

Principles of Liberty and Compassion

Adapted from Bastiat's 1850 classic *The Law*

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Life, Liberty, and Property

"In spite of what politicians would have us believe, life, liberty, and property do not exist because men have made laws. On the contrary, it was the original existence of life, liberty, and property that prompted people to make laws in the first place."

—Frederic Bastiat, 1850

We hold a gift from God that includes all other gifts. This is the gift of **life**—physical, mental, and moral consciousness.

Part of moral consciousness is the ability and responsibility to act, and not to be acted upon. This is the definition of **liberty**.

The Creator of life and liberty also gave us our faculties (physical and mental abilities), and the Earth, with her many natural resources. When we combine these gifts we create products, services, and income for ourselves. This is called **property**. Because property is a natural product of life and liberty, it may also be properly viewed as a gift from God.

We can therefore agree on the following principles:

- ❖ **Life is a gift from God.**
- ❖ **We are created to act, and not to be acted upon.**
- ❖ **Property is a natural by-product of life and liberty.**

Natural Right to Protect

"What are our faculties but the extension of our individuality? And what is property but an extension of our faculties?"
—Frederic Bastiat, 1850

Each of us has a natural right to protect his person, his liberty, and his property. Said Bastiat: "These are the three basic requirements of life, and in order for one to be preserved, so must the other two."

Collective power (the law) is derived from individual power. Thus the law may only *inherit* from the people powers that individual people themselves possess.

It follows, then, that if an individual cannot violate the life, liberty, or property of another, then law cannot justly do so either. To create such a law would be to legislate **social injustice**.

In sum:

- ❖ **Each has a natural right to protect and defend his person, liberty, and property.**
- ❖ **Collective power (the law) is derived from individual power.**
- ❖ **The law cannot justifiably violate the person, liberty, or property of another.**

The Pursuit of Prosperity at the Expense of Others

"Men will resort to plunder whenever plunder is easier than work,"
— Frederic Bastiat, 1850

Self-preservation and self-development are common aspirations among people. It is also man's nature to try to satisfy his desires with the least possible pain. Unfortunately this means that when they can, men wish to live and prosper at the expense of others.

When this happens, men change the law from a tool of protection to a tool of **coercive redistribution**: it takes the property of one person and gives it to another. The law is also used by the lawmaker for his own profit.

Sharing in the plunder. When coercive redistribution is organized for the profit of the lawmaker or certain protected classes, the violated classes may either try and stop it, or share in it. Historically, plundered classes tend to choose the latter, even to the point of institutionalizing universal plunder.

Impact on society and politics It is generally accepted that taking the property of another is both immoral and unjust. When it is admitted that the law may be diverted from its true purpose—that it may violate property instead of protecting it—society and politics naturally decline.

When law violates property instead of protecting it,

- ❖ **The definitions of justice and injustice are reversed.**
- ❖ **People lose their moral sense and their respect for law.**
- ❖ **Special classes (i.e., special interests) participate in making law, either to protect themselves against plunder or to use it for plunder.**

Resistance from Vested (“Special”) Interests. When a law of coercive redistribution is abolished, the person who has profited from this law will complain bitterly, claiming that state protection of his particular industry enriches the state, etc. The acceptance of these arguments by vested interests has built legal plunder into a whole system.

The present day delusion is an attempt to enrich everyone at the expense of everyone else; to make plunder universal under the pretense of organizing it.

Legal Plunder Has Many Names. Legal plunder can be organized in an infinite number of ways, including: benefits, subsidies, encouragements, progressive taxation, tariffs, protection, public schools, guaranteed jobs, guaranteed profits, minimum wages, a right to relief, a right to the tools of labor, free credit, and so on. All these plans as a whole—with their common aim of coercive redistribution—constitute **socialism**.

The Choice Before Us. This question of legal plunder must be settled once and for all.

There are only three ways to settle the question of legal plunder:

- 1) **Limited Legal Plunder:** The few plunder the many.
- 2) **Universal Legal Plunder:** Everybody plunders everybody.
- 3) **No Legal Plunder:** Nobody plunders anybody. This is the principle of justice, peace, stability, harmony, and logic.

The Pursuit of Philanthropy at the Expense of Others

"Here I encounter the most popular fallacy of our times. It is not considered sufficient that the law should be just; it must be philanthropic."

—Frederic Bastiat, 1850

A Look at the American and French Revolutions is instructive: The American Founders considered the law sufficient that guarantees to every citizen the free and inoffensive use of his abilities for physical, mental, and moral self-improvement. French Revolutionaries, on the other hand, demanded that the law directly extend welfare, education, and morality throughout the nation.

This is the seductive lure of socialism. And these two uses of the law are in direct contradiction to each other. We must choose between them. A citizen cannot at the same time be free and not free.

The French socialist DeLamartine once wrote to Bastiat, "Your doctrine is only the half of my program. You have stopped at liberty; I go on to fraternity."

Bastiat replied simply, "The second half of your program will destroy the first." He continued, "It is impossible to separate the word fraternity from the word voluntary. Fraternity cannot be legally enforced without liberty being legally destroyed."

- ❖ The most popular fallacy of our times is that the law can be simultaneously just and philanthropic.
- ❖ Fraternity cannot be legally enforced without liberty being legally destroyed.

The Pursuit of Happiness: Liberty and Philanthropy

*"Happiness is the by-product of doing for others."
— Mae Carden, 1967*

For many, happiness is complete when their lives are spent in the service of others. They share others' burdens and feel joy in others' success. They volunteer, they give, they share. Their service draws individuals, families and communities closer together in brotherly love. This is **philanthropy**: the voluntary giving of one's own time, talents, and worldly goods.

Conversely, when a government forcibly takes from one and distributes it to another, philanthropy is mocked and liberty is injured. The taxpayer has her property taken from her while the recipient, not knowing the person from whom money was taken, feels no swelling of gratitude or love. Nor does her liberty increase (as socialism claims), as long as she remains dependent upon government.

Proponents of government redistribution will say that those who are against public programs are against philanthropy. This is a false charge, as government programs, being neither voluntary, nor truly giving (you cannot give what is not yours) are, by nature, *un-philanthropic*. Indeed, it may be said that *socialism co-opts philanthropy*.

The American Founders proclaimed a natural right to *pursue* happiness, not to *have* happiness. Happiness can be felt, and freely shared, but it cannot be forcibly distributed. Individuals who understand this put their faith in their fellow man. Those who do not understand this put their faith in government.

- ❖ Happiness is a by-product of freely doing for others. This is philanthropy.
- ❖ Happiness can be felt, and freely shared, but it cannot be forcibly re-distributed. Socialism co-opts philanthropy.