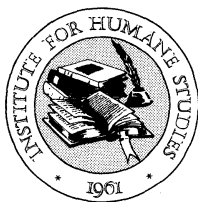


# **The New Despotism**

**Robert A. Nisbet**

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1177 University Drive  
Menlo Park, California 94025

Robert A. Nisbet, Albert Schweitzer Professor of Humanities at Columbia University, received his doctorate in social institutions from the University of California in 1939. The scholar has held numerous teaching and administrative positions in California and Arizona during the course of his distinguished career. He has authored or coauthored twelve books, among which are *The Quest for Community* (1953), *The Sociological Tradition* (1966), *Social Change and History* (1969), and his most recent work, *Twilight of Authority* (Oxford University Press, 1975).

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## **The New Despotism**

When the modern political community was being shaped at the end of the 18th century, its founders thought that the consequences of republican or representative institutions in government would be the reduction of political power in individual lives.

Nothing seems to have mattered more to such minds as Montesquieu, Turgot, and Burke in Europe and to Adams, Jefferson, and Franklin in the United States than the expansion of freedom in the day-to-day existence of human beings, irrespective of class, occupation, or belief. Hence the elaborate, carefully contrived provisions of constitution or law whereby formal government would be checked, limited, and given root in the smallest possible assemblies of the people. The kind of arbitrary power Burke so detested and referred to almost constantly in his attacks upon the British government in its relation to the American colonists and the people of India and Ireland, and upon the French government during the revolution, was foremost in the minds of all the architects of the political community, and they thought it could be eliminated, or reduced to insignificance, by ample use of legislative and judicial machinery.

What we have witnessed, however, in every Western country, and not least in the United States, is the almost incessant growth in power over the lives of human beings—power that is basically the result of the gradual disappearance of all the intermediate institutions which, coming from the predemocratic past, served for a long time to check the kind of authority that almost from the beginning sprang from the new legislative bodies and executives in the modern democracies. The 18th-century hope that people, by their direct participation in government, through voting and office-

holding, would be correspondingly loath to see political power grow, has been proved wrong. Nothing seems so calculated to expand and intensify the power of the state as the expansion of electorates and the general popularization of the uses of power.

Even so, I do not think we can properly explain the immense power that exists in modern democracies by reference solely to the enlargement of the base of government or to the kinds of parliaments Sir Henry Maine warned against in his *Popular Government*. Had political power remained *visible*, as it largely did down until about World War I, and the manifest function of legislature and executive, the matter would be very different. What has in fact happened during the past half century is that the bulk of power in our society, as it affects our intellectual, economic, social, and cultural existences, has become largely *invisible*, a function of the vast infragovernment composed of bureaucracy's commissions, agencies, and departments in a myriad of areas. And the reason this power is so commonly invisible to the eye is that it lies concealed under the humane purposes that have brought it into existence.

The greatest single revolution of the last century in the political sphere has been the transfer of effective power over human lives from the constitutionally visible offices of government, the nominally sovereign offices, to the vast network that has been brought into being in the name of protection of the people from their exploiters. It is this kind of power that Justice Brandeis warned against in a decision nearly half a century ago: "Experience should teach us to be most on guard to protect liberty when the governments' purposes are beneficent. Men born to freedom are naturally alert to repel invasion of their liberty by evil-minded rulers. The greatest dangers to liberty lurk in insidious encroachments by men of zeal, well-meaning but without understanding."

What gives the new despotism its peculiar effectiveness is indeed its liaison with humanitarianism, but beyond this fact is its capacity for entering into the smallest details of human

life. The most absolute authority, wrote Rousseau, “is that which penetrates into a man’s inmost being and concerns itself no less with his will than with his actions.” The truth of that observation is in no way lessened by the fact that for Rousseau genuinely legitimate government, government based upon the general will, *should* so penetrate. Rousseau saw correctly that the kind of power traditionally exercised by kings and princes, represented chiefly by the tax collector and the military, was in fact a very weak kind of power compared with what a philosophy of government resting on the general will could bring about. Tocqueville, from a vastly different philosophy of the state, also took note of the kind of power Rousseau described. “It must not be forgotten that it is especially dangerous to enslave men in the minor details of life. For my part, I should be inclined to think freedom less necessary in the great things than in the little ones, if it were possible to be secure of the one without the other.”

Congresses and legislatures pass laws, executives enforce them, and the courts interpret them. These, as I have said, are the bodies on which the attentions of the Founding Fathers were fixed. They are the visible organs of government to this day, the objects of constant reporting in the media. And I would not question the capacity of each of them to interfere substantially with individual freedom. But of far greater importance in the realm of freedom is that invisible government created in the first instance by legislature and executive but rendered in due time largely autonomous, is often nearly impervious to the will of elected constitutional bodies. In ways too numerous even to try to list, the invisible government—composed of commissions, bureaus, and regulatory agencies of every imaginable kind—enters daily into what Tocqueville calls “the minor details of life.”

Murray Weidenbaum, in an important study of this invisible government, *Government Mandated Price Increases*, has correctly referred to “a second managerial revolution” that is now well under way in American society. The first managerial revolution, described originally by A. A. Berle and Gardiner C. Means in their classic book *The Modern Corporation and*

*Private Property* and given explicit identity by James Burnham, concerned, as Weidenbaum points out, the separation of management from formal ownership in the modern corporation. The second managerial revolution is very different. "This time," writes Weidenbaum, "the shift is from the professional management selected by the corporation's board of directors to the vast cadre of government regulators that influences and often controls the key decisions of the typical business firm." Weidenbaum concerns himself almost entirely with the business sector—pointing out incidentally that this whole cadre of regulation is a by now deeply embedded cause of inflation—but the point he makes is just as applicable to other, nonbusiness areas of society.

In the name of education, welfare, taxation, safety, health, environment, and other laudable ends, the new despotism confronts us at every turn. Its effectiveness lies, as I say, in part through liaison with humanitarian rather than nakedly exploitative objectives but also, and perhaps most significantly, in its capacity to deal with the human will rather than with mere human actions. By the very existence of one or another of the regulatory offices of the invisible government that now occupies foremost place, the wills of educators, researchers, artists, philanthropists, and enterprisers in all areas, as well as in business, are bound to be affected: to be shaped, bent, driven, even extinguished.

Of all the social or moral objectives, however, which are the taking-off points of the new despotism in our times, there is one that stands out clearly, that has widest possible appeal, and that at the present time undoubtedly represents the greatest single threat to liberty and social initiative. I refer to equality, or, more accurately, to the New Equality.

"The foremost, or indeed the sole, condition required in order to succeed in centralizing the supreme power in a democratic community is to love equality or to get men to believe you love it. Thus, the science of despotism, which was once so complex, has been simplified and reduced, as it were, to a single principle."

The words are Tocqueville's, toward the end of *Democracy in America*, in partial summary of the central thesis of that book, which is the affinity between centralization of power and mass equalitarianism. Tocqueville yielded to no one in his appreciation of equality before the law. It was, he thought, vital to a creative society and a free state. It was Tocqueville's genius, however, to see the large possibility of the growth in the national state of another kind of equality, more akin to the kind of leveling that war and centralization bring to a social order. It is only in our time that his words have become analytic and descriptive rather than prophetic.

There is a great deal in common between military collectivism and the kind of society that must be the certain result of the doctrines of the New Equalitarians, whose aim is not mere increase in equality before the law. In fact this historic type of equality looms as an obstacle to the kind of equality that is desired: *equality of condition, equality of result*. There is nothing paradoxical in the fondness of equalitarians for centralized power, the kind that the military best evidences, and the fondness of centralizers for equality. The latter, whatever else it may signify, means the absence of the kinds of centers of authority and rank that are always dangerous to despotic governments.

Equality of condition or result is one thing when it is set in the utopian community, the commune, or the monastery. The Benedictine Rule is as good a guide as we need for the administration of this kind of equalitarian order, small enough, personal enough to prevent the dogma of equality from extinguishing normal diversity of strength and talent. For countless centuries, everywhere in the world, religion and kinship have been contexts of this kind of equality; they still are in theme.

Equality of result is a very different thing, however, when it becomes the guiding policy of the kind of national state that exists in the West today—founded in war and bureaucracy, its power strengthened by these forces throughout modern history, and dependent from the beginning upon a degree of leveling of the population. We may have in mind

the ideal of equality that the monastery or family represents, but what we will get in actual fact in the modern state is the kind of equality that goes with uniformity and homogeneity—above all, with war society.

Tocqueville was by no means alone in his perception of the affinity between equality and power. At the very end of the 18th century, Edmund Burke had written, in *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, of the passion for leveling that exists in the militant and the military: those, he wrote, “who attempt to level, never equalize.” The French Revolution, Burke believed correctly, was different from any revolution that had ever taken place before. And the reason for this difference lay in its combination of eradication of social diversity on the one hand and, on the other, the relentless increase of military-political power that expressed itself in the timeworn fashion of such power. All that tended toward the destruction of the intermediate authorities of social class, province, church, and family brought simultaneously into being, Burke noted, a social leveling and a transfer to the state alone of powers previously resident in a plurality of associations. “Everything depends upon the army in such a government as yours,” he wrote; “for you have industriously destroyed all the opinions and prejudices, and, as far as in you lay, all the instincts which support government.” In words prophetic indeed, since they were written in 1790, Burke further declared that the crisis inherent in “military democracy” could only be resolved by the rise of “some popular general who understands the art of conciliating the soldiery, and who possesses the true spirit of command.” Such an individual “shall draw the eyes of all men upon himself.”

The theme of military democracy, of the union of military and social equality, was strong in certain 19th-century critics. We see it in some of Burckhardt’s writings, where he refers to the future rise of “military commandos” in circumstances of rampant equality. We see it, perhaps most profoundly, in James Fitzjames Stephen’s *Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity*, though what is most evident in that remarkable work is much



less the military, save by implication, than the implacable conflict Stephen discerned between equality and liberty. There were others—Henry Adams in America, Taine in France, Nietzsche in Germany—who called attention to the problem equality creates for liberty in the modern democratic state. Nor were such perceptions confined to the pessimists. Socialists such as Jaurès in France saw in the citizen army, based upon universal conscription, an admirable means of instilling in Frenchmen greater love for equality than for the liberty associated with capitalist society.

It is evident in our day how much more of a force the ethic of equality has become since these 19th-century prophecies and prescriptions were uttered. Two world wars and a major depression have advanced bureaucracy and its inherent regimentations to a point where the ideology of equality becomes more and more a means of rationalizing these regimentations and less and less a force serving individual life or liberty.

No one will question the fact that a higher degree of equality now exists in Western countries than at any time in the past. This is true not only of equality of opportunity and legal equality, each of which became a burning issue by the early 19th century, but of the more generalized equality of economic, political, and social *condition*. It is condition or result, not opportunity, that is today the central perspective in equalitarianism; and that ideological fact is itself part of the larger reality of an extraordinary achievement of equality of condition or result, at least by the standard given us by history. Nor is there anything strange in the intensification of equalitarianism in such an age as ours, for, on the evidence of the history of social movements, powerful agitation in behalf of some social or moral value comes only when the surrounding social order can be seen to reflect that value in at least some degree, commonly only recently accomplished.

Equality has the great advantage of being able to draw upon both religious and political energies. It is only in the religious and political realms indeed that the cry for equality

has been heard historically—much more often in the former than the latter, prior to the age of the French Revolution. Whatever else equality is, it is a spiritual dynamic. Major social movements require such a dynamic, irrespective of whether they are primarily religious or political at the core. It is not so much the surrounding material conditions as it is this inner spiritual dynamic that in the long run determines, though by means that are complex and still inadequately understood, what the outcome of an issue will be. I think it would be hard to exaggerate the potential spiritual dynamic that lies in the idea of equality at the present time. One would have to go back to certain other ages, such as imperial Rome, in which Christianity was generated as a major historical force, or Western Europe of the Reformation, to find a theme endowed with as much unifying, mobilizing power, especially among intellectuals, as the idea of equality carries now.

Equality has a built-in revolutionary force lacking in such ideas as justice or liberty. For once the ideal of equality becomes uppermost, it can become insatiable in its demands. It is possible to conceive of human beings conceding that they have enough freedom or justice in a social order; it is not possible to imagine them ever declaring they have enough equality—once, that is, equality becomes a cornerstone of national policy. In this respect it resembles some of the religious ideals or passions that offer, just by virtue of the impossibility of ever giving them adequate representation in the actual world, almost unlimited potentialities for continuous onslaught against institutions.

Affluence is a fertile ground for the spread of equalitarian philosophy, for the pains of affluence manifestly include in our age the pain of guilt over the existence of any and all inequalities. It is not enough, as we have been discovering, to create equality before the law—at least to the degree that this is ever possible—and to seek legal equality of opportunity. Vast systems labeled affirmative action or open admissions must be instituted. And then, predictably, it is discovered that even these are not enough.

The reason for this is plain enough. Equality feeds on itself as no other single social value does. It is not long before it becomes more than a value. It takes on all the overtones of redemptiveness and becomes a religious rather than a secular idea.

Like other historic religious ideas and also ideas of political character, equality has an inherent drive that carries it well beyond national boundaries. The proper abode of equality, like any other redemptive idea, is all mankind, not simply this or that parochial community. We are already in the presence of this universalizing state of mind in discussions of equality. It is not enough that classes and groups in the United States, or in the West, should become equal. The entire world, especially the Third World, must be brought in. Yet simple arithmetic suffices to prove the impossibility of either the United States or the West extending its resources to this Third World—particularly in light of the population increases which would become inexorable and, also, the present spread in these countries of an ideology, Russian or Chinese in source, that, as the present record makes only too clear, reduces what productive power is presently in existence.

But it is the nature of providential ideas like equality that they are stayed by neither fact nor logic. They acquire a momentum of their own, and I can think of few things more probable than the spread of equalitarianism in the West—not despite but because of its manifest irrationality as the sovereign objective of national and world policy.

The significance of equalitarianism in our day is made all the greater by the profound affinity that exists, and has existed for many centuries, between equality and the distinctive nature of the Western state from the time of the Cleisthenean reforms at the end of the 6th century B.C. Those revolutionary changes put an end to the inequalities of traditional kinship society in Athens and ushered in the polis. Excepting only, as we are obliged to here, the class of slaves, a high degree of equality was instituted among the Athenian

citizens. This equality was, of course, in part a function of the central power that was also inaugurated in the polis, a power that cut, often destructively, through all the intermediate loyalties that had been handed down from the most ancient times. Athenian equality, in sum, is comprehensible only in light of the leveling that resulted from political extermination of the traditional kinship diversity of Athenian society.

Neither Plato nor Aristotle liked equalitarianism, though there is assuredly an equality of sorts within the class of guardians that Plato creates to govern his utopian Republic. But like it or not, both Plato and Aristotle perforce gave equality a higher place than could be imagined in the minds of earlier Greek thinkers such as Heraclitus or statesmen such as Solon. Aristotle, who intensely disliked Platonic communism, nevertheless thought that some degree of equality of wealth was a prerequisite for political stability.

With rare exceptions, the Western philosophy of the political state has carried from that time to ours an imposing emphasis on the desirability of equality. The reason for this lies, in the first instance, in the nature of the power that has gone with the Western state since the Greeks. This power—sovereignty, as it is commonly called—seeks to go directly to the individual. The great difference between the Western state during the past twenty-five hundred years and the traditional state of Asia—as Karl Marx was one of the first to note—lies in the contrasting relation they have to the individual. In China, India, and other Eastern societies prior to the present century, governments reigned, as it were, but did not rule. Their claimed powers were at times certainly as centralized and bureaucratized as anything to be found in the West, but these powers almost never touched individual lives directly. Between the power of the government and the life of the individual lay strata of membership and authority—clan, village, caste, temple—which were almost never penetrated by the ruler or his bureaucracy. It was possible, in short, for the Asiatic state to exist for thousands of years in the presence of, as a superstructure of, a nonpolitical society

founded on kinship and locality that was the real center of human life in matters of authority, function, and responsibility.

Very different has been the Western state. Omitting only the Middle Ages—and even then the *idea* of the centralized state remained vivid to those acquainted with Greek and Latin—the Western structure of political power has been a process of almost permanent revolution against the social groups and authorities that lay intermediate between individual and state. By virtue of its inherent centralization, its definition in terms of territory rather than social or religious function, its prized doctrine of sovereignty through which the state's power is declared superior and supervening to all other powers, the Western state's very existence in the ancient world and in the modern since the Reformation has represented a kind of built-in war against traditional society and its ingrained authorities.

In its struggle for individual allegiance, the Western state has, in a very real sense, actually manufactured individualism. It has done this not merely as a result of the negative attitude political rulers since Cleisthenes have taken toward social, religious, and economic groups that seemed to be competing with the state, but, perhaps more crucially, in the positive creation of individual rights, freedoms, and benefits. Say what one will of the unique power of the state and of its all-too familiar capacity for extending this power bureaucratically into the lives of countless human beings, creating coercions and invasions of autonomy all the way, the fact remains that the central power of the state has also been associated with some resplendent gains in liberty and welfare. It is no exaggeration to say that from the time of Pericles, through Alexander the Great, the Caesars, and down to the Cromwells and Napoleons of modern history and also the more centralizing of American Presidents from Andrew Jackson to Lyndon Johnson, a great many such gains have come directly from the use of central power. It was after all the central power of the American government, not the local or regional powers of communities and states, that brought about first the abolition of slavery in the United States and

then, slowly but surely, increased civil rights for blacks and other minorities.

It is for this reason, no doubt, that the state in the West has attracted to itself what can only be called a clerisy of power. I refer to the long succession of philosophers and intellectuals from Greek and Roman times to our own who have made the political state the temple, so to speak, of their devotion. Religion is the only other value system that has had its clerisy—older than the political clerisy but, in modern Western civilization, possessed of much less power and influence. No other institution comes to mind that has won itself a clerisy as have religion and politics. Not until the early 19th. century did economists come into existence in their own right, and it is hard to find in economic writings any of the sense of redemptive passion that is so common in religious and political works. It is possible, though I am skeptical, that technology today has a clerisy in the sense in which I use the word here. There is surely no other.

Through most of the history of Western civilization the political clerisy has given itself to the needs and values of the state, just as its great rival, the religious clerisy, has to those of the church. Each clerisy has produced its titans—St. Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, on the one side; Plato, Hobbes, Rousseau, on the other—as well as its vast ranks of lesser minds, its ordinary intellectuals and technicians. The political state can be seen to be a temple in Rousseau quite as much as the church is a temple in Augustine.

It is Tocqueville who, so far as I know, first made the relation between equality and power a principle not only of political sociology but of the philosophy of history. "In running over the pages of our history," Tocqueville writes in the Introduction to *Democracy in America*, "we shall scarcely find a single great event of the last seven hundred years that has not promoted equality of condition." The Crusades, the introduction of firearms, the rise of the infantry, the invention of movable type in printing, the Protestant Reformation, the opening of gates to the New

World—all of these, Tocqueville notes, had been attended by a leveling of medieval ranks and a spreading equality of economic, political, and intellectual condition.

But equality is only half the story that Tocqueville gives us, not only in *Democracy in America* but also in his classic study of the old regime and the French Revolution. The other half of the story is, of course, centralization of power. In the same introduction he writes: "I perceive that we have destroyed those individual powers which were able, single-handed, to cope with tyranny; but it is the government alone that has inherited all the privileges of which families, guilds, and individuals have been deprived. . . ."

Centralization and equality—these are for Tocqueville the two dominant tendencies of modern Western history, with the relationship between them functional. All that has magnified equality of condition has necessarily tended to abolish or diminish the buffers to central power that are constituted by social classes, kindreds, guilds, and other groups whose virtual essence is hierarchy. As Tocqueville—and before him Burke—perceived, some degree of inequality is the very condition of the social bond. Variations among individuals, in strength, intelligence, age, aspiration, ability of whatever kind, and aptitude, will always tend toward the creation of inequality of result. Only through operation of a single, centralized structure of power that reaches all individuals in a community, that strives to obliterate all gradations of power, rank, and affluence not of this power's own making, can these variations and this inequality be moderated.

This is clearly the reason that all the great modern revolutions, with the single and mixed exception of the American, have presented the by now often described spectacle of enormous increases in governmental authority. Never mind the motivational value of the catchwords freedom and justice; the unfailing result of European revolutions, culminating in the Communist and Nazi revolutions of this century, has been immensely greater use of political power.

Not least of the reasons for this has been, of course, the role equalitarianism has played in these revolutions. For all

European revolutions have been founded upon assault against the kinds of inequality that are the lineal products of the Middle Ages. The real issue was not capitalism but the lingering remnants of feudalism, even for the revolutions in this century that have taken place in the name of socialism. But the thrust toward equalitarianism inevitably led to a disintegration of old social unities, and only the power of the state was left to fill this vacuum.

The conditions for the spread of equality as a motivating value have been very fertile during the past two or three centuries. Populations have grown hugely; local and regional boundaries have eroded away in large measure, thus exposing many inequalities which have been concealed behind these boundaries. Industrialism, with its own machine-based disciplines, has done much, as Marx realized more vividly than anyone before him, to diminish inequalities, to concentrate them, as it were, into the single inequality between capitalist and worker. The immense spread of consumer goods, their cheapness of price, has also done much to bring about a generalized equality of patterns of living, at least as measured against earlier patterns in the West. And finally, as I have noted, there has been the incessant spread of centralized power, whether in the hands of king, military, or the people, during the past two centuries, to spread further equality by virtue of this power's destructive effects upon social and economic differentiation.

In one of his excellent essays, the British political scientist Kenneth R. Minogue refers to the "suffering-situations" which modern history so abundantly reveals. These either are in fact or can be rendered into a fairly widespread, standardized kind of situation calling for sudden and heroic action, invariably political action. I think inequality will prove to be the single greatest suffering-situation of our age. As one thinks of it, one sees that feudalism and capitalism were regarded in earlier times as suffering-situations by large numbers of intellectuals concerned with political power. The word "feudal" did not come into existence until the 17th



century, and when it did it took on almost immediate pejorative significance. By almost all of the key minds of the 17th and 18th centuries, feudalism was regarded as infamous; its localisms, decentralizations, and divisions of power were made tantamount to anarchy and evil. We would not, surely, have seen the central power of the national state increase as greatly as it did in these two centuries had there not been something large and evil, by designation at least, for the state to cope with. The *philosophes'* common liking for highly centralized political power had behind it in great part their loathing of everything "feudal."

In the 19th century, "capitalism" replaced feudalism as the important suffering-situation. Modern radicalism was to a great extent formed around hatred of capitalism, and while not all radicals, by any means, gravitated toward the national state as the means of redemption, we find just about all of them, save only some of the anarchists, profuse in their appreciation of revolutionary centralization of power. If any single thing identifies the modern radical mind, it is the invariably negative reaction to private enterprise, profit, and competition. And just as the national state aggrandized itself in the 17th and 18th centuries at the expense of authorities that could be labeled feudal, so has the national state in the 19th and 20th centuries further aggrandized itself, in powers claimed and in bureaucracy, by virtue of the controls and restraints it has placed upon capitalist enterprise. That the controlling boards and agencies quickly become dominated by representatives of the very industries and channels of commerce they are supposed to regulate, leading to even greater exploitation of consumer and public, is a fact well attested by this time, but not one that ever enters the minds of legislators and others when some alleged suffering-situation leads to the creation of still another regulatory agency.

I am inclined to think that "capitalism" is in our time becoming as moribund, as archaic, a term as "feudalism." What is surely succeeding these is "inequality," though there are some serious observers of the present scene who believe

that "technology" comes very close in this respect. There is no doubt that the powers of government have become greatly increased in very recent years on the basis of undoubtedly well-intentioned proposals for the regulation of technology, which so many of poetic or romantic disposition have seen as suffocating to the human spirit. Even so, the evidence is clear, I think, that inequality is the great suffering-situation of the late 20th century. In its name power will increase drastically; it already has!

Something more must be said about the mind that above any other I can think of exerts profound influence upon the New Equalitarians in the present age. Rousseau is, as conservatives and anarchists alike came to realize in the early 19th century, the representative of the special kind of power that is inherent in the modern, centralized national state. He is, I believe, the single most radical political mind in the West after Plato—whom Rousseau adored and regarded as the first of his intellectual masters. Only Marx exerts the kind of effect Rousseau has today upon the radical mind.

Rousseau's influence is more than political in the ordinary sense. He is the real source of that subjectivism of political and social consciousness that has been growing steadily ever since the appearance of his major writings in the late 18th century. Not only in radical ideology, but in large sectors of education, psychology, literature, philosophy, and the social sciences, his distinctive blend of worship of self and of power conceived as community is all too apparent.

What gives Rousseau currency in so many areas of thought on man and the state is his extraordinary combination of emphasis upon the ego and power—the power that lies in the General Will. This is the will of the people, but only of a people that has been cleansed, so to speak, of all the corruptions and prejudices that lie in the historic social order. Equality is the very essence of Rousseau's political community; but it is the kind of equality that exists when every form of association and every social value that could possibly rival the General Will have been exterminated. Equality of

result is the great and overarching aim of Rousseau's political writings. Freedom too, if we like; but, as nearly all commentators have stressed, Rousseau's is a very special kind of freedom that is virtually indistinguishable from the equalitarian political community. No one knew better than Rousseau the intensity of political power that would be required to create equality in the political order. It is in this light that one of the New Equalitarians, Christopher Jencks, writes in our day:

If we want substantial redistribution we will not only have to politicize the question of income equality but alter people's basic assumptions about the extent to which they are responsible for their neighbors and their neighbors for them. . . . As long as egalitarians assume that public policy cannot contribute to economic equality directly but must proceed by ingenious manipulations of marginal institutions like the schools, progress will be glacial. If we want to move beyond this tradition, we will have to establish political control over the economic institutions that shape our society.

In actuality, however, such control will almost certainly have to go beyond strictly economic institutions and values, which are the express concerns of most proposals today for equality of condition. For, as Rousseau realized so prophetically, once equality has been made the dominant value of a social order, it must, and will, reach toward cultural, social, educational, even psychological spheres of human life, for it is in these that the real consequences of economic inequality are most deeply felt. We have Rousseau's *Confessions* as witness of the fact that, in his own life, it was less the occasional poverty he experienced that gnawed at him than the subtler gradations of prestige, influence, and power he encountered in the Paris of the Sorbonne, in the glittering salons where brilliance of conversation was so much prized, and among the *philosophes*, whose intellectual superior Rousseau was in most respects but whose general love of the *haute monde* he found repugnant.

Moreover, Rousseau realized, and stated eloquently in his

*Discourse on the Arts and Sciences*, that the springs of egoism, ambition, and desire for social eminence lie deep in human nature as it has been formed over the long period of man's history following the original instituting of private property and the rise of the agricultural and mechanical arts. All of man's ills, his torments and subjections to oppression, originated, Rousseau tells us in the second *Discourse*, with inequality, when with private property there appeared "social interdependences" which made inequality of status fixed and inevitable. Given the length of mankind's history since the early "fatal departure" from natural equality, it is evident that corrective measures must be encompassing and powerful. Men may want equality, once its virtue is made evident to them, but more than simple popular desire by majorities is required to root equality securely in human nature. Hence Rousseau's call, in the *Social Contract*, for a Legislator, as Rousseau calls him, who will not hesitate to remake human nature itself in the pursuit of equality:

He who dares to undertake the making of a people's institutions ought to feel himself capable, so to speak, of changing human nature, of transforming each individual who is by himself a complete and solitary whole, into part of a greater whole from which he in a manner receives his life and being. . . . He must, in a word, take away from man his own resources and give him instead new ones alien to him, and incapable of being made use of without the help of other men.

Elsewhere Rousseau tells us with the candor that is so typical of his political writings that "if it is good to know how to deal with men as they are, it is much better to make them what there is need that they should be. The most absolute authority is that which penetrates into a man's inmost being, and concerns itself no less with his will than with his actions."

How well Rousseau knew! He records in his *Confessions* that from an early age he had become aware of the fact that men are entirely what their form of government makes them. Hence there must be no reluctance in the uses of power, the power, especially, that lies at the core of the absolute, total,

and unremitting General Will. If we would have virtue, Rousseau wrote electrically in his *Discourse on Political Economy*, we must be willing to *establish* it!

Western society is rarely lacking in those who, in one way or other, religious or political usually, are obsessed by the mission of establishing virtue. Most clearly, the West is not lacking now in such individuals. And in our time, by a rising number of persons, chiefly intellectuals and politicians, virtue is defined solely and exclusively as equality; again, let it be emphasized, equality of condition or result.

And there is no want either of ingenuity or cleverness in demonstrating that virtue is equality—nothing less, nothing more. Undoubtedly the most highly praised work in philosophy of the past decade or two is John Rawls's *Theory of Justice*. Although there is excellent reason to believe that the almost ecstatic response to it will shortly abate among professional philosophers, it is certain that this book will be for a long time to come the central work in moral philosophy for the clerisy of power. It is tailor-made for the needs of those to whom equalitarianism and central power are but two sides of the same coin.

Justice, we discover, is for Rawls "fairness," which is surely a reasonable definition. What is a good deal less reasonable is the author's further conclusion that justice and fairness are—equality! And for John Rawls, as for all others in the cult of equality, equality has little to do with historic equality before the law. Through two dubious rhetorical techniques, which he labels "the original position" and "the veil of ignorance," Rawls seeks to demonstrate that all men of reason and good will, when liberated from the misconceptions and prejudices of the social order they live in, will easily reach the conclusion that society is built on the rock of equality; that is, equality of "social primary goods," the economic, cultural, political, and even psychological attributes that are so variously distributed in society as the result of equality of opportunity and equality before the law. Social primary goods, which may be stretched to include

even “bases of self-respect,” are to be made equal, or at least equitable, through what he calls “the difference principle.”

This principle means simply that there shall be no inequalities of “social primary goods” in society unless it can be demonstrated that such inequalities are in the interest of the less advantaged. There must be no differences among individuals in social position, the fruits of knowledge, talent, and enterprise, as well as in income and property, except insofar as superior possession among some can be demonstrated to redound to the welfare of others. This, succinctly stated, is Rawls’s difference principle.

The mind boggles at the thought of the political apparatus necessary to give expression to and to enforce such a principle. Rawls seems not to have heard of political bureaucracy, but even if he had, he would no doubt take refuge in his stated principle that the “liberty” of each individual is primary, not to be violated by interests of utility or expediency. Liberty, however, turns out to be for Rawls very much what it is for Rousseau: mere equal shares of something *called* liberty, which bears little relation to the autonomies and immunities that are the true hallmarks of liberty. Equality is the dominant value in Rawls.

The New Equalitarians of our day seem to detest the central elements of the social bond quite as much as Rousseau did. I refer to the whole tissue of interdependences—interactions, conflicts, coercions, conformities, protections, and disciplines—which are the molecules of social order. It is with good reason that our equalitarians detest such interdependences, for, in whatever degree or form, inequality is the essence of the social bond. The vast range of temperaments, minds, motivations, strengths, and desires that exists in any population is nothing if not the stuff of hierarchy. When associations are formed for whatever purpose, cooperation and mutual aid included, inequality is immediately apparent. Even the New Equalitarians would presumably balk at the thought of holding all musical talents to the same limits; and no doubt they would feel the same way with respect to academic and intellectual talents. It is the “economic” realm that they have

in mind. But, as I have said, it is cultural, psychological, and social inequality that galls once equality is declared the ascendant ideal. Rousseau detested the arts and sciences, just as he did all social interdependences, seeing correctly that in these areas inequality is impossible to contain.

Inevitably there is opposition to kinship. The family, final enclave of political and economic privacy, is correctly perceived by the New Equalitarians as the most powerful barrier to the redistribution of goods and statuses which is called for in their strategy. In this they are also in harmony with Rousseau, who did not hesitate, in the final pages of the *Discourse on Political Economy*, to recommend virtual abolition of the family, chiefly as a means of separating the children from what Rousseau described as the "prejudices" of the fathers. There were a number of radical equalitarian movements in the late 18th and early 19th centuries that frankly proposed that children be separated from their families at a very early age and brought up in state-operated schools. Only thus, it was believed, could the family's inherently destructive effect upon the ideal of the accomplishment of mass equality be offset.

There is much less awareness of this vital necessity among present-day New Equalitarians, or, if there is in fact awareness, much less courage and forthrightness in recommending abolition of the family. It is much easier to concentrate upon private property as the target, not giving emphasis to the well-attested fact that wherever there is private property there will be a strong family system. After all, the origins of private property lie in clan and kindred; and even after the conjugal family, the household, became the chief element of kinship, its relationship to property remained very close. As Joseph Schumpeter noted in his *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*, it was not the isolated individual, so dear as an abstract concept to the classical economists, but the household that was the main engine of modern capitalist development. It is not economic man, but quite literally, the head of the household—working for the present and future of the members of his family, and hence saving and investing, in

however small degree—who is the central figure in the capitalist drama, as in all earlier forms of economy.

Unquestionably it is this fact that will offer the New Equalitarians their greatest single challenge. For, although equality is a prestige-laden word in contemporary Western society, it is largely the more traditional types of equality—in law and economic opportunity—which are the referents. Individuals at all levels may at times burn with the sense of injustice where the multiple rewards of social life are involved—social and cultural as well as economic—but it is far from certain that a mandatory redistribution would only issue in choice, would wish for a generalized policy of equality, whether of income or anything else. The realization is too strong that, given the immense range of aptitudes, desires, aspirations, strengths, and motivations in any population, any genuine effort to offset this range by a national policy of mandatory redistribution would only issue in novel forms of inequality: those which result when differently endowed human beings are obliged to submit to a single measure of result. Ordinary majority will in democracy, then, can hardly be counted upon, certainly at the present time, to support and give acquiescence to the kind of equality that is dreamed of by those members of the clerisy of power who have result and condition, not law, in their minds.

All of this is true, but we are living in strange and frightening times. Whereas majority will, merely polled by Roper or Gallup, might very well even today register strong opposition to the New Equality, the blunt fact is that an operating and motivated majority will shows clear signs of becoming one of the casualties of the decline of the political habit of mind, of the revolt against politics in any and all of its forms.

The politics of virtue, from Plato to Bentham, has rarely if ever corresponded with emphasis on majority will any more than it has with emphasis on historic individual rights and immunities before the law. Plato thought majority will in the good state as absurd as in matters of mathematical truth. Rousseau made a careful and absolutely vital distinction



between majority will as such, which he termed the mere "will of all," and the General Will, which might or might not, Rousseau candidly states, be congruent with what a simple majority might wish at any given time. It is interesting to note that in *Theory of Justice*, while not actually abrogating majority will in a democracy, John Rawls has given it a somewhat lower status among the crucial verities than certain other elements of his just society.

I have perhaps paid too much attention to the writings of the New Equalitarians, for, ascendant though they assuredly are at the present time in the intellectual world, and fertile though they will undoubtedly prove to be in the preparing of political manifestos and platforms, there is no more reason to believe they will be crucially responsible for egalitarian tendencies in the future than their intellectual forerunners—socialists, social democrats, progressives—have been in the past.

If we plot the development of social equality in Western society over the past few centuries, we find that it follows almost perfectly the development of centralization and bureaucratization in the political sphere. Even more strikingly, the development of equality follows the trajectory of war. It is in periods of national, mass warfare that we observe the greatest advances of the egalitarian ethic in many areas. The point is that even if no egalitarian ethic existed, if there were not the vein of equality in the modern Western mind that there so plainly is, the mere existence of political and military centralization in the modern world would have brought about pretty much the same patterns of equality we see around us.

My own estimate is that a good 75 per cent of all the national programs that have been instituted in Western countries during the past two centuries to equalize income, property, education, working conditions, and other aspects of life have been in the first instance adjuncts of the war state and of the war economy. Equality is far from least among the qualities that go with social and economic programs of nationalization during times of war.

“Every central power which follows its natural tendencies,” wrote Tocqueville, “courts and encourages the principle of equality; for equality singularly facilitates, extends, and secures the influence of a central power.” And it was Thomas Jefferson who observed that the state with power to do things *for* people has the power to do things *to* them.

I do not say that the ethic of equality necessarily leads to the demand for absolute power. Philosophers, like the rest of us, are entitled to be taken at their word, and, however naïve the New Equalitarians may be in their common indifference to problems of political power, we cannot justly accuse them of wishing to bring about either military socialism or political absolutism. Moreover, there are ages in history when diffuseness of power, fragmentation, and the concomitant forms of local oppression and inequality are so great that even the most ardent libertarian could properly wish for an increase in central political power and the leveling of ranks in society that goes with it. The West has seen such ages. Nor will we soon forget the morally repugnant inequality of legal right imposed upon the blacks right down to very recent times. I do not see how anyone who prizes a free and creative culture could oppose the extension of the forms of equality which have been, over and over, the crucial circumstances within which long-oppressed minorities have broken free and given their talents to the arts, the sciences, politics, and other areas of leadership.

But the evidence is clear enough that we are looking well beyond legal equality in many circles today, and a very different kind of equality is becoming ever more widely prized. With it, or with such achievements of this kind of equality as have been thus far a part of the social order, goes a degree of political power and of political intrusion into once autonomous areas that a rising number of persons will, I am convinced, find odious. Ongoing experience with certain programs of equalitarianism—affirmative action, mandatory busing to achieve ethnic quotas, open admissions, among others—certainly suggests this. All other things being equal, it is more likely

that popular opposition to such programs would increase and even become successful.

Alas, all other things are not equal. For the equalitarianism of such programs is only one facet of a much larger reality: the existence of a bureaucratized welfare state that prizes uniformity above all other things and that, as a large number of recent instances suggest, will stop at nothing to enforce this uniformity. Uniformity is prized by all bureaucracies, political or other, simply because it saves bureaucrats from the always agonizing responsibility of dealing with the individuality and the complexity of real life.

There is a measure of equality without which any community must suffer. And although I would not rank equality among the very highest of the West's moral values—not as high, assuredly, as liberty and justice—its ethic is no mean one. The tragedy in our time is that what is good in the ethic of equality is fast becoming swamped by forces—of power above all—which aim not, really, at equality in any civilized sense but at uniformity, leveling, and a general mechanization of life.

There is, obviously, inevitable conflict with liberty. I mean the kind of liberty that goes with differentiation, variety, individuality, and a very wide spectrum of social and psychological traits; the kind of liberty that is involved in all creative work, whether in the arts and sciences or in the economic sphere. It is nonsense to say that the pupil in public school today has the same freedom to learn that was once present before uniform programs took command in the country as the result of the ever-greater penetration of the school system by the federal government and its central bureaus of education. Given these conditions and also the constantly increasing emphasis upon equal grading, or upon no grading at all, with differences between the bright and dull wiped out symbolically, how could there possibly be the freedom to learn that is always stimulated by visible incentive?

There is, to be sure, another kind of freedom that does not suffer from the spread of equalitarianism: the kind best seen in totalitarian societies; the kind that is divisible into equal

shares irrespective of the talents and motivations of those holding these shares. The Russian and Chinese governments are scrupulous in their attention to this kind of mass freedom, for there is nothing to worry about in the way of consequences. What such governments do have to worry about is the kind of freedom that is simply impossible to divide equally among a people: the freedom to be creative. The problem of the intellectual, the artist, and the scientist in contemporary Russia is evidence enough of the strain presented to a social order by this kind of freedom, which is inherently incompatible with any kind of equality except equality before the law and of opportunity.

It is extremely unlikely that political power could be as encompassing of life, as penetrating of privacy, were it not for certain changes in the nature of power. If I were to seize upon a single phrase for these changes, it would be "the softening of power." The power of the state is no less—indeed it is far greater—than it was even during the divine-right monarchies. But where the exercise of power over individual life was then nakedly coercive, commonly brutal in infliction, and above all direct and personal, the same exercise of governmental power is today blander, more indirect, engaged in the immobilization of the human mind when possible rather than in the infliction of corporal punishments. A great deal that is commonly ascribed to popular welfare, to humanitarianism, even to an increase in individual freedom, might better be ascribed to the softening of power, through organization, technology, social work, psychiatry, equalitarianism, and various other techniques and values whereby the impact of government upon human life has been lessened in the experiencing, all the time that political control of human life has vastly increased.

We have been recently made aware of profound changes in the nature of power in Soviet Russia. Rare today are the brutality, torture, and terror that were so manifest in the Age of Stalin. Rare too are the public trials before state tribunals that in the 1930s were means not only of exterminating

declared enemies of the state but of terrorizing the public at large. I think it is exceedingly unlikely that we shall see again in the world the kind of direct, naked use of force on large numbers of persons that the governments of Stalin and Hitler brought to such heights. Very probably Stalinist and Nazi concentration camps, torture chambers, and death camps represent a watershed in the history of the use of power by government over individual lives. For it is notable that even the Nazi government felt it necessary so to organize the torture and destruction of Jews and others as to conceal so far as was possible these enormities from the German public. To a lesser extent, that was true of Stalin's Russia as well. Once, in almost all nations of the world, such torture and execution, far from being in any degree concealed, would have been flaunted before the public. I am inclined to think that the advances of humanitarianism during the past century or two, together with advances in technology which have made possible a liberation, through drugs and machinery, from the incidence of pain our ancestors knew, have combined to give people a very different attitude toward the visible infliction of cruelty and brutality.

"Not many people," writes Sir Dennis Gabor in *The Mature Society*, "could stand the sight of a tumbril moving slowly through the streets, with the delinquent tied to a stake, and the executioner with the brazier next to him digging the red hot poker into the screaming wretch." Indeed they could not; not today. Yet a surprisingly short time separates us from ancestors who not only could stand it, but who solemnly regarded such spectacles, along with public hangings and floggings, as indispensable to the maintenance of order. We do not have to go very far back in Western history to find otherwise humane and gentle minds in perfect composure at the sight of floggings, drawings and quarterings, and flayings which it is unlikely that more than a tiny handful of the pathological could today bear the knowledge—much less the sight—of as public policy.

In substantial part, as Sir Dennis observes, the changed

attitude toward the more brutal uses of power by governments has come from the changed place of physical pain in almost all human lives. It is difficult, in our age of pain-preventives and pain-liberators, to realize the extent to which physical pain was once commonplace. It is rather horrifying today to read of the agony that was once the unavoidable accompaniment of a long list of diseases, not to mention injuries and disabilities of one kind or other. And, as Sir Dennis well notes, in a society in which physical pain is the common lot, there is not likely to be the same reaction to, the same perception of, pain deliberately inflicted upon individuals either for amusement's sake or for the protection of society. A social order that could, in its lower classes, find diversion in the frequent spectacle of bloody, knockdown, eye-gouging, nose- or ear-mutilating fights—among women as well as men, we read of the English 18th century—would not be likely to react as we do to the torturing, flogging, and hanging of miscreants.

That kind of society has almost wholly disappeared in our time, and with it the shape of punishment and of power. But such transformation of police or governmental power in no way means that such power has lessened. It can mean actual increase, especially if power is disguised as a form of therapy. The relative absence of Stalinist torture and mass murder in Russia does not mean that a power vacuum now exists. No doubt the memory in the older generation of Stalinist terror is sufficient to restrain dissident impulses, but, as we have recently been made aware, the art and technology of therapy, so-called, have become in present-day Russia the commonest guise of power over the unruly or dangerously creative. Techniques lumped in the public mind under the label “brainwashing” have manifestly assumed far greater use in the totalitarian countries than would once have been thought either desirable or necessary by their rulers.

It is not as though such uses of power had not been foreseen—by Huxley, or Orwell, and before both by Samuel Butler in *Erewhon*, a utopia in which the delinquent and criminal were put in hospitals. It is a commentary on the

time we ourselves live in that we are less likely to find Erwhon as humanitarian as our Victorian ancestors might have, for we are too well aware of the employment today of hospitals and other contexts of therapy for the express purposes of punishment and overt behavior control.

It would be comforting if power-as-therapy were confined to the totalitarian societies, but it is not. As I write, there has just been released a 651-page report by Senator Sam Ervin's subcommittee on constitutional rights which describes in great detail the number and variety of projects, mostly sponsored by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, whose essence is the control of behavior through drugs and related means. Alcoholics, shoplifters, child molesters, and homosexuals are, the report states, but a few of those on whom therapy is being used, often in clear violation of constitutional rights, as a means of alteration of mind and behavior. "There is a real question," Senator Ervin is quoted as saying in connection with release of the report, "whether the government should be involved at all in programs that potentially pose substantial threats to our basic freedoms."

Dr. Thomas Szasz has been writing eloquently for years now on the extent to which legal pleas of insanity and mental inadequacy, with consequent commitment of individuals to asylums rather than jails, have intruded into the once sacrosanct area of individual ethical responsibility. Our villains have vanished along with our heroes, and each disappearance is related to a spreading state of mind that sees less and less responsibility devolving upon the individual for his acts. The same overall set of mind that snatches the chronic rapist or the mass murderer from the ranks of villainy and places him among the mentally disturbed is likely to remove the occasional great man or woman from the ranks of heroism and subject this individual instead to relentless examination of private life and to public exposure. Not a Washington or a Lincoln, surely, would have been able to maintain the image of greatness in circumstances such as those the media, the social sciences, governmental investigative agencies and committees, have created.

The greatest power, as major political theorists from Plato to Rousseau have declared, is that which shapes not merely individual conduct but also the mind behind that conduct. Power that can, through technological or other means, penetrate the recesses of culture, of the smaller unions of social life, and then of the mind itself, is manifestly more dangerous to human freedom than the kind of power that, for all its physical brutality, reaches only the body. We shrink today from the infliction of physical pain upon our contemporaries—except, that is, in time of war, and even then we prefer the kind that is dealt out at thirty-thousand feet in bombs to the kind revealed at My Lai—but we do not shrink from projects in government, in the social and behavioral sciences, and in the media by which mind and spirit are invaded and thus affected by power, in however soft a form.

Privacy is an excellent litmus test, it would seem, for the actual state of freedom in a culture. I do not think many people would argue seriously that the extent of individual privacy today is even close to what it was a few decades ago. The exposure that Governor Rockefeller was required to make of economic, family, and personal life—and, I think, much more could have been required without serious outcry—during the consideration that followed his nomination to the Vice Presidency would have once been utterly inconceivable. So gross a violation of privacy would surely have converted our political heroes of the past, from Washington to FDR, into beings of somewhat less than heroic mold. I am aware that a strong case can be made for the propriety and safety (to public weal) of detailed penetrations of economic and political privacy. But we shall, I think, find that an equally strong case will shortly be made in justification of identical invasions of sexual and other equally intimate recesses of privacy.

Large-scale government, with its passion for equalitarian uniformity, has prepared our minds for uses of power, for invasions of individual privacy, and for the whole bureaucratization of spirit that Max Weber so prophetically identified



as the disease of modernity. We do indeed see, and take a measure of comfort in, certain liberties of an individual kind in the realms of the theater, publishing, and public speech that our ancestors did not know. Rights to obscenity, pornography, public display of body and mind, and others of related character exist that were once absent. If these are in some way connected with the larger structure of freedom, especially political freedom, and might even be reckoned forces in the long run toward ending the kinds of invasion of privacy that governmental, military, and paramilitary agencies now represent, we can perhaps overlook the crudities and vulgarities that such rights so plainly carry with them.

It is well to be reminded, though, that more often than not in history, license has been the prelude to exercises of extreme political coercion, which shortly reach all areas of a culture. That is one observation that history makes possible. Another and related one is that very commonly in ages when civil rights of one kind are in evidence—those pertaining to freedom of speech and thought in, say, theater, press, and forum, with obscenity and libel laws correspondingly loosened—very real constrictions of individual liberty take place in other, more vital, areas: political organization, voluntary association, property, and the right to hold jobs, for example.

I believe it was Napoleon who first sensed the ease with which, in modern society, the illusion of freedom can be created by strategic relaxation of regulations and law on individual thought, provided it is *only* individual, while all the time *fundamental economic and political liberties* are being circumscribed. The barriers to the kind of power Napoleon wielded as emperor are not *individual* rights so much as the kinds of rights associated with autonomy of local community, voluntary association, political party. These are the real measure of the degree to which central political power is limited in a society. Neither centralization nor bureaucratized collectivism can thrive as long as there is a substantial body of local authorities to check them. But on the other hand, there is no reason why a considerable degree of individual

freedom cannot exist with respect to such matters as sexual conduct, speech, writing, and religious belief without serious impact upon the structure of political power. There are, after all, certain freedoms that are like circuses. Their very existence, so long as they are individual and enjoyed chiefly individually as by spectators, diverts men's minds from the loss of other, more fundamental, social and economic and political rights.

A century ago, the liberties that now exist routinely on stage and screen, on printed page and canvas, would have been unthinkable in America—and elsewhere in the West, for that matter, save in the most clandestine and limited of settings. But so would the limitations upon economic, professional, educational, and local liberties, to which we have by now become accustomed, have seemed equally unthinkable a half century ago. We enjoy the feeling of great freedom, of protection of our civil liberties, when we attend the theater, watch television, buy paperbacks. But all the while we find ourselves living in circumstances of a spread of military, police, and bureaucratic power that cannot help but have, that manifestly does have, profoundly erosive effect upon those economic, local, and associative liberties that are by far the most vital to any free society. From the point of view of any contemporary strategist or tactician of political power, indulgence in the one kind of liberties must seem a very requisite to diminution of the other kind. We know it seemed that way to the Caesars and Napoleons of history. Such indulgence is but one more way of softening the impact of political power and of creating the illusion of individual freedom in a society grown steadily more centralized, collectivized, and destructive of the diversity of allegiance, the autonomy of enterprise in all spheres, and the spirit of spontaneous association that any genuinely free civilization requires.

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