ESSAY

BOLSHEVIK POWER AND IDEAS OF THE COMMON GOOD

Jonathan Daly

Any legislator will have [peace and mutual good will] as the object of all his enactments.

—Plato, *Laws* 628c

"Man is by nature a political animal," wrote Aristotle,[1] meaning that humans can fulfill their potential only in organized community. If the Stagirite was correct, then by nature we cannot but seek the common good. Why? Because living together is our destiny, seeking our own good naturally stems from our love of self, and therefore wishing for and fostering the good of the community promotes our own welfare. Moving from theory to practice, thinkers who touch on political and social matters either implicitly or explicitly proffer ways and means intended to promote the common good. From the drafters of the Code of Hammurabi and other early political documents to the seemingly endless recent American electoral campaigns, even including such hardheaded thinkers as Machiavelli, we humans have always and everywhere professed to seek it as our noblest aim.[2]

The problem, however, is which vision thereof, how to achieve it, and for whom? The organization called Protestants for the Common Good, who were constituted quite specifically as an alternative to the Christian Coalition and other conservative Protestants, advocate a different vision of the common good than do the latter. Undoubtedly all these groups are earnest partisans of that noble end. At the risk of flippancy, though, one can assert that Hitler, Mao, Stalin, Castro, Franco—nearly every dictator one can think of—has, at least rhetorically, advocated, or purported to advance, the common good, however narrowly construed. Thus, although many, many activists and political actors—perhaps even most of them—have relatively successfully advanced the cause of human prosperity and happiness, one can point to some truly egregious exceptions.

Such exceptions are likely to occur when political actors, who naturally profess to serve the common good, fail to inscribe their

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conceptions and designs within the framework of cultural and intellectual tradition. At our peril, we reject completely the customs, folkways, and thoughts of those who have gone before as we endeavor to make the world a better place. After all, if nearly all people instinctively seek to bring about the common good, then most of the collective wisdom handed down from generation to generation and especially from millennium to millennium is unlikely to be of no account. Indeed, only in modern times have some political actors believed the opposite. Of those who have actually come to power, the Bolsheviks were probably the most thoroughgoing partisans of tabula rasa. The horrors of Bolshevik governance stemmed directly from their repudiation of the precious fruits of Western political thought.

Their ideas had a genealogy stretching back to antiquity and might yield to a detailed taxonomy, though there are perhaps two principle ones: utopianism and gnosticism.[3] Both date at least to the time of the ancient Greeks and have been with us ever since. By utopianism, one may quote "making the perfect the enemy of the good," in the words of Voltaire. Generally, this involves aspiring to create a social order requiring behaviors that we humans, in our frailty, are incapable of sustaining. Gnostics typically lay claim to knowledge of the inner workings of society unavailable to most people. Neither of these means constitutes a ready or apt tool for bringing about the common good. They can instead only justify hijacking the very idea thereof. Happily, they are also quite rarely resorted to, as one would expect, if seeking the common good truly is a natural human impulse.

Yes, among the dozens of major Western political theorists, there have been very few utopians and gnostics. Hardly any at all, in fact. Plato proposed in his *Republic* a society ruled by philosopher-kings and with many rules and restrictions often contrary to human nature (for example, the abolition of property and immediate family ties among the guardians). Yet many scholars suppose that he intended the work as a heuristic or cautionary device, full of irony, and certainly not as the basis of a real-life political system. Indeed, neither Plato nor anyone else ever attempted to build such a society. Much the same can be said of the *Utopia* of St. Thomas More. Plato himself remained dissatisfied with his utopian political vision (in part because of the failure of his efforts to shepherd Dionysius II of Syracuse in the ways of philosopher-kingship), replacing it in his most mature work, the *Laws*, with a mostly practical approach to concrete problems of statecraft. One must leap ahead more than two thousand years to encounter another important thinker who seriously posits an ideal political order apparently at odds with human reality—Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778). Yet even this philosopher, while propounding his concept of a "general will" that somehow harmonizes the interests of all citizens, never purports to impose it on society by force. It is not surprising that Rousseau flourished during the Enlightenment, the first time in human history when it seemed that nearly all social problems could be resolved or at least ameliorated by reason, the era in which the very idea of progress emerged. Nor should one be astonished that utopian visions for achieving the common good proliferated in the years that followed.

Serious Western political thought has seen even fewer gnostics. On the one hand there have been the Millenarians, stretching from the first Christians, through such watchers as Joachim of Fiore (c. 1135–1202) and the Millerites and Mormons of the nineteenth century, right up to the latest believers in

various theories and predictions of the "end times." On the other hand are conspiracy theorists who believe that the true social realities lie behind a veil that only illuminati can lift. Commentators down through the ages have claimed to know of secret but determinant machinations behind the scenes of powerful agents, including Protestants, Catholics, Jews, "dark forces," and witches.

Probably the first highly influential political thinker to seek to advance the common good by appealing to both utopianism and gnosticism was Karl Marx (1818–1883). The telos for humanity that he imagined and posited—but never clearly described—was a perfect society. It would be without major socioeconomic struggle, since there would be no classes. War would never break out. Prostitution would disappear. Exploitation and oppression would be no more. The productive level would be astonishingly high, making "it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic," as he wrote in the *German Ideology* (1845).

Contrary to much common opinion, Marx believed that capitalism enormously advanced the common good. Several brief passages from the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848) will suffice to prove this point. "The bourgeoisie," he wrote, "has accomplished wonders far surpassing Egyptian pyramids, Roman aqueducts, and Gothic cathedrals." Further he notes: "The bourgeoisie has created enormous cities . . . and has rescued a considerable part of the population from the idiocy of rural life." Later still he argues that "the bourgeoisie . . . has created more massive . . . productive forces than have all the preceding generations together."

Yet Marx also believed that the bourgeois society brought into existence by the capitalist economic system profoundly alienated the entire population and corrupted social relations. Workers were torn from the means of production (and the fruits of their labors), the variety of traditional freedoms was replaced by free trade, the "proletarians became a mere commodity," family ties among workers were "torn asunder," and bourgeois men came to see their wives as "a mere instrument of production." The very values that traditionally helped people to make sense of their world had lost all their meaning for the industrial worker. "Law, morality, religion," opined Marx in the *Manifesto*, "are to him so many bourgeois prejudices."

It was at this point that Marx entered the gnostic realm. He claimed, already in the *Manifesto*, to have attained esoteric knowledge, having raised himself "to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement [of the 'proletariat'] as a whole." In the preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859), Marx argued that "the sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society—the real foundations, on which rise legal and political superstructures and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness." This was the concept of the base-superstructure duality. Contrary to Marx's materialistic pretensions, this concept is metaphysical in nature. In fact, he claimed repeatedly to apprehend the inner essence of things, the teleology of human reality, and what he called the "objective" intentions of historical actors.

Here's where Marx's gnosticism veered into conspiracy theory, as Karl Popper argued in *The Open Society and Its Enemies*.[4] Marx claimed to see behind the veil of bourgeois society and to apperceive a conspiracy of capitalist exploiters manipulating the

social, economic, political, and even cultural institutions (not as individuals but as a class). Wage labor was not what it appeared, because businessmen failed to pay workers for the full measure of their labor, extracting a "surplus value," as machines and factories merely stored up "reified" surplus labor, never mind that managers, inventors, engineers, and other nonproletarian actors added valuable inputs to the productive process. All the institutions of bourgeois society, moreover, were shams. The rule of law and jurisprudence were only bourgeois class interests "made into a law for all." Religion was "the illusory happiness of the people," the "opium of the people." The free market was a "blind force" that needed to be superseded. The liberal conception of civil rights and personal liberty were no more than a mask for the "liberty of capital freely to oppress workers."[5]

Marx's means to liberate workers from oppression and exploitation and to bring about their common good and indeed that of the vast majority of people in Europe's industrial societies was to dismantle what he considered shams and insidious tools of domination, but which for political thinkers of the Western tradition were in fact institutions painstakingly built up over centuries to prevent man's alienation, "to secure the blessings of liberty," in the words of the United States Constitution, and, ultimately, to temper the potentially crushing power of the state. Again, in the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx declares boldly that his imagined Communist society would lack "bourgeois" individuality, independence, and freedom; the free market and private property; "bourgeois" law and jurisprudence; the "bourgeois" family and marriage; "bourgeois" morality, philosophy, and religion; and nationality, nationalism, and patriotism. Thus would he give up millennia of social capital and hundreds of years of political philosophy. Politically, this meant repudiating a profound idea set out by Thomas Jefferson in 1798: "Free government is founded in jealousy, and not in confidence." In other words, he continued, "In questions of power, then, let no more be heard of confidence in man, but bind him down from mischief by the chains of the Constitution." For Marx, far more important than institutional control, limits, or guarantees was what he called socialist and class "consciousness." He did not advocate trusting individuals but rather social forces that used individuals as tools in history's inexorable movement forward. In practice, unfortunately, this amounts to the same thing. What you cannot take away from Marx, however, was his commitment to the common good. He devoted his life to seeking to promote it.

In arguing against blindly trusting individuals with political power, Jefferson evinced neither utopianism nor gnosticism. He was optimistic about constitutional government but pessimistic about man's chances for self-perfection. Humanity is fallen in some profound sense, he thought. Human individuals are selfish, greedy, and power hungry. Marx essentially disagreed. Man's species-being is not by nature fallen. The evil of the world inheres in class structures only. Jefferson was a follower of the practical early Enlightenment of Locke and Montesquieu; Marx of the utopian later Enlightenment of Rousseau.

Some Marxists, such as Eduard Bernstein (1850–1932), grasped a decade or so after Marx died that their mentor had misapprehended some key aspects of development in industrial society, including the rise of a large and influential middle class, the dynamism and flexibility of free-market capitalism, and the power and vibrancy (not the immiseration) of industrial labor. These revisionists advocated pursuing the

common good, which they still believed lay in a socialist future, by evolutionary and not revolutionary means. In fact, on the eve of World War I the doctrine and practice of revolutionary Marxism had fallen on difficult times in Europe.

This picture changed dramatically with the collapse of the Imperial Russian government and the Romanov dynasty in February 1917 (OS). Vladimir Lenin (1870–1924) had devoted his life to revolutionary Marxism and to promoting the common good, as he understood them. His older brother had been hanged for a plot to kill Emperor Alexander III. Lenin himself had spent nearly five years in prison and Siberian exile in the late 1890s and then most of the rest of his life before April 1917, living abroad in Europe, trying and hoping to bring about a revolution in Russia, seeking always to win followers and arguments. As late as January 1917, he had confessed that "we old timers will not see the revolution in our lifetime." By late October (OS), however, he was head of a revolutionary government and, shortly, a revolutionary dictator. As such, he and his closest supporters were in a position to impose on the largest country in the world, and the third most populous, the most radical vision for affecting the common good ever seriously attempted on a big scale.

What did they envision? They proposed a "revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat," following the teachings of Marx, that would act as a caregiver government until the country reached an adequate level of productive forces and revolutionary consciousness. Yet what did this mean? On the eve of coming to power, Lenin argued in "Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power?" (September 1917) that any literate person could run the day-to-day work of administering the state and that the entire population should gradually be trained to run the government. At this time, including in the major work *The State and Revolution* (August–September 1917), Lenin claimed the new government would be, essentially, of the people, by the people, and for the people. In other words, it was all about the common good and indeed an interpretation thereof that most progressively minded and liberal people of the time would laud.

Unfortunately for Russia, the proletariat did not constitute the vast majority of the population, as Marx had considered necessary for the success of a socialist revolution. On the contrary, it made up at most 3 percent. So, by November 1917, the Bolshevik party, now in power, found itself buoyed up with widespread sympathy for their promises but "objectively" supported by only a tiny fraction of the people. Civil war almost inevitably ensued. In fact, it could have been avoided only if the Bolshevik leaders had agreed to share power at the very least with most other socialists or if they had scaled back their program of revolutionary transformation. They did neither. Instead, they set about dismantling all the existing restraints on institutionalized and arbitrary power and in their place established rules limiting individual and institutional freedom and autonomy. And every step of the way, they proclaimed their devotion to the universal common good. It seems highly unlikely that these leaders would have pursued the almost complete annihilation of civil society, which according to Marx was pure sham, had they not deeply believed or at least had not been able to give a very solid appearance of believing that their policies were serving that noble end.

The Bolshevik vision of the state was reductionist: they saw it as an object that serves the interests of the class currently in power. The state would eventually "wither away" under Communism, following the

theory of Marx, but until that time it would simply be a tool of the ruling class, the proletariat. Ironically, that which was supposed to be entirely impersonal in fact grew more invested with subjective content than any Bolshevik leader could have imagined. This shift would not have surprised Jefferson, of course.

Three examples may suffice. First, one of the Bolsheviks' most dramatic early political acts was the abolition of the existing judicial system. Created by imperial fiat in 1864, it consisted of independent courts at three levels, a vigorous bar, trials by jury, and established traditions of jurisprudence. All these institutions were to be replaced by "people's courts" and "revolutionary tribunals" in which largely untrained judges would decide cases on the basis of revolutionary consciousness. Second, members of the Russian Communist Party enjoyed a personalized legal status. In practice, the judicial authorities were obligated to inform the local party committee of the arrest of any Communist. If three comrades vouched for him, then he went free. Senior party officials could be tried only by special party commissions, no matter their crimes.[6] Third, orderly political succession is among the thorniest matters of political theory and practice, yet the Bolshevik leaders seemed to have no sense of this. No rules, norms, or laws regulated political succession in Soviet Russia. Inevitably, the death of Lenin occasioned a battle royal among his likely replacements.

Ironically, Lenin himself muddied these waters before his death by declaring each of these political bigwigs in various ways inadequate, from Bukharin to Trotsky. It is ironic also that a regime aiming at impersonal rule should have produced instead arbitrary rule by an army of officials. Yet how could it have been otherwise in the absence of any clear constitutional, legal, or institutional norms? The result, in any event, as Lenin and other Bolshevik leaders repeatedly lamented, was a highly inefficient governmental system. As a leading socialist statistician who worked in the cooperative movement and then for the People's Commissariat for Agriculture until 1922, Aleksei Peshekhonov, recalled, the Communist leadership constantly "restructured" "at all levels" and "in all forms" every bureaucratic agency and thereby "completely destroyed" them.[7] A bit of hyperbole perhaps, but the Bolsheviks would not have so continuously reorganized these institutions had they not believed that their policies should promote efficiency and in a general sense the common good.

The same was true, and even more obviously so, of the economy. Over the first few years of their rule, the Bolsheviks attempted systematically to abolish private property and the market, beginning with the nationalization of land, upon coming to power, and proceeding with large businesses, urban real estate, small businesses, financial instruments, and much more. Meanwhile, the selling of agricultural produce on the open market and trading pretty much anything privately were largely banned. By 1920 many common services, including public transportation, utilities, and postage, were made free to large segments of the public and to government agencies. Moreover, the economy was moving more broadly, or so the leadership hoped, toward the complete abolition of money. All these measures, so clearly intended to raise the country's productive capacity and foster the common good, left Russia destitute.

Before the revolution, some leading Bolshevik activists, including Lenin himself, had opposed providing relief to victims of starvation. The existing political order, according to Lenin, made famine inevitable. Feeding the hungry would only

help maintain the system, whereas starvation would drive people to overthrow it. In this sense famine played a "progressive role."[8] Lenin's Bolshevik government, three decades later, opposed private philanthropic organizations as a matter of principle. As one government official opined, "In the socialist state, there is no place for private charity."[9] Most such institutions were nationalized or outlawed, for example the Russian Red Cross, whose 149 hospitals were taken over by the state.[10]

When famine struck in summer 1921, the government refused to allow either intellectuals or religious leaders to organize relief. In fact, Lenin gave explicit orders in August to arrest, jail, and/or exile the well-known liberal members of a private committee for famine relief and to mock them systematically in the press for alleged selfishness.[11] The government's struggles "on the hunger front," which included seizing church valuables ostensibly for feeding the hungry but relatively little actual famine relief, involved a propaganda barrage to the effect that every action and each policy of the state in this regard was directed toward the common good, be it the building of socialism, the feeding of the starving, or the punishing of enemies of the people.

The dismantling of existing political and economic institutions was intended to pave the way toward reliance on supposedly more effective, progressive, and fair methods of organizing society, especially revolutionary consciousness. Here was the core value and silver bullet of Communism. Unfortunately there is no such thing on earth, at least not in a sustained and reliable manifestation. Certainly the leadership, to its dismay, encountered much selfishness, inefficiency, pursuit of particular interests, and other signs of "counterrevolutionary consciousness." They explained this enormous problem by arguing, in the words of a senior Cheka (VChK) official, that the "powerful Russian giant, which held within itself sufficient strength to shake the earthly sphere, was unable to overthrow the bourgeois class, which like a vampire sucked at its ease the life juices of the people."[12] He thought that the best way to tackle this problem was with the secret police. Indeed, he proposed that "*each citizen should be both a Red Armyman and a collaborator with the Cheka*."[13]

Lenin himself echoed this view but also found, on some occasions, that even the Cheka could not be trusted to root out counterrevolutionaries; then he proposed relying on a "good Communist," for "if it is a good Communist, and a good Communist is a good Chekist," then he'll get the job done.[14] I suppose it is clear that the Bolsheviks ended up in something of a quandary: they could not be sure of almost anyone doing the right thing. Where, then, was the vaunted revolutionary consciousness? Early on they grasped that it had to be inculcated from without.

As one Communist pedagogue wrote, "It is necessary to educate the child in such a way that he will achieve happiness only by being a socialist. To speak more colorfully, it is necessary to tune the strings of the human soul in such a way that these strings create harmony only when playing the melody of the socialist order."[15] Or, in the words of Anatoly Lunacharsky, the commissar for enlightenment, "Each person must think as WE, must become a living, useful corresponding organ or part of this WE." Such training, he insisted, should begin at age five.[16] Indeed, the Eighth Party Congress in March 1919 defined schools in Soviet Russia as "an instrument for the Communistic regeneration [*pererozhdenie*] of society."[17] Yet, according to Nikolai Bukharin, education should be viewed in the broader context of "proletarian coercion in all its forms,"

which together constitute "a method for the development [*vyrabotka*] of a communistic humanity from human material of the capitalist period."[18] As Trotsky noted in 1923, however, raising the cultural level of the workers and peasants to a sufficiently high level would take a long time.[19]

While they were waiting for a new Soviet man to emerge, the new leaders relied on various forms of social, political, economic, and cultural control. Ultimately these mechanisms became the mainstay and chief hallmarks of the Soviet system. Few aspects of life escaped surveillance and direction by the institutions and agencies that arose for this purpose. For example, in early 1922 the GPU (the successor to the VChK), on orders from the Politburo, undertook to establish surveillance bureaus in "each state, public, cooperative, and private institution or enterprise, as well as in institutions of higher learning." The bureaus, staffed by loyal Communists, should "report systematically on any anti-Soviet or counterrevolutionary phenomena, must study all personnel for political unreliability," and must help informants of the GPU to join the institution.[20]

While government control pervaded society, including religious institutions, food supply, physical movement within the country, political organizations, the press and literature, and art and music, the extent of its institutionalized control may be grasped by considering the condition of blue-collar and white-collar workers. Beginning in spring 1918, key Bolshevik leaders occasionally referred to a "universal labor obligation" for all of Soviet society. Indeed, the country's first constitution, promulgated in summer 1918, proclaimed such a legal regime, though in this early period it was resorted to only sporadically,[21] for example, in regard to members of the former upper classes forced to clean latrines or to carry out other humiliating tasks, mostly for show.

Lenin himself wrote in late March 1918 that "from a labor obligation as applied to the rich, the authorities should move to, or rather simultaneously pose the task, of using corresponding principles in regard to the majority of laboring workers and peasants." In order to enforce these rules, he continued, special industrial courts were necessary with the right to impose prison sentences for "infractions of labor discipline."[22] Already in December 1918 a minor employee in a Moscow-based steamer company noted in his diary that life had "to a tragic level [become] unfree." One was afraid of being late for work, of leaving work early, and of failing to attend political meetings and rallies on pain of losing one's job.[23]

Surely, one would think, the trade unions, which had grown so vibrant and dynamic in 1917, would protect the rights and interests of Soviet labor. As the Bolshevik leader Grigory Zinoviev explained at the All-Russia Congress of Trade Unions in early January 1918, however,

> We have overthrown the power of the bourgeoisie, and at the moment when the working class together with the poorest peasantry has achieved the transfer of power to the working class, when your unions have become an element of government, what is the substantive meaning of their independence right now? According to the representatives of the rightwing, the substantive meaning of their independence constitutes independence from the Soviets of Workers' and Peasants' Deputies for the purpose of supporting saboteurs and supporting those who are fighting against the worker-peasant government, for the purpose of supporting those

> who are organizing strikes against the working class "in the name of" the sacred right to strike and the freedom of association.[24]

His principal meaning was this—and this idea cropped up again and again in early Bolshevik times—the state was proletarian and defended the interests of the workers and of the poorest peasants, and therefore it would be absurd for the latter to organize against it. In other terms, the government by its very nature and because it was imbued with revolutionary consciousness was pursuing the common good and thus could not be questioned in any meaningful way.

Indeed, because the state belonged to the people, serving the state loyally became everyone's primary obligation. Thus, in late 1919 and early 1920, Trotsky advocated what he called the "militarization of labor" as the only available means by which to rebuild the country's industrial base after six years of world war and civil war.[25] A decree of February 1920, though never fully implemented, established a periodic obligation to work outside one's own field, for example in the harvest, in construction, and, in the case of peasants, in providing cartage and snow removal. Local agencies were ordered to organize peasants into units of three hundred, ready to act on any and all orders. According to Trotsky, this apparatus of labor duty should teach the peasant masses that the new regime obligates them to lend the state a part of their labor as an installment toward services it will be receiving from the Soviet state, such as culture and education.[26]

The party leaders viewed any avoidance of one's labor obligations as a grave offense. Again, it only harmed the workers themselves and their state. At the Ninth Party Congress (March 29–April 5, 1920), the leadership discussed how to fight "labor desertion," which meant being absent from one's job. They concluded that interning "labor deserters" in the newly created concentration camps would be a reasonable punishment.[27]

It is not surprising that non-Bolshevik political activists viewed matters differently. Later in April, at the Third Congress of Trade Unions, several Mensheviks spoke out. Rafail Abramovich in particular put it this way: "If socialism requires the militarization of labor and coercing people, how different is it from [ancient] Egypt?" In reply Trotsky argued that "man seeks to avoid work. Man is a rather lazy animal. The very principle of labor obligation has replaced the free labor market, just as the socialization of production replaced capitalist property."[28] Again, restraints on the freedom of labor were justified by reference to the long-term goal of building socialism—that is, to bringing about the common good.

Although both Marx and Lenin suggested that industrial workers were the key element in the capitalist economy, and that mechanization and rationalization had simplified most administrative tasks, the Bolshevik leadership was very keen to draw technical experts into the building of socialism. Lenin rejected, therefore, the idea of "building Communist society with Communist hands" as "a childish idea," since "Communists are a drop in the sea of people."

Instead, Communists needed to proceed "with other hands," learning from the bourgeoisie, directing them on the path forward.[29] Even former employers and military officers with reputations as exploiters and oppressors had to be recruited if they also possessed valuable technical expertise.[30]

Experts had no choice about serving the new state. For one thing, people with every imaginable expertise were periodically required to register with the authorities: teachers, agronomists, artists, dentists,

doctors, military officers—the list was endless. Thus an order of the Council of People's Commissars of January 1919 threatened with "severe punishment" anyone possessing any agricultural training who failed to register with the authorities and to accept any work.[31] Similarly, in December 1920, in connection with his plan for the full-scale electrification of the country, Lenin ordered "the mobilization of all without exception engineers, physicists, and mathematicians" to provide "no less than two lectures per week" on the theory and practice of electric power. Failure to do so would land the recalcitrant in prison.[32] Given such alternatives, it was extremely difficult to refuse to work for the government or indeed for any of its agencies. Aleksei Peshekhonov recalled a statistician in Ukraine whom the local Cheka arrested and jailed. Each day he was taken to the Cheka headquarters to work. Eventually they offered him his freedom in exchange for a permanent job with the security police.[33]

Nor would such experts be granted free rein once they were on the job. Each military officer had a shadow, called a political commissar, who analyzed and verified his every policy decision. Take the Eastern Front commander in chief, Mikhail Muravyov. A brilliant military officer, the Bolsheviks needed his talent but distrusted him. Thus, in early July 1918, Lenin demanded "triple control" over him, meaning in this case three experienced and forceful Bolshevik "handlers." "Never leave him even for a second," Lenin warned. They were playing with fire: a few days later Muravyov mutinied.[34]

The higher one's responsibility in the system and the more open to competing temptations, the more pressure and control. On February 19, 1919, the Central Executive Committee decreed that government officials (*rabotniki*) could be taken hostage if they failed to carry out certain duties.[35] Diplomatic personnel posed the greatest dangers and therefore faced the tightest supervision. As an order of September 1920 warned, "A diplomatic mission should be like a military fortress organized in such a way, internally and externally, that . . . each permanent participant in the work of the mission must be seen as a possible traitor, and each visitor a possible spy." Employees of the mission, therefore, must have "a solid anchor back in Russia in the form of family and close people . . . [who] can be considered hostages."[36]

Leading scientific experts were themselves transformed into something like hostages to the Soviet state. In November 1920, for example, the Central Committee of the Swedish Red Cross asked Lenin to allow the Nobel laureate in physiology, Ivan Pavlov, to move to Sweden, "where he could continue his work in quiet and favorable conditions." Lenin was willing to improve his material conditions, to order state publishers to put out his works, to outfit his personal apartment and his laboratory with "maximum convenience," and to give his family special rations. Yet, in February 1921, Lenin formally rejected the Swedish proposal. "Soviet Russia is engaged in intensive development," he insisted, "which requires the cooperation of exceptional minds like Pavlov."[37] For the common good of building socialism in Russia, in other words, Pavlov could not be allowed to leave.

During periodic sweeps by the Cheka, for example in fall 1919, hundreds of scientists, scholars, professors, and technical experts landed in jail. As Lenin warned at this time, in the face of dangers posed by intellectuals allied with liberal conspirators, it was "better for dozens and hundreds of intellectuals to spend a few little days and weeks in jail than for 10,000s of workers to be killed. Far, far better."[38] This was a standard theme: the

government might prefer not to imprison scientists and scholars, but pursuing the common good sometimes required it. More than that, it was necessary to root out saboteurs, foot draggers, and other miscreants among experts pressed into service. Even trivial matters could seem like high crimes, when the common good of the first proletarian revolution was at stake. Thus, if Soviet publications failed to end up in libraries, then, as Lenin railed, "we have to know precisely whom to imprison." Or employees "slowly filling out the paperwork for [the acquisition of] water turbines" must be "hunted down and driven into prison," again in the words of Lenin.[39]

What conclusions can one draw from the foregoing? First, that we humans have an innate tendency to seek the common good, and that political actors and theorists, generally speaking, promise to promote it. In other words, their intentions are almost always good. Second, however, intentions need to be backed up by a careful and respectful study of the great works of political philosophy. The profound arrogance that attends thinkers who willfully disregard the painstaking efforts of those who came before often dooms their projects to failure. After all, if humans instinctively seek the common good, then the totality of a given people's thoughts, traditions, and values cannot possibly be useless or invalid. If nearly all political philosophers have concluded, for example, that humans are not perfectible, then the chances are very limited that they should all be wrong. Third, when one nevertheless discounts such accumulated wisdom in pursuit of the common good, then forcing an entire people into the Procrustean bed of one's theory will necessarily require dramatic coercion, and in any event cannot succeed. Finally, the regime that provides the most goods and services imposes the greatest demands on its people. By giving individuals everything, it can legitimately demand total loyalty.

1 *Politics*, 1253a, 9. In the *Ethics*, he added that "no one would choose to have all of the good things of the world in solitude, for man is a social and political being and his natural condition is to live with others." See *Nichomachean Ethics*, 1169b, 19.

2 A draft of this article was presented at a conference at the University of Notre Dame in 2008. I should like to thank Mike Westrate and his colleagues for inviting me and Notre Dame for making my visit possible. I dedicate this article to Gerhart Niemeyer, my first intellectual mentor.

3 By "gnosticism," I do not mean the ancient sects but a modern attitude toward the world. On the former, see Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, 3d ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001); on the latter, Gerhart Niemeyer provides an intimation in "Loss of Reality: Gnosticism and Modern Nihilism," in Gerhart Niemeyer, *Aftersight and Foresight: Selected Essays*, forward by William F. Buckley Jr., introduction by Michael Henry (Lanham, MD, and London: University Press of America, 1988).

4 Karl Raimund Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, 2 vols., 5th ed. (London: Routledge, 2003), 2:94–96.

5 These quotations appear in various of Marx's works, including the *Communist Manifesto* and *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (1843). In general, see Andrzej Walicki, *Marxism and the Leap to the Kingdom of Freedom: The Rise and Fall of the Communist Utopia* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 15. Cf. V. I. Lenin: "What they call liberty is liberty to make profit, liberty for the few to become rich, the liberty of the trade turnover" (speech at the First All-Russia Congress of Workers in Education and Socialist Culture," July 31, 1919, from *V. I. Lenin, Collected Works*, 4th English ed. [Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965], 533).

6 L. N. Lutov, *Nachalo NEPa v provintsii: Simbirskaia gubernia, 1921–1923 gg.* (Ul'ianovskii gos. universitet, 2002), 76–77.

7 A. V. Peshekhonov, *Pochemu ia ne emigriroval* (Berlin: Obelisk, 1923), 24.

8 Evgenii Gusliarov, *Lenin v zhizni: Sistematizirovannyi svod vospominanii sovremennikov, dokumentov epokhi, versii istorikov* (Moscow: OLMA-PRESS, 2004), 74. Similarly, Marx believed that the slave-holding system in America was "progressive." For a clash of ideas among Bolsheviks about prerevolutionary famine relief, see K. Ostroukhova, "Bol'shevistskaia gazeta 'Zvezda,'" *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia* 8, nos. 11–12 (1928): 135–48 (here: 144).

9 Z. Iu. Arbatov, "Ekaterinoslav, 1917–1922 g.g.," in *Arkhiv russkoi revoliutsii*, ed. I. V. Gessen, 22 vols. (Berlin: G. V. Gessen, 1923), 12:105.

10 *Russkii krasnyi krest posle 1917 goda: Ocherk deiatel'nosti Rossiiskogo Obshchestva Krasnogo Kresta (Staraia organizatsiia)* (Paris: Rapid-Imprimerie, 1925), 5–19.

11 Letter of Lenin to Stalin, August 26, 1921, cited in *P. I. Negretov, comp., V. G. Korolenko: V gody revoliutsii i grazhdanskoi voiny, 1917–1921: Biograficheskaia khronika* (Benson, VT: Chalidze Publications, 1985), 361; Politburo resolution, August 27, 1921, cited in Dmitrii Volkogonov, *Lenin: Politicheskii portret*, 2 vols. (Moscow: Novosti, 1994), 2:206.

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13 Ibid., 82 (italics in original).
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15 A. Sventsitskii, cited in V. A. Shishkin et al., eds., *Petrograd na perelome epokh: Gorod i ego zhiteli v gody revoliutsii i grazhdanskoi voiny* (St. Petersburg: Dmitrii Bulanin, 2000), 290.
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26 L. N. Litoshenko, *Sotsializatsiia zemli v Rossii* (Novosibirisk: Sibirskii khronograf, 2001; first published in Moscow: Narodnoe pravo, 1918), 302–5.
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29 Cited in D. L. Golinkov, *Krushenie antisovetskogo podpol'ia v SSSR*, 2 vols. (Moscow: Politicheskaia literatura, 1978), 2:156.
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32 Sidorovnin, ed., *Vozhd*,' 138.
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34 L. V. Gorokhova, S. S. Elizarova, and L. N. Titov, eds., *Kazanskaia gubernskaia Chrezvychainaia komissiia (1917–122): Sbornik dokumentov i materialov* (Kazan': Tatarskoe kn. izd-vo., 1989), 25, 26n.
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