

# The State as a Threat to Life, Liberty, Property, and the Pursuit of Happiness

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## **Abstract**

The state, by its very nature, poses a constant threat to life, liberty, property, and the pursuit of happiness. Through its monopoly on power, the state imposes laws, taxes, and regulations that restrict individual freedoms, control resources, and redistribute wealth. Its bureaucratic expansion leads to overreach, coercion, and the erosion of personal autonomy. The state's involvement in wars, surveillance, and economic control undermines the very rights it claims to protect. In practice, the state often prioritizes its own growth and power, disregarding the welfare and freedom of individuals, turning liberty into a tool for maintaining control.

## **1 The relationship between the state and private property has long been fraught with tension**

While classical liberalism and libertarianism argue that private property is a fundamental right, essential for individual freedom and prosperity, the state's involvement in property rights is far from straightforward. In fact, the state often functions in ways that undermine or restrict private property, sometimes even directly contravening the very principles of private ownership it claims to uphold. The power of the state to regulate, confiscate, or redistribute private property has been central to the workings of many governmental systems, especially those with a strong bureaucratic apparatus. This reality reveals a complicated and often contradictory relationship between the state and private property. The following is a deeper exploration of how the state can be seen as at odds with the very notion of private ownership.

One of the most direct ways in which the state can be considered antagonistic to private property is through its power of expropriation, also known as eminent domain. This power allows the state to seize private property for purposes deemed to be in the public interest, such as building infrastructure or expanding public works. In many cases, property owners may receive minimal compensation for their loss, and in some instances, the justification for seizing property can be ambiguous or questionable. The state's power to expropriate

can be seen as a direct challenge to the concept of private ownership, as it effectively removes the right of individuals to fully control their own land or assets. Critics of this practice argue that it allows the state to violate property rights under the guise of public benefit, with the state's interests often trumping those of the individual property owner.

The state's involvement in wealth redistribution further complicates the relationship with private property. Redistribution often takes place through mechanisms like taxation, welfare programs, and social policies, which involve the state taking resources from one group and redistributing them to another. Progressive taxation, for instance, takes a higher percentage of wealth from wealthier individuals and redistributes it to fund public services or welfare programs. While the intent behind these policies is often to reduce inequality and provide for the public good, they can also be seen as a violation of private property rights. The act of taxation involves taking property from one person to give to another, often without the direct consent of the individual whose property is being taken. Critics argue that this form of redistribution infringes upon individuals' right to enjoy the full benefits of their property, and in some cases, reduces their ability to create wealth independently.

In totalitarian or socialist systems, the state's role in regulating property is even more direct and invasive. The state often takes control over the means of production and distribution, negating private ownership altogether. This can occur through policies of nationalization, where entire industries or sectors—such as energy, transportation, or telecommunications—are taken over by the state. In these systems, the notion of private property is systematically undermined, as the state effectively owns all resources, leaving individuals with no meaningful control over their assets. In communist regimes, for example, the state's control extends across nearly all aspects of the economy, from land to factories, eliminating private ownership of these critical resources. Citizens in such regimes are left with no claim to property beyond their personal effects, making it clear that the state's power is fundamentally at odds with the traditional concept of private property.

Even in more democratic systems, where private property is generally respected, the state's regulation of property can still be seen as an infringement upon owners' rights. Through laws and regulations, the state often dictates how property can be used, developed, or transferred. While some regulation is necessary—such as building codes, zoning laws, and environmental protections—excessive or arbitrary regulation can significantly limit an owner's ability to fully exercise their rights over their property. Zoning laws, for example, can prevent individuals from using their land or property as they see fit. A homeowner might be prohibited from turning their house into a commercial property, even if there is no harm done to the community. Such restrictions can be seen as a violation of property rights, as the state imposes limits on how individuals can use the property they own, dictating what is or is not permissible even in areas where no harm is caused.

Similarly, environmental regulations can restrict how landowners use their property, particularly if the government deems certain land uses harmful to the

environment. While such regulations may be well-intentioned, the imposition of these rules can be seen as an infringement on the individual's ability to fully develop or use their property in the way they wish. In some cases, property owners are prohibited from developing their land in certain ways or forced to make changes to their property that they might not agree with. These regulations, though often framed as necessary for public health or the environment, can undermine the principle of private property by giving the state undue control over how and when private property is used.

Another significant way the state can undermine private property is through its control over monetary policy and its ability to print money or run deficits, which can lead to inflation. Inflation erodes the value of money, which directly affects the purchasing power of individuals' wealth and property. Essentially, the state can reduce the real value of private property through inflation without ever having to formally confiscate or expropriate it. Inflation is often described as a hidden tax on property, as it diminishes the real value of savings and investments, particularly those held in currency. This dynamic represents a direct contradiction of the principles of private property, as the state's monetary policies can lead to a diminution in the value of the property that individuals have worked to accumulate.

The state's monopoly on force is another critical aspect of its relationship with private property. The state not only has the power to regulate and control property but also determines how property rights are enforced and defended. In many cases, the state's power can be used selectively to protect the property rights of the wealthy and the powerful, while disregarding the interests of ordinary citizens. Legal systems and police forces often act in ways that favor those with political or economic power, ensuring that the state serves the interests of a select few rather than the general public. This creates an inequality in how property rights are defended, with the state's legal apparatus often prioritizing the interests of corporations, elites, or government officials over the rights of ordinary people.

Finally, the state's welfare policies, particularly in systems that provide extensive social services, can weaken the concept of private property by making individuals more dependent on the state rather than self-sufficient. As the state provides for citizens' needs—such as healthcare, housing, and education—it reduces the incentive for individuals to use their own property and resources to meet those needs. People become less inclined to maintain or improve their property when they rely on the state to meet their basic needs. This shift from personal responsibility to reliance on state assistance diminishes the role of private property as a source of personal freedom and economic security.

In many authoritarian or socialist regimes, the state often monopolizes land and resources, further limiting private ownership. In these systems, the government holds the ultimate claim over land and resources, leaving little or no meaningful property rights for citizens. For instance, in communist states, land is often nationalized, meaning individuals cannot own property in the traditional sense. Instead, the state holds the rights to land and resources, and citizens are left with little control over what they possess. This creates a tension between the

state's control over land and the notion of private property, as the government dictates who has access to land and resources.

The state's complex relationship with private property reveals its inherent contradictions. Whether through expropriation, regulation, inflation, or redistribution, the state's actions often work in opposition to the concept of private ownership. For advocates of anarcho-capitalism and minimal government, this presents a fundamental argument against the legitimacy of the state. They argue that private property can only be truly protected in a system that minimizes or eliminates government interference, allowing individuals to freely control and benefit from their property without the threat of state coercion. The state's repeated encroachment on private property, whether through direct seizure or indirect means, demonstrates the fundamental incompatibility between the ideals of private property and the expansionist nature of the state.

## **2 The state, by its very nature, is expansionist— both in terms of its power and its reach into the lives of citizens.**

While political systems like that of the United States claim to be built upon ideals such as the protection of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, the state, particularly through its bureaucratic apparatus, often undermines these rights, expanding its control at the expense of individual freedoms and even human lives. The very nature of the state is to consolidate power, and throughout history, this consolidation has often led to the erosion of personal liberties and the degradation of lives both domestically and abroad. The state's ability to extend its authority and reach into the lives of citizens represents a constant danger to personal freedom, as it evolves into an increasingly powerful and intrusive entity.

One of the ways the state fosters this expansion is through its bureaucratic apparatus and the centralization of power. The structure of the state inherently encourages bureaucrats to expand their own authority. Bureaucrats, by virtue of their roles in administering and enforcing laws, have a built-in incentive to increase their scope of control, often leading to overreach into areas that were once considered private or individual domains. This expansion of state power is not always about increasing efficiency or better organizing public services, but reflects the fundamental desire of the state to centralize authority and consolidate power into the hands of a few. Over time, bureaucracies grow larger and more complex, which in turn grants the state ever greater control over people's lives. In the U.S., for example, the administrative state has become one of the most powerful entities, making decisions that affect virtually every aspect of life, from economic policies to healthcare to education. Instead of merely protecting rights, the growth of the state results in excessive regulation and interference in private affairs, restricting individuals' freedom and autonomy in ways that often go unnoticed.

The state often justifies its growing influence as a necessary means for public good or maintaining social order, yet the resulting laws and policies often suppress individual freedom rather than promote it. Bureaucratic intervention into personal lives and decisions frequently leads to unintended consequences such as social inequalities, economic disruptions, and an erosion of personal liberties. In the United States, the government's involvement in systems such as welfare, criminal justice, and education can often lead to poor outcomes that disproportionately affect marginalized communities. For example, bureaucratic policies that limit economic opportunities or restrict individual mobility contribute to poverty, stagnation, and a sense of helplessness among many citizens. These policies often reinforce the power dynamics that allow the state to maintain control over its population, suppressing the freedoms it purports to protect. The welfare state and policies meant to manage social issues often wind up creating dependency and limiting the ability of individuals to build self-sufficiency, further centralizing the power of the state while reducing the individual's control over their own destiny.

Perhaps one of the most glaring ways the state fails to protect life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness is through its involvement in war—both domestic and foreign. Throughout history, states have been expansionist, seeking not only to grow their political territory but also their influence globally. This expansion often leads to violent conflicts, with millions of lives lost and entire societies devastated in the name of imperialism or national security. In the U.S., the state's foreign interventions—such as the Vietnam War, Iraq War, and the ongoing conflicts in Afghanistan—have resulted in the deaths of millions of civilians and soldiers, as well as the destruction of entire countries. These wars are often justified by state officials under the guise of promoting freedom or defending national security, but the end result has been the loss of countless lives, including the very lives the state claims to protect. The state's imperial ambitions often mask its true desire for power, the acquisition of resources, and the projection of influence. Instead of securing the welfare of its citizens, the state's expansionist tendencies typically lead to unnecessary violence and destruction, far from the ideals it professes.

As the state expands its reach, so too does its ability to monitor and control its population. With advancements in technology, the state has gained unprecedented capabilities to track and surveil its citizens. This ever-expanding surveillance state represents a significant erosion of privacy and civil liberties. Politicians and bureaucrats often justify these measures as being necessary for public safety or national security, but they usually represent a deeper intrusion into the daily lives of citizens. Programs like PRISM and the Patriot Act in the U.S., for example, allowed the government to collect vast amounts of personal data without consent, violating individuals' right to privacy. The state's ever-growing surveillance apparatus doesn't merely seek to protect citizens; it serves to control and monitor them. This control over citizens' private lives consolidates power in the hands of the government and its bureaucrats, leaving individuals at the mercy of an all-seeing, all-knowing state.

Along with its reach into citizens' private lives, the state also exerts con-

siderable control over the economy and property rights. While the state claims to protect private property, its involvement in economic systems through taxation, regulation, and monetary policy often undermines the very idea of private ownership. Taxation is one of the most contentious tools the state uses to redistribute wealth. Progressive taxation systems, which aim to take a larger share of wealth from the rich to fund public services, are seen by some as a form of coercive wealth redistribution, eroding the property rights of individuals. In addition, government regulation of markets—whether through labor laws, business regulations, or environmental restrictions—limits the ability of individuals to use their property as they see fit. These policies often benefit the state and entrenched interests at the expense of private individuals, further consolidating the state's control over the economy. Even more insidiously, inflationary policies such as money printing or deficit spending can undermine the value of private property. By increasing the money supply, the government can erode the purchasing power of savings and wealth, essentially taxing property without any explicit legal action. This reduces the real value of private assets, making it harder for individuals to protect their wealth and maintain control over their property.

State bureaucrats often act out of self-interest, seeking to expand their power and influence rather than serve the people they are supposed to protect. This leads to a perpetuation of inefficiency and corruption, as bureaucrats and politicians work to increase their own scope of authority and influence, often at the expense of the public good. Bureaucracies, once established, tend to grow larger and more powerful, even when their growth becomes inefficient or detrimental to the population. A stark example of this is the military-industrial complex in the U.S., where corporations and military contractors benefit from government spending on defense, often at the cost of domestic needs or peaceful diplomatic solutions. These military contractors and politicians benefit directly from ongoing military engagements, whether or not they are in the best interest of the public. In these instances, bureaucrats act more like self-serving elites, expanding the scope of the state to perpetuate their own influence and wealth, even at the expense of the broader population.

In many instances, the state serves not the interests of the people, but of the elites—corporate, financial, or political. Through its bureaucratic structures, the state often protects the privileges of the powerful, using its monopoly on force and its legal system to maintain the status quo. For example, during the 2008 financial crisis, the state intervened to bail out large corporations and banks, using taxpayer money to cover the costs of corporate failures while ordinary citizens were left to suffer the consequences of their poor economic policies. Corporate bailouts have shown that, rather than serving the people, the state often acts to preserve the wealth and power of the elite, further entrenching the divide between the powerful and the powerless.

Thus, the state, particularly in its expansionist and bureaucratic form, often undermines the very principles it claims to protect—life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Instead of safeguarding individual freedom, the state often acts as a force of coercion, oppression, and destruction. Its tendency to expand power

through bureaucratic control, surveillance, militarism, and economic intervention erodes personal freedoms, leading to violence, injustice, and the erosion of personal rights. The state's promise of protecting these fundamental rights is frequently undermined by its own nature, as it seeks to expand its control at the expense of the individual.

### **3 Corruption is, by its very nature, an inherent characteristic of the state.**

The state's control over economic, legal, and political systems creates a fertile ground for corruption to flourish, as it gives those in power the ability to manipulate resources, laws, and privileges to benefit their own interests. This corruption is not just a series of isolated acts of dishonesty or bribery; rather, it is embedded within the very structure of state authority. The consolidation of power within the state often leads to the creation of a system where the interests of the few—often the bureaucrats and elites—are prioritized over the needs and rights of the broader population.

At its core, the state's monopoly on force and coercion provides a means for individuals in positions of power to manipulate the system for their own gain. Since the state holds the ultimate authority to enforce laws, impose taxes, and regulate economic activity, those in power can use these tools to secure personal wealth, reward loyal supporters, and punish political enemies. This system of power creates a perverse incentive where the goal of many in power is not to serve the public good but to accumulate wealth and consolidate control. Bureaucrats and politicians, knowing that they can shape laws and policies to their benefit, may engage in practices such as bribery, kickbacks, nepotism, and patronage to maintain their grip on power. This dynamic leads to the creation of a corrupt system, where the public good is subordinated to the interests of the ruling class.

One of the key reasons corruption is so prevalent in the state is the centralization of power. When a small group of individuals or institutions hold significant control over vast aspects of society, the potential for corruption multiplies. Bureaucracies, which are designed to manage the state's affairs, are inherently prone to self-perpetuation. As bureaucrats grow their departments and accumulate more power, they often become more focused on preserving their own authority rather than serving the needs of the people. This leads to an increase in inefficiency and lack of accountability, as corruption becomes entrenched within state systems. For example, in highly centralized systems, bureaucrats may engage in rent-seeking behavior, where they extract economic rents from the system without contributing to its productive activities. Rather than improving services or governance, they may focus on maintaining their own privileges by manipulating regulations, laws, and resources to enrich themselves or their allies. Over time, this undermines the legitimacy of the state and the idea that it serves the public interest.

Moreover, the state's control over resources makes it a magnet for corruption. Governments are responsible for the management of large-scale resources, from natural wealth like minerals and oil to financial resources such as tax revenue and national budgets. With this control comes the ability to decide who has access to these resources, and in many cases, those in power use this authority to enrich themselves and their cronies. The process of privatization or allocation of public contracts is often where corruption becomes most visible. For instance, government contracts for infrastructure projects, military equipment, or public services can be awarded to companies with political connections rather than those best suited for the job. This creates a cycle of corruption, where state officials exploit their positions to benefit themselves and their associates, while the public ends up with subpar services and economic inefficiencies.

The lack of accountability in state systems further exacerbates corruption. In many political systems, particularly in authoritarian or semi-authoritarian regimes, the ruling class enjoys immunity from prosecution or scrutiny. The judiciary, which is supposed to hold the state accountable, is often corrupt or controlled by those in power. In such a system, even when corruption is identified, those responsible are rarely held accountable. This creates an environment where corruption becomes institutionalized, with individuals in power knowing that their actions will not lead to consequences. Even in more democratic systems, the state's size and complexity can make it difficult for citizens to monitor and hold officials accountable, resulting in a lack of transparency and a weakening of checks and balances. This lack of oversight allows corruption to thrive and become ingrained within the state's institutions.

Corruption also thrives in environments where the state's monopoly on force is used to silence dissent or political opposition. The state's ability to control law enforcement and military forces means that it can coerce or intimidate individuals who may expose corruption or advocate for reforms. Whistleblowers and activists, who seek to reveal unethical practices or demand accountability, are often targeted by the state, facing harassment, imprisonment, or even violence. In such regimes, the people have no effective means of challenging corruption, and as a result, it becomes normalized. The state's use of force to maintain its control creates a system where corruption flourishes without fear of reprisal, making the fight against corruption almost impossible.

The concept of corruption in the state is not limited to financial misconduct or bribery; it also extends to the ideological corruption of political systems. In many cases, state institutions that claim to promote the public good or uphold moral values are deeply compromised by corruption. Political leaders may adopt the language of human rights, democracy, or justice, while simultaneously engaging in oppressive policies, economic exploitation, and human rights violations. The state uses its control over information and media to propagate state-approved narratives, often obscuring its corrupt actions and presenting itself as a benevolent entity. This ideological manipulation is a form of corruption that misleads the public into believing that the state is acting in their best interest, when in fact, it is serving only the interests of the elite.

Therefore, corruption is not just a byproduct of the state—it is an inherent



feature of its structure. The centralization of power, control over resources, lack of accountability, and the state's monopoly on force all create a system in which corruption can thrive. Bureaucrats and politicians are incentivized to increase their power, often at the expense of public welfare and individual freedoms. Corruption is embedded within the state, not as an anomaly, but as a natural consequence of the concentration of authority and the absence of true checks and balances. It perpetuates itself through a system that prioritizes the interests of the few over the needs of the many, creating a cycle of exploitation and inequality. Until the state's power is reduced or eliminated, corruption will remain an inevitable and destructive force that undermines the rights and dignity of individuals.

#### **4 In totalitarian states, the relationship between the state and its citizens is not just one of dominance—it is a complete subjugation of individual autonomy.**

Totalitarian regimes are defined by their absolute control over all aspects of life, with the state dictating not only the political and economic systems but also the personal behaviors and thoughts of individuals. This kind of control extends far beyond maintaining law and order; it is about total domination over every sphere of society. People live in a system where their freedom, liberty, and pursuit of happiness are completely denied, and instead, they are coerced into compliance through a combination of fear, surveillance, and repression. The state seeks to control every facet of life, from personal relationships to political expression, and uses violence, propaganda, and ideological manipulation to achieve its goals.

One of the most profound ways in which totalitarian regimes suppress freedom is through absolute control over the lives of individuals. In these systems, people are not allowed to pursue their own desires, live as they wish, or even think freely. The state's bureaucracy is empowered to dictate how citizens behave, what they believe, and even how they express themselves. Personal freedom, the cornerstone of a flourishing society, is obliterated as the state dictates everything. In the Soviet Union under Stalin, for instance, the totalitarian state not only controlled the economy but also exercised control over art, speech, and even thought, forcing citizens to conform to the state's narrative or face punishment. Anyone suspected of dissent or deviation from the state's ideals faced purges, imprisonment, or even execution. The state, under such regimes, is not merely a political entity, but a force that monopolizes power and strips individuals of their most basic rights to self-determination and personal freedom.

Totalitarian governments maintain their power through a combination of fear and intimidation. The secret police, informants, and surveillance systems work together to create a society where no one feels safe from the watchful eye

of the state. Even the slightest deviation from the accepted norm—whether in political beliefs, cultural practices, or personal actions—can result in severe punishment. This constant surveillance creates a climate of paranoia and self-censorship, where individuals no longer trust each other or even their families, as the fear of being reported to the authorities can be enough to silence dissent. In Nazi Germany, for example, the Gestapo and SS used terror to control the population, with citizens constantly living in fear of being accused of being disloyal to the regime. The threat of arbitrary punishment was so great that it crushed not only opposition but also individual creativity, expression, and the fundamental human desire for freedom.

The elimination of political opposition is another critical feature of totalitarian regimes. In such systems, there is no room for alternative views, and any form of dissent is met with brutal force. Political plurality, freedom of assembly, and free speech are completely suppressed, and individuals are punished for voicing opposition to the state. This goes beyond simply denying people the right to vote or express disagreement; in totalitarian states, any form of dissent is viewed as a threat to the state's ideological purity and legitimacy. This leads to the systematic imprisonment, torture, or execution of anyone seen as an enemy of the regime. North Korea is perhaps one of the most extreme examples of this. Under Kim Jong-un, the regime maintains absolute control over its citizens through indoctrination, brutal repression, and widespread surveillance. Dissent is not tolerated in any form, and even the slightest act of rebellion is punished harshly, often resulting in concentration camps or execution. In such a society, citizens have no rights to express their beliefs or pursue their own happiness; they are completely at the mercy of the state.

In these regimes, the state also has an absolute monopoly on information. Propaganda is used extensively to manipulate public opinion and redefine reality. The state controls the media, education, and culture, ensuring that all sources of information align with the official ideology. This control extends to all aspects of society, including art and literature, where anything that challenges the official narrative is banned. In Orwell's "1984", the idea of a totalitarian state is encapsulated in the concept of "doublethink"—the ability to believe two contradictory ideas at the same time, because the state dictates what is true. In Stalinist Russia, the government rewrote history to ensure that all discrepancies or inconsistencies with the state's narrative were erased from public consciousness. This manipulation of reality is one of the most insidious features of totalitarianism because it distorts truth, leaving citizens unable to distinguish between what is genuinely real and what is state-imposed fiction.

The state's use of violence and coercion is another defining feature of totalitarian regimes. Violence is not just an occasional tool of repression; it is a fundamental mechanism for maintaining power. Mass executions, imprisonment, torture, and the use of terror are regular practices in such states, where human life is seen as expendable if it serves the interests of the regime. Under Mao Zedong in China, the Cultural Revolution used violent struggle sessions to humiliate, attack, and sometimes kill perceived political enemies, while the Great Leap Forward led to widespread famine and death due to the govern-

ment's disastrous economic policies. These actions show how totalitarian states use violence not just to enforce law and order but to suppress entire populations, destroy opposition, and eliminate any threat to the regime's power.

Totalitarian states are often not content with controlling their own territories; they seek to expand their influence and control beyond their borders. War is frequently used as a tool of expansion, and the totalitarian regime's appetite for power can lead to disastrous military campaigns, resulting in millions of civilian deaths and the destruction of entire societies. For example, Nazi Germany's aggressive expansionist policies led to the outbreak of World War II, which resulted in the deaths of tens of millions of people, including the Holocaust of 6 million Jews. Soviet Russia, under Stalin and later leaders, similarly engaged in wars of conquest to expand its empire, with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Warsaw Pact's suppression of uprisings in Hungary and Czechoslovakia leaving countless victims in their wake. The state in these regimes is not simply about maintaining domestic order; it is about expanding its power at the expense of other nations and populations, regardless of the human cost.

The totalitarian state ultimately seeks to replace the individual's autonomy with the will of the state. It requires absolute loyalty to its ideology, and any deviation is punished with violent repression. The individual's right to freedom, self-determination, and the pursuit of happiness are secondary to the regime's desire to maintain control. In such a society, human life is reduced to a mere tool of the state's goals. Personal liberties are sacrificed for the state's expansionist ambitions, and the individual's role is reduced to serving the totalitarian agenda—a life of survival rather than freedom. The totalitarian state leaves its citizens trapped in a system that strips them of basic human rights and uses violence, manipulation, and fear to keep them subjugated.

## 5 The mirage of a minimal state

Mises, Hayek, Milton Friedman, James Buchanan, William Niskanen, Robert Nozick, and many other prominent economists and political theorists have long warned about the inherent tendency of the state to expand, and their calls for a minimal state are, in hindsight, critically flawed. While they understood the state's coercive nature and the detrimental effects of overregulation and excessive government intervention, they still promoted the idea of a minimal state, which ultimately ignores the inherent expansionary nature of government institutions.

Mises and Hayek on the State's Expansion:

Ludwig von Mises and Friedrich Hayek, both leading figures in the Austrian School, recognized the state's tendency to grow and centralize power. They understood that the centralization of power within the state often led to inefficiency, corruption, and the erosion of individual freedoms. Mises, in particular, argued that the state would gradually encroach upon the market and individual liberty as it sought to expand its reach, control the economy, and regulate social life. Hayek, too, warned against the dangers of central planning and

state control in his seminal work, *The Road to Serfdom*. However, despite these warnings, both advocated for a minimal state as the solution—believing that reducing the state’s scope could prevent it from growing too powerful. Yet, the fundamental flaw in their position lies in the assumption that the state, once minimized, would not naturally expand over time. Their oversight is critical: any state, even a minimal one, is a coercive apparatus that tends to expand its control once established.

#### Milton Friedman’s Advocacy for a Minimal State:

Milton Friedman, a leading advocate of free-market capitalism, argued for a minimal state that would protect property rights, enforce contracts, and ensure national defense. While his advocacy for reducing government intervention in the economy was groundbreaking, he still assumed that the state, once limited, would remain within its bounds. Friedman underestimated the inherent nature of the state to perpetuate its own growth. Even in his writings, such as *Capitalism and Freedom*, where he advocates for reducing state intervention in areas like healthcare and education, Friedman fails to address how the state’s bureaucratic incentives will naturally lead to expansion, regardless of the initial size or scope of government. Over time, government agencies and institutions tend to grow in response to political pressures and bureaucratic inertia, as new powers are constantly sought to “manage” unforeseen challenges.

#### James Buchanan and the Myth of Limited Government:

James Buchanan, one of the most influential public choice theorists, theorized that a limited government, constrained by constitutional checks, could prevent the kind of overreach and expansion typically seen in larger governments. While Buchanan’s work on constitutional economics was groundbreaking, he underestimated the inherent dynamics of political systems. Public choice theory explains how politicians and bureaucrats pursue their own interests, often leading to government expansion. Buchanan’s ideal of a minimal state with stringent constitutional limits is naive because it does not consider the self-interest of those in power. In practice, the expansion of government occurs due to the incentives of those in charge, who are often motivated to increase their influence and resources—leading to larger and more intrusive government regardless of the original intentions.

#### William Niskanen’s Insights on Bureaucratic Growth:

William Niskanen, in his work on public choice theory and the behavior of bureaucrats, highlighted how bureaucracies inherently expand in size and scope. Bureaucrats, he argued, have a vested interest in increasing the size of their agencies and their budgets in order to enhance their power and rewards. Niskanen’s model, known as the bureaucratic model, demonstrated how bureaucracies, even in a minimal state, would inevitably seek to expand their own influence. This was one of the key pieces missing in the arguments of Mises, Hayek, and Friedman: while they acknowledged the dangers of state power, they did not sufficiently account for the internal incentives within the state to grow and consolidate power. Niskanen’s work shows that any form of government will tend toward expansion, making the concept of a truly minimal state unrealistic in practice.

Robert Nozick's Theory of the Minimal State:

Robert Nozick, in his book *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, famously defended the idea of a minimal state based on individual rights and the protection of property. According to Nozick, the state's only legitimate function is to protect citizens from force, theft, and fraud. He argued that this minimal state would serve as a night-watchman state that ensures security but does not interfere in the economic or personal lives of individuals. However, Nozick's argument is weakened by the fact that even in his minimal state, there are numerous forces at work within the bureaucratic system that would encourage the state to expand its scope and influence. Incentives for bureaucratic growth, political pressures, and economic demands all create a situation where a state, even if initially limited, will inevitably encroach upon the freedoms it was supposed to protect. Nozick's failure to recognize the self-expansion of the state limits the applicability of his arguments for a minimal state.

The Core Issue: The Inherent Expansion of the State

All of these thinkers, despite their critiques of state power, fail to account for the inherent dynamics within state systems that drive them toward expansion. Whether it is bureaucratic growth, political incentives to increase power, or the pursuit of economic control, the state has an inherent tendency to grow. The very nature of the state, with its monopoly on the use of force and control over resources, creates an environment in which its size and scope will expand over time, even in systems that begin with minimal government. This reality makes the idea of a minimal state an illusion—one that ignores the natural dynamics of political systems and the self-interest of those in power.

The Flaw in the Minimal State Argument

The problem with promoting a minimal state is that it assumes that once government is limited, it will remain so. However, history has consistently demonstrated that even limited governments expand over time, as bureaucracies grow, political actors seek more influence, and economic pressures push for more government intervention. By advocating for a minimal state, these thinkers overlook the fundamental flaw in their logic: the state is a coercive institution with incentives to expand, regardless of its initial size. The bureaucratic nature of the state, with its drive for more power, makes any attempt to limit the state's growth ultimately unsustainable.

Conclusion

While Mises, Hayek, Friedman, Buchanan, Niskanen, and Nozick made significant contributions to understanding the dangers of state power and advocating for limited government, their ideas fall short in recognizing the inherent expansionary nature of the state. The state, even in its minimal form, is driven by self-interest, bureaucratic incentives, and the natural tendency to consolidate power, making the ideal of a minimal state an impractical and unrealistic goal. Any government, no matter how limited, will inevitably expand its reach, erode individual liberties, and undermine the freedoms it claims to protect. This is a central flaw in the minimal state argument—a flaw that must be addressed if we are to truly understand the relationship between government and personal freedom.

- 6 Daron Acemoglu, James Robinson, and Francis Fukuyama are prominent political economists and social theorists who have emphasized the importance of state capacity in shaping economic and political outcomes. Their work focuses on the idea that strong, centralized, and capable states are crucial for fostering economic development, political stability, and social well-being. While their theories offer valuable insights into the role of the state in economic and social systems, from a libertarian or anarcho-capitalist perspective, they can be viewed as advocating for a strong state—even authoritarianism—at the expense of individual freedom, property rights, and self-determination. Their emphasis on the state’s capacity highlights the inherent contradictions of promoting liberty and economic prosperity while simultaneously advocating for the concentration of power in the hands of the state.

#### The Emphasis on State Capacity

Acemoglu and Robinson, in their influential book *Why Nations Fail*, argue that inclusive institutions—those that promote political and economic freedoms, protect property rights, and provide equal opportunities—are essential for long-term prosperity. They emphasize the role of the state in creating these institutions, enforcing the rule of law, and ensuring that individuals are free to pursue their interests without being hindered by powerful elites or arbitrary political decisions. According to their framework, a strong and capable state is needed to create a fair playing field where economic activity can flourish.

However, this focus on state capacity presupposes that the state is the primary actor in organizing and regulating society. While Acemoglu and Robinson do acknowledge the importance of market forces and private property, they place a significant amount of trust in the state’s ability to establish and enforce the rules of the game. In their view, economic success and prosperity are dependent on the strength and competence of the state to implement sound policies,

enforce property rights, and prevent the exploitation of the poor by elites.

#### The Potential for Authoritarianism

One of the major concerns with their argument is the implicit authoritarianism that arises from their conception of state capacity. While they advocate for inclusive institutions, the focus on the centralized state as the vehicle for implementing these reforms raises questions about the concentration of power and control within the hands of a few. For example, the development of state capacity often requires a strong, centralized bureaucracy that can enforce laws, manage the economy, and regulate industries. This, in turn, risks enabling authoritarian tendencies, as the state's power grows to dominate all areas of life—economic, social, and political.

In countries where the state is weak or corrupt, these theorists argue, economic development and political stability are difficult to achieve. The solution they propose is the strengthening of the state—not merely through the creation of inclusive institutions but through the consolidation of political power in a way that can effectively manage the economy and society. In many cases, this would require top-down control, state-led developmental projects, and possibly even the suppression of dissent to prevent challenges to the state's authority and the elites who benefit from its policies.

#### Francis Fukuyama's Concept of State Building

Fukuyama, in his work *The Origins of Political Order and Political Order and Political Decay*, emphasizes the importance of state-building as a prerequisite for social order and economic growth. Fukuyama argues that a state must be strong enough to provide basic public goods—such as infrastructure, education, security, and the rule of law—before it can effectively promote democratic governance or economic prosperity. Fukuyama's emphasis on state capacity builds on the historical lessons of state development, particularly in the West, where strong institutions were gradually constructed to manage society's needs.

While Fukuyama's work does acknowledge the dangers of over-centralization and the importance of democratic accountability, he still asserts that state strength is a key ingredient for progress. From a libertarian perspective, this reliance on state power is problematic. Fukuyama's argument can be seen as an endorsement of statist control—with the state taking on a dominant role in the creation and enforcement of social and political norms. The growth of state capacity in the form of centralized power can, in practice, lead to a loss of personal freedoms and the erosion of private property rights, as governments consolidate their control over economic and social institutions.

#### The State as a Threat to Liberty and Property

From the perspective outlined in *The State as a Threat to Life, Liberty, Property, and the Pursuit of Happiness*, the theories of Acemoglu, Robinson, and Fukuyama can be seen as dangerously statist. The centralized power they advocate for, though ostensibly designed to promote prosperity and secure property rights, actually undermines the very values it seeks to protect. By placing so much emphasis on the strength of the state, these theorists implicitly accept that government institutions can be trusted with the power to regulate and redistribute resources—power that often leads to abuses, corruption, and the

consolidation of authority in the hands of a few.

In practice, the expansion of state capacity often results in the further concentration of power and control in the hands of bureaucrats, politicians, and elites. Even in well-intentioned states, bureaucratic expansion and state intervention can have perverse consequences. For example, the expansion of welfare programs, taxes, and economic regulation might lead to greater inequality, the entrenchment of political power, and a diminished sense of personal autonomy. Bureaucratic interests often push for more control and more regulation, regardless of the effect on individual rights, resulting in a reduction of freedoms and a suppression of innovation and entrepreneurship.

Additionally, state-controlled economies often distort market incentives, hinder competition, and perpetuate economic inefficiencies, thereby reducing the overall wealth and prosperity of the population. The expansion of government power is frequently accompanied by political corruption, where state actors use their power to enrich themselves, protect their allies, and suppress political opposition.

#### Conclusion: State Capacity as a Double-Edged Sword

In conclusion, the emphasis on state capacity by Acemoglu, Robinson, and Fukuyama, while insightful in its analysis of political and economic development, overlooks the dangers of centralized state power. From the perspective that sees the state as a threat to life, liberty, property, and pursuit of happiness, the reliance on the state to provide the conditions for prosperity is deeply problematic. The state's inherent drive for expansion, control, and coercion often leads to the very injustices it seeks to remedy. While the goal of strong institutions is commendable, the assumption that centralized power can be trusted to act in the best interests of individuals leads to the erosion of freedoms and the consolidation of power among a small elite. Thus, even well-intentioned calls for state capacity fail to account for the inherent nature of the state as an institution that is, by definition, expansionist and coercive.