

# BOOKS

## **Dependent on D.C.: The Rise of Federal Control Over the Lives of Ordinary Americans**

by Charlotte Twight

St. Martin's Press/Palgrave • 2002 • 512 pages  
• \$26.95 hardcover; \$17.95 paperback

*Reviewed by James Bovard*

Charlotte Twight has written an excellent book to help Americans understand how the federal government is insidiously seizing control of their lives, year by year, edict by edict, emergency by emergency. Twight provides both a solid theoretical framework and bevy of examples to drive home the danger from Washington.

A professor of economics at Boise State University, she highlights how, “from the perspective of individual liberty,” the “authority to control, not the specific controls imposed at a particular point in time,” is the key issue. Her concern is “not only the growth of dependence but also the growth of an ideology of dependence—the normative judgment that broad governmental power creating pervasive dependence on government is desirable.”

The author shows how politicians and bureaucrats are continually slanting the playing field against individual freedom. Twight warns, “Deliberately manipulating our ability to stop their power quest, federal officials have used techniques that systematically increase people’s personal costs of resistance.”

Twight also shows how government grows by deception, for example, how presidents, congressmen, and bureaucrats conned Americans into accepting Social Security. The Social Security Administration for decades told people that their Social Security taxes were being held for each citizen in individual accounts; in reality, as soon as the money came in, politicians found ways to spend it. Social Security Commis-

sioner Stanford Ross conceded in 1979 that “the mythology of Social Security contributed greatly to its success. . . . Strictly speaking, the system was never intended to return to individuals what they paid.” Ross said that Americans should forget the “myth” that Social Security is a pension plan and accept it as a tax on workers to provide for the “vulnerable of our society.”

American citizens now shoulder over \$12 trillion in unfunded Social Security liabilities. If the defenders of Social Security insist that the fraud was justified, the question arises: What future limits should exist on government’s prerogative to deceive the people? If Social Security is an acceptable fraud, what would government have to do before it was considered to have gone too far?

Twight vivifies how the federal control of education has been increasing for decades. Public education is the most expensive “gift” that most Americans will ever receive. Government school systems are increasingly coercive and abusive both of parents and students. Government schools in most areas have been taken over by unions, judges, and grandstanding politicians. And the worse schools have failed, the more years of students’ lives they are commandeering. Unfortunately, regardless of the continual failures of Washington’s education programs, federal intervention has spread like kudzu through the nation’s schools.

One of the best parts of the book is the analysis and revelations about federal surveillance of average Americans. Twight drives home how the feds were already sticking their noses practically everywhere—even before 9/11, the Patriot Act, and Total Information Awareness.

*Dependent on D.C.* walks readers through how the government has acquired far more arbitrary power in recent decades—and why that power is a dire threat to the Constitution and Americans’ everyday life. Anything that increases dependency on government undermines liberty. How can a citizen help steer the ship of State at the same time that he has his hand out for another government benefit? Once a person becomes a government dependent, his moral standing to resist

the expansion of government power is fatally compromised. Every increase in the number of government dependents means an increase in political power. Each increase in the number of government dependents means another person who sees limits on government power as a threat to his own personal well-being.

America is capsizing as a result of the vast increase in the number of government dependents and employees—a voting bloc that overwhelms every other potential force. H. L. Mencken quipped in the 1930s that the New Deal divided America into “those who work for a living and those who vote for a living”—a division more true now than ever before.

Hopefully, Americans will wake up to the danger of constantly growing government power before it is too late. However, as Twight’s book shows, that defense is becoming more difficult with each passing year. □

*James Bovard is the author of Lost Rights (1994) and Terrorism and Tyranny: How Bush’s Crusade Is Sabotaging Freedom, Justice, and Peace (St. Martin’s, forthcoming September 2003).*

## Multiculturalism and the Politics of Guilt

by Paul E. Gottfried

University of Missouri Press • 2002 • 176 pages  
• \$29.95

Reviewed by George C. Leef

**R**ecently the book *The Skeptical Environmentalist* by Bjørn Lomborg was denounced by the Danish Committee for Scientific Dishonesty. Without offering specifics, the committee said the book was “contrary to the standards of good scientific practice.” It hasn’t been banned or burned, but here is an official body endeavoring to tell people what thoughts are unacceptable.

It is part of a growing movement, here and in Europe, toward government management of people’s beliefs. In *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Guilt*, Paul Gottfried writes about the mega-state’s embrace of that new role. Controlling people’s actions just isn’t

enough for many modern “liberals”; they now wish also to regulate people’s thoughts and naturally have turned to government for the necessary enforcement powers. From campus speech codes in the United States to laws like that in France under which writer Michel Hoellebecq was recently charged for having written critically about Islam, we now face a steadily increasing array of sanctions for expressing “incorrect thoughts.”

Gottfried, a professor of humanities at Elizabethtown College in Pennsylvania, began his project of describing the growth of what he calls “the managerial state” in his 1999 book *After Liberalism* (reviewed in the October 2000 issue). The current book extends Gottfried’s insights to a particularly troubling aspect thereof—its “therapeutic” side, which aims at “curing” people of their “bad” ideas. Gottfried explains: “Our welfare state since midcentury has become increasingly preoccupied with modifying social behavior. And while American administrative democracy has not gone as far economically in nationalizing production [as other governments], it has moved into socializing ‘citizens’ through publicly controlled education and wars against discrimination. Such reconstructionist initiatives have been taken in response to what the state, the media, and ‘victim’ groups designate as a crisis, a surging outburst of prejudice that supposedly must be contained and whose representatives need to be re-educated.”

What advocates of liberty need to understand, Gottfried contends, is that the central planners have changed their objectives. Whereas the left has long pursued economic planning to eliminate the alleged unfairness of the market, its emphasis has been moving away from economic controls and toward behavioral controls. Politicians like Bill Clinton and Tony Blair understand that they need the economic growth that only a relatively free economy provides to obtain revenue for their social projects. “What distinguishes third-way planners from earlier social democrats is a greater willingness to sacrifice economic collectivism for economic growth,” Gottfried writes. “Social control

by the state does not presuppose a socialized economy, and government interventions into child rearing, spousal relations, and intergroup dynamics can now go forward in conjunction with market forces.”

The big selling point of old-style socialism was fear—fear of poverty, of “Robber Barons,” of the “chaos” of freedom. Like an advertising slogan that is so timeworn that it no longer brings in customers, “fear” has been dropped by the left and replaced with a new hook better suited to contemporary conditions: guilt. People must acquiesce in the new social regulation because they have to atone for a constellation of past wrongs. Gottfried writes, “The relevant political-moral attitude is an ostentatious guilt about the historical past that the majority society is supposed to exhibit.” The state and its allies parade before the public a steady stream of “politically correct martyrologies” to keep it compliant.

“By harping on the real or imagined evils of the past,” Gottfried writes, “proponents of state-controlled socialization appeal to the guilty conscience of their listeners.” He is surely correct in that assertion. Many colleges and universities now have freshman-orientation sessions that are reminiscent of Maoist re-education camps, where white students are harangued and berated so they will “understand” what it’s like to be a member of an oppressed group. Yet there is little opposition to those programs, the guiltmeisters having done their work well.

Gottfried’s analysis also has its foreign policy dimensions. If government power can be used to “do good” at home, why stop there? Thus we get military interventions abroad not because there is any conceivable threat to the United States, but because the people just aren’t behaving nicely. As the author puts it, “This new internationalism, as suggested by Clinton and Blair, aims at nothing less than a transformation of human consciousness.” So allied forces go into Kosovo because we have to stop ethnic hatreds, and European nations organize a campaign to punish Austria for electing a prime minister with unenlightened views.

Just as Europe was ahead of the United

States in the old, purely economic kind of socialism, Europe has gone further into the therapeutic socialism about which Gottfried writes. There, people are actually fined and imprisoned for verbal offenses against “the antifascist order.” The First Amendment still offers us protection against the worst instincts of the thought controllers, but it would be good to remember that judicial “interpretation” that takes away constitutional protection for our liberties is nothing new.

A necessary and important book. □

*George Leef is book review editor of Ideas on Liberty.*

## The Skeptic: A Life of H. L. Mencken

by Terry Teachout

HarperCollins • 2002 • 349 pages plus notes and index • \$29.95 hardcover

*Reviewed by Sheldon Richman*

Nearly half a century since his death, H. L. Mencken (1880–1956) continues to fascinate. What attracts so many to the audacious debunker of sham, the Colossus of literary, political, and social criticism from the 1910s into the 1930s?

His latest biographer, cultural critic Terry Teachout, provides some answers to that question. While not a full-blown biography, *The Skeptic* mines the most important areas of Mencken’s life and digs out much of interest pro and con. Mencken fans, of which there remains a legion, won’t always be pleased with Teachout’s findings or judgments.

As newspaperman, book author, and magazine writer and editor, Mencken courted controversy—deliberately: he celebrated Nietzsche in 1908; he wrote a paean to the Kaiser’s Germany in 1914; he offended Jews (though many of his best friends really *were* Jewish); he demeaned blacks (while publishing black authors); he derided Christianity; he promoted a literary naturalism that flaunted the underside of life; and he daily insulted the middle class as

the “booboisie.” He was a man full of prejudices (Mencken’s word), who could be unjust to the targets of his gleefully mischievous pen, such as William Jennings Bryan and Calvin Coolidge. Teachout’s portrait is often unflattering, and for this some Mencken aficionados blame the biographer. But it is not entirely Teachout’s fault. In many ways, Mencken asked for it.

And yet something about him casts a spell. First, there is the quality of Mencken’s writing. His earthiness and gusto leave their mark on all who come in contact with him.

Second, he lived a life that many would love to live. Seemingly carefree, daring, and uninhibited, Mencken wrote what he wanted about anything he wanted and the consequences be damned. (Teachout shows us that a good deal of Mencken’s public persona didn’t square with his private life. Mencken was a respected man of his bourgeois community and lived quietly, in his boyhood Baltimore home, with his mother until she died when he was 45. His biographer believes he was a poseur in more ways than this.)

Third, for libertarians, Mencken was unequalled in capturing the spirit of American individualism. He was never a socialist and had no sympathy with the plans and pretenses of American politicians. (“We suffer most when the White House bursts with ideas.”) He valiantly battled censorship and Prohibition, the New Deal and FDR, the burgeoning bureaucracy and its penchant for smothering the creative individual. Many an advocate of the freedom philosophy could spend the day quoting him on the supremacy of liberty, the diabolical nature of government, and the threat from egalitarianism and democracy.

Put these three together, and any mystery concerning the Mencken allure evaporates. For some of us, they tote up to irresistibility. It surely explains why Mencken was so dominant a cultural figure in his heyday that a Hemingway character could say nonchalantly, “So many young men get their likes and dislikes from Mencken.”

*The Skeptic* is a hard book to get a handle on. While Teachout boasts that “Unlike

Mencken’s previous biographers, I write, very broadly speaking, from his point of view,” one is hard pressed to find more than traces of empathy. More often, the reader gets the impression that Teachout doesn’t much like his subject. He assuredly admires how Mencken integrated style and substance. He is awed by Mencken’s prodigious energy and output. He respects many of Mencken’s accomplishments, such as helping to liberate American letters from a stultifying and censorial Puritanism and his path-breaking description of the “American language.” But he also levels serious and even shocking criticism: that Mencken was a bad magazine editor; that his literary self-education was woefully incomplete; that he misunderstood some of the writers he championed and panned; that he was not as dispassionate an observer as he appeared; that his goring of bourgeois America wore thin; and that, most egregiously, he misperceived the rise of fascism and Hitler. He goes so far as to blame the Mencken of the 1920s for helping “lay the intellectual groundwork for the America-hating adversary culture of the sixties.”

Mencken is a big subject made more difficult by his confounding contradictions. No biographer of his is to be envied. Much of Teachout’s material will cause the reader to grimace, but Mencken admirers will find that after 400 pages, even if their sense of the man is less clear, their admiration somehow survives. □

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## Wealth and Democracy: A Political History of the American Rich

by Kevin Phillips

Broadway Books • 2002 • 472 pages  
• \$29.95 hardcover

*Reviewed by Gregory Bresiger*

**K**evin Phillips, a Republican populist, keeps writing the same book.

In several bestsellers in the 1990s, such as *Arrogant Capital* and *The Politics of*

*the Rich and Poor*, Phillips has been describing the American economy in a way that could lead readers to think America is a giant Bolivia where only the superrich own any property of consequence. In his depiction of America, the rich get richer and the middle class works overtime and runs up endless debts. I can hardly recognize this nation. Phillips has evolved into a social democrat whether he acknowledges it or not.

His heroes, or at least those he constantly quotes, are those who battle “inequality.” They are mostly friends of big government. One is former New York governor Mario Cuomo. Phillips admires him and others like him because their social and economic policies are designed to knock the rich down a peg or two and thereby help the rest of us. The only problem with Cuomo’s reign in the Empire State is that it hurt the rest of us.

Phillips, a former Republican strategist, is also a fan of populists such as Ralph Nader. The reader is also treated to hymns to Abraham Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt, Franklin Roosevelt, and other such tribunes who favored big government.

Phillips’s disdain for those who accumulate significant wealth is made clear when he approvingly quotes Benjamin Disraeli: “As a general rule, nobody has wealth who ought to have it.” (Phillips doesn’t inform the reader that Disraeli was notorious for dodging people he owed money to and finally solved his money problems by marrying a rich woman.)

The attentive reader should therefore not be surprised that Phillips also praises a politician, Richard Nixon, who admired Disraeli and wanted to outflank the left by becoming a twentieth century “Tory Democrat.” “As president,” Phillips writes in bragging that Nixon endorsed his ideas and previous books, “Nixon himself supported national health insurance, income maintenance for the poor, and higher taxation of unearned than earned income.”

Phillips leaves out a few things: Nixon ran huge deficits, pressured the Fed to follow loose monetary policies so he could be re-elected, and imposed wage and price con-

trols, policies that gave the nation “stagflation” after Nixon was gone. Those policies hurt the middle class and working poor more than the rich, but Phillips is blind to that reality. Nixon also created the alternative minimum tax, another soak-the-rich device designed for millionaires that is now afflicting middle-class households.

What is Phillips’s solution to today’s problems of “inequality”? Unless there is another New Deal, another FDR, or a President Nader, Phillips warns, we should all prepare to become serfs in a modern feudal manor.

What is one to make of Phillips’s latest quasi-Marxist appeal? Remember the Al Smith line about the New Dealers stealing the socialists’ clothing? Michael Harrington, the American socialist leader who saw the Socialist Party defeated again and again, once argued that the way to advance American collectivism was for socialists to join the left wing of the Democratic party. It appears that Phillips—who spends a good part of more than 400 pages praising every “Republican progressive” with any socialist impulse—is doing the same yeoman work in the Republican party. □

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## **Liberty for Women: Freedom and Feminism in the Twenty-First Century**

edited by Wendy McElroy

Ivan R. Dee • 2002 • 353 pages • \$30.00  
hardcover; \$18.95 paperback

*Reviewed by Bettina Bien Greaves*

**A**dmittedly, men and women are different. Women are from Venus, men from Mars. The French say, “vive la différence.” But today’s radical feminists exaggerate the difference and consider men and women two “separate and politically antagonistic classes.” Libertarians and individualists, on the other hand, look on all men and women as members of the same human race. Radical feminists advocate special treatment



for women in the workplace, academia, and society; libertarians and individualists see the issue as government force versus freedom and seek equality for women under law.

Wendy McElroy is a libertarian, an individualist feminist (“ifeminist”), and has written widely on the struggle of women for equal rights and opportunity. The contributors to *Liberty for Women*—university professors, lawyers, political scientists, economists, physicians, prostitutes, midwives, and even a president of the American Civil Liberties Union—cover many issues. According to McElroy, “all human beings have a right to the protection of their persons and property,” and this book applies that principle consistently.

The authors want to get government off women’s backs, recognize their “economic self-sufficiency [and] psychological independence,” and maintain “realistic attitudes toward female competence, achievement, and potential.” Law professor Richard Epstein, for one, advocates removing legal restrictions and allowing everyone, men and women alike, the freedom to enter into contracts to better themselves through voluntary transactions. He writes that this will “enhance the vitality of the social system as a whole” and that it “dovetails neatly into any and all theories that recognize the limits as well as the uses of markets.” As an example of the harm done when the government refuses to respect freedom of contract, consider the Supreme Court’s decision, which relied on the Civil Rights Act’s anti-discrimination Title VII (1964) and the Pregnancy Discrimination Act (1978), to overturn a voluntarily agreed-on contract devised by a manufacturer of batteries to protect its women employees and their potential offspring from exposure to dangerous chemicals. What the government calls “discrimination” Epstein regards as mutually beneficial agreement.

Only a few of the essays in the collection can be mentioned in this short review.

Political scientist Ellen Frankel Paul explains that affirmative-action, comparable-worth, and sexual-harassment legislation increases the cost of hiring women, ensures

that government’s “equal-opportunity regulators” will “remain forever enmeshed in the workplace,” and “exaggerates all the problems the women’s movement has been trying to change.”

“Equity feminist” Camille Paglia considers anti-pornography laws “inherently infantilizing.” Cato Institute research associate Cathy Young maintains that “an individual’s noncoercive sexual behavior is no one else’s business.”

The subject of abortion is discussed by economist Alexander Tabarrok. He writes that while ifeminists consider abortion “a private matter that must be left to the conscience of those directly involved . . . mainstream ‘pro-choice’ feminists consider the ‘right to an abortion’ to be an entitlement for which others may legitimately be forced to pay. . . . Ifeminists call for the government to get out of reproductive decision-making altogether—to neither subsidize nor tax abortion or other contraceptive choices.”

Concerning prostitution, University of Chicago Professor Martha C. Nussbaum argues “there is nothing *per se* wrong with taking money for the use of one’s body.” “[W]ith prostitution: what seems right is to use law to protect the bodily safety of prostitutes from assault, to protect their rights to their incomes against the extortionate behavior of pimps, to protect poor women in developing countries from forced trafficking and fraudulent offers, and to guarantee their full civil rights in the countries where they end up—to make them, in general, equals under the law, both civil and criminal.”

Norma Jean Almodovar, a prostitutes-rights activist and former call girl, argues that “So long as the sex is consensual it should not matter to anyone outside the relationship how many times the sexual activity occurs, or with how many sexual partners, or for whatever mutually agreed upon price.” Decriminalization of prostitution “would involve no new legislation to deal with prostitution *per se*, because there are already plenty of laws which cover problems such as fraud, force, theft negligence, and collusion.”

“[V]exing ethical questions” and “serious questions about individual rights and contract law” may be involved in the controversial new reproductive technologies, but McElroy holds that “like effective contraception and access to legal abortion, [they] seem to provide women with the ‘choice’ central to virtually all brands of feminism. . . . The true issue surrounding the new reproductive technologies remains ‘a woman’s body, a woman’s right.’”

For decades, radical feminists have misled women as to their interests. *Liberty for Women* explains that their true interests depend on removing legal obstacles to freedom. □

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## Robert Nozick

edited by David Schmidtz

Cambridge University Press • 2002 • 230 pages  
• \$60.00 hardcover; \$20.00 paperback

*Reviewed by Eric Mack*

This is a collection of original essays on the philosophical work of Robert Nozick, who died in the spring of 2002. Nozick rose to philosophical prominence with his first book, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, published in 1974. Contributor Philip Pettit aptly says that this book still “stands unchallenged as the most coherent statement available of the case for a rights-based defense of the minimal, libertarian state.” None of Nozick’s subsequent five books dealt directly with political philosophy, and during most of his ensuing philosophical career, he attempted to distance himself from *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (ASU). Nevertheless, it is indicative of his failure to establish this distance that most of the essays in this volume focus on the libertarian doctrine of ASU. I shall follow suit by concentrating on the three strongest of the essays on Nozick’s political thought.

Loren Lomasky’s chapter, “Nozick’s Libertarian Utopia,” contends that Nozick’s discussion of libertarian utopia—which Nozick presented as a supplementary argument for the minimal state—is actually a crucial component of the main argument in ASU. Nozick says that his main argument for the minimal state is that it could arise by morally permissible steps from a stateless condition. Lomasky recognizes that showing that the minimal state could arise in this way is hardly decisive, for many radically different political structures could arise by permissible steps—if people freely take dumb enough steps. So Lomasky depicts Nozick’s appeal to the utopian aspects of the libertarian political framework as a way of revealing why this structure is more appealing than other structures that could also arise by permissible means. According to Lomasky, the minimal state is more appealing because it has the utopia-like, synergistic feature of promoting a social order in which each person’s well-being is likely to be good for other people too. These are not the important benefits for people that arise from trade or joint production. Rather, they are the vicarious benefits for people of others achieving their own diverse goods in their own ways.

In ASU Nozick rejects the consequentialist idea that rightness and wrongness in an action is entirely a matter of the value or disvalue of that action’s consequences. He holds, instead, that performing an action can be wrong even if its outcome would be more valuable than the outcome of not performing that action. For instance, it can be wrong for you to kill innocent person A even if your killing A would prevent someone else from killing innocent persons B and C. (Here we accept the conventional wisdom that it would be better for one innocent person, rather than two innocent people, to be killed.) According to Nozick, there are certain principles you ought to abide by—such as, do not kill innocents—even if your abiding by those principles does not maximize those principles being abided by.

Philip Pettit’s essay, “Non-Consequentialism and Political Philosophy,” focuses on and criticizes Nozick’s anti-consequentialism.

Pettit does a nice job of laying out the standard—but, I think, mistaken—arguments for why everyone ultimately has to be a consequentialist.

The fundamental dispute between anti-consequentialists and consequentialists is a dispute about the nature of practical rationality. Is rationality in action entirely a matter of effectively attaining one's goals? Or is it also in part a matter of abiding by certain principles—such as the principle against killing innocents—which may restrict the means one may use toward the attainment of one's ends? Gerald Gaus's essay, "Goals, Symbols, Principles: Nozick on Practical Rationality," analyzes Nozick's subsequently developed theory on this matter. Gaus shows that Nozick's post-ASU dissatisfaction with libertarianism can be traced to this theory; for according to Nozick's later doctrine, the only reason one has to act in conformity with a moral principle—such as, the principle of not coercing people to come to the aid of others—is the "symbolic util-

ity" involved in the act of abiding by the principle. Hence, one should be prepared to violate that principle whenever the utility—especially the symbolic utility—of violating the principle is greater than the symbolic utility of abiding by the principle. For instance, one should be prepared to violate the principle of not coercing people to come to the aid of others whenever the symbolic utility of having official, public programs of assistance to the needy is greater than the symbolic utility involved in the act of abiding by the principle. Gaus points to deep flaws in Nozick's later, essentially consequentialist, account of practical rationality.

Each of these strongest essays is difficult going. First read *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*. Then mull it over and read it again. Then go in search of interesting commentaries—three of which can be found in Schmidtz's *Robert Nozick*. □

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