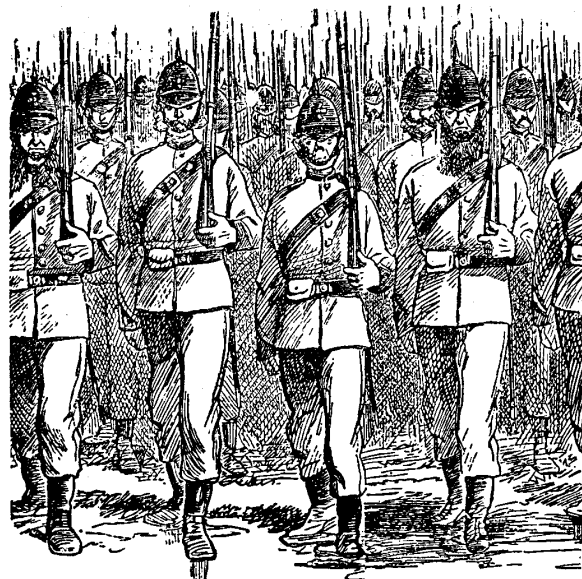


THE FOLLY OF DUTY

A

NICK ROBERTS



All governments, everywhere, exist by lies.

Once a group of people discover their mistake in creating or accepting a government, their rulers may consider the threat, or use, of force to prevent resistance. However, the crafty or thoughtful ruler, who seeks a long or permanent reign, may think violence a poor tool. Its threat may not always intimidate, and its use may fail, or set a bad example. So the clever ruler invents or adapts special lies in order to convince his victims (dubbed 'citizens' or 'subjects') that resistance to the state is impossible, undesirable, painful and immoral. Libertarians are all too familiar with these shams. Examples include: "Without Government, chaos and petty tyranny will ensue", or "Without Government, the people will starve", or "Government exists because God/History/Human Nature/The People insist upon it."

I believe, however, that the State's most potent, durable and versatile lie is the myth of 'Duty'. Indeed, 'Duty' is such an effective confidence trick, that I know of no government, clique, politburo, synod or any other bandit or gang who wish to disguise their crimes, which have not used it at some time to keep the poor suckers in line.

Duty comes in three handy, ready-to-use forms, of which the first is:

"NOBLESSE OBLIGE" —THE FUEL IN THE CROWN

Roughly stated, noblesse oblige is the sham behind which the individuals in government hide to conceal their motives, and the immorality of their rule. "We don't actually *want* to lord it over you like this," they admit frankly and honestly through their teeth. "It's a heavy responsibility which we are reluctantly forced to bear. Do you think that we actually *enjoy* ripping you off by taxation, killing you off in wars, and pushing you around with our laws and censorship and bureaucrats? Of course not! It's our Duty to act like this." Noblesse oblige is fine camouflage for the relish with which certain people seek to run and ruin the lives of complete strangers. I ask you, if duty is so onerous, why do politicians spend so much time, money (sometimes even their own) and even risk their lives to obtain the power they claim to dread? Are there so many saints around, eager to sacrifice all personal comfort and safety for the good of their fellow citizens? *If* they are so noble, they are pretty thick to boot. Perhaps if Hitler had possessed a weaker sense of racial duty, he might have stuck to his architecture and eidelweiss.

PATRIOTISM

The second form of the multi-purpose, wonder-morality called 'Duty' comes in the bottle marked "Ordinary Citizen's Duty" — patriotism.

This one really keeps the mugs quiet, because it is used to convince Ordinary Citizens that they are actually morally obliged to obey their country's wishes. For 'country', read 'rulers'. Surprise, surprise, this type of duty is defined by politicians and their intellectual spokesmen.

Variously called 'patriotism', 'democratic privilege', 'class will' and 'holy service', the citizen's sense of

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Nick Roberts is a journalist on the *Lancaster Guardian*

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Director: Dr Chris R. Tame

Editorial Director: Brian Micklethwait

Webmaster: Dr Sean Gabb



FOR LIFE, LIBERTY AND PROPERTY

duty blocks all rational argument against the state's claims to sovereignty. Duty clamps a self-denying ordinance on those who might otherwise ask awkward questions about the legitimacy and motives of those in power. It's a kind of spiritual version of the Orwellian boot, stamping on peoples' self-respect, forever.

A recent example: J. F. Kennedy told his Fellow Americans not to ask what their country could do for them, but rather, what they could do for their country. The Vietnam war provided an illustration of what this stirring call meant, to wit: pay up, fall in, march off, and drop dead. If you survive and come back all messed up, don't blame Uncle Sam, mister ... We in the government of This Great Nation of Ours were only doing our duty, forcing you to do yours. Sorry son, taxes are up to pay for the war, we don't have any work for you today.

The other side used much the same cant, with different adjectives and nouns, but using the same verbs and producing shorter and yellower dead or crippled heroes.

Naturally, we ordinary citizens have a duty only to our native or adoptive countries. Should we choose to side with someone we actually approve, of, we would become traitors or mercenaries. Are Ghurkhas or Irish citizens serving in the Royal Army described as traitors to Nepal or Eire? Not by HM Government, they aren't. Are Foreign Legionaries called mercenaries by the President of the umpteenth French Republic? Mais non! Did the Bolsheviks call their erstwhile allies, the Ukrainian Nationalists, glorious socialist comrades? Not after the Red Army outnumbered the Cossacks, they didn't.

Happily, warfare is actually a relatively rare occurrence in the span of human history. The chief reason for which people are conned into believing in duty, is economic. To all rulers everywhere, we are the kine who tread the corn. In Western democracies, we are bled a bit by taxation, but not generally killed. We starve a little through state inflation and regulation of our pleasures. Duty's permanent task is to persuade hardworking mugs into applauding the regular looting of our wages by government, and that we are heroes because we are 'honest, law-abiding tax-payers'. Libertarians can strip away the deceptions of government by proof and reason, but often run into the brick wall of 'Duty to my fellow men and to the general welfare'. The statist-minded cannot conceive of a happy and prosperous community without a state to help him do his duty to the needs of all.

The third form of duty is called:

**RAISON D'ETAT — OR HOW TO RENDER
UNTO CAESAR THAT WHICH IS SOMEBODY
ELSE'S WITHOUT HAVING TO THINK ABOUT
IT TOO MUCH**

Raison d'etat provides the proxies, servants and conscripts of the state with an excuse to commit the gov-

ernment's crimes for it with a clear conscience. This is how it works; "Alright, I don't want to kill, imprison, enslave or extort money from you," whines the patriotic citizen. "I don't even really see the need for it myself. However, my government tells me that it is my duty to obey. Sorry." Sounds offstage of gunfire, locks being bolted, liberating tanks rumbling through the streets, and the thud of tax-demands falling through the letterbox. The patriot can now sneak off for a drink, trying to convince himself that, thanks to his duty, he hasn't just committed a crime at all.

The great thing about duty, for the rulers, is that it is vague. It can mean any damned thing they wish it to. Thus, whenever governments are limited in their actions by written constitutions, laws, or election promises, they can disguise their illegal behavior amidst cries of 'higher duty', and calls to duties above the 'letter of the law'.

Labour councillors threaten to screw their ratepayers more than the Tories think wise, they evade the illegality of their actions by claiming a duty to the people of this city.

When Roosevelt decided to squash the Constitution in the hope of combatting the depression (available from all government economic planners and all good Marxist bookshops), he did so from behind a chorus of supporters, calling on the individuals squashed along with the Constitution to recognise their duty to the American People and to help Roosevelt to do his.

Any law or promise, however explicit or binding, can be broken if the politicians concerned have a high enough sense of duty.

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

"Oh, what a selfish, uncaring and lonely fool you are, Nick, to have no sense of duty to anyone or anything," is what my statist friends will say. Actually, I find that libertarians tend to have a considerable appreciation for responsibility and honour, probably because they understand most clearly what these qualities are, and what value they have.

Look, I'm not knocking personal responsibility at all. I like it, and want more of it. Call it duty if you like, but let me choose it for myself. By signing contracts, by making promises, by the exchanging of rings, and by the swearing of mighty oaths. Not by being told what my duty is.

Duty is neither moral nor just, unless it is voluntarily promised from the heart, in good faith and free will, and accepted by whoever is on the receiving end.

Free men and women will not and can not have duty imposed upon them from the outside.

That is not duty at all.

It's slavery.