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by Daniel B. Klein

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—David Boaz, Author, ***Libertarianism: A Primer;***
Executive Vice President, Cato Institute

The first two essays in this collection explore the moral consequences of government policy. Those consequences are personal, as the rules within which one lives affect the meaning of one's life, and political, as the character of a people affects the determination of policy, partly by affecting the extent to which justifications for policy become valid. The two essays develop the idea of dignity, and argue that blows to liberty and blows to responsibility feed on each other through dignity. Morals and government policy work as an interdependent system, a system which might begin steering itself toward results no one originally wanted.

Professor Klein's third essay is titled "If Government Is So Villainous, How Come Government Officials Don't Seem Like Villains?" It explores beliefs within government agencies and suggests that in government honest people believe in the goodness of bad policies. Like the previous essays, it maintains that communities work by cultural systems and the yearning to find meaning in life.

The Occasional Paper suggests that liberty is the legal framework that best suits the meaning-seeking animal.

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tures means no bureaucratic interference. Somalis seem particularly well adapted to operating in such an environment. . . . The clan tradition makes any form of central government difficult here. . . . Somalis consider themselves born free. To them, the State equals registration, regulation and restriction."

All these reports, and more, lent credence to my friends' statement that when the Somalis dismantled their state in 1991, tribal governments had quickly filled the vacuum. That had come as a surprise, they said, to those who remembered the determined efforts of the state to eliminate Somalia's traditional judges and police from the political scene. But tribal government remained the government of choice for Somalis. According to my friends, this indigenous government, composed of part-time police and law courts, had been effective during the past seven years in keeping the peace in the rural areas. They said that many observers thoughtlessly describe this situation as anarchy whereas, in reality, it is government based on natural law.

Unraveling the Somali Political Equation

Before the colonial era, the homeland of the Somali nation was the whole of the Horn of Africa, bounded on the north and east by the Indian Ocean, on the south by the Tana River in what is now Kenya, and on the west by the Ethiopian and Galla highlands. It was fragmented into five parts by the colonial powers—France, England, Italy, and Ethiopia. In 1960, the British withdrew from the north and the Italians from the south, leaving in their place one government over the former two colonies. There resulted a v-shaped country, the Republic of Somalia—a 1,600-mile belt of coastline around both sides of the Horn with an average depth of some 200 miles.

The French subsequently withdrew from the extreme northwest coast, leaving the Republic of Djibouti. A fourth part of the original Somali nation is now controlled by Kenya. The fifth part lies inland, comprising the heartland of the Horn. It is wholly within Ethiopia and nominally independent—hence unrestricted movement is permitted between Ethiopia and Somalia.

Soon after the British and Italian withdrawal, the Somalis realized that independence had not made them free. The foreign oppressors had left, but their tool of oppression, the state, remained intact. Three decades later, therefore, with the intention of restoring the pre-colonial indigenous political tradition, the leading tribes within the republic joined forces and deliberately dismantled the central government. The United Nations attempted militarily to reinstate it but was defeated, and Somalis themselves made several splinter attempts at state formation, notably in Mogadishu and Hargeisa. Such attempts accounted for most of the turmoil in the years following the dissolution of the central government in 1991.

The basic problem confronting the Somalis is that voting democracy cannot work in a tribal or clan system, where any coercive political apparatus with power to tax and confer patronage is seen as a prize to be controlled for the benefit of one's kindred. The presence or even the prospect, therefore, of a state apparatus keeps the country in continual agitation.

That explains the Somali "warlords." These are warriors who gain their support within their tribes by holding out the promise that they will re-establish the state and control it in order to grant privileges to their kinsmen and prevent others from doing the same to them. In dismantling their state in 1991, the Somalis did not realize that the mere possibility of a future state would be enough, in the short term at least, to prevent peace from returning to their country. If the tribes could convincingly declare that their territory would remain forever stateless, no one would listen to these warriors and they would have no option but to place themselves again under the discipline of tribal customary law. The Somali nation would have neutralized its warlords.

Unfortunately, there has been no practical possibility of that happening. The mere likelihood of a central government has been like the golden apple of Eris, Greek goddess of discord. Eris rolled a golden apple into the hall on Mount Olympus where all the gods were partying without (for good reason) having invited her. Inscribed "For the fairest," the golden apple quickly accomplished its intended purpose of setting the gods to fighting.