



Do you remember when we Americans thought of the Ayatollah Khomeini as a good man trying to help his people who were suffering under a dictatorial government? He was in exile in France, and he was getting a great deal of favorable publicity on international television as he taped his revolutionary messages and smuggled them back into Iran. His obviously sincere and deeply religious life-style—along with his promise of freedom and justice to his oppressed countrymen—won him the support of the overwhelming majority of the Iranian people. In addition, he soon gained the best wishes of good people all around the world, including millions of Americans.

Then the Ayatollah (the revered

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leader of the religion of the majority of his people) gained *political* control of the nation. He immediately began approving the confiscating of property from the rich and giving it to the poor, the kidnaping of hostages for ransom and blackmail, the restricting of minority religions throughout the land, and the public execution of "traitors and other enemies of the Iranian people."

To show their approval of the Ayatollah's particular brand of freedom and justice, the Iranian people voted overwhelmingly for a new constitution that made him dictator for life. Apparently they felt they could safely entrust their lives to such a good man.

The universal appeal of this persuasive idea of giving political power to "good people" to be used for the benefit of everyone has always been with us. It was an already-

popular literary theme in ancient Greece when the philosopher Plato developed it into the political theory still studied by students of government in all nations today. We hear it everywhere in the United States in this popular political maxim: If we elect good people to public office, we'll have good government.

Goodness and Power

As I watched the unfolding of the most recent disaster to the Iranian people, the thought struck me that perhaps most of the evil in this world is committed by good people who are sincerely trying to help. Let it never be forgotten that the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini is a good man who is quite willing to make every personal sacrifice in his sincere efforts to help his people. He does not wish to become rich from his efforts. When he refers to himself as a servant of God and of the people, he is totally sincere. He has always worked hard and lived frugally. He devotes much time to prayer. He would be called a good man in any nation and age.

Invariably, however, these good people become corrupted by the political power they possess to help others. The fact that they may be deeply religious seems only to increase the terror they use to do good as they understand it. To see this, you need only study the history of the Christian church (or the history

of any religion) and note what happens when the religious leaders gain *political* power. Usually the corruption appears immediately. But sometimes it doesn't appear in a virulent form for a few months. Inevitably, however, this corrupting influence of power always appears, and the terror begins in one form or another. Even the leader of all Christians, Jesus Christ himself, recognized that fact when he indicated that the corrupting influence of earthly political power applied to him also. Thus he refused to accept it, even though he was tempted by the possibility of using it for a good purpose.

A primary reason that helps me to better understand this good-people syndrome (as well as to appreciate the corrupting nature of power and the desire for it) is that I once suffered from it myself. There was a four-year span in my life when I truly wanted to do good for the American people (and for the world in general) and wished I had the *political* power to accomplish my good intentions.

I was 16 years old at the time. I had just gone through a dramatic religious experience and I was firmly convinced I had discovered a sure way (and probably the only way) to eternal life. As a dedicated young man, I felt a responsibility to share my good fortune with my fellowmen. That's the nature of the

good-people syndrome, i.e., we want to share and to help the less fortunate. We really and truly do, and we'll go to any lengths to accomplish it.

Youthful Victims

Probably all of us have endorsed this compelling syndrome to some extent at one time or another. We just wouldn't be human if we hadn't. In my classroom discussions with those wonderfully idealistic students between the ages of 17 and 23, I encounter this good-people syndrome all the time. Most of those students truly want to help their less fortunate fellow-humans all over the world. And some of them literally lust for the power of government to do good to mankind. They are beautiful people. I respect them and wish them well. And I also suggest to them that the desire to use political power to do good to people is bad for *everyone's* health, including their own.

While young people are perhaps more susceptible to this emotional good-people syndrome than are older people, it's a mental aberration that can strike at any age. And it can last from a few days to a lifetime. The Ayatollah Khomeini at age 80 has a far more severe case of this syndrome than I ever had in my teens. But I can better understand the irrational thought processes and abnormal actions of that elderly

leader because I remember so well the devastating effect the syndrome had on me as a youth.

Beginning with my teen-age religious experience and continuing for several years thereafter, I would have been happy indeed to enforce a law that compelled everyone in the United States to join the "one true religion" I had accepted. I only wanted to help! And the idea of a government-enforced religion appealed to me then, just as it has appealed to many millions of Americans before me and still today. My reasoning at that time was as follows: "If I were blind to the truth like so many of my misguided neighbors, I would surely want them to do to me what I wanted to do to them—for their own good, of course." Fortunately for all concerned, I didn't have the power to impose my fantasies (my syndrome) on others.

In a like manner, the Ayatollah Khomeini will unhesitatingly use whatever means he has available to convert or destroy anyone who stands in the way of the advancement of *his* true-theological-political-system. Unfortunately, the Ayatollah has the political power to carry out many of his fantasies.

As often as not, the possessors of this good-people syndrome are fully prepared to die (literally) for what they believe will help other people. For example, I honestly believe that,

at age 16, I was prepared to give up my life if that became necessary in my campaign to save the immortal souls of others. The Ayatollah Khomeini has stated several times that he expects to be killed because of his religious beliefs and the political actions that are inspired by them.

In short, the motives of us victims of this syndrome are unselfish and pure. We are truly good people who only want to help. And we are fully prepared to pay a high price personally for our beliefs and our desire to serve the people.

Strangely, only *good people* seem to become possessed by this particular mental abnormality. This is so much the case that I have here named this syndrome in honor of all good people everywhere who want to use political power to do good to others. While bad people, i.e., murderers and rapists, can also suffer from this syndrome, they seldom offer it as an excuse for their anti-social and destructive behavior. But our very best people, i.e., those who are most eager to do good to mankind, almost always use the good-people rationale to defend their actions. The fact that their programs don't work as advertised doesn't seem to distress them in the least. The failures aren't their fault! And since they're good people who are sincerely trying to help, they're always willing to try again.

This good-people syndrome has

existed as long as mankind. It came with us; the first human beings to appear on earth were born with the desire to do good to others as they saw it. It is clear to me that this inherent emotion and compulsion was (and still is) necessary for the preservation of any sort of viable social order and for the survival of the human race itself. The absence of this compulsion, i.e., the absence of any desire to do anything at all to help any other human being, would obviously mean the end of mankind. Thus the only workable procedure we have (individually and then collectively) is to learn to control this inherent desire to impose our wills on others—even when we think it's for their own good.

I'm convinced this can be done because, to some considerable extent, I've actually learned to do it, i.e., I have resolved never again to use force or the threat of force (legal or illegal) to impose my will or viewpoint on any peaceful person. And I actually live by that principle to the full extent permitted by political reality and my own all-too-human fallibility. Thus while I may sometimes deviate from my own principle, at least I have a clear reference point and a basic guide to help me select the best alternative among the available choices.

Perhaps we could learn to follow this ideal: Let us help others by doing for them what *they* want done; if we

can't or won't, then at least let us have enough respect for humanity to leave them alone. It's simply not a good idea to try to make over another human being in your own image. It can't be done and, anyway, one is enough.

Do you suppose this inherent good-people syndrome that causes

us to try to impose our wills on others for their own good could be the "original sin" we're born with? At least that possibility would offer a logical explanation for those familiar allegories in all religions that tell us about cupidity and arrogance and ignorance—and the fall that comes with them. ☉

Popular Causes and Unpopular Effects

It is being discovered that good intentions are not enough. If good intentions are to accomplish anything, they must be translated into concrete economic measures, and such measures may or may not produce the intended effects. Even if they do, they are almost sure to produce unintended ones as well. Where some groups are benefited, others are hurt. Competition for productive efficiency tends to degenerate into a scramble for political favor. Government of, by, and for the people tends to become government of, by, and for pressure groups. The promise of cradle-to-grave security weakens economic incentive, tends to make men financially irresponsible and reduce them to the moral level of dependent children. Why should a man strain nerve and muscle to provide for himself, to keep his job, to lay something by for a "rainy day," to make provision for his old age, to protect his family from want, when a paternal state promises to do these things for him? Every personal financial misfortune, every source of dissatisfaction with one's economic lot, tends to become a grievance against the State. . . .

When our own and other governments assumed or accepted the responsibility of protecting the people against the risks of unemployment, disability, old age, and other hazards, they built into their economies an inflationary bias against which they are still striving, in most cases with very indifferent success, and which, unless arrested, must eventually bring hardship rather than welfare, insecurity rather than security, to the intended beneficiaries.

IDEAS ON



LIBERTY

From *The Guaranty Survey*, November 1957,
Albert C. Wilcox, editor

PROGRESS | IN A | | FREE | ECONOMY

THE FREE MARKET, operating through the profit motive, has been responsible for the tremendous success of the American economic system. It has ensured the maximum possible effort to introduce innovations and to extend their application as rapidly as possible, with the result that in comparatively short periods of time revolutionary improvements have become commonplace. Because of this and because of the rapid adaptation it assures to all changes in economic conditions, it has rendered every crisis, from natural disasters, to wars, to absurd acts of government, a merely temporary

setback in a steady climb to greater prosperity.

The picture I have painted of a free economy is one of continuous progress and improvement. And so it has been in the United States over the last two hundred years, during most of which time we had a substantially free economy. As the free economy has come to be steadily undermined and the transition to a form of socialism drawn even closer, however, the foundations of economic progress have been eroded. For reasons that should become progressively clearer from now on, a controlled or socialist economy cannot have economic progress.

I believe that the advocates of socialism know this, or at least that they sense it, and that, as a result,

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