

Benevolent Government



Send him mail.

"Food for Thought" is an original column appearing every other Tuesday at Everything-Voluntary.com, by Norman Imberman. Norman is a retired podiatrist who loves playing piano, writing music, lawn bowling, bridge, reading, classical music, going to movies, plays, concerts and traveling. He is not a member of any social network, nor does he plan on becoming one. Archived columns can be found here. FFT-only RSS feed available here.

Most people believe that governments are better equipped to run people's lives than the individual themselves. This belief is based upon a misconception of the essence of human nature. They believe that people are generally evil and/or stupid by nature. From such a belief, they reason that those evil and stupid tendencies must be held in check through "good" government management. They therefore believe that the government must take the form of rule by a dictator with benevolence in his heart, where the benevolent dictator somehow is not evil and has the Wisdom of Solomon. Plato wrote of it in his *Republic* from which sprung the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and all the starvation, imprisonments, hardships, torture and tyranny that followed.

The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language defines *benevolence* as "an inclination to perform kind, charitable acts; a kindly act; a gift given out of generosity," and defines *benevolent* as "characterized by or suggestive of doing good; of concerned with or organized for the benefit of charity." As in most dictionaries they either never define the "good" or never clarify its definition. *Dictator* is defined as "an absolute ruler; a tyrant; a despot," and implies asserting or tending to assert one's authority or to impose one's will on other persons. It's important to understand is that it's not the intention of doing good but the implementation of those activities that are perpetrated in the name of "doing good," that must determine the "goodness" or "badness" of those acts. In all cases, when the implementation is a coercive one, the short term or immediate effects can easily be seen as "good" but the long-term effects, unintended consequences and the harm created behind the scenes are rarely seen or understood.

The concept of "benevolent" dictator is a contradiction in terms. It's very easy to have benevolent intentions. An intention is just a thought. Anyone can think benevolence. The benevolent dictator thinks to himself, "I would like to end hunger, crime, economic depression, homelessness, sickness, fraud, and in general, other people's stupid mistakes."

In fact, one doesn't have to be a benevolent dictator in order to have such dreams for his country. We all have those same dreams. However, in the final analysis, "benevolent" intentions are without substance. Only actions are considered to be either benevolent or its opposite, malevolent. If a diabetic insists on eating sugar, then the benevolent dictator turns his intentions into action and makes it illegal for the diabetic to eat sugar. The proponent of benevolent dictatorships reasons that the diabetic who eats sugar will end up in the hospital emergency room, which is subsidized by the taxpayer. Therefore, we owe it to ourselves to support the idea of a law against diabetics eating sugar. In fact, the sugar-eating diabetic is committing a crime against his fellow man if he eats sugar, so the law is really enacted to prevent crime and protect the citizens. To take it a step further, this new criminal must be punished for his lawlessness by paying a fine. If he doesn't pay the fine the money will be taken from him under duress. If he resists, he will be thrown in prison, or worse. No wonder our prisons are full. Who can argue with such wisdom? Once such sophistry is an accepted reason for passing a law, it opens the floodgates for the passage of hundreds of thousands of other laws, all to create a "safety net" to protect the collective mob of "good" citizens. Thus the tyranny of collectivism is born.

All acts of coercion are malevolent since they involve the creation of win-lose situations and victims. Only voluntary acts can be considered benevolent. The giving of charity voluntarily is a benevolent act. The giving of charity by a government is a malevolent act because it necessitates the forced taking (stealing) from some in order to give to others, even if it is done with good intentions.

A benevolent act, by definition, is an act whereby coercion is absent. Dictatorships, by definition, are systems in which coercion is the coin of the realm. A truly benevolent society can exist only when it is based upon individual freedom, and includes the option to do harm or make stupid anti-self-interest mistakes. The option to do harm by evil people in a free market will be counter balanced by innovation and technology created by the honest and intelligent people of that society. In a society where all markets are 100% free, evil and stupidity would be reduced through innovation and production. When given the chance, free men are capable of fantastic innovations including the technology to prevent crime, reduce poverty and homelessness, prevent disease and promote the general welfare without enslaving a single person. On the other hand, where men are enslaved by the State, that society will stagnate and eventually deteriorate into a Third World country. We are watching it happen in our own country while the solution offered by the proponents of benevolent governments is more of the same but in a "benevolent" manner. In other words, "soft fascism."

To be benevolent means to refrain from harming others. The State cannot exist without harming others. Harming others is their business and prime directive for the "good" of society. A dictator cannot be benevolent, as history has proven. All autocratic systems are

inherently evil and inefficient whether they are communistic, fascistic, democratic, monarchies or “benevolent” dictatorships. Placing the adjective “benevolent” before the word dictator or government or State doesn’t make it benevolent. A Platonic society such as the now-extinct Soviet Union couldn’t last, because it had to collapse under its own tyrannical weight.

The reason why evil and stupidity are growing at an alarming pace is that they are subsidized by our “benevolent” State—not because we are born evil or stupid. The more something is subsidized, the more you get of it. Witness our burgeoning welfare system. History is replete with stories of rulers who started out with the good intention of eliminating evil and stupidity from their shores but ended up being more evil than the evil they were attempting to eliminate. Lenin, Stalin, Hitler, Mao, and Castro all took office with a dream of ruling benevolently but ended with a society devastated by their rules, regulations, five-year programs, concentration camps, genocide and confiscatory taxation. The proponent of rule by a benevolent dictator actually sees himself as that ruler but fails to understand how the corruption of power will eventually infect him too. He will start out with his dream-list of good intentions, then enact them into law, but will soon discover that “someone is not cooperating,” which is always the case. That’s when the benevolent dictator invents the guillotine, heads start to roll and hell is born on earth. The road to hell is paved by benevolent intentions.

From the false premise that people are born evil or stupid it is easy to understand why those holding such a false premise would propose a society administered by a “benevolent” dictator. False premises lead to false, ineffective and harmful solutions. After all, they do observe evil and stupidity running rampant in our country, but they fail to delve into the cause of it. When the cause is misdiagnosed or undetected, the treatment will fail. That’s how things work in medicine. Our social problems are as much a disease as polio. These problems are the effects for which there is a cause. However, the study of causality takes much time and research and most people are so caught up in their daily “good deeds” and the acquisition of the material things of life that they can’t be bothered to get involved and don’t have the intellectual curiosity to try. Most people are not interested in looking into the cause of the things that they like or dislike, but even if they do look, they stop short of the inquiry. It’s not enough to establish the obvious cause of things. Most often the immediate and obvious cause has a deeper and more significant cause than the superficial factor. People prefer prosperity to poverty but are ignorant of the causes of prosperity and poverty. They prefer a citizenry of intelligent people but are ignorant of the cause of enlightenment, intelligence and the cause of stupidity and ignorance. They prefer a society without crime but never think about the cause of crime and the cause of domestic peace. They all claim to want freedom but never think about the difference between freedom and slavery. Both concepts are so mixed up in their minds that they can’t tell one from the other which is how the authorities prefer it should be. If you ask ten different

people to tell you their definition of freedom with examples, you will get ten different answers. Some of the examples of freedom will actually be examples of slavery. The majority believes that freedom is wonderful but it can go too far because people are evil and stupid and need to be prevented from performing evil and stupid acts. They begin, *a priori*, with a false premise and build their dream society based upon that premise.

People are not born evil. They are born with the human nature of wanting to satisfy their desires. All of their actions are motivated by the desire to seek greater satisfaction or avoid dissatisfaction. There is no value judgment to be made from that fact. The value judgments of men must be made based upon the methods they employ to gain greater satisfaction. The methods may be moral or immoral, good or bad, honest or dishonest, voluntary or coercive. Only an institution of education can teach men how to properly behave if they desire to live in peaceful harmony with others. Peace and moral behavior are a package deal to be taught in the same course, because it is a question of, "if" thus "then." "If" you wish to establish peace "then" only the moral non-coercive pathway can attain that goal. A proper institute of learning must be totally free of the influence of all "benevolent" dictators in order for it to be effective. Our present educational system is actually an indoctrination camp that confuses the students with lies, ridiculous definitions, false premises, partial truths and false interpretations of history. No wonder the graduates of today are misinformed.

When the education system is run by the State it creates and magnifies the very stupidity, ignorance and evil it is trying to eliminate. As a general rule, whenever any government interferes with free exchanges between people in all areas of endeavor, they get the opposite result, sometimes in the short run but mostly in the long run.

The benevolent dictator proponent claims that libertarian ideology cannot work due to the inherent evil and stupidity of most people. The exact opposite is true. Statism cannot work, benevolent or otherwise, as history has shown, because if people have become evil and stupid, it is due to the coercive forces of "benevolent," or rather malevolent, Statism. It is no accident that our country prospered during those years when the "benevolent" government had little influence on the decisions of people. As the government made its presence felt by the passage of more "benevolent" laws, that prosperity, abundance and security slowly eroded to the point whereby we are now at each other's throats in all of the various market places of the land. Class warfare abounds. Presently we are only leering at each other behind the lines with bared teeth but eventually we will arrive at the point where there will be blood in the streets, all due to the proponents of the "benevolent" dictatorship philosophy, which unfortunately, includes most of the population.