should they get in trouble. Abusing alcohol can destroy your family and your health. It may even eventually kill you. If you want to participate in boxing, wrestling, bungee jumping, football, or mixed martial arts, then go right ahead, but make sure you have some money set aside or have health insurance. If you get injured, don't expect anyone else to pay the bill. Smoking cigarettes might result in lung cancer; chewing tobacco might result in mouth cancer. Don't even think about trying to sue the tobacco companies when your life is cut short. Want to be a prostitute? Serial killers prey on them. Walk the streets and get in cars at your own risk. Want to raise

your prices during a national disaster? Fine, but you may lose customers in the long run. And of course, religious people would say that sinning against God may have eternal consequences.

Joe Biden was right. It should be up to people to decide whether to wear a mask, not the government. But not only should wearing a mask be up to them, as long as people don't violate the personal or property rights of others, and as long as their actions are peaceful, their associations are voluntary, and their interactions are consensual; it's up to them what they do, not the government.

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NEXT MONTH:
**“Vouchers Are Not
the Answer”**
by Laurence M. Vance

Out of Control Government and Isaiah's Job

by *Richard M. Ebeling*



It is very difficult to be a classical liberal or libertarian and not experience bouts of disappointment, frustration, and outright pessimism. The world around us seems to be going to hell in a handbasket. Government continues to grow and, apparently, is out of control.

For example, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) released its semiannual Budget and Economic Outlook, 2022-2032 in late May 2022. The CBO expects that when the federal government's current fiscal year ends on September 30, 2022, Uncle Sam will have spent \$5.874 trillion. Tax revenues from all sources will be \$4.890 trillion, leaving a budget deficit for the fiscal year of \$1.036 trillion. Total nation-

al debt held by the public will come in at \$24.173 trillion, while the gross national debt (which includes Treasury securities held by other government agencies) will be more than \$30.621 trillion.

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is expected to equal \$24.694 trillion in 2022. So, this means that federal spending will 23.8 percent of GDP, while taxes will absorb 19.6 percent of GDP. The more than \$1 trillion deficit will amount to 4.2 percent of GDP.

Bigger government in the years ahead

Things do not get better looking over the coming decade, the CBO anticipates. In 2032, federal expenditures are expected to total \$8.469 trillion, for a 51.8 percent increase over 2022. Federal taxes are projected to amount to \$6.662 trillion in 2032, or a 36.2 percent increase over a decade earlier. The budget deficit is predicted to be \$2.252 trillion in 2032, representing a 217 percent increase over the deficit in 2022. Gross Domestic Product will be \$36.680 in 2032, says the CBO, and will be 48.5 percent larger than in 2022.

The government's share of the GDP pie, in other words, will be increasing noticeably faster than the national economy is projected to

grow over the next 10 years. Also, the share of government borrowing to simply pay the interest on the existing accumulated national debt will be increasing as well. In fiscal 2022, the federal government will borrow \$1.036 trillion, as we saw. Out of this, nearly \$400 billion will be used to pay interest owed on the national debt, or about 39 percent of total borrowing. In 2032, when the deficit is expected to be \$2.253 trillion, \$1.193 trillion will be used just to pay interest on the, then, accumulated national debt, or 52 percent of all government borrowing in that year. So more than half of all the money the federal government will have to borrow 10 years from now will be used just to stay current on the interest payments due from all the earlier decades of annual deficit spending.

More than half of all the money the federal government will have to borrow 10 years from now will be used just to stay current on the interest payments.

Of course, all of this has to be taken with a grain of salt. Ten years ago, the CBO did not anticipate the great economic contraction of 2020 caused by the federal and state government's draconian response to

the coronavirus crisis, that commanded the shutdown and lockdown of much of the U.S. economy for several months. And just two or three years ago, the CBO was still projecting that price inflation, as measured by the Consumer Price Index, would still be rising at a "modest" 2 percent a year in 2022.

Entitlement programs are heading for disaster

What is driving a huge portion of government spending and growing deficits and debt are the "entitlement" programs, that is, the welfare state, especially Social Security and Medicare/Medicaid. In 1970 (in 2022 inflation-adjusted dollars), Social Security and Medicare spending came to a little over \$300 billion out of \$1.5 trillion (again, in 2022 inflation-adjusted dollars) of federal government spending, or a little less than 21 percent of the total budget that year. In fiscal year 2022, Social Security and Medicare spending will come to about \$1.8 trillion, or 31 percent of all federal expenditures.

But an additional component to this is that these entitlement programs are heading for bankruptcy. Already, in 2021, the Social Security Trust Fund spent \$147 billion more than was taken in by the designated

taxes for the government pension program. Over the next 10 years, Social Security will run a cumulative deficit of \$2.4 trillion. Where is the money coming from to fill this gap? In past decades, the Social Security Trust Fund ran surpluses, that is, it collected more of those designated taxes than it paid out to eligible retirees.

**By around 2034,
the trust fund will have “cashed
in” all of those securities.**

The trust fund “invested” those surpluses in U.S. government securities. In other words, these surpluses were covering part of the federal government’s overall annual deficits. But by around 2034, the trust fund will have “cashed in” all of those securities. Under current legislation, the Social Security Trust Fund may pay out only what it collects in taxes or holds in the form of those Treasury securities. So, around a decade from now, Social Security taxes collected will permit retirees to receive only about 77 percent of what is currently redistributed to them from the working-age population. In other words, if you were receiving a Social Security check from Uncle Sam every month in the amount of, say, \$1,000, you

would find at some point that the check in the mail would be only \$770.

The same applies to Medicare. In 2021, Medicare-related taxes came to \$337.4 billion, with expenditures of \$328.9 billion, or a modest surplus of \$8.5 billion. But according to the Medicare Trust Fund report for 2022, by 2031, taxes collected will equal around \$594 billion, with outlays totaling \$684 billion, or a deficit of \$90 billion. The problem will be that the Medicare Trust Fund will have cashed in all the Treasury securities in its “asset” portfolio in 2028. It, too, is facing bankruptcy under current federal legislation.

Bigger military budgets due to foreign interventionism

Added to this is government military spending, as well. In inflation-adjusted 2022 dollars, the U.S. defense budget was about \$600 billion in 1970, when the Vietnam War had not yet come to an end. In fiscal year 2021, defense spending came to over \$800 billion. So, in spite of the end of the Cold War with the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991, the United States government spends 33 percent more on the military than over half a century ago. Foreign military interven-

tions in Somalia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, and other places in the world over the last 30 years have prevented any of the promised “peace dividend” expected three decades ago with the end to the Cold War.

In 1900, federal spending equaled only around 2.7 percent of GDP.

Now, with U.S., NATO, and European Union military support for Ukraine in its war with Russia, and the emerging new Cold War between the United States and China, Defense Department spending can only be expected to increase in the years ahead. After all, President Biden has publicly committed America to coming to Taiwan's defense if China were to attempt to invade that island. If this is a serious “promise,” in the face of growing Chinese military expenditures and outreach in East Asia and the Indian Ocean, this will require greater sums spent by the United States to militarily match its new chosen rival for global hegemony.

These numbers, of course, do not include all the other categories of federal spending, from National Public Radio to the Departments of Education, Housing and Urban Development, Health and Human Re-

sources, Agriculture, State, Interior, Homeland Security, and all the rest. Still more tens of billions of dollars on these.

Government spending equals what is taken from the private sector

This is all a far cry from the beginning of the twentieth century, when in 1900, federal spending equaled only around 2.7 percent of GDP, with state and local spending, together, coming to another 4 percent of GDP. That is, all levels of government took less than 7 percent of national income. That meant that the American citizenry was keeping 93 percent of the income they earned. Keep in mind that this was also before the introduction of federal income tax in 1913. In comparison, with a CBO-estimated GDP in 2022 of almost \$24.7 trillion, all levels of government — federal, state, and local — will be spending almost \$10 trillion, or over 40 percent of the national economic pie.

The reader may have noticed that I have given greater emphasis to levels of government spending than to amounts taxed or borrowed, per se. The reason being that it is government spending that represents the amount of private production siphoned off and out of the di-

rect hands of the private producers and income earners of the society. This is how much the government plunders from the people of the country, regardless of whether the production and income that is transferred into the hands of those in political power has been done by taxation or borrowing.

Our consumer-chosen standards of living would be that much higher, as reflected in what we decided to spend that \$10 trillion on.

What does \$10 trillion of total government spending equal? It is, in fact, more than the \$9.777 trillion that the American citizenry spent in 2021 on household consumption expenditures for “services.” These included housing and utilities, health care, transportation, recreational activities, food services and hotel accommodations, and financial services and insurance, as well as nonprofit institutional spending on household services.

What this means is that if government had not pickpocketed this \$10 trillion out of our income and wealth, we would have had the financial wherewithal to more than double our expenditures on these types of personal and consumption services. Our consumer-chosen

standards of living would have been that much higher, as reflected in what we decided to spend that \$10 trillion on.

Bigger government reduces freedom in many ways

All of this, of course, is just the relatively direct dollars-and-cents size and scope of government in modern American society. It does not include the estimated additional \$2 trillion a year that private businesses must incur in additional costs to comply with all the federal regulations imposed on private enterprises in the United States. It does not capture all the human misfortunes imposed on all those priced out of employment opportunities due to the minimum wage, or who do not have the financial means to meet the regulatory rules and expenses to be able to open and operate a business and thus never have a chance to be self-employed or try their hand at being an entrepreneur.

Also, that \$10 trillion of government spending does not directly remind us of the extent to which government intrudes and surveils into the privacy of our individual and family lives in the name of a war on terrorism or the never-ending war on drugs, or restrictions on

people's movements through passport and visa requirements, or due to border controls that represent government central planning of who may travel and for what reasons they may enter or leave the country.

Social power is the sum of all the free actions of all the free individuals in a free society.

It also enables the United States government to play the role of self-appointed policeman of the world, with military bases in dozens of countries, which carries the constant risk of Americans at any time being drawn into new foreign wars and conflicts based on what those in political power in Washington, D.C., decide is in the "national interest." This can include the danger of a nuclear conflict with Russia over Ukraine or a potentially equally cataclysmic war with China over Taiwan.

Albert Jay Nock on social versus political power

Thinking about all of this, as I said at the beginning, easily sinks the friend of freedom into despair and despondency. How can it even be stopped, let alone reversed, so that a society of individual liberty,

limited government and truly free markets can be established in the United States? This gets me to a famous but seemingly neglected essay written by Albert Jay Nock in the 1930s called "Isaiah's Job."

Nock was one of the most insightful advocates of individual liberty in the twentieth century. He is most famous for his 1935 book, *Our Enemy, the State*. He clearly laid out what he called the difference between "social power" and "political power." Social power is the sum of all the free actions of all the free individuals in a free society. It comprises the personal choices, free associations and exchanges, and creative achievements when government leaves people alone to peacefully follow their own paths for betterment as they, respectively, see it.

Political power comprises all the government actions that interfere with those free actions by free people in the form of taxes collected, regulations and restrictions imposed on personal and market activities, and the compulsory redistributions of income and wealth that are meant to privilege some at others' expense. The greater the political power by government in the society, the more social power is diminished; that is, individual free-

dom is reduced and “the state” grows with its legitimized use of force over people’s lives.

The dark New Deal days of growing government

Nock wrote all this during the New Deal days of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s administration. Government spending had never before been as large; government taxes had never been so high; government deficits and the national debt had never before reached such heights. The people’s gold had been confiscated by the government, and depreciating paper money was given to them in exchange. Millions were on the government dole, and huge government “public works” projects replaced private enterprise or seduced private business with government contracts and subsidies.

In addition, during the first years of FDR’s New Deal, there was the attempt to impose a system of fascist-type central planning over the entire U.S. economy. Only a series of Supreme Court decisions brought this “experiment” in a fully command-and-control economy to an end. Roosevelt merely continued with more and bigger government through greater spending on welfare and “make-work” projects.

FDR demonstrated an arrogance and hubris in his wielding of presidential power than seemed not much different from the dictators of Europe who finally brought about a terrible war in 1939. Roosevelt then finagled his way into the war, a war that a huge majority of Americans wanted no part of, by introducing a system of aggressive economic sanctions and ultimatums on the Japanese. It culminated in the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941.

FDR demonstrated an arrogance and hubris in his wielding of presidential power.

These were dark times for friends of freedom. The classical liberal idea and ideal seemed not only to be in eclipse, coming to an end with collectivisms like communism, socialism, fascism, and Nazism seeming to be the future for mankind.

Isaiah’s job of speaking the truth

In the midst of all this, Nock wrote his essay, “Isaiah’s Job,” which appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1936. He paraphrased the story of Isaiah in the Old Testament. Isaiah was sent by God to warn people about the evils of their ways and

their need to repent and return to the path of righteousness. But wherever he goes, Isaiah is met with resistance and ridicule. Finally, in despair, Isaiah cries out to God, asking why he has been sent on this hopeless mission.

All that a friend of freedom can do is speak what he knows to be true about the right principles for a free society.

God replies that it's not Isaiah's job to know whether or how successful he may or may not have been in getting people to change their ways. That's God's job, since he can look into the hearts and minds of people in a way that Isaiah cannot, and as a result, Isaiah can never know who may have been touched and influenced by what he had said in God's name. Isaiah's job is to uprightly speak the truth and tell people where a better path may be found. The rest is God's job.

Nock's point was to say that nobody can read the future, or how people may or may not change what they believe and what they will socially and politically want or oppose. All that a friend of freedom can do is speak what he knows to be true about the right principles for a free society and how and why such

a free society should be desired if liberty has any value and if peaceful prosperity for mankind is to be made possible.

In dark political times, like those in the 1930s or now in 2022 America, Nock said that the cause of freedom had need for a "remnant," by which he meant, "those who by force of intellect are able to apprehend these principles [of freedom], and by force of character are able, at least measurably, to cleave to them." They learn, preserve, and share their understanding about the idea and ideal of liberty when and as they can with those around them, when opportunities present themselves in their respective corners of society. And you may never know who has listened to what you said or how effective and influential it may have been.

You never know who is listening when you explain freedom

Let me give an example from my own experience. When I was in graduate school in the New York City area, I started to make some extra money teaching introductory economic classes at the Newark campus of Rutgers's University in New Jersey. I lived in New York City and would have to commute back and forth on the nights that I was teaching.

One evening after taking the train under the Hudson River from New Jersey to lower Manhattan, I stopped to do some food shopping at a small market before continuing over to Queens, where I was living. Waiting on line at the checkout, I noticed the woman behind me was staring at me. Finally, she asked, “Aren’t you Richard Ebeling? And you teach at Rutgers’s, don’t you?” I nervously replied, “Yes,” Then in a voice loud enough that everyone around could hear, she said, “You have ruined my marriage.”

You may never know who has listened to what you said or how effective and influential it may have been.

That got everyone’s attention, especially when she repeated the words for a second time. My eyes were looking for the exit. I said, “Excuse me?” She answered, “My husband took your economics class last semester, and all he does now is come home from work, watch the evening news, and complain about government for the rest of the night. You have ruined my marriage.”

How she knew that I was his teacher for that class I never found out. Nor do I have any idea who her husband was. Did he earn an “A” or

was he a “C” student? Did he ask any questions during class or did he just listen silently the entire semester? Did he sit in the front or way in the back of the room? I have no idea.

But what it did teach me was that you never know how or who you may influence and get to think about things after sharing your ideas about freedom. Even when it seems that the person you are talking to is resistant or oblivious to the ideas you are expressing, you never know how they may rattle around in his mind the next day or a year later and affect how he thinks about freedom and the free society. Nor can you always know if someone not part of the conversation is listening in to what is being said and making him think about things a little differently about the value and importance of liberty.

Modern communication facilitates the freedom advocate’s task

When Albert Jay Nock wrote “Isaiah’s Job,” back in the 1930s, it was a much more isolated and lonelier environment in which to discover others who shared classical liberal or libertarian ideas. There were only a handful of print publications open to them. And communication was limited to snail mail,

landline telephones, and having to physically travel to meet and interact with people face-to-face.

Today, the internet and email and text messaging have transformed the means by which friends of freedom can find out about each other, publish articles, write blogs, film and upload videos, and talk face-to-face via Skype or Zoom, from one's own living room. We have come to take such things so much for granted that we forget how revolutionary they really are, compared to not very long ago.

This also means that we have amazing ways to communicate with multitudes of others; friends of freedom are able to share and improve their understandings of the ideas of liberty and the better ways to express them. These are ways that Nock and others like him never had in those earlier times. We can far more easily and rapidly work to change the climate of opinion by making people aware of the facts and the consequences of a government out-of-control.

The most important thing not to lose sight of, in my opinion is that regardless of how bad things may seem, they have seemed equally bad in the past. Just as Albert Jay Nock helped to cultivate a new generation of friends of freedom, that is our task in our own time. And together we can make a society of liberty a reality, without always being depressed or despondent about who or how many may be listening.

Richard M. Ebeling is the BB&T Distinguished Professor of Ethics and Free Enterprise Leadership at The Citadel. He was professor of Economics at Northwood University and at Hillsdale College and president of The Foundation for Economic Education, and served as vice president of academic affairs for FFF.

NEXT MONTH:
**“If America Were
Totalitarian, Where Would
You Want to Live?”**
by Richard M. Ebeling

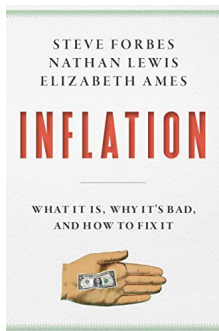
I wanted the American eagle to go screaming into the Pacific....Why not spread its wings over the Philippines, I asked myself?... I said to myself, Here are a people who have suffered for three centuries. We can make them as free as ourselves, give them a government and country of their own, put a miniature of the American Constitution afloat in the Pacific, start a brand new republic to take its place among the free nations of the world. It seemed to me a great task to which we had addressed ourselves. But I have thought some more, since then, and I have read carefully the treaty of Paris [which ended the Spanish-American War], and I have seen that we do not intend to free, but to subjugate the people of the Philippines. We have gone there to conquer, not to redeem. It should, it seems to me, be our pleasure and duty to make those people free, and let them deal with their own domestic questions in their own way. And so I am an anti-imperialist. I am opposed to having the eagle put its talons on any other land.

— Mark Twain

Now That Inflation Is Back, Here's the Book to Read

by George C. Leef

Inflation: What It Is, Why It's Bad, and How to Fix It by Steve Forbes, Nathan Lewis, and Elizabeth Ames (Encounter Books, 2022).



We have been through this many times before — prices start to increase at an accelerating pace and consumers grumble about inflation, while politicians try to pin the blame for it on parties other than themselves. Right now (May 2022), prices are rising at their fastest rate in many years, and people wonder just how bad it will get.

They won't find that exact answer in the new book by Steve

Forbes, Nathan Lewis, and Elizabeth Ames, *Inflation: What It Is, Why It's Bad, and How to Fix it*, but they will learn everything else they need to know. It's easy to read (plain English uncluttered by economic jargon and pointless mathematics), and the authors provide the antidote for all of the disinformation that statisticians peddle about inflation. And they cap it off with the one and only solution to the problem of inflation, namely the gold standard.

To begin with, what is inflation?

The authors explain that generally rising prices (what most people call “inflation”) is just one of the symptoms of the actual inflation, which is the supply of money in a nation. When government increases the amount of money in circulation, that is inflation. As the quantity of money increases, the purchasing power of each unit of money falls, thus leading to generally rising prices. In the market, individual prices may rise (while others fall), but you can't have an overall rise in prices unless the government is inflating the money supply.

Throughout history, many governments have resorted to inflation, invariably because the rulers' appetite for spending exceeded the inflow of money from taxation. The authors give numerous examples.

In ancient Rome, emperors wanted vast sums for their military campaigns, for their welfare programs to keep the people happy (the famous “bread and circuses”), and for their lavish living. So they steadily debased their coinage. Once pure silver, by late in the Empire, the coins contained barely a trace of silver. Far more were in circulation, but they didn’t buy much. People resorted to barter rather than deal in the questionable and rapidly depreciating coinage.

Politicians would like to deceive people by leading them to think that inflation is caused by greedy business people.

During the American Revolution, state governments printed up lots of paper money that had no backing. It quickly traded at less than the purported face value, and eventually people disdained accepting it at all, hence the phrase “Not worth a Continental.”

In Germany after World War I, the Weimar government resorted to inflation, and by 1923, prices were rising daily, even hourly.

The champion for inflation seems to be Zimbabwe, where the government recently printed so much money that it eventually is-

sued a bill for 100 trillion dollars, which had virtually no value.

Politicians would like to deceive people by leading them to think that inflation (i.e., price increases) is caused by greedy business people or bad foreigners. The truth, however, is always that it’s caused by their own creation of money to pay for their expenditures.

Forbes, Lewis, and Ames show how our government does it. Our system is more sophisticated than running the printing presses. The U.S. government inflates the money supply through the Federal Reserve System’s “Open Market Operations” when it purchases government bonds — that is, the instruments of federal borrowing. Since the government spends more than it takes in, it has to borrow incessantly. The Fed turns that debt into money.

When the Fed buys those bonds, money flows into the accounts of the sellers — big financial institutions, which then lend most of it out. But where does the Fed get the money? It creates it out of nothing. The Fed’s dollars are created by mere electronic legerdemain. That’s how our money supply expands. The authors correctly say, “Washington relies on a constant flow of zero-interest rate ‘free loans’ from

Federal Reserve bond buying operations.... This Fed-enabled borrowing encourages a vicious inflationary cycle, leading to larger government, more spending, and debt.”

Sadly, there are quite a few economists who see nothing wrong with this. They maintain that “low inflation” is good. Current Fed chairman Jerome Powell claims that the economy would suffer if we didn’t have some inflation, and a tribe who believe in something called Modern Monetary Theory (MMT) argue that government borrowing and spending is no problem at all. According to MMT advocates, as long as the government can create the money to pay for its vast spending programs, it should do so.

A falling value of money does nothing to stimulate production and innovation.

Our authors soundly refute those ideas.

Is inflation necessary for economic expansion? Certainly not. A falling value of money does nothing to stimulate production and innovation. In the decades after the Civil War, the United States experienced a tremendous increase in productivity while we were on the

gold standard. The value of the dollar gradually rose for many years, meaning that prices slowly fell, which was good for consumers.

As long as the value of money remains relatively stable, producers will easily adjust. There’s no need for government to artificially engineer inflation or deflation.

Regarding MMT, the authors say that it’s just “old wine in new bottles.” Economic cranks have long prescribed inflation so that government can pursue a vast socialist agenda. The results have always been ruinous. Referring to lead MMT proponent Prof. Stephanie Kelton, the authors write, “If the Fed printed money nonstop to fund Kelton’s welfare-state vision, investors and anyone else holding dollars would run for the hills. The dollar would go the way of the Russian ruble in the 90s or the Cuban peso.”

Yes, and I would add only that the MMT crowd seems not to understand the concept of opportunity cost. The more the government spends, the more it diverts resources away from the private sector, where the profit and loss system directs them toward productive uses, and into the maw of the state, where politicians squander them on wars, welfare, and all sorts of vote-buying schemes. That makes us poorer.

What's bad about inflation, other than the obvious fact that it leads to rising prices?

Forbes, Lewis, and Ames explain that inflation wreaks much hidden economic damage. It robs people of the value of their savings. It causes the misdirection of resources, away from useful production and into schemes to keep ahead of inflation. It causes malinvestment, as people are tricked by artificially low interest rates into speculative deals, especially in real estate. It erodes trust and encourages crime. And it leads to increasing dependency on government.

On that last point, the authors quote George Gilder, who has written that the "scandal of money" is negating the American dream since more and more people come to expect Uncle Sam to solve every problem and take care of them.

Inflation itself is an act of dishonesty. Rather than forthrightly telling the people, "We are going to increase your taxes to pay for these new government programs," politicians covertly extract the wealth to pay for them through the Fed's ability to create money.

So, what is the solution? How can we once again have stable money?

What we need to do is to return to gold, the authors argue. Make the

one and only job of the Federal Reserve to keep the value of the dollar stable by anchoring it once again to gold. The gold standard compels governments to live within their means, which is to say the taxes they collect. To those who say that gold is "old-fashioned" and just couldn't work today, they reply that it would work if our political leaders wanted it to.

Forbes, Lewis, and Ames explain that inflation wreaks much hidden economic damage.

And that, of course, is the real problem. Most of our politicians are hooked on inflation just like drug addicts are hooked on their narcotics. They and their allies in the media and intelligentsia say that gold can't work because they don't want the discipline that gold would impose on them.

But that's the essence of the problem. Politicians don't want to be constrained in their ability to extract wealth from productive people. They found ways to escape the discipline of the gold standard before and will do so again. The ultimate solution to the problem of inflation is to denationalize money, as F. A. Hayek advocated in his famous 1976 book. If government doesn't

produce or control money, it cannot debase it.

We need this book today and for years to come because the destructive effects of the government's manic money creation are still in their early stages.

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Is uniformity [of opinion] attainable? Millions of innocent men, women, and children, since the introduction of Christianity, have been burnt, tortured, fined, imprisoned; yet we have not advanced one inch towards uniformity. What has been the effect of coercion? To make one half the world fools, and the other half hypocrites.

— Thomas Jefferson

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