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# Etceteras . . .

ONE OF THE WEARIEST CLICHÉS in political discourse is Pogo's observation that "we have met the enemy, and he is us." Again and again, mercilessly, commentators and pundits deliver the melancholy conclusion that it is pointless to complain about the government because, in a democracy, "we are the government." Among the most recent authors to fall back on this exhausted bromide is Hillary Rodham Clinton, who observes in *It Takes a Village* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996, p. 312) that "government is not something outside us"—it "is us."

Now, if this observation were correct, most of us would be certifiable lunatics by virtue of what "we" are doing to "ourselves." Of course, any adult with an IQ above 70 understands that, in the great multitude of instances, "we" are not coextensive with the government. Most of us are not masochists.

Breaking loose from the high-school-civics conception of government ought to be the first step of one's education in political science. Even the dictionary can help. The Random House Dictionary defines government as "the political direction and control exercised over the actions of the members, citizens, or inhabitants of communities, societies, and states," or simply "political administration." This definition is helpful as far as it goes; at least it hints that where there is government, someone exercises direction and control over someone else. Still, a dictionary definition cannot reveal the blood-and-steel reality of the "administration" involved in governing.

The most vivid and truthful description I have come across—one guaranteed to cure anyone suffering from acceptance of the Pogo fallacy—was penned by the French socialist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon in the mid-nineteenth century. Proudhon took the literal approach:

To be GOVERNED is to be kept in sight, inspected, spied upon, directed, law-driven, numbered, enrolled, indoctrinated, preached at, controlled, estimated, valued, censured, commanded, by creatures who have neither the right, nor the wisdom, nor the virtue to do so. To be GOVERNED is to be at every operation, at every transaction, noted, registered, enrolled, taxed, stamped, measured, numbered, assessed, licensed, authorized, admonished, forbidden, reformed, corrected, punished. It is, under pretext of public utility, and in the name of the general interest, to be placed under contribution, trained, ransomed, exploited, monopolized,

extorted, squeezed, mystified, robbed; then, at the slightest resistance, the first word of complaint, to be repressed, fined, despised, harassed, tracked, abused, clubbed, disarmed, choked, imprisoned, judged, condemned, shot, deported, sacrificed, sold, betrayed; and, to crown all, mocked, ridiculed, outraged, dishonored. That is government; that is its justice; that is its morality.

And all that before the tremendous growth of government during the past 150 years!

For calling this passage to my attention, I am grateful to Deirdre McCloskey. The source is P.-J. Proudhon, *General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. John Beverley Robinson (London: Freedom Press, 1923), p. 294. I will personally pay \$20 to anyone who sends me a better description of government.

ROBERT HIGGS

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### Correction

The editor regrets that two changes requested by Irving Louis Horowitz were not made in his paper, "Culture, Politics, and McCarthyism," in volume I, number 1. On p. 104, "Charles Westoff" should have been "Norman Ryder." On p. 106, the sentence referring to Leo Strauss's observation should have read as follows: "We should recognize the importance of Leo Strauss's observations in *Persecution and the Art of Writing about the relationship of culture and oppression: that it may serve as a stimulant to creativity.*"

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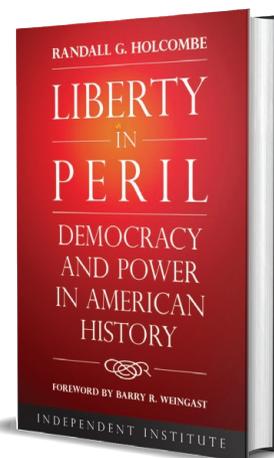
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