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# ***The People's Romance: Why People Love Government (as Much as They Do)***

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# The People's Romance:

## Why People Love Government (as Much as They Do)

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*Abstract:* Using Schelling's analysis of mutual coordination and focal points, I interpret Smithian sympathy as sentiment coordination. When the yearning for sentiment coordination seeks, further, for it to encompass the whole social group and looks naturally to government for the focal points, we have *The People's Romance*. This yearning for encompassing sentiment coordination asserts itself by denying individual self-ownership. Government activism and coercion become romantic ends in themselves. The People's Romance is evident in the writings of communists, social democrats, and others who champion the achieving of a "common understanding," "common endeavor," or "shared experience." The People's Romance helps to explain a wide variety of political and cultural puzzles. I explore whether The People's Romance can be compatible with classical liberal goals and values, and conclude in the negative.

Keywords: Sentiment, coordination, collectivism, statism, coercion, liberty.

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**Introduction**

In 1995, the annual meetings of the American Economic Association included a plenary session about domestic policy issues. One of the panelists was the Nobel laureate MIT economist Robert Solow. In the course of his remarks, Solow said that he did not find school choice appealing. During the question and answer period, I asked him why he did not find school vouchers appealing. He replied: "It isn't for any economic reason; all the economic reasons favor school vouchers. It is because what made me an American is the United States Army and the public school system."

Admirable in its candor and lucidity, Solow's reply might suggest a solution to a broader conundrum. If government intervention creates an official and common frame of reference, a set of cultural focal points, a sense of togetherness and common experience, then almost any form of government intervention can help to "make us Americans." If people see government activism as a singular way of binding society together, then they may favor any particular government intervention for its own sake --whether it be government intervention in schooling, urban transit, postal services, Social Security, or anything else-- because they love the way in which it makes them American.

Of course, love of government as a binding and collectivizing force does not exist in anyone's sensibilities as an absolute. Everyone seeks other goals as well and understands that some government interventions are more costly than voluntary solutions, and people make their judgments according to their understanding.

People may favor government for other reasons: they fancy themselves part of the governing set; they yearn for an official system of validation; they want to avoid the burden of justifying a dissenting view; they fear, revere or worship power. All such factors work in conjunction with self-serving tendencies of less existential nature—privilege seeking, subsidy seeking, and so on—and with the rationalizations of these tendencies. Furthermore, people may be biased toward government because cultural institutions indoctrinate and cow them.

All such tendencies may be part of a general account of “collectivism”—in the sense of statism. In this article, I seek to expand our understanding of just one factor of collectivism that never operates in isolation from the others and not necessarily the most significant: people’s tendency to see and love government as a binding communitarian force. I take notice of that tendency in realms that range from the texts of Hegel and Marx to recent political philosophy to mundane policy discourse. I am an errant economist with no claim to mastery of materials here dealt with. I can only say that the constellation outlined in this article is one that I discern as clearly as I see the Big Dipper, but the points of light themselves wax and wane depending on how one gazes.

### **Beating Time Together**

When we think of the action of the primitive band, the family, or the organization, we think of the whole acting as an integrated entity. We may fail to consider that the posited entity consists of constitutive elements or members. We may neglect to think how each member experiences his membership in the entity, and achieves with the other members the consonance in action that permits us to say the entity acts in this or that way.

Georg Simmel comments on what is perhaps the most manifest exhibition of the human social organism:

It is interesting to observe how the prevalence of the socializing impulse in primitive peoples affects various institutions, such as the dance. It has been noted quite generally that the dances of primitive races exhibit a remarkable uniformity in arrangement and rhythm. The dancing group feels and acts like a uniform organism; the dance forces and accustoms a number of individuals, who are usually driven to and fro without rime or reason by vacillating conditions and needs of life, to be guided by a common impulse and a single common motive. ([1904] 1957, 546)

In the social organism, instances of mutual coordination, such as the dancers' moving to the beat of drums, provide the atomic structure of the extensive coordination of the various parts that permits us to say that the entity exists and acts as a whole.

Unlike a spontaneous order, an organization such as a dance group proceeds, at least in skeletal structure, under an authoritative leadership or direction. A structure of central leadership and direction implies an authoritative *understanding* of the organization's nature, goals, situation, and potential. The authoritative understanding can be imparted, at least in rough and summary terms, to all members of the organization, constituting a *common understanding* and enabling all members to share an experience of the organization's movement and the realization of its goals. In at least broad, skeletal terms, the members of an organization share a common understanding of the extensive coordination achieved in the whole, and of how their instances of mutual coordination contribute to—or *cooperate in*—that extensive coordination.<sup>1</sup>

Consonance in the dance, march, chant, song, or ensemble performance is mutual coordination of bodily motions made sensate in sight, sound, and vibration. No wonder so many of the terms used to describe mutual coordination originate in music. We speak of

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<sup>1</sup> On the two coordinations, see Klein 1997. Incidentally, my labeling has evolved since the 1997 paper. I now prefer *mutual coordination* for Schelling coordination and *extensive coordination* for Hayek coordination.

people as acting or being in unison, in consonance, in concert, in concord, in accord, in harmony, in sync, in tune with each other.

### **Smithian Sympathy as Sentiment Coordination**

When a marching band performs on a field, spectator view the extensive coordination of the spectacle in common. Watching from the stands, they also enjoy a mutual coordination -- not of their bodily motions or actions but rather their sensations, perceptions, understandings, and sentiments. Even if they watch from their homes, on television, they may imagine that all viewers dance together in spirit. In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Adam Smith notes that “nothing pleases us more than to observe in other men a fellow-feeling with all the emotions of our own breast” ([1759] 1976, p. 13). Man yearns for coordinated sentiment as he yearns for food in his belly.

Smith makes use of a certain metaphor repeatedly to describe an individual’s elemental joy at being in sentimental consonance with his fellows:

The man whose sympathy keeps time to my grief, cannot but admit the reasonableness of my sorrow (16).

[A person suffering misfortune] longs for . . . the entire concord of the affections of the spectators with his own. To see the emotions of their hearts, in every respect, beat time to his own . . . constitutes his sole consolation. (22)

The great pleasure of conversation and society . . . arises from a certain correspondence of sentiments and opinions, from a certain harmony of minds, which like so many musical instruments coincide and keep time with one another. (337)

Eight times Smith uses the metaphor of people beating (or keeping) time together. A metaphor he uses even more frequently, about thirty times, is that of “entering into” the sentiments of another, which again connotes a common experience and togetherness, as when one joins the spirit of the household when one enters into a home.

Thomas Schelling helps us understand the nature of mutual coordination by setting out a problem of togetherness disrupted:

When a man loses his wife in a department store without any prior understanding on where to meet if they get separated, the chances are good that they will find each other. It is likely that each will think of some obvious place to meet, so obvious that each will be sure that the other is sure it is “obvious” to both of them. One does not simply predict where the other will go, since the other will go where he predicts the first to go, which is wherever the first predicts the second to predict the first to go, and so ad infinitum. Not “What would I do if I were she?” but “What would I do if I were she wondering what she would do if she were I wondering what I would do if I were she . . . ?” What is necessary is to coordinate predictions, to read the same message in the common situation, to identify the one course of action that their expectations of each other can converge on. They must “mutually recognize” some unique signal that coordinates their expectations of each other. (1960, 54 ellipses in original)

Schelling’s parable captures the sense of mutuality: Each person thinks about how the other understands the situation, and both understand that their understandings interrelate.

This mutuality resides in organizational life in general, in *cooperation*, even in the organization’s larger, long-in-coming achievements.

This sense of mutuality, or shared understanding, is precisely what is *not* present in the extensivity of a spontaneous order: if we eat out, we know nothing about the people and efforts that contributed to the provision of our lunch, except for those who helped serve it.

We can hardly guess what the rest of the chain of provision is like, and we have no particular reason to do so. No mutuality-in-the-whole exists in a *spontaneous* extensive coordination.

In Schelling's exposition of mutual coordination, he explained that when people face a coordination problem, they seek a solution in a focal point:

Most situations . . . provide some clue for coordinating behavior, some focal point for each person's expectation of what the other expects him to expect to be expected to do. Finding the key, or rather finding *a* key—any key that is mutually recognized as the key becomes the key—may depend on imagination more than logic; it may depend on analogy, precedent, accidental arrangement, symmetry, aesthetic or geometric configuration, casuistic reasoning, and who the parties are and what they know about each other. (1960, 57)

Precedence, symmetry, and so on make focal points focal. A prime characteristic of focal points, says Schelling, “is some kind of prominence or conspicuousness” (57). This conspicuousness in turn often depends on perceptible uniqueness (57-58). The man and woman separated in the store might go to the cash register *nearest* to where they were together *last*—a double uniqueness. Factors like precedence, symmetry, simplicity, accession, and so on often provide the context for people's decision about what to seek uniqueness *in*. The dancers' movements are coordinated because of the prominence of a specific drum beat. If two distinct drum beats play simultaneously, perhaps neither will be focal, and resolution will be sought in a higher-level sign or meta-sign, such as the gestures of a group leader. As Schelling notes, “[t]he coordination game probably lies behind the stability of institutions and traditions and perhaps the phenomenon of leadership itself” (91).

Schelling's analysis, especially as developed by David Lewis (1969) and other works, leads us to see Smithian sympathy as the coordination of sentiments. Love might be interpreted as a sort of coordination equilibrium in which sentiment is reflected and re-reflected in the lovers' eyes, such that the sentiment is neither his nor hers, but *theirs*. People

naturally form relationships and communities built upon the focal points of norms, morals, virtues, traditions, and shared conceptions of their history.

### **Club Romance**

In cooperating with the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, we talk to them of their advantages. “Give me that which I want and you shall have this which you want” (Smith [1776] 1981, 27). In *The Wealth of Nations*, Smith shows that a touch of sentiment coordination attaches to every market exchange.

In the rich morality plays of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, the contexts Smith discusses are generally those of the individual in his local or private affairs face to face with his associates and relations. Smith is concerned above all with the individual’s moral life and conduct. Almost never does he speak of conduct or sentiments in the context of the broad political culture. An optimist especially at the time he first composed the *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, he apparently saw no conflict between the great yearning for coordinated sentiment and the prospects for a libertarian polity.

Smith’s writings furnish a groundwork for libertarian theories of voluntary communities and norms (see for example, Paine [1792] 1961, 398-403; Tocqueville [1840] 1969; Karlson [1993] 2002; Foldvary 1994; Beito, Gordon and Tabarriok 2002; Kukathas 2003). In economic theory, goods like fitness clubs, churches, movie theaters, and schools are sometimes called “club goods,” as they are experienced or enjoyed jointly by “members” of the club (Buchanan 1965). By analogy, it is useful to refer to coordinated sentiment among a voluntary grouping as *club romance*. Again, even in “impersonal” market exchanges, there is a touch of human communication. Libertarians like Chandran Kukathas (2003) say that true liberals let clubs compete freely and without privilege and tolerate internal club practices that

we might find alarming. Adam Smith said likewise about religious competition, confident that voluntarism would teach “candour and moderation” ([1776] 1981, 793).

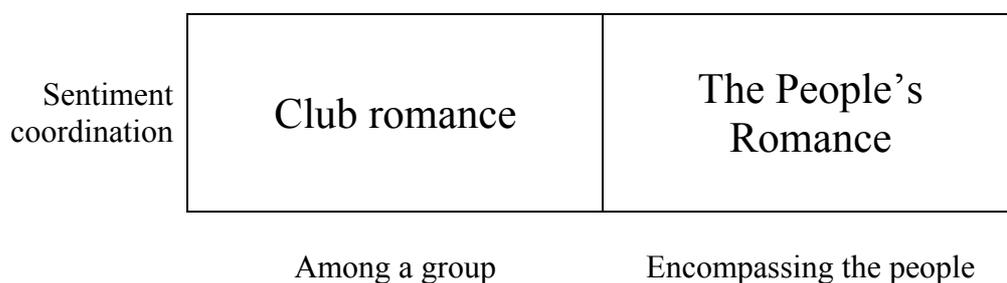
### **Encompassing Coordination of Sentiment: The People’s Romance**

When a certain further element is added to the desire for sentiment coordination, however, the result is ominous. Although Smith posited a desire for sentiment coordination, but he did not speak of the desire for a sentiment coordination that encompasses the whole group. In Smith, we desire to commune with someone. In *encompassing* sentiment coordination, we fancy the notion of communing with the whole. In Smith, we desire club romance, whereas in encompassing sentiment coordination we desire an official club romance where the club is the whole of the people.

Who is included in “the whole” and who is not depends on social configurations and people’s awareness of the group. When people think of society at large as the group to which they belong--when they think of having “citizenship,” whether it be in a town, a county, or a country--the logic of coordination leads directly to government as the focal point. Unparalleled in power, permanence, and pervasiveness, the government is prominent, conspicuous, unique, focal. Moreover, as people look to government as the focal point, it increasingly draws them into thinking of its dominion as the boundaries that define the group. The government provides and validates the focal points in the sentiment game, and, in the first instance, it arranges and validates the games that citizens can play.

Government creates common, effectively permanent institutions, such as the streets and roads, utility grids, the postal service, and the school system. In doing so, it determines and enforces the setting for an encompassing shared experience—or at least the myth of such experience. The business of politics creates an unfolding series of battles and dramas whose

outcomes few can dismiss as unimportant. National and international news media invite citizens to envision themselves as part of an encompassing coordination of sentiments—whether the focal point is election-day results, the latest effort in the war on drugs, or emergency relief to hurricane victims—and a corresponding regard for the state as a romantic force. I call the yearning for encompassing coordination of sentiment *the People’s Romance* (henceforth TPR) (see tale 1).



The cycle of *government-defined-group* and *group-finds-focal-points-in-government* may help to explain why collectivist notions ascended into the mainstream in Great Britain, the United States, and elsewhere so suddenly (around 1890) and aggressively and why government size and intervention surged during the ensuing century. The cycle is implicated in the multifaceted problem of surging statism, notably the sanctification of the democratic creed of popular sovereignty, and the genre and technology of The-World-is-Watching photographic journalism (Weaver 1994, chap. 2). Robert Higgs’s account of government growth in the United States incorporates *ideology* as a key variable (1987, chap. 3). The concept of TPR may help us to interpret the changes in American ideology that occurred during the Progressive Era, World War I, the New Deal, and World War II.

### **Encompassing: In Aspiration or Imagination**

“Encompassing,” of course, need not include everyone in the group. Some individuals may be absent, home with the flu, or persisting in reclusiveness. Moreover, the group does not necessarily include everyone in the jurisdiction. The group commonly distinguishes itself and its sentiments by referring antipathetically to some other kind of people. The group often plays up an opposition group—a scapegoat group, or *other*. Thus, the group defines itself in part in relation to the “wetbacks,” “kikes,” “queers,” “hippies,” “drug pushers,” “commies,” “left-wingers,” “right-wingers,” “capitalist pig-dogs,” “fundamentalists,” “racists,” “rednecks,” and so forth.

TPR signifies a yearning for a dominant and expanding sentiment coordination, a yearning especially upset by the perception that certain individuals have sentiments at odds with this feeling. This yearning seeks conformity and inclusion, and it dislikes deviance, discord, and dissension. The “other,” or scapegoat group, represents the sentiments to be diminished, controlled, and eliminated. TPR is not content to achieve sentiment coordination among those who would be coordinated; it wishes to stamp out sentiment discoordination. It tends to be overweening, and if enthusiasm isn’t sufficient, it becomes assertive and belligerent.

The term “encompassing” in our definition (“the yearning for encompassing coordination of sentiment), then, is not to be taken literally. “*Encompassing*” may be understood to mean any of the following: “imagined to be encompassing,” “symbolically encompassing,” “aspirationally encompassing,” or merely “dominant and official.”

### **TPR versus Self-ownership**

TPR helps us understand how authoritarians and totalitarians think. If TPR is a principal value, the well-being thought to depend on everyone else’s proper participation,

then it authorizes a kind of joint, though not necessarily absolute, ownership of everyone by everyone, which means, of course, by the government. One person's conspicuous opting out of the romance really does damage the interests of the others.

The essence of property rights lies in other's duties not to interfere with one's property. When those duties weigh on us as genuine moral obligations, they are authorized by interest—that is, by the property owner's interest. If the collectivity's interest really does depend vitally on one's (uncritical) participation, then the collectivity may well erect an apparatus of control and promulgate norms of duty, norms that enjoy social recognition and acceptance—in other words, *that make one its property*. The statist romantic manifesto is clearly set down by Hegel:

It is false to maintain that the foundation of the state is something at the option of its members. It is nearer the truth to say that it is absolutely necessary for every individual to be a citizen. The great advance of the state in modern times is that nowadays all the citizens have one and the same end, an absolute and permanent end. (1952, 242)

Whereas Hegel saw some mystical, organic foundation for political obligation, modern-day social democrats see political consent or “social contract,” but the upshot is the same. In their social-democratic tract *The Cost of Rights*, Stephen Holmes and Cass R. Sunstein hold that all things are owned, fundamentally and ultimately, by the government. “Private property [is] a creation of state action,” “laws [enable property holders] to acquire and hold what is ‘theirs’” (1999, 66, 230). The quotation marks around theirs tell us: the car you park in your garage is really the property of the state; the state just lets you think it is yours. Holmes and Sunstein presumably would say that your own person is “yours” only in a diminished sense that calls for quotation marks. Any decentralized exercise of property rights or contract is undertaken by the government's authorized delegation. Taxes are the fees you

pay for having those things—your car, your house, your own person—placed at your disposal. Throughout their book, we find indications that their doctrines exist to serve TPR: “To focus on the cost of rights is to urge that the collectivity define rights, and spend resources on rights, in a way that is broadly defensible to a diverse public engaged in a common enterprise” (216).

TPR lives off coercion which not only serves as a means of clamping down on discoordination, but also gives context for the sentiment coordination to be achieved. The government inculcates the notion of “The People” chiefly by coercion.

### **Not All Bad, Just Not Worth It**

TPR is one human value that libertarian policy does not advance. In insisting on libertarian policy, and hence in turning away from TPR, however, one need not regard TPR in itself as something false or perverse or irrational. The tens of thousands who watched and chanted and lifted their arms in unison at the massive National Socialist rallies, in which well-kept columns marched in lockstep to make a gigantic rotating swastika, no doubt knew an awesome elemental human joy, a romance far more powerful than that experienced by exultant soccer fans watching their country’s team win the World Cup.

TPR recommends government activism, and government activism means the contravention of the liberty maxim. I oppose TPR simply because of the damage and degradation it entails, not only to material comfort and other values, but to other processes of human meaning, dignity, and decency on which joy also depends. TPR just ain’t worth it.

Unfortunately, for reasons that cannot be discussed here, the damage and degradation *are difficult to see*, and especially so when society’s cultural institutions are highly statist.<sup>2</sup> The

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<sup>2</sup> In principle, democracy might choose libertarianism, but problems are legion. For example, Brennan and Lomasky’s (1993) theory of expressive voting fits nicely with TPR, and these analysts show in detail how expressive voting deranges the democratic process.

problem, as I see it, is not so much that those swayed by TPR are morally defective, but that they have become locked into a set of unenlightened mental habits. It is in conjunction with a postulate that maintains that the relative worthiness of libertarian policy is subtle that TPR constitutes a bias.<sup>3</sup>

### **TPR in Karl Marx**

TPR is at the heart of communism. In, *Capital*, Marx claims that capitalism creates cooperation: “As a general rule, labourers cannot co-operate without being brought together: their assemblage in one place is a necessary condition of their co-operation. Hence wage labourers cannot co-operate, unless they are employed simultaneously by the same capital, the same capitalist, and unless therefore their labour-powers are bought simultaneously by him. (1936, 361). Marx salutes the capitalist entrepreneur for organizing labor in his factory according to “a preconceived plan” and coordinating their “union into one single productive body” (364). In his view, however, the competition between capitalists, each engaged in “commodity production” to garner “surplus value,” renders despotic and exploitive the extensive coordination of labor achieved within a single factory.

Marx spins a system of economic nonsense, but over and above the blather is an appeal that returns to his idealization of cooperation and the encompassing coordination of sentiment -- encompassing both within human society and, correspondingly, within each person’s selfhood. As Robert Tucker explains, Marx presupposed that the division of labor in society corresponds to a division of spirit in the self, or alienation (1961, 188-223).

Of capitalism (or spontaneous order), Marx writes, “the cohesion of the aggregate production imposes itself as a blind law upon the agents of production, and not as a law

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<sup>3</sup> I do not contend that if people understood better what was good for them, they all would become staunchly libertarian, but only that people by and large would become *more* libertarian than they are now.

which, being understood and hence controlled by their common mind, brings the production process under their joint control” (1998, 256). The achieving of conscious control is essential to the wholesomeness of work: “Freedom in this field can only consist in socialied man, the associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with Nature, bringing it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it as by the blind forces of Nature” (1998, 807). Marx glorifies the deliberate extensive coordination of labor, but he despised any boss. When communism integrates community existence and economic activity, the economy would be like one big factory, and, with all parties working in cooperation, the laborer will avoid the indignity of subordination because there will be no boss other than the entire community of which he belongs (1936, 391). “[O]nly when [man] has recognized and organized his own powers as *social* powers so that social power is no longer separated from him as *political* power, only then is human emancipation complete” (Marx 1983: 234).

Marx said that “all labour in which many individuals cooperate necessarily requires a commanding will to coordinate and unify the process . . . much as that of an orchestra conductor” (1998, 382). In the great book *Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx* (1961), Robert Tucker explains Marx’s utopian vision: “The old authoritarianism of the factory regime, based on servitude under the division of labour, would be supplanted by a free conscious discipline such as that which prevails in a symphony orchestra. . . [T]he abolition of the social division of labour . . . signifies the advent of harmony and unison within humanity at large, the emergence of a unified society consisting of a vast association of ‘complete individuals’” (199-200). Marx insists that, in a wholesome economy, all its participants understand the extensive coordination of economic activity as mutual coordination.

One might say that Marx’s animus is against any sense of social stratification and domination, but then one must explain why he is so blind to the social stratification and domination inherent in his political schemes. I submit that in his mind the basic difference

between working for a capitalist boss and working for a communist boss is that the communist plan permits one to conceive work as participation in a great romance—or TPR. In other words, TPR blinds leftists to the realities of coercion and domination intrinsic in their political ideals.<sup>4</sup>

I am not claiming that TPR was Marx’s principal motivation. That motivation might have been much darker, and his doctrines might have been intellectual “superstructure” serving his basic drives. The point applies to any theorist, sage, or leader (as noted by Smith [1759] 1976, 233). We cannot peer into a person’s soul; Only rarely and only in part can we separate his stated reasons from his personal drives and motivations. However, even if Marx’s subterranean motivations spang from other sources TPR is a central component of his doctrines and of the movements, and intellectual traditions they inspired.

### ***TPR The ABC of Communism***

Marx wrote a great deal about how capitalism works, but very little about how communism would work. When his followers got around to dealing with communism, the central role of TPR became clear. *The ABC of Communism*, by N. Bukharin and E. Preobrazhensky, first written in 1919 and published in 1922, presents an agenda of theft and brutality on stupendous scale, rationalized in terms of TPR:

[S]ociety will be transformed into a huge working organization for cooperative production. There will then be neither disintegration of production nor anarchy of production. In such a social order, production will be organized. No longer will one enterprise compete with another; the factories, workshops, mines, and other productive institutions will all be subdivisions, as it were, of one vast people’s workshop, which will embrace the entire national economy of

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<sup>4</sup> Isaiah Berlin’s book on Marx may be used to support the notion that TPR is the soul of Marx’s system; see Berlin 1963, 131, 139, 143.

production. . . . The essence of the matter lies in this, that the organization shall be cooperative organization of *all* the members of society. The communist system, in addition to affecting organization, is further distinguished by the fact that *it puts an end to exploitation, that it abolishes the divisions of society into classes.* ([1922] 1969, 114-115, emphasis in original)

Here is the logic in all its simplicity: “The home worker who is dependent upon the dealer or the factory owner, works for the dealer or the factory owner. He becomes their beast of burden. The home worker who is dependent upon the proletarian State is a social worker” (328-29).

In capitalist society, class divisions obstruct TPR. The proletariat must seize and expropriate all capitalist operations and resources. “Manifestly,” say Bukharin and Preobrazhensky, the various operations must be linked together. But “[t]he question arises, with which organization must the others be linked up. The answer is simple. We must select the greatest and most powerful of all. Such an organism is constituted by the State organization of the working class, by the Soviet Power (332). Here we see clearly the pursuit of encompassing sentiment coordination and the invocation of the focal means of achieving it.

According to Bukharin and Preobrazhensky, to bring everyone into the common, classless plan, under “a genuine, popular control” (337) the various economic bodies and operations must “BE TRANSFORMED INTO ECONOMIC DEPARTMENTS AND INSTRUMENTS OF THE STATE AUTHORITY; THEY MUST BE ‘STATIFIED.’ (333, capital letters in the original). Would-be independent agents must take orders and payments from the state. “Thus the home workers will by degrees be drawn within the general system of production now being organized upon socialist foundations. They will be drawn within that system, not only by being supplied with certain products of social production, but also

because they themselves will be directly working for the proletarian State in accordance with a plan prescribed for them by the instruments of the proletarian State”(329).

All this for TPR: “Labour discipline must be based upon the feeling and *the consciousness that every worker is responsible to his class*, upon the consciousness that slackness and carelessness are treasons to the common cause of the workers” (339 emphasis in original).

### **TPR in Social Democratic and Communitarian Beliefs**

Many authors make clear that social democracy is chiefly about TPR. In his social-democratic classic, Bernard Bosanquet writes: “It follows that the State, in this sense, is, above all things, not a number of persons, but a working conception of life. It is, as Plato has taught us, the conception by the guidance of which every living member of the commonwealth is enabled to perform his function” (1923, 140-41). Columbia University professor and Progressive Era economist Edwin Seligman, who studied in Germany and helped to professionalize the study and teaching of economics in the United States, writes of taxation: “We pay taxes not because we get benefits from the state, but because it is as much our duty to support the state as to support ourselves and our family; because, in short, the state is an integral part of us” (1925, 73).

Today, we often hear statist intellectuals and commentators call for “a common experience,” “a common understanding,” “a common enterprise,” “a common cause.” The term common has multiple meanings. It can mean “known,” “ordinary,” “or often-found,” as in: “Don’t be embarrassed; on this highway running out of gas is a common occurrence.” Another meaning of common is shared or “encompassing”: “Americans enjoyed a common

experience in seeing their country put a man on the moon.”Intellectuals and commentators have in mind this second meaning. Thus, in the calls for “a common experience,” “a common understanding,” and so forth, we ought to recognize the call for encompassing coordination of sentiments—TPR.

Many statisticians express the same penchant for shared or common experience:

- The title of Richard Rorty’s social-democratic tract speaks of TPR: *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-Century America* (1998; for example see 50).
- Harvard professor Derek Bok writes, “government is the one administrative agency that can define, enunciate, and validate a set of common moral standards and obligations for all the people” (2001, 12). Reminiscent of William James, Bok finds the idea of national service “all the more compelling now that the disappearance of the draft has removed one of the few opportunities to gather Americans from all walks of life in a common civic undertaking” (409).
- In *After Virtue* (1984), Alasdair MacIntyre claims that justice and desert make sense only in “a community whose primary bond is a shared understanding both of the good for man and the good of that community” (250) and then makes the “disquieting suggestion” that our society has lost any such shared understanding and that justice and virtue fall into shambles.
- Benjamin Barber advocates “strong democracy,” which “rests on the idea of a self-governing community of citizens who are united less by homogeneous interests than by civic education and who are made capable of common purpose and mutual action” (1984, 117). Strong democracy “requires institutions that will involve individuals at both the neighborhood and the national level in common talk, common decision-making and political judgment, and common action” (261). This ideal seeks coordination on “one

common vision of the political and economic world” (263). “Voucher schemes undertaken in a climate of antigovernment privatism will only hasten the death of all public seeing and political judgment, enhancing the private power of individuals at the expense of a public vision of our common world” (264).

These examples of statist invocations of “common purpose,” and the likemight easily be multiplied twentyfold.<sup>5</sup>

### **Superstitions that Sustain The People’s Romance**

As noted, the communists veiled the coercion and domination intrinsic to their scheme with the notion that the new society would be “classless” and the centralized power would be under “a genuine, popular control.” In modern times, social democracy’s coercion and domination are veiled by a set of superstitions and taboos at best only somewhat less fatuous. Social democrats tend to see society as an organization administered by government. This creed aids TPR, but many ordinary persons will find the notion oppressive if they think of the administration as strictly top down. Although they want to see a social organization, they do not want it to be a strict hierarchy. The magical element that holds it all together is the idea that the government receives its mandate and warrant from ordinary persons. The democratic notion of popular sovereignty tells the ordinary person that he gives license to the government, as he does to a voluntary association or club. This superstition makes the whole understanding tolerable. As de Tocqueville put it, “Our contemporaries are ever a prey to two conflicting passions: they feel the need of guidance, and they long to stay free. Unable to wipe out these two contradictory instincts, they try to satisfy them both together. Their imagination conceives a government which is unitary, protective, and all-powerful, but

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<sup>5</sup> Fine Hayekian critiques of participatory and deliberative democracy are found in the works of David Prychitko (2002) Mark Pennington (2003), and Michael Wohlgenmuth (in this issue of the *Independent Review*).

elected by the people. Centralization is combined with the sovereignty of the people. That gives them a chance to relax. They console themselves for being under schoolmasters by thinking that they have chosen them themselves. ([1840] 1969, 693). Thus, citizens “are turned alternatively into the playthings of the sovereign and into his masters, being greater than kings and less than men” (694).

Joseph Schumpeter, in his assessment of the social democratic “club” view of society, indicates its pervasiveness: “ever since the princes’ feudal incomes ceased to be of major importance, the state has been living on a revenue which was being produced in the private sphere for private purposes and had to be deflected from these purposes by political force . . . . The theory which construes taxes on the analogy of club dues or of the purchase of the services of, say, a doctor only proves how far removed this part of the social sciences is from scientific habits of mind. (1950, 198)

I agree with Schumpeter, but this is not the place to debate the social-democratic view. The point is that nested within the conventional view that government *is not* a mammoth apparatus of coercion is the tenet that society is an organization to which we belong. Either on the view that we constitute and control the government (“we are the government”) or on the view that by deciding to live in the polity we choose voluntarily to abide by the government’s rules (“no one is forcing you to stay here”), the social democrat holds that taxation and interventions such as a minimum wage law are not coercive. The government-rule structure as they see it is a matter of “social contract” persisting through time and binding on the complete collection of citizens. The implication is that the whole of society is a club, a collectively owned property, administered by the government.

In “Socialism and Superior Brains” ([1894] 1932), George Bernard Shaw puts it plainly: “That great joint-stock company of the future, the Social Democratic State, will have

its chairman and directors as surely as its ships will have captains” (279). Again, the superstitions involving a supposed consent to the organization that is the society, and the taboos that surround these superstitions enable many to enjoy the purported common endeavor—the romance—of the “company,” the “club”—The People.

### **TPR in Mundane Political Discourse**

Examples drawn from ordinary political discourse illustrate how TPR lurks in mundane policy issues:

- In 1990, U. S. postmaster general Anthony Frank explained why he opposed freedom in postal services: “I am against it, because I believe the U.S. Postal Service is a legitimate and necessary *public* institution that serves an important social function as a binding, unifying force in our national life . . . As a public institution, it serves *all* the American people, not merely those groups, areas, or segments that are clearly profitable” (47, 49; emphasis in origina). In a similar vein, the Hollywood director and actor Kevin Costner’s film *The Postman* (1997) shows its hero resurrecting civilization in post-apocalyptic America by restarting the U. S. Postal Service.
- In promoting the U. S. Census of 2000 in a press, the Census Director Kenneth Prewitt said: “every household that returns the form does strengthen the ties that bind us together as a civilized society” (2000).
- A spokesman for the Natural Resources Defense Council, a left-wing pressure group, measured the success of recycling: “Recycling is probably the single most successful environmental policy out there. Most people in the world today know about reduce, reuse, recycle. It is very widely practiced. More people participate voluntarily in recycling than voted in the last four presidential elections” (qtd. in Rembert 1997). Thus, recycling—typically

promulgated by government and subsidized with tax-dollars—is successful because it had become a common ritual and experience.

### **TPR's Explanatory Power**

Besides taking TPR from the horse's mouth, we may infer it from the horse's behavior. Taking TPR into account helps to explain much that otherwise remains only poorly explained.

Many people, particularly ones who in the American context would tend to vote Democrat or Green, are inclined to support economic restrictions such union privileges, occupational licensing, the minimum wage, housing market-controls, the postal monopoly, and import restrictions. Yet knowledgeable economists agree that these restrictions are bad for humankind. Perhaps their support arises because TPR requires, as Bukharin and Preobrazhensky put it, that activities be statified. What seems primary is not often how well the program or policy achieves stated goals of improving education, mobility, opportunity, and so on but instead the collective endeavor itself.

Why do people who claim to be concerned for the poor so often support or go along with policies that are obviously and predictably bad for society and especially the poor? Why do they support government schooling, antidevelopment land-use policies, rail transit projects, and policies to discourage the use of the private automobile? TPR provides an explanation: these policies bind people together (like a bundle of sticks).

Many populists, right and left, oppose free trade, alleging that it will hurt low-skilled workers. Even if that claim were true, however, why do they leave out of their consideration low-skilled Chinese or Brazilians? Answer: TPR is about *we Americans*. “The People”

excludes “the other people.” TPR helps explain why “distributive justice” reaches only to the border. If you scratch an egalitarian you’ll often find TPR.

I suspect that a large part of the impetus behind the welfare state is the yearning for a collective enterprise: “We” taking care of “Ourselves.” In this theater, some have to be cast as the needy, helpless, disadvantaged, inferior, and so on. I suspect that one reason coercive egalitarians feel that “the disadvantaged” deserve government support is that the scheme demeans and exploits them, so that the assistance is a sort of compensation.

Why are people uneasy about globalization? The communitarian Alasdair MacIntyre rightly says: “Patriotism cannot be what it was because we lack in the fullest sense a *patria*. . . . In any society where government does not express or represent the moral community of the citizens . . . the nature of political obligation becomes systematically unclear” (1984, 254). Globalization blurs the “we,” dissolves political obligation, and deflates TPR.

Why are government officials and enthusiasts often hostile to leading corporations like Microsoft, McDonald’s, Wal-Mart, and Martha Stewart? Why are they often hostile to other bases for independent private cultural power such as private builders, private schools, and talk radio? Part of the answer may be that they are jealous in guarding their role as medium and focal point in TPR. Why are they hostile to placeless “suburban sprawl,” private communities, private shopping malls, the private automobile (especially big ones), gun ownership and toting, and home schooling? Because these practices are means of withdrawing from TPR and creating an autonomous circle of authority, power, and experience.

**“War!”**

Randolph Bourne famously said “War is the health of the State.” In war, TPR swells and rends libertarian constraints:

War is the health of the State. It automatically sets in motion throughout society those irresistible forces for uniformity, for passionate cooperation with the Government in coercing into obedience the minority groups and individuals which lack the larger herd instinct. [War] seems to achieve for a nation almost all that the most inflamed political idealist could desire. Citizens are no longer indifferent to their Government, but each cell of the body politic is brimming with life and activity. We are at last on the way to the full realization of that collective community in which each individual somehow contains the virtue of the whole. In a nation at war, every citizen identifies himself with the whole, and feels immensely strengthened in that identification. ([1919] 1964, 71)

TPR helps to explain why Americans who lived through World War II generally remember it as a good time, even a time of improving material conditions, even though, as Robert Higgs (1992) shows, it was a time of significantly declining material conditions.

TPR captures what William James sought in the “moral equivalent of war,” --namely “a conscription of the whole youthful population to form for a certain number of years a part of the army enlisted” to dig coal, make tunnels, wash clothes, catch fish. “[We should be] conscious of our work as an obligatory service to the state. We should be *owned*, as soldiers are by the army, and our pride would rise accordingly” ([1910] 1963, 299, 300; italics in the original). In Great Britain at the Labour Party Conference of 1945, Sir Stafford Cripps said: “We have got to engender in the people the same spirit of determination to see this programme through that they have displayed in winning victory in the war” (quoted in Jewkes 1948: 227).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> John Jewkes (1948, 227-29) targeted TPR in his criticism of social democracy in Great Britain.

TPR helps explain why ambitious government programs are so often pitched in the metaphor of war, as in the war on vice, the war on illiteracy, the war on poverty, the war on crime, the war on disease, the war on AIDS, the war on hunger, and the war on drugs.

Now Americans have the war on terrorism. This program actually is war—after September 11, 2001, when Americans were attacked and killed The U. S. government invaded Afghanistan--but in many respects it is better understood as the new giant in the parade of war frauds.

### **Four Points of Origins**

One can speculate on the origins of TPR in human evolution and in the universals of human experience. Here I suggest four sources:

1. ***Socio-biological and cultural evolution.*** Millions of years of primate evolution and more than one million years of human evolution in hunter-gatherer bands of fifty to one hundred people might well have selected for TPR. Major group experiences were encompassing. Interpretation of affairs was static and common to all (even if bits of information were not). Leaders provided focal points for the entire band. The yearning and ethic of TPR may well have advanced group selection, and, with sanctions against deviants, genetic and individual selection as well. Hayek (1976,1978,1988) explained the atavism of social justice; likewise, one might build an argument about the atavism of TPR.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Paul Rubin (2002, 2003) presents an argument about various statist tendencies as atavistic, but nothing like encompassing sentiment coordination.

2. ***Society as family: government as parent.*** The economist Deirdre McCloskey notes that it is difficult to teach market theory to the eighteen-year-old because she “has lived mainly in a socialist economy, namely, her birth household, centrally planned by her parents, depending on loyalty rather than exit” (2000, 185). The “socialist economy” metaphor is imperfect but highly suggestive. Relationships in the household are communal and altruistic. Especially for the formative period prior to puberty, the child is reared obeying a supreme central authority that routinely circumscribes and overrides her own judgment and coordinates activities in a top-down fashion. The supreme authority also validates an authoritative interpretation and justification of things (“because I said so”). The family is the cradle of encompassing sentiment coordination. It is plausible that the individual’s thought patterns would follow that mental model in dealing with other social issues. The family romance may function as a sort of prototype of TPR. The history of government, of political philosophy, and of political culture is replete with metaphors that interpret society as family and government as parent. Nowadays, both Irving Kristol on the right and George Lakoff on the left embrace an interpretation of politics as vying models of parental government, in the one case damning the indulgent Mommy State (Kristol 2000) and in the other damning the strict Father State (Lakoff 2002). Both ignore the option of not seeing government as parent.
3. ***Society as being: government as head.*** Works like Marvin Minsky’s *The Society of Mind* (1986) argue that the individual human being is a society of subagents and faculties that is largely hierarchical. It is not a process of voluntary individual action between coequals, a process generating a

polycentric network of relations,<sup>8</sup> but rather a top-down kind of society, and it displays nothing analogous to the price system. The “social structure” of the self is based on command, repression, and banishment. In these respects, the internal structure of the self is much like a state, which governs by command and brooks no competition. Within the “society” of the self, the achievement of joy—whether a tranquil serenity or a moving sense of catharsis—probably has much to do with a coordination of feelings such that no major feeling upsets the convergence of all other feelings. We feel joyful or “whole” when nothing inside us pulls in a separate direction. This concordance within the self may be another prototype for TPR. The history of political philosophy and social theory is replete with metaphors of society-as-being and government-as-head.

4. ***Society as organization: government as director.*** Intentional organizations—churches, clubs, associations, companies, schools, charities—provide yet another mental model for understanding and relating to society. Any intentional community, even if not formally declared, is a sort of organization, insofar as its members think of themselves as belonging to the set of people who have agreed to an enduring governance structure for the collection of members. The notion of society as organization is pervasive in mundane and high-brow political discourse. Again, members of an organization seek meaning in identifying with the organization and in sharing in its mission, purposes, and experiences, which make for some degree of community. The individual may extend this model and seek an encompassing sense of

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<sup>8</sup> Hayek stresses this difference between the mind and social spontaneous order (1967, 74).

community in society at large, with government as leader or director of the supposed organization.

### **More on Government Coercion as an Assertion of TPR**

If anyone other than the government issued a serious threat to harm us for employing people at a wage of less than eight dollars per hour, that person would be regarded as a coercive menace. As Frédéric Bastiat noted, when the government coerces people, it does what would be criminal for anyone else to do (1995, 52). It asserts its singular authority to violate the liberty of innocent people. It asserts a kind of fundamental ownership of the people themselves; hence many statist say liberty is illusory. Asserting this privileged position serves TPR, for the coercive programs force all to admit their subordination vis-à-vis the government, and therefore to recognize the government as a unique, superpowerful romantic force.

Thus, TPR explains why atrocious policies such as the war on drugs can be enacted and cheered and can persist. Even though Republicans supposedly care about freedom and Democrats supposedly care about “the little guy,” the politicians do nothing to abate the policy. The vast majority of academic Democrats have never lifted a finger against this overt Nazism. As for the general population, although public opinion on the matter has shifted in the libertarian direction, it has favored the policy for generations. Many watch *COPS* on television to see real-life Gestapo-like bullies bust into private homes and drag off defenseless innocents to be locked in cages like animals. Thomas Szasz (1974, 1992) provides an explanation that makes this despicable undertaking understandable in terms of TPR. The targeting of drugs, drug addicts, and drug pushers is a modern instantiation of the primitive impulse to find a scapegoat against which the power and unity of the group can be organized,

exercised, flaunted, and exulted in. Szasz observes that drug-abuse hysteria and the war on drugs “are pretexts for scapegoating deviants and strengthening the State”(1992: 62). “[A]s a propaganda tool, dangerous drugs are therapeutic for the body politic of the nation, welding our heterogeneous society together into one country and one people” (115).

The more shocking the violation, the more aroused is TPR. Even now, after a lapse of some seventy years, mainstream statist still lionize the riot of intervention that occurred during the New Deal era--a riot that in actuality deepened and prolonged the Great Depression (Higgs 1997) and shackled the country to terrible policies--as a great event during a time in which “the country came together” and “we” did something. What “we did” was assert and advance TPR.

When the policy process gets rolling, it often seems that what matters most is that “we do something.” Any new coercive intervention, any expenditure of tax dollars, is preferred to doing nothing at all, maybe because “doing something” asserts the government’s supremacy over libertarian principles, and that assertion serves TPR.

### **Why Are Intellectuals Who Are Pro-Welfare State and Anti-Regulatory State So Rare?**

Political visions do battle over which ideas should be focal in the public understandings of the polity. In the clash of visions, the competing ideas become symbolic. Even narrow-issue policy choices are suffused with broad connotations and concern for what ideas a choice seems to affirm or negate.

Why are economists not more vocal in advocating the repeal of a wide variety of pernicious interventions, such as agricultural subsidies and restrictions? One reason might be that some economists see the TPR benefit, but the main answer probably lies in the symbolic

realm of TPR versus its libertarian annihilation. The intellectuals who favor TPR are disinclined to throw their weight behind anything that could weaken TPR.

I have been involved in academic economics for twenty years, and during that time I have taken note of the views or judgments that vocal economists express or neglect to express. I have always been exasperated that my fellow economists do not speak more clearly and preponderantly against a wide array of microeconomic interventions that are plainly bad in every respect—especially in their promotion of TPR.

Whereas libertarian economists oppose both the welfare state and the regulatory state, the social-democratic economists support the welfare state and, well, do not speak very clearly about the regulatory state. Asymmetric information apparently makes it difficult to say for sure whether expert caregivers who have the best knowledge of the patient's history, condition, and options should be able to utilize medical therapies that Food and Drug Administration bureaucrats have not certified. In letter delivery, free enterprise, might generate natural monopoly, so maybe it is better to have a government monopoly.

Facetiousness aside, why do Paul Krugman, Bradford DeLong, Joseph Stiglitz, Kenneth Arrow, Robert Solow, James Tobin,<sup>9</sup> Alan Krueger, Richard Freeman, John K. Galbraith, James K. Galbraith, and others in their ideological quarters, including a great many who are not as prominent but just as settled in their opinions, almost never emphatically favor libertarian reform on any of the one thousand issues where such reform would plainly benefit society, especially the least well off? TPR might help us understand why we find few unequivocal characters<sup>10</sup> in the Yes-No cell where they would be in favor of the welfare state but opposed to the regulatory state.

One explanation for the rarity of outspoken Yes-No economists might be that the reasons against both the welfare state and the regulatory state come down to the same body of

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<sup>9</sup> Let it be noted, however, that Tobin (1965) strongly condemns the minimum wage and union privileges.

<sup>10</sup> Mancur Olson may have been a real Yes-No economist. A few other half-hearteds—none dramatic in propounding free-market reforms—are Alan Blinder, Lawrence Summers, Robert Frank, and Peter Lindert.

ideas, which one either appreciates or does not. I am inclined to say, however, that it does not require a fine understanding to see the badness in 90 percent of the regulatory state. Any candid person who diligently considers libertarian alternatives to existing interventions should see the badness in policy after policy and should thereafter stand firmly for much freer markets. Also, it is not clear to me that all libertarians appreciate certain body of refined ideas; some people simply seem to be soberly immune to TPR, as if by disposition. They see no good reason to favor government but they never acquire much appreciation of the arguments for libertarian policy.

The rarity of opposition to the regulatory state among those intellectuals who favor the welfare state may lie in the fact that TPR lurks behind their support of both. Other worthwhile explanations certainly exist, but this explanation, based on a weakness for and protectiveness toward TPR, deserves consideration.

### **Is TPR Necessarily Anti-Libertarian?**

I have suggested that TPR and libertarian policy goals are fundamentally at odds. This relationship is not strictly definitional. An outstanding counterexample would be the American Revolution, which fed or instantiated TPR yet advanced libertarian policy goals. A war effort is not necessarily antilibertarian on the whole—ridding a territory of slavery or the world of a Hitler obviously has a libertarian resonance--but the exceptions are rare. What I mean by TPR is something that, in ordinary domestic affairs, is antilibertarian pretty much in its essence.

The individuals of a country or region might be said to form “a people” on the basis of their language, customs, and traditions. As an American who in recent years has gained an ordinary residence and family in Stockholm, I have noticed all manner of distinctive Swedish

customs involving language, food, drink, drinking songs, folk songs, holidays, popular children's characters and stories, sports, the Swedish royal family, and so on. These elements—especially the language—are part of “being Swedish,” common cultural reference points. They are practiced for the most part by individuals and families to the extent and in the manner that they personally choose and for their own private—if traditional—experience. They are available but not requisite. They do not project a collective narrative and in that sense, do not usually make for an encompassing experience. They are ways of communing with other persons, not ways of communing as The People.

In 1959, Ingemar Johansson astounded the boxing world by knocking out Floyd Patterson in the third round and capturing the title as World Heavy-Weight champion. Swedish pride in the event is depicted in the small-town story *My Life as a Dog*. Throughout the movie there is no sign of national or collective identity—indeed, the movie celebrates personal idiosyncrasy—until the final moments, which show almost everyone absorbed by the radio broadcast and then running into the street screaming “Hurray for Ingo!” “Hurray for Sweden!” Ingo's victory—Sweden's victory—was a shared experience that engendered an encompassing coordination of sentiment. The feeling when Sweden goes to the World Cup finals must be similar. I regard such a narrative and romance as related to but different from TPR. It might be a romance of the people, but not of The People. Let's face it, when Swedish boxers or soccer teams don't win big, only the die-hard fans take much notice. Ingo Johansson is a national hero, but the romance is just an underdog or Cinderella story that has universal appeal. You need not be Swedish for tears to well up at the conclusion of *My Life as a Dog*. Muhammad Ali is a hero and a major figure for some people, but he is not particularly a *national* hero simply because he is American and Americans dominate in boxing. He is, however, a local hero of his home town of Louisville, Kentucky.

Moment-in-the-sun event such as winning the World Cup are jubilant common experience for the citizens of the country in question, just as a tragic event like the death of Princess Diana is a common experience for her subjects. These events, however, are not The People's story. What is significant about TPR is that The People are not merely the auditors, but are identified as (or strongly identified *with*) the protagonists of the story. Widely practiced traditions and folk customs are fertile ground for coordinated sentiment, for Smithian sympathy, for club romance, and may be so common that they foster a sense of "The People." Even when customs involving national icons such as the national flag engender the acting out of a ritual in every single backyard, and everyone knows that everyone is in his or her backyard doing the same, and everyone knows that everyone knows, it is not TPR. In themselves, such activities are not encompassing experiences and are not of The People.

By contrast, governmental structures and policies are routinely identified as The People's. For generations in Sweden, the Social Democratic vision was officially trumpeted as "The People's Home" (*Folkhemmet*). (Nowadays the term is too trite and corny to be effective as a political slogan, but the Social Democrats still use it nostalgically.) Today in Sweden, democratic mythologies still lead people closely to identify governmental structures with The People.

### **TPR on "the right"**

TPR is essential to the left. For this reason, it is coherent to speak of "the left," and the historic and natural color of the left, found in Europe still, is the warmest, most passionate color. (The new color convention in the United States--blue for the Democrats and red for the Republicans-- apparently created by the media in 2000, is just wrong.) Nevertheless, certain types of antileftists also may embrace TPR.

“The right” is ill-defined. As is well known, the political culture has long been dominated by leftists, and it is natural that the political culture would reflect their point of view, which, crudely, is: If you’re not one of us, you are one of them. “The right” (or “conservatives”) often means all those who are not left. In the American context, it often means anyone who does not favor the Democrats over the Republicans.

It might be useful to distinguish three sometimes overlapping kinds of antileftists. First, some people positively favor TPR but in a form, such as what George Lakoff (2002) calls the “strict father,” that puts them at odds with the leftist agenda. George Will (1983) writes of “statecraft as soulcraft,” and, as Steven Ealy (2004) shows, Will’s penchant for collective enterprise, shared values, and shared fate is central to his statism. The same is generally true of the neoconservatives. A major TPR theater for this group is foreign policy. “We” are combating terrorism, liberating Iraq, planting the seeds of democracy, spreading freedom, and so forth.

Second, *traditionalists* are especially fond of long-established customs and institutions, of genuine community that resides in the relations of their families, friendships, churches, and Little League activities, and of icons such as the American flag--all of which are common in the sense that they often help to create a lattice of club romances. Traditionalists like to have barbecues on the Fourth of July, and they like the idea of others having barbecues. They like *being of a way of life*, but ordinarily they do not require an encompassing collective enterprise, experience, or romance. They favor family rule over bureaucrat rule. Traditionalists might embrace TPR, but doing so is not inherent in their traditionalism.

The libertarians are the third kind.

Frank Meyer (1996) favored traditionalism and libertarianism. He told the traditionalists that they should tolerate others who choose a different way of life, and he

assured them that cherished traditions can survive and even thrive under libertarian policy. He urged traditionalists and libertarians ought to get along, in alliance against statism. I concur, and I hasten to add George Will and the neoconservatives to the list of opponents.

### **Make Liberty TPR?**

If innocuous traditions and popular sporting events do not demonstrate compatibility between TPR and libertarian policy goals, what about achieving a People's Romance based on liberty? Perhaps the cherishing of liberty can be a focal point for the encompassing coordination of sentiment. Unfortunately, this candidate for compatibility, too, must be rejected.

Smith (1790, 175-76, 216, 218, 262, 327) and the legal theorist Lon Fuller, in his book *The Morality of Law* (1969, chap. 1), distinguishes two classes of moral rules<sup>11</sup>. The more basic class comprises the core duties within a community. Here would reside Hume's "three fundamental laws" of justice (1978, 526) or Smith's "sacred laws of justice" ([1759] 1976, 84), namely, the respect for person, property, and agreements. Here also resides the morality of common decency. These rules are "negative" in nature; they tell us what we are *not* to do. As Smith puts it, "We may often fulfil all the rules of justice by sitting still and doing nothing" ([1759] 1976, 82). The man who barely abstains from violating the basic rights of others, however, "has surely very little positive merit" (82). The other class of moral rules pertains to what Fuller calls the morality of aspiration. The latter rules, according to Smith, "present us rather with a general idea of the perfection we ought to aim at"(175). They are the positive rules, values, and virtues of higher aspirations, excellence, greatness, valor, and the

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<sup>11</sup> Fuller acknowledges six mid-twentieth-century authors (1969, 5 n. 2)

sublime. Smith and Fuller explain that the principles underlying such virtues are inherently loose, vague and indeterminate.

I see liberty as residing in the first class, and hence not a value or virtue of heroic or romantic aspiration. To refrain from violating the other's liberty, from extorting and bullying, is not the realization of a lofty aspiration, but a minimal requirement of decency. Whereas TPR needs to supply a positive story of action and achievement, the basic laws of justice do not project any dramatic endeavor. Rather, they leave individuals to undertake their own private projections. Fuller, in fact, relates the ideas of the Soviet author Eugene Pashukanis, liquidated in 1937, who explained that the concepts of basic moral and legal duty are part and parcel of capitalistic spontaneous order and that communism would repeal economic exchange and hence the morality of duty (1969, 24-26). The morality of communism, Pashukanis claimed, would be a morality of collective aspiration, which the morality of spontaneous order cannot generate or even accommodate. As James Buchanan puts it, "To lay down a 'social' purpose, even as a target, is to contradict the principle of liberalism" (2000, 115).

That libertarian principles cannot give wings to TPR was also recognized by J. G. Fichte, an early rabble-rouser for The German TPR. In his *Addresses to the German Nation* in 1808 he said: "What spirit has an undisputed right to summon and to order everyone concerned, whether he himself be willing or not, and to compel anyone who resists, to risk everything including his life? Not the spirit of the peaceful citizen's love for the constitution and the laws, but the devouring flame of higher patriotism, which embraces the nation as the vesture of the eternal" ([1808] 1968, 120, see also 125-26).

The inability of libertarian principles to vitalize TPR is a sort of corollary to an old theme in classical-liberal economics: economic understanding brings depression to the

student and unpopularity to the teacher. Economic understanding deflates TPR, so economic ignorance is bliss. In 1944 Hayek noted “the traditional unpopularity of the economists,” adding, “You probably all know the remark of Walter Bagehot that the public has never yet been sorry to hear of the death of an economist. In fact, the dislike for most of the teaching of the economists in the past has built up a picture of the economist as a sort of monster devouring children” ([1944] 1991 39). George Stigler described good economists as the pourers of cold water (1988, 4).

### **The Neglected Shrine of Liberty**

High patriotic romance might be combined with a libertarian ethic only if society faced repeated skirmishes in which liberty-minded people fended off the conquest and pillage of would-be coercers. The only image we might have today of an ongoing aspiration for liberty would be the broad cultural battle against statism. To propose this battle as a foundation for TPR, however, would be to suggest a broad popular enthusiasm and involvement in libertarian think tanks, reform efforts, and cultural and educational programs, and such a suggestion would be ludicrous.

A sustained romantic involvement in liberty seems to call for more than a one-time event, however momentous that might be. The American Revolution was broadly a fight for liberty against a government oppressor, and it had a libertarian philosophical vision (Bailyn 1967). In an essay entitled “From the Memoirs of a Subject of the United States,” (1972), H. L. Mencken observes that Americans yearn for a grand and noble political vision, yet find no answer. He then suggests one, represented by a peculiar shrine:

It is somewhat astonishing that 100% Americans should wander so helplessly in this wilderness. For there is a well-paved road across the whole waste, and it

issues, at its place of beginning, from the tombs of the Fathers, and their sacred and immemorial dust. Straight as a pistol shot it runs, until at the other end it sweeps up a glittering slope to a shrine upon a high hill. This shrine may be seen on fair days for many leagues, and presents a magnificent spectacle. Its base is confected of the bones of Revolutionary heroes, and out of them rises an heroic effigy of George Washington, in alabaster. Surrounding this effigy, and on a slightly smaller scale, are graven images of Jefferson, Franklin, Nathan Hale, old Sam Adams, John Hancock and Paul Revere, each with a Bible under his arm and the Stars and Stripes fluttering over his shoulder. A bit to the rear, and without the Bible, is a statue of Thomas Paine. Over the whole structure stretch great bands of the tricolor, in silk, satin and other precious fabrics. Red and white stripes run up and down the legs of Washington, and his waistcoat is spattered with stars. The effect is the grandiose one of a Democratic national convention. At night, in the American manner, spotlights play upon the shrine. Hot dogs are on sale nearby, that pilgrims may not hunger, and there is a free park for Fords, with running water and booths for the sale of spare parts. It is the shrine of Liberty! (72-73)

Mencken then assesses the success of this shrine and cause:

But where are the pilgrims? One observes the immense parking space and the huge pyramids of hot dogs, and one looks for great hordes of worshipers, fighting their way to the altar-steps. But they are *non est*. Now and then a honeymoon couple wanders in from the rural South or Middle West, to gape at the splendors hand in hand, and now and then a schoolma'm arrives with a flock of her pupils, and lectures them solemnly out of a book. More often, perhaps, a foreign visitor is to be seen, with a *couronne* of tin bay-leaves under his arm. He deposits the *couronne* at the foot of Washington, crosses himself lugubriously, and retires to the nearest hot dog stand. But where are the Americanos? Where are the he-men, heirs to the heroes whose gilded skulls here wait the Judgment Day? Where are the Americanizers? Where are the boosters and boomers? Where are the sturdy Coolidge men? Where are the Rotarians, Kiwanians, Lions? Where are the authors of newspaper editorials?

The visionaries of Chautauqua? The keepers of the national idealism? Go search for them, if you don't trust the first report of your eyes! Go search for honest men in Congress! They are simply not present. For among all the visions that now inflame forward-looking and up-and-coming men in this great Republic, there is no sign any more of the one that is older than all the rest, and that is the vision of Liberty. The Fathers saw it, and the devotion they gave to it went far beyond three cheers a week. It survived into Jackson's time, and its glow was renewed in Lincoln's. But now it is no more. (73-74).

Mencken's essay is fundamentally wistful. He laments that the vision of Liberty does not inspire and motivate, and he is somewhat perplexed about the failure. Between all the jests is an earnest call—"Back to Bach!," he declares—to return to the original libertarian vision. Yet the inherent weakness of Liberty as an ongoing political rallying cry is made clear enough in Mencken's recognition of what political enthusiasm and force really consist of—a recognition conveyed in the shrine's vulgarity and in Mencken's concluding paragraph: "Against all this I protest, feebly and too late. The land swarms with Men of Vision, all pining for Service. What I propose is that they forget their brummagem Grails for one week, and concentrate their pep upon a chase that really leads uphill. Let us have a Bill of Rights Week. Let us have a Common Decency Week" (78). The notion of Service (as in, "public service") and the notion of a This-or-That Week typify the character of politics and illustrate how TPR manifests itself in what seem to be innocuous political efforts. During This-or-That week we shall (supposedly) all ruminare and deliberate on This-or-That, bringing our thoughts and sentiments into an encompassing coordination. Instituting an official This-or-That Week is a way of claiming approval and validation for certain ideas, values, and implied programs--of asserting The People have officially chosen certain policies. It is a manner of asserting The People's ownership over and above the individual's ownership

of his person and property. In his satirical “Common Decency Week,” Mencken is telling us that any political action with encompassing pretensions is at odds with common decency.

### *Liberty Enlightening the World*

Another failure of liberty to propel TPR is the colossal statue that was originally called *Liberty Enlightening the World*. The project was conceived by the Frenchman Édouard-René Lefebvre de Laboulaye (1811-83), a law professor, prolific political writer, inspiring speaker, and member and later senator for life in the National Assembly. Although not a radical liberal, Laboulaye was a fervent liberal republican who lionized American liberty and constitutionalism (and propounded Lincoln’s side in the Civil War). He conceived of a monument donated by the citizens of France to the United States to commemorate the centennial of 1776. He and a group of like-minded intellectuals realized the project. The statue’s sculptor and other great champion, Auguste Bartholdi, too, was also a strong partisan of liberty. (Trachtenberg 1977, 22, 31-34, 57-59, 75, 81). The project was libertarian in its execution. On both sides of the Atlantic, practically all support was voluntary, making *Liberty Enlightening the World* a monumental example of the voluntary provision of a public good.<sup>12</sup>

The libertarian aspects were enhanced by Grover Cleveland, first in 1884 as governor of New York by vetoing a fifty –thousand-dollar state appropriation to aid the project, and second, as president of the United States at the unveiling ceremony two years later, by delivering words that perfectly captured the intended meaning of the monument: “We will not forget that *Liberty* has made here her home, nor shall her chosen altar be neglected. Willing

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<sup>12</sup> The French government contributed a naval vessel for the statue’s shipment to the U.S. Because Bedloe’s Island (now Liberty Island) was and remains federal government property, the U.S. government naturally played a role in fixing up the island and hosting the inaugural ceremony. See Trachtenberg 1977, 38, 140, 148, 179; Blanchet and Dard 1985, 62, 71, 73, 92.

votaries will constantly keep alive its fires and these shall gleam upon the shores of our sister Republic in the East. Reflected thence and joined with answering rays, a stream of light shall pierce the darkness of ignorance and man's oppression until Liberty enlightens the world" (qtd in Trachtenberg 1977, 83).

Cleveland saw the light, but his prediction about willing votaries quickly proved wrong. Almost immediately the interpretation changed. As Marvin Trachtenberg explains,

As early as 1883 [three years before the statue was completed] the French meanings were lost on Emma Lazarus. In her famous poem "The New Colossus," the beacon of liberty seen across the sea was not intended to serve France or any other nation, but rather to guide those Europeans eager for a new life *away* from Europe entirely, to the "golden door" of America, where an uplifted torch was symbolic not of "enlightenment" but simply of "welcome." . . . [I]n 1903, at the height of immigration, this sentiment was so widely accepted as expressing the statue's meaning that a plaque bearing the poem was affixed to the pedestal as an *ex post facto* inscription. (1977, 187)

Thus the statue, a symbol of universal human liberty projected outward by the torch of enlightenment, not by the sword, with a face that "expresses not only triumph but embittered desire"(Trachtenberg 1977, 60), was quickly transformed into a symbol of The American People. "The statue was becoming the image not so much of America the protagonist of Liberty, but simply America itself" (p. 187). Soon *Liberty* assumed a belligerent mien on posters for Liberty Bonds, which asserted the citizen's duty to pony up for the U.S. government's involvement in the First World War.<sup>13</sup>

Although libertarian groups sometimes find an icon in *Liberty*, most Americans are oblivious to its libertarian message. With its charismatic size, design, location, and connection to "the golden door," the *Statue of Liberty* is regarded by many as simply a

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<sup>13</sup> See images of Blanchet and Dard 1985, 124, 127, 152.

favorite among the national monuments, another colossal decoration and landmark.

Laboulaye's attempt to create a libertarian monument, to channel collective romance in the libertarian direction, has yet to succeed.

Libertarian Machiavellianism probably sometimes ought to promulgate and manipulate TPR to effect reform, enhance order or win an election, but doing so is a matter of exigent political strategy. That aside, I am inclined to conclude that TPR itself will never advance liberty, that TPR is simply something to lament and to try to deflate. Even where it might take harmless or possibly even vaguely libertarian forms, the danger exist that it will be hijacked for purposes that arouse and feed its coercive appetites. Decent, enlightened people must relinquish TPR.

### **Deflating The People's Romance: Some Grounds for Optimism**

Again, many factors besides TPR could help explain the stupendous errors that constitute statism. In addition to the general problems of using government to garner privileges and resources and the problem of government-dominated cultural institutions, there are the more all-too-human problems of the intellectual's anxiousness for the prestige of what he imagines to be an elite or governing set, citizens' anxiousness for official validation from and subordination to a phantom lord, and the basic reverence of power and permanence. My ruminations about TPR, then, should be understood as *one* explanation, not *the* explanation, for statism's sway.

I suspect, however, that TPR is quite central, and that it relates to the other factors, so if it were to be significantly abated, statism also would. In *The Study of Man*, Michael Polanyi observes that explicitly formulated knowledge offers the opportunity for us to reflect on it critically(1963, 15). Man's theories of man are inherently dialectical. Formulating a

theory that is true is often part of a process that retires its truth. Explaining to people that they have an unhealthy penchant for sweets is part of the process of subduing that penchant. Likewise, TPR can be overcome or at least abated mainly by the usual methods of critical discussion and persuasion.

TPR is probably general to humankind, but its force depends on circumstances. I believe that technological developments in communications and transportation have diminished the power of TPR, and I expect the trend to continue. We do not belong to a single well-defined group but rather, increasingly, to many loosely defined groups, and those groups are increasingly of our own choosing. The structures we experience are less organizational and more networked and spontaneous. Our epistemic instincts are constantly challenged. We get used to “knowing” many people of celebrity who do not know us. Meanwhile, we do not know the fellow who lives next door. People pursue their own interests and communities and freely ignore the vast social oceans that lap against the walls of their homes. Increasingly, there is no common experience, and people know it, if only on a visceral level. Disjointedness proliferates not only in experience, but in interpretation of public affairs. The official political culture is losing its dominance. People increasingly ignore the major media. They go to the websites, radio programs, and cable television stations that offer the interpretations they prefer. These competitive commentaries take aim at the official interpretation and thereby turn news itself into the news. Media success stories like television’s John Stossel and radio’s Larry Elder, as well as many of the popular intellectual web logs, show that the current market demand can sustain a libertarian line, and the demand might increase as awareness of this viewpoint grows. Big government can still exercise brute force and other forms of power, but can it retain popular support? The impulse and agenda to create an encompassing common experience, an encompassing government-led romance, is received with increasing skepticism.

Also significant is the growing disenchantment with the single greatest TPR-indoctrination program, government schooling. Scattered prospects for school-choice reform exist in the United States, and a growing number of families are opting for home schooling, the networks of which have a strong libertarian streak (as well as a religious streak). In general, the popular aura of “the common school system” is fading. As it carries on in a state of demoralization, the attitude it engenders in students may be better represented by Bart Simpson than by TPR.

The very boundaries of the polity are becoming increasingly blurred. People and their electronic messages (increasingly in English) traverse borders with increasing ease. Globalization erases demarcations between the people of the earth. On the intellectual front, we have seen a real weakening of statist precepts and commitments. The academic field of public choice has examined “politics without romance,” as James Buchanan puts it. He writes: “The rapidly accumulating developments in the theory of public choice . . . have all been influential in modifying the way that modern man views government and political process. The romance is gone, perhaps never to be regained”. ([1979] 1999, 57). Buchanan’s words are overly optimistic, but correct in essence. The intellectual scene is increasingly policy oriented, increasingly framed in sensible ways that rule TPR out of court. Optimism lies in the fact that those intellectual battles are winnable. Academia in the United States continues to be dominated by social democrats, but their ability to rally students to TPR dwindles, and their statism is becoming less righteous and absolute.

It remains unclear, however, whether intellectual victory matters much for the course of policy. The more developed countries, on the whole, have not made bold changes in the size and intrusiveness of government; at best they have slowed expansion. Many less-developed-countries have liberalized significantly, for the most part by undoing egregious policies, not by leapfrogging toward liberty beyond the Western norm.

Another big “however” is the problem of militarism, mass destruction, and terrorism. Not only war The People’s most fervent romance, it is, to paraphrase Randolph Bourne, The People’s most liberating romance.

Still, barring major war, the prospects for deflating TPR are looking up (for this reason, I suspect the Democratic Party is in serious trouble). Correspondingly, the prospects for a libertarian enrichment of culture are also looking up. Even if policy isn’t fixed, even if the overall political culture is not improving, wealth and technology are increasingly enabling individuals to resist and withdraw from the dominant political culture. That culture does not engulf people as it did previously. We may look forward to diverse political cultures that accommodate vibrant communities of the mind wise to the statist quackeries and misadventures that surround us.

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