

Advice for Presidential Candidates From Bastiat

Whether conjured up by something I ate before bedtime, or by the cheesy horror flick I watched a few nights before, or by something else, I just don't know – but I tossed and turned through one of the most vivid dreams last weekend that I've ever experienced.

The Dream

I was in a classroom with all the 2020 presidential candidates, including the present occupant of the White House. My job was to introduce the guest speaker, none other than the late, great French economist and statesman [Frédéric Bastiat](#), author of [The Law](#) and one of my "[real heroes](#)."

It should have been a night of ecstasy. Every person vying for president schooled by the greatest storyteller the philosophy of liberty has ever produced! In real life, I'd almost give my firstborn to see Kamala Harris, Bernie Sanders, Elizabeth Warren, Donald Trump, and the others enrolled in a "Bastiat for Beginners" course. Alas, it was a nightmare. I never spoke a word after the introduction. I could only observe as the master calmly instructed. Maddeningly, nothing he said seemed to sink in; the "students" wouldn't even take notes. I remember sensing immense frustration.

Only two good things came out of this ordeal: I woke up before any of them could get elected, and I got the idea for this article. Why not gather a few of Bastiat's very best lines in one place – the ones I would most want a presidential candidate to seriously think about?

Well, here they are. Imagine the difference it could make if even one of the candidates allowed the wisdom of only one or

two of these snippets to truly sink in. Never again would they see the nanny state in the same way they did before:

1. "The State is the great fiction through which everyone endeavors to live at the expense of everyone else."
2. "Between a good and a bad economist this constitutes the whole difference: the one takes account only of the visible effect; the other takes account of both the effects which are seen and those which it is necessary to foresee. Now this difference is enormous, for it almost always happens that when the immediate consequence is favorable, the ultimate consequences are fatal, and the converse. Hence it follows that the bad economist pursues a small present good, which will be followed by a great evil to come, while the true economist pursues a great good to come, at the risk of a small present evil."
3. "[The socialists declare] that the State owes subsistence, well-being, and education to all its citizens; that it should be generous, charitable, involved in everything, devoted to everybody; ...that it should intervene directly to relieve all suffering, satisfy and anticipate all wants, furnish capital to all enterprises, enlightenment to all minds, balm for all wounds, asylums for all the unfortunate... Who would not like to see all these benefits flow forth upon the world from the law, as from an inexhaustible source? ... But is it possible? ... Whence does [the State] draw those resources that it is urged to dispense by way of benefits to individuals? Is it not from the individuals themselves? How, then, can these resources be increased by passing through the hands of a parasitic and voracious intermediary?"
4. "It is impossible to introduce into society a greater

change and a greater evil than this: the conversion of the law into an instrument of plunder.”

5. “When plunder becomes a way of life for a group of men in a society, over the course of time they create for themselves a legal system that authorizes it and a moral code that glorifies it.”
6. “Socialism, like the ancient ideas from which it springs, confuses the distinction between government and society. As a result of this, every time we object to a thing being done by government, the socialists conclude that we object to its being done at all. We disapprove of state education. Then the socialists say that we are opposed to any education. We object to a state religion. Then the socialists say that we want no religion at all. We object to a state-enforced equality. Then they say that we are against equality. And so on, and so on. It is as if the socialists were to accuse us of not wanting persons to eat because we do not want the state to raise grain.”
7. “If the natural tendencies of mankind are so bad that it is not safe to permit people to be free, how is it that the tendencies of these organizers are always good? Do not the legislators and their appointed agents also belong to the human race? Or do they believe that they themselves are made of a finer clay than the rest of mankind?”
8. “It is not true that the function of law is to regulate our consciences, our ideas, our wills, our education, our opinions, our work, our trade, our talents, or our pleasures. The function of law is to protect the free exercise of these rights, and to prevent any person from interfering with the free exercise of these same rights by any other person...The existence of persons and

property preceded the existence of the legislator, and his function is only to guarantee their safety.”

9. “Leave people alone. God has given organs to this frail creature; let them develop and grow strong by exercise, use, experience, and liberty.”
10. “Misguided public opinion honors what is despicable and despises what is honorable, punishes virtue and rewards vice, encourages what is harmful and discourages what is useful, applauds falsehood and smothers truth under indifference or insult, a nation turns its back on progress and can be restored only by the terrible lessons of catastrophe.”
11. “The real cost of the State is the prosperity we do not see, the jobs that don’t exist, the technologies to which we do not have access, the businesses that do not come into existence, and the bright future that is stolen from us. The State has looted us just as surely as a robber who enters our home at night and steals all that we love.”
12. “Everyone wants to live at the expense of the state. They forget that the state wants to live at the expense of everyone.”
13. “You who think that you are so great! You who judge humanity to be so small! You who wish to reform everything! Why don’t you reform yourselves? That task would be sufficient enough.”
14. “The mission of the law is not to oppress persons and plunder them of their property, even though the law may be acting in a philanthropic spirit. Its purpose is to protect persons and property... If you exceed this proper limit–If you attempt to make the law religious,

fraternal, equalizing, philanthropic, industrial, or artistic—you will then be lost in uncharted territory, in vagueness and uncertainty, in a forced utopia or, even worse, in a multitude of utopias, each striving to seize the law and impose it on you.”

—

This article was originally published on [FEE.org](https://www.fee.org). Read the [original article](#).



[Image Credit: Flickr-Gage Skidmore (Biden and Harris) [CC BY-SA 2.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/) and LefontQ [CC BY-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)]