



The Law

Frédéric Bastiat

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The Law, originally published as a pamphlet in 1850. It defines, through development, a just system of laws and then demonstrates how such law facilitates a free society. In The Law, he wrote that everyone has a right to protect "his person, his liberty, and his property". The State should be only a "substitution of a common force for individual forces" to defend this right. "Justice" (defense of one's life, liberty, property) has precise limits, but if government power extends further, into philanthropic endeavors, government becomes so limitless that it can grow endlessly. The resulting statism is "based on this triple hypothesis: the total inertness of mankind, the omnipotence of the law, and the infallibility of the legislator." The public then becomes socially-engineered by the legislator and must bend to the legislators' will "like the clay to the potter": "I do not dispute their right to invent social combinations, to advertise them, to advocate them, and to try them upon themselves, at their own expense and risk. But I do dispute their right to impose these plans upon us by law – by force – and to compel us to pay for them with our taxes". Bastiat posits that the law becomes perverted when it punishes one's right to self-defense (of his life, liberty, and property) in favor of another's right to "legalized plunder," which he defines as: "if the law takes from some persons what belongs to them, and gives it to other persons to whom it does not belong. See if the law benefits one citizen at the expense of another by doing what the citizen himself cannot do without committing a crime." Bastiat was thus against redistribution.

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