

Then Truth Will Out

“The road is always better than the inn.”

An assessment of position
on the freedom road
after passing
the 25th milestone at FEE

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Then Truth Will Out

LEONARD E. READ



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The Foundation for Economic Education is a nonpolitical, nonprofit, educational institution. Its senior staff and numerous writers are students as well as teachers of the free market, private ownership, limited government rationale. Sample copies of the Foundation's monthly study journal, *The Freeman*, are available on request.

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To the Founders of FEE

MARCH, 1946:

Donaldson Brown (1889-1966)
Vice-Chairman, General Motors Corporation
New York City

Fred Rogers Fairchild (1877-1966)
Knox Professor of Economics
Yale University

David M. Goodrich (1876-1950)
Chairman, B. F. Goodrich Company
New York City

Henry Hazlitt (1894-)
Editorial Staff, New York Times
New York City

Claude Robinson (1900-1961)
President, Opinion Research Corporation
Princeton

Leo Wolman (1890-1961)
Professor of Economics
Columbia University

Contents

1. *A CONFESSIOIN OF FAITH* 1
Author's premise or ideological position. Civilized person identified as one who recognizes he is both a social and individualistic being. Distinction between freedom and license. The ideal embraces limited government, precludes anarchy.

2. *THE KINGDOM ON EARTH* 3
Gleanings from quarter-century at FEE. Economic understanding important but moral scruples come first. Truth revealed only through integrity of behavior. A confirming personal experience. Not dangerous to be honest. Persons of integrity are educable; dissimulators are not.

3. *WHO ARE YOUR FRIENDS?* 11
The process of personal enlightenment outlined and explained. Givers or receivers of light are high-level friends. Law of love—its meaning and relevance to politico-economic understanding. Repetition and refinement of thought and deed.

4. *THE WISDOM IN KNOWING I KNOW NOT* 21
From simple to cosmic consciousness. The more that is known, the greater an awareness of the unknown. Know-it-allness breeds authoritarianism. Importance of awe. New miracles respected; familiarity breeds contempt and deadens wonder. Wisdom and humility, a recipe for good citizenship.

5. *THE UNRULY CONSENSUS* 29
Voucher system in education illustrates fallacy of substituting one socialistic scheme for another. The consensus rules: that which is handed down to us plus what we, who live on its growing edge, put into it. Recognizing limitations essential for realization of potentialities. Growth in awareness generates enlightenment, one's way to influence the consensus.

6. *THE KING CAN DO NO RIGHT* 35
Divine Right doctrine manifested in modern "kings" of planned economy and welfare state variety. Creative activities cannot be ruled, only ruled out. "Kings" keep others from being themselves, can do no more. Each man's right to be himself creatively. The planned economy a herding maneuver, down the "king's" lane.

7. *LEAVE IT TO THE FREE MARKET* 42
What is and is not in one's power to correct. The market, if free, is intimately personal, renders justice, moves aspirations and satisfactions toward harmony, is humane. State interventionism has opposite effects. Reasons cited for popular misconceptions.

8. *HOW TO BE A BENEFACTOR* 53
The extent and limitation of social responsibility. Danger in assuming that all social problems are one's own. Pursuit of self-interest, if intelligently interpreted, best way to serve others. Looking after self prime social duty. Minding one's own business is the doctrine of liberty.
9. *A LABORER LOOKS AT FREEDOM* 61
All workers—manual, intellectual, spiritual—are laborers. Labor laws and labor unions against the laborer. Exploitation theory and other sophisms deceive us. Choose free entry and competition: freedom!
10. *A CONSUMER LOOKS AT FREEDOM* 67
Everyone a consumer. Consumer interest and public interest identical; a basic premise for public policy. Economic complexity hinders understanding, inspires clichés and fallacies. Interventionism always antagonistic to consumer interest; everyone gains through freedom.
11. *A CONSERVATIONIST LOOKS AT FREEDOM* 74
Distinction between preservation and conservation. Man a part of the environment. Government can preserve by keep-off-grass techniques; how free market conserves scarce resources. Human beings, animals, wild-life sanctuaries, forestry, parks, playgrounds used to test these claims. Monetary and psychic profit both important.

12. *NOTHING FAILS LIKE SOMETHING-FOR-NOTHING* 84
 Success, unless earned, leads to failure. Faculties develop through struggle, not handouts. Affluence comes easily in free economy, but tends to induce atrophy, not growth. Learning to live with affluence a unique challenge in human experience.
13. *PROGRESS DEPENDS ON FREEDOM* 90
 Freedom man's most important tool; not a goal in itself but a vital means to each man's goals. Should one wish to be free of ideas? Growth? Never! Freedom from want, from fear, from competition examined. Fundamental is the freedom from restraints against the release of creative energy.
14. *BEHIND THE SYNTHETIC CURTAIN* 97
 The choices we face: (1) continue government spending spree which spells collapse; (2) stop spending, without other correctives, which means massive unemployment; (3) pare government spending to bone and simultaneously remove synthetic curtain—the only sensible option. The curtain defined. Plenty of jobs if curtain removed; the more who work the greater the production; production the only source of real wages and better living.
15. *WHY FLATTER THE COMMUNISTS?* 105
 Communist organizers active, but not the basic cause of campus strife and other disorders. Organizers spawned by whoever is organizable. Blaming communists tends to conceal real cause: ourselves. Foolish ideas always present; lower standards allow

such ideas to proliferate. Unless we consciously resist, nonsense does not pass by us but into us. Communists but the fungus spawned by the muck heap.

16. *DEFIANCE OF LAW* 111
 Moral laws defied at our own peril. Man-made statutory law largely obnoxious; should be obeyed, if not respected. Obedience strengthens the will to repeal bad laws; lawbreaking removes this incentive. Governance is with us always; the question is: what kind? The need for statesmanship.
17. *RESIST NOT EVIL* 118
 A search for truth in modern application of the Biblical injunction. Confrontations lend credence to evil; evil tends to vanish when not sustained by tension. Ignore the enemies of freedom and let our case go by default? To the contrary, make the case by concentrating on the positive.
18. *ON SPREADING THE WORD* 125
 A critique of two-sided, public debate. Objective becomes audience applause, not truth. Forensic artist wins, right or wrong. The case for self-improvement—increasing one's own light. An example of how self-enlightenment mirrors itself through the ages; success, where short-cuts fail.
19. *ON LABELING THE IDEAL* 131
 The specific can be named. Freedom philosophy an ideal to be sought; best left nameless while not yet attained. The fallacy of labeling the unknown ideal or those who strive for it. Learning to seek truth

without labeling the result may be first step toward finding it.

20. *A RETURN TO READING* 138
 A free society unlikely without serious study. “There’s too much to read” and “I don’t have time to read” are mere excuses. Self-interest the key to joyful reading. Supply of knowledge exceeds demand.
21. *READINESS IS ALL* 144
 Private ownership, specialization, freedom to contract and trade provide abundance. Such freedom also increases interdependence to point where no one can injure another without harm to self. Golden Rule, a prime tenet of sound economics, an ancient and universal ethical imperative.
22. *THE WILL TO PREVAIL* 153
 Many experts simply pursue social troubles to point of exhaustion and despair. Days darker than ours have been followed by best eras in history with no one foreseeing turnabout. Solutions depend on insight, not forecasting. The magic of believing. Believers prevail where doubters fail.
- ADDENDUM* 161
 A reprint of Bastiat’s chapter, “Abundance and Scarcity.” The essence of economics explored with unmatched simplicity, clarity, and wit.
- INDEX* 173

One free man says frankly what he thinks and feels in the midst of thousands who by their actions and words maintain just the opposite. It might be supposed that the man who has frankly expressed his thought would remain isolated, yet in most cases it happens that all, or the majority, of the others have long thought and felt the same as he, only they have not expressed it. And what yesterday was the novel opinion of one man becomes to-day the general opinion of the majority. And as soon as this opinion is established, at once by imperceptible degrees but irresistibly, the conduct of mankind begins to alter.

—LEO TOLSTOY

1.

A Confession of Faith

TO PARAPHRASE John Ruskin: I have heard it said, by men practiced in public address, that hearers are never so much fatigued as by the endeavor to follow a speaker who gives them no clue to his purpose—I will take the slight mask off at once, and tell you plainly where I stand and what you may expect of me.

Perhaps the clearest way to identify one's politico-economic position—at least in broad outline—is to reveal his idea of the ideal, that is, what he means by civilization or by a civilized people.

Civilization is a term ascribed to such widely varying societal situations that it has lost nearly all reference to quality. Thus, a use of the term requires of the user that he define his meaning.

To me, civilization can mean nothing less than a society of civilized people. So how is a civilized person to be identified?

A civilized person, according to my ideal, must recognize that man is at once a social and an individualistic being.

Thus, he must not only be self-responsible but, at the same time, understand that he owes to others no infringements on their rights.

In a word, the truly civilized person is a devotee of freedom; he opposes all man-concocted restraints against the release of creative human energy.

The civilized person realizes how incorrect it is to think of freedom as synonymous with unrestrained action. Freedom does not and cannot include any action, regardless of sponsorship, which lessens the freedom of a single human being. To argue contrarily is to claim that freedom can be composed of freedom negations, patently absurd. Unrestraint carried to the point of impairing the freedom of others is the exercise of license, not freedom. To minimize the exercise of license is to maximize the area of freedom.

In order to achieve this ideal, it is necessary that there be an agency of society—representative of the social side of man—which codifies the thou-shalt-nots, the taboos, the destructive actions and enforces their observation.

The fact that society's agency—government—has a historical record of getting out of hand, of becoming destructive itself, only testifies to how far from civilized we are. It does not warrant discarding the idea of the ideal; it does not justify anarchy.

Ideally, that is, in a civilized society, government would restrain license, not indulge in it; make it difficult, not easy; disgraceful, not popular. A government that does otherwise is licentious, not liberal—and a people who permit this are not quite civilized.

2.

The Kingdom on Earth

MARCH 1971—the 25th Anniversary of The Foundation for Economic Education!

“Well, what on earth have you accomplished in a quarter century?”

That is a valid question which, alas, cannot be answered with a Victory salute. Indeed, surface appearances point to nothing but losses, the broad social practice of freedom having steadily waned through the years since FEE began. In the light of such evidence, why keep trying?

There is reason aplenty for persistent effort, not only on our part but on yours, whoever you are.

The private ownership, free exchange, limited government way of life, more stumbled upon than brought about by any precise design, has no long-range survival value except as a supporting rationality comes to the rescue.¹ This remarkable politico-economic arrangement cannot last without intellec-

¹ For a development of this point, see “A Role for Rationality” in my *Let Freedom Reign* (Irvington-on-Hudson, N.Y.: The Foundation for Economic Education, 1969), pp. 9-24.

tual, moral, and spiritual underpinnings, many of which have yet to be discovered, understood, explained. In the absence of understanding, coercive collectivism—statism—spills in to occupy the vacuum. Witness what is happening!

In a sense, then, these 25 years have been a period of probing beneath our waywardness to solid foundations upon which to erect and refine a rationale that will make a free society possible.

Do our troubles stem from economic illiteracy? We thought so in the beginning. Without discounting the need for economic understanding, we no longer view it as the bedrock on which to build. For were everyone lacking in moral scruples, the mastery of economics would not make a whit of difference. Fundamentally, ours is a moral problem.

All history attests to the rise and decline of nations, societies, civilizations. And any thoughtful person, when his own society appears to be on the wane, will try to get at the root of the matter. What is the unique strength of an emerging society or the peculiar weakness that leads toward social decline? What accentuates these ups and downs? Why this monotonous evolutionary-devolutionary sequence?

Personal Integrity

If there were a simple and obvious explanation, it long since would have been brought into the open for all to see and, hopefully, bent to our purpose.

I believe that this obscure force, or the lack of it, must be identified with the human psyche; it is a quality that develops or deteriorates in the minds of men. The cause of these ups and downs occurs within each individual. Contagious, yes, for like begets like; but this would be the only

sense in which the force might be construed as social. Unquestionably, this is a personal problem.

What, then, can it be? I suggest that it has to do with the rise and decline of integrity: *the accurate reflection in word and deed of whatever one's highest conscience dictates as Truth*. Such dictates of conscience may not in fact be Truth but they are the nearest approximation possible for any human being—the closest he can ever come to The Kingdom.

What is to be inferred from "The Kingdom"? If one posits, as I do, an Infinite Consciousness, an out-of-reach Ideal—Creation—then Infinite Truth is The Kingdom. And the eternal challenge to imperfect man is that he bring himself into as much possession of Truth as he can.

The key is familiar, though rarely understood as related to the ups and downs of societies: "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness, and these things will be added unto you." This admonition is being ignored and thus lies in near obscurity.

In other words, if one will first and foremost seek Truth (The Kingdom) and Righteousness (integrity), then these things—a societal rise being one of "these things"—will be the dividend. But, seek first the dividend, thereby relegating Truth and Righteousness to an inferior position, then the result surely will be a society in decline. In the words of C. S. Lewis, "Aim at Heaven and you get earth thrown in. Aim at earth and you will get neither."²

Now to my point: Truth and Righteousness cannot be torn asunder without obliterating Truth; these are two sides of the same moral coin, that is, they are the inseparable com-

² See *Mere Christianity* by C. S. Lewis (London: Goeffrey Bles, Ltd., 1953), p. 106.

ponents of The Kingdom on earth! To illustrate: It is a sin to feather my own nest at the expense of others. My highest conscience pronounces this as a Truth. For me to speak or write or act in a contrary manner is to indulge in dissimulation, to flout Righteousness, to live a lie, to deny the Truth that is within me.

Some Fallacies at Best

With reference to the rise and decline of integrity, it is necessary, at the outset, to re-emphasize that whatever any individual's conscience dictates as Truth may not in fact be Truth but here, *and here alone*, resides such Truths as mankind possesses. One's highest conscience not only can but often does hold fallacies and errors to be Truths. No human being is or ever has been free from this flaw. Thus, even our most accurate reflections—integrity—pronounce fallacies and errors, perhaps more often than not.

Reflect on the millions of people who make perfectly honest pronouncements on subjects about which they know little, if anything at all. For instance, according to the tenets I hold to be Truths, Karl Marx expounded numerous errors. Yet, he was—at some points—a man of integrity and in 1848 proudly claimed this virtue for himself and his kind: “The communists disdain to conceal their views and aims.” I like the young Marx for that!

And I admire integrity in everyone despite the fact that accurate reflection in word and deed projects an enormous amount of nonsense.

Consider those who speak or write or act contrary to what they believe to be Truth, those who practice dissimulation. Is nonsense thereby curbed? Indeed, it is not; it is multiplied.

Were everyone to behave in this manner, Truth would have no way of coming to light—mankind confronted entirely with falsehood!

There are Truths and many are known, else we would not be here. But we must look upon man-perceived Truths as extreme rarities when compared to Infinite Truth. These rare and precious gems of Truth, like diamonds, are mined—brought to the surface—for man's use in company with inordinate amounts of useless residue.

When integrity is the rule, fallacies and errors are brought honestly into the open, where they can be seen and discarded. Precisely as in mining, the waste is relegated to the slag pile!

“We are all dwarfs mounted upon the shoulders of giants.”³ Who are the giants, the ones on whose shoulders all of us are mounted? *Exclusively* the ones who have, over the ages, combined Righteousness with such Truths as they apprehended—men of integrity! Civilization, indeed the very existence of mankind, rests on integrity! Civilizations can rise only as that virtue is practiced and held sacred; they must decline when dissimulation is the mood and the mode.

False Goals

What of those who seek first the dividends rather than the Kingdom? What are “these things”? One need not look into the behavior of others in order to find this reversal of emphasis. I can look into the mirror and there are plenty of examples. True, some of these desires for “things” have been overcome, disciplined out of practice, but the scars re-

³ Fulbert of Chartres (Eleventh Century).

main and the memories persist as temptations. However, they must be recognized for what they are—"these things" or dividends—if I am not to yield to them.

For instance, I wish to be favorably received by a certain scholarly, affluent individual who believes in the essentially free society—except tariffs. Shall I conceal from him my belief in free exchange, thus trying to win his approbation, or shall I reveal what my conscience dictates as Truth, inviting his enmity? This is a considerable temptation. But if I were to yield, and everyone else did the same, freedom in transactions would be an unknown concept. To yield is dissimulation; not to yield is integrity.

Or, take the thesis I'm propounding here. Suppose "The Kingdom" were positively scorned by everyone else rather than simply ignored as it is today by those who proclaim that God is dead. Shall I reveal, or conceal, what my conscience dictates as Truth? One is tempted to "go along" with the crowd, rather than risk abuse and disgrace.

"I must be practical" is among the most forbidding obstacles to Righteousness. When socialism is rampant, as now, there is the temptation to weasel, to compromise or, at best, to counsel a cautious and gradual retreat, thus condoning by implication the socialistic thesis. I once asked a distinguished economist why he inserted one socialistic chapter in an otherwise excellent book. He thought it would save him from excessive condemnation by the academic fraternity. There is the temptation not to stand alone with conscience; one fears being regarded as "a nut."

Fame, fortune, acclaim, popularity, and the like are "these things." And to seek them first is to risk a substitution of dissimulation for integrity. Seek Truth, then "these things" come along as the dividend.

Honesty the Best Policy

Admittedly, this basic admonition calls for faith in something beyond the obvious. Why my faith?

Twenty-six years ago, I came to New York City as the Executive Vice-President of the National Industrial Conference Board. Shortly after arrival, I was invited to meet with a dozen top corporate executives, an ad hoc affair unrelated to the NICB. Following dinner, the purpose of the meeting was revealed: "We are here not to discuss the merits or demerits of the Full Employment Act; we are all opposed to it. The question is, what shall we do about it?" Immediately, I resolved to be a listener only. For how these men might appraise the newcomer would have much to do with my career.

For two hours I listened: "We must not reveal our position; instead, we shall hire college professors to appear before the Congressional Committee and speak our piece." And so on!

Finally, one of them asked my views. The thoughts that raced through my mind! If I tell these men what I really think, I'm a goner. Not to tell them is to live a lie, to seek approval before men rather than God. *I told them!* There was dead silence, my fate seemingly sealed. Then one of them exclaimed, "Read is right!"

As it turned out, their views were presented openly to the Congress by one of them. As for me, this was among the most rewarding and instructive experiences of my life. Every one of that group welcomed me as a friend, often seeking my counsel. Why? Each felt certain that I would tell him the truth as I saw it.

Experience tells me it is *not* dangerous to be honest, to

practice integrity. Indeed, accurate reflection of what one believes to be Truth engenders respect, trust, friendliness—assuming, of course, that one is not argumentative, abusive, cantankerous. And why should one be? I have no call to compel anyone to accept my views; my moral obligation is to express my thoughts honestly for whatever others may wish to make of them.

While it is true that integrity breeds respect, trust, friendliness, and other desiderata, it is well to keep in mind that these are only dividends. Therefore, it is not for these that one is righteous but for Truth's sake, and that alone. It is simply a matter of getting the priorities in proper order.

Finally, the individual who practices integrity is teachable for, by definition, he is a Truth seeker. The dissimulator on the other hand is, at best, no more than a dividend seeker. He has torn Truth and Righteousness apart and, thus, has alienated himself from such Truth as is within him. Until he reverses the priorities, he is not educable.

As one reflects on this subject, it becomes obvious that when dissimulation is widespread, as it seems to be now, nations, societies, civilizations suffer decline. To reverse the direction requires only that integrity become the way, the mode, the style. Then Truth will out!

Then Truth will out—not all at once, never fully to any man or any generation, or even during any century, but bit by bit to those who persist in the eternal search.

3.

Who Are Your Friends?

IT WAS a thoughtful letter, and this paragraph especially intrigued me:

I asked once before, who are your friends? You did not answer. I repeat, who are your friends?

Now, why should anyone wish to know that? What does it have to do with exploring the truth about freedom? More than first meets the eye! Here is my answer for what it is worth—how I stumbled onto it and its relevance to all of us who labor in this vineyard.

My own answer began to take shape many years ago, at a weekend seminar FEE had been invited to conduct in the Midwest. At the opening dinner on Friday, I was seated next to one of our hosts. “Since making your acquaintance,” he remarked, “I have a new set of friends.” Somewhat puzzled, I asked for an explanation. “Well,” said he, “until you interested me in the freedom philosophy, I spent my spare time in merriment and diversion—with the fast set, one might say. Now, I see them no more; my new friends are of a serious, thoughtful, inquiring nature, such as those who are at

this Seminar." This was most impressive, for I had never thought of myself as changing anyone's life to that extent.

After dinner, I opened the meeting as follows:

We have specified no topics for tonight, tomorrow, or Sunday forenoon. Instead, we shall discuss whatever seems relevant. But at the start, might it not be a good idea to search for an appropriate premise, some basic point of reference, from which to do our thinking. Consistency in philosophical and ideological positions is otherwise unlikely; and we should aim at consistency. So, let me share my premise with you.

My search for a premise began by asking and answering the most difficult question I could imagine, namely, what is man's earthly purpose? The answer hinges on three fundamental assumptions.

The first is founded on an observation: man did not create himself, for it is easily demonstrable that man knows practically nothing whatsoever about himself. Thus, my first assumption is the primacy and supremacy of an Infinite Consciousness.

My second assumption is also demonstrable: the expansibility of the individual consciousness. While difficult, it is possible to expand one's awareness, perception, consciousness.

My third assumption is not demonstrable; I simply believe in the immortality of the individual spirit or consciousness—this earthly moment being not all there is to it.

Now, if you will concede my assumptions, the answer to man's earthly purpose is clear; it is to see how close he can come to expanding his own consciousness into a harmony with Infinite Consciousness. In other words, see how close he can come to a realization of those creative potentialities uniquely his own, each of us differing vastly from any other in this respect.

What, then, is my premise? It is individual growth, evolution, emergence, development, "hatching."

How is this to be used in maintaining a consistent position? Simply weigh your own or another person's ideas in terms of the premise. If these ideas are antagonistic or tend to thwart the premise, you are warranted in disapproving them. If, on the other hand, the ideas seem to be harmonious and to promote the premise, then you are justified in favoring them. Consistency can be approached in this manner.

These introductory remarks cast the evening's discussion in a moral and spiritual vein. The "law of love"—from a book by Tolstoy¹—was a term used numerous times by the participants in that opening session.

Two impressive thoughts were in mind as I dozed off that night: "I have a new set of friends," and "the law of love." Were these, perhaps, related?

Love Is Light

The question to which I awakened next morning was this: Whom do you regard as your best friends? An honest inventory revealed them to be those individuals who give me enlightenment or, conversely, those few who perhaps are getting glimmers of light from me, that is, the persons, whoever they may be, who are related to me in the learning process. High level friendships!

With these thoughts, the word "love" at once took on a meaning unlike the Greek *agape*, *eros*, or *philia*, or the dozen definitions to be found in Webster's. The Biblical observations, "God is love" and "God is light," caused me to infer

¹ *The Law of Love and The Law of Violence* translated by Mary K. Tolstoy (Rudolph Field, N.Y., 1948)

that love, in its finest meaning, is light—enlightenment. As wonderful a revelation as I have experienced.

Now, my dear correspondent, you know who my friends are—present and past—not necessarily by name but you know the nature of them. Frederic Bastiat, for instance, is as much my friend as if he were living today and dining regularly at my table. The same is true of numerous individuals who have lived during the past thirty centuries. Indeed, every author who gives me enlightenment, regardless of when he wrote or spoke, is included on my list of friends. And he is my friend who catches a glimmer of light from me—now or in the future.

To find friendships of this kind would appear to qualify as the highest aspiration of earthly existence. But what about the relevance of such friendships to freedom, a way of life so little understood? What does this call for on your part and mine? The answer is clear: refinement, now and always. For our own lights are brightened only as our thinking is refined. Let me relate this point to the politico-economic world in which we now live.

There are more than enough of us who say we favor freedom. Our numbers, based on say-so, are in the millions. “Free enterprisers” outnumber avowed socialists a hundred to one, and then some!

Precepts vs. Performance

The trouble is that most “free enterprisers” are not what they purport to be. There is an enormous discrepancy between the tenets they proclaim and the deeds they practice. Self-styled capitalists, free enterprisers, and conservatives—when they betray their creed—are far more responsible for our

blundering into socialism than those who admit to being socialists. To employ an analogy: when those ordained as high priests sanction evil, disintegration is spawned more by them than by all the thieves and crooks in Christendom.

Our plight is aggravated by the fact that many self-styled freedomites think their sole obligation is to announce that they favor economic freedom and oppose Federal intervention in the market place. This is as shallow as saluting a flag because of its colors, without knowledge of the principles and traditions it symbolizes. What this amounts to is choosing sides because of a preference for a good label—freedom—rather than for a bad label—socialism. The enormous lip service paid to freedom in America today is, for the most part, nothing more than ideological affectation and, like a wolf in sheep's clothing, is both deceptive and dangerous.

Consider a now-and-then letter received at FEE: "You don't need to repeat your freedom story for me; I've got the point."

Implicit in such self-assessment is the writer's "graduation." No question about it, he feels that the difference between what he now knows and what is left to know is deserving of no more effort on his part. He has made the grade! The point I wish to make is that such people have missed the point entirely!

The facts: Probably some of these self-graded "free enterprisers" know as much, or possibly more, than any of us—except for one thing: they do not yet know how little they know.

True, many of us have grasped the kindergarten point that socialism, communism, the planned economy, the welfare state, or other variants of collectivism are not consonant with the way of life we have in mind. Creative accomplishment by

government edict is suspect; leave creative activities to the free market. All well and good, but such minor awareness must be likened to a child's first step; it takes a lot of doing—growth, development, repetition, refinement—before the mile can be run in four minutes flat!

The Need for Refinement

We at FEE took our stand on the side of the private ownership, free market, limited government way of life long ago, and have spent the past twenty-five years attempting, as best we know how, to write and speak its rationale. That we have some grasp of the a-b-c's is borne out by the fact that rarely are we obliged to return to earlier assertions and "eat crow," as the saying goes. The broad, general outline, if soundly formulated, may be used over and over again, year in and year out; but it is the framework only. When it comes to apprehending the tenets and principles within the framework and learning how to explain them in crystal clarity, I know of no one, past or present, who has more than scratched the surface. We are all neophytes; no one is more than a novice! Any individual whose experience denies this conclusion has done very little significant homework.

Conceding that no individual is more than a novice, what is the problem we face? What confronts the person who would first apprehend and then speak and write freedom's rationale?

In each presentation he must repeat the framework, despite the risk of appearing "old hat." For it is folly ever to leave a reader or listener in the dark as to the premise from which reasoning proceeds. Repetitious or not, this is not show biz, as the entertainers put it, but as deadly serious as survival it-

self. Be it remembered that "repetition is the mother of learning."

The real problem and the prime necessity is to probe ever further into the unknown, for it is self-evident that the quality of understanding is not up to what the current situation requires. When the quality is high enough—that is, when we can intellectually meet the challenge which is peculiar to our own period in history—then, and only then, will the societal situation veer in the right direction. Nor do we have any way of knowing what that required quality is until—and unless—an improved consensus becomes evident. Prior to that happy day we have no alternative but to acknowledge that our understanding is deficient.

And, interestingly enough, the further one probes, the more stubbornly does Truth resign herself and reveal her secrets. In short, the prober into how human beings act and react to ever-changing stimuli must not be discouraged with barely inching ahead. His understanding, if he has the will to stay with his probing, is made up of the same freedom thesis, over and over again, with an added refinement first here and then there. It is, I repeat, refinement and more refinement, now and always!

Clarify the Thought

Probing is akin to prospecting. You get an idea or lead, pose it as a hypothesis, and follow it with the hope of striking ore. But the ore, if discovered, is not worth much until it is refined. Refinement of rough ideas means "thinking through," that is, apprehending to the point where clear explanation is possible. This is the minimum required for achievement.

A few questions to which answers can be found only by more probing into the efficacy of economic freedom and individual liberty:

What causes people by the millions to turn more and more away from personal responsibility and the competitive processes of the open market—and toward government—for problem solving? Why so different from a few decades ago? If we cannot face these questions and come upon improved answers, a history book some day will be entitled, *The Decline and Fall of the United States of America*.

Has there been a change in the environment which leads people to believe that all the problems of all the world are now their personal problems? Though the problems are much too big for our little minds, do we, perhaps, experience a sense of accomplishment by turning the problems over to other little minds with nothing added but the police power to enforce little-mind decisions? How can the individual avoid being drawn into this political trap?

Are the principles of voluntary competitive enterprise rejected by a person simply because he cannot think how he would—for instance—deliver the mail? In a word, are we erroneously correlating the potentiality of freedom with our own ignorance, thus concluding that the free market has shortcomings similar to yours and mine? Are we rejecting freedom altogether, just because we ourselves do not see how to solve every problem? If we assume that everyone else's ignorance matches our own, is this any reason to hope for a miracle from the one who will become "the man on horseback"?

Even more serious, are we postulating what human beings can accomplish, when self-responsible and free, on the observed actions of men neither responsible nor free? Are we

to project how free men will act by studying the behavior of slaves? Can we ever imagine how the free market would work by observing how men in a governmentally rigged market react? Do not the planned economy and the welfare state alter the behavior of men? Is there not a distinction between those who are kept and those who keep themselves?

Are we on a spiritual downgrade? Is there not a relationship between the unprecedented American miracle of material affluence and such spiritual underpinnings as "men are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights . . ."? If men's rights are not endowed by an order over and beyond the human estate, they must, perforce, be endowed by a human collective which, in this context, is the political state. If not one or the other, from where else do men's rights derive? Suppose the Cosmic Order calls for the evolution of individual awareness, perception, consciousness, as I believe. Then, should not the decline and fall of one more society be the Cosmic Signal that its participants are off course? If that be the case, can we not presume that any expedient short of getting back on course is a waste of time and energy? Is it possible that a good economy is but a dividend declared for those who are on course, morally and spiritually? Would not the principles of economics, even if they were understood by a society of immoral men, be utterly useless?

Or, are we failures as teachers—those of us who glimpse the efficacy of economic freedom and individual liberty? If so, why? A lead: the more we see into the miraculousness of the free market, the more clearly do we recognize the errors of political intervention in the peaceful affairs of men. And the more errors we see, the more intolerant is our tendency—intolerance being an intervention of sorts. If we allow im-

proved insight to breed intolerance, then we are on the way to madness, capable of neither teaching others nor learning from them. This gives us another lead: he who sees more than others should treat them sympathetically rather than antagonistically. Should not observed errors and mistakes by others inspire us to increase our own candle power? Flaws can be seen only when and where there is light. Darkness recedes as light is increased.

Finally, the useful prober roams all over the place, examining the human situation in every nook and cranny. He knows that the answers are elusive; assuredly, they are hidden far off, maybe only a few of them ever to be found. Conceivably, this is the way it should be—a lead the prober might also examine. For, as Cervantes put it, "The road is always better than the inn." If we truly seek freedom, then there is no inn, no graduating class, so long as life endures. It is always the road: refinement and more refinement, now and forever. And, fear not repetition, for "nothing is too often repeated that is not sufficiently learned."

It is an observed fact that the prober, the refiner, the seeker after Truth can make little if any progress going it alone. How richly he will be rewarded depends, in large measure, on the quality of his friends. Thus, there is no more relevant question than this: *Who are your friends?*

4.

The Wisdom in Knowing I Know Not

MY CANINE friend, Rusty, has *simple* consciousness, as do all higher animals. He knows quite a few things, without knowing that he knows; he is wholly unaware that there are things he does *not* know.

Human beings possess a distinctive attribute: *self-consciousness*. We know that we know. But self-consciousness seldom tells one how little he knows. That information is difficult to acquire and valuable to possess; it is the beginning of wisdom.

There are said to be a rare few who have acquired or been endowed with *cosmic consciousness*—graced with self-transcendence. In other words, they have achieved a breakthrough and have glimpsed Creation; they peer beyond themselves, even beyond their environment. They see enough of the miraculous—not seen by most of us—to inspire them with a sense of awe. Knowing far more than the mill run of us, they measure their knowledge against what might be known,

and confess to knowing nearly nothing. These rare individuals weigh their finite knowledge on the scale of infinite truth. And this awareness of their limitations teaches them not to meddle or become bothersome "authorities" on everything. Such enlightened humility surely is an earmark of wisdom.

But what about the mill run of us who have not reached that highest stage of consciousness? If know-it-all-ness is indeed a major source of our social ills, let's get rid of this weakness! To gain an awareness that we do not know is to take the initial step toward wisdom.

A Sense of Awe

A sense of awe may well be the key to the requisite humility. But if we are incapable of self-transcendence, how are we to see the miraculous in everything, to stand in awe of all there is? Perhaps this is an impossible intellectual chore, but the high stakes demand that we try.

For an example of a recent development that leaves us all in awe, consider the laser that "burns *billions* of times brighter than the light at the sun's surface."¹ Incredible and beyond belief!

Only one person of my acquaintance knows anything more about the laser than that it exists.² While my friend knows something of this fantastic gadget with its enormous potentialities for both good and evil, he realizes that no one has more than scratched the surface. The few score scientists who

¹ Laser is an acronym: Light Amplification by Stimulated Emission of Radiation.

² Tom Meloy, author of "Laser's Bright Magic." *National Geographic*, December, 1966.

know a bit about the laser stand as much in awe as do those of us who know nothing. "Authorities" or know-it-alls are nonexistent.

Why this universal awe? How come the general acknowledgment, "I do not know!" Why does the laser leave us awe-struck while other miracles do not? The answer to these questions may reveal the cause of know-it-all-ness—that ignorance which makes "authorities" out of the mill run of us.

I believe the laser dumfounds us only because it is a brand new miracle; it is not yet commonplace; we have not come to take it for granted. When and if the laser becomes "old hat," we will stand no more in awe of it than we now do of a pencil, clothing made of sand, delivery of the human voice at the speed of light, or a jet plane. When the laser becomes common, "authorities" will begin to surface.

In 1958, when jet planes were first put to commercial use, a Captain said to me just prior to take-off, "I simply cannot understand how this 250,000-pound thing gets off the ground." Today, not even a passenger on his first flight bothers to wonder about it. Awe, it seems, is displaced by familiarity. And it may be observed that know-it-all-ness increases along with familiarity.

Familiarity not only breeds contempt but also has a strong tendency to deaden wonder and to dull any sense of the miraculous.

The Inquiring Mind

By what mental feat, then, are we to sustain our awe and curb our dreaded know-it-all-ness? The answer is simple to express, though difficult to achieve: *Keep alive our sense of wonder!* True, the strength to sustain a sense of wonder

against the drag of habit does not come naturally; it has to be a willed or conscious action, and we must persist. This takes energy, but how can we expect such an important forward step at a smaller price!

A bit of verse helps to summarize and to dramatize the contrast—a brand new miracle and an old familiar miracle:

Fueled by a million man-made wings of fire,
The rocket tore through the sky . . .
And everybody cheered.

Fueled by only a thought from God,
The seedling urged its way through the thickness of black.
And as it pierced the heavy ceiling of the soil
And launched itself up into outer space . . .
No one even clapped.

Nearly everyone stands in awe of brand new miracles: rocketing to the moon or hitting it from earth with a laser beam. No familiarity, and a general wonderment fascinating to behold!

Hardly anyone stands in awe of a seedling shafting itself into outer space or of countless other old and incomparably greater miracles. Familiarity displaces awe. Wonder gone, know-it-all-ness in its stead!

Of all miracles, what is first and foremost? The most wondrous of them all? About which man knows the least? No question about it: Creation! Religion, which presumes to deal with the mysteries of Creation, is as old as humanity. On what subject is there greater and longer familiarity? Yet, note the "authorities"—countless sects and creeds, ever so many of them claiming "the last word"—as though God were dead. Dead is their humility, their awe of God's wonders!

Or reflect on the absence of awe as related to Creation's most familiar and profound earthly miracle: man. Merely observe the endless and conflicting cures for human ills, physical and psychic. People stand awe-struck before the unfamiliar laser, but there is a striking and appalling lack of "I do not know" when it comes to the familiar but incomparably greater miracle: the body and mind of man.

Of course, there is no other area of thought so brilliantly placarded for all to see as "political economy," the area of my concern. This discipline deals not merely with the miraculous individual but with millions of them and their interrelationships, the miracle compounded: society. Aged, indeed, and as familiar as the eternal quandary social organization poses! Wonderment? Awe? Humility? They are difficult to find in this area.

Contemplate the historical parade of politicians with their ever varying and antagonistic panaceas, each claiming infallibility: "I know!" Or those "economists" who try to make an exact science of society, reducing everything to numbers and theorems, attempting to measure human actions and reactions, translating innumerable miracles to graphs and arbitrary symbols—and then passing off their findings as answers! And other tens of thousands all over the world, mounted on this soap box or that, pronouncing final judgments!

My own "knowing" that know-it-all-ness is unfavorable to personal growth and to social harmony and well-being reminds me of the witticism, "People who think they know everything are particularly disturbing to those of us who do." But however presumptuous of me, the case for awe or wonderment should be attempted.

The devotee of freedom—opposing all man-concocted restraints against the release of creative energy—rejects the

idea of rulership in its overriding sense; he believes that others know, better than he, how to run their own lives. If others suspect he has valuable guidance, it is theirs for the asking—never an imposition.

A Cumulative Wisdom

The individual who is consistent in his freedom position, while renouncing rulership over creative actions by himself or by any other person, does not flout social rules; he is aware that society exists and functions only under rules of some sort. And he is realistic enough to know that these rules are not made up by individuals on the spur of the moment; they develop by permission of the consensus—the ruling force.

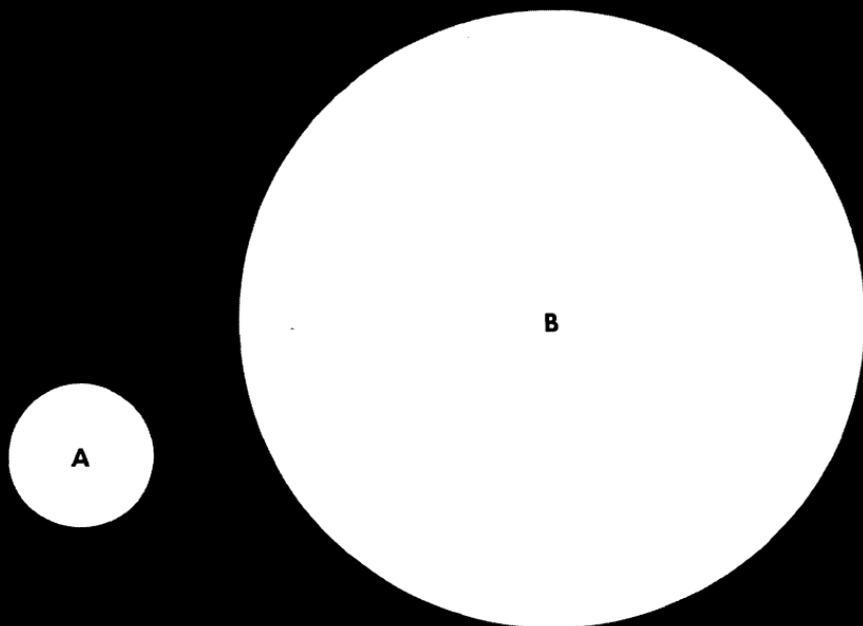
The consensus, in brief, is the residual legatee of mankind's history; it consists of what is handed down to us *plus* what we, who live on its growing edge, put into it—good, bad, or indifferent.

Know-it-all pronouncements—countless millions of them, year in and year out—inevitably become a part of the consensus. I suggest that these, in varying degrees and without exception, have a downgrading or deteriorating effect. Why? Because no man is qualified or entitled to play the role of the Creator. Such pronouncements, by definition, are authoritarian-rooted attempts to control the lives of others: wage, price, production, and exchange controls, guaranteed income, subsidies, and so on. When know-it-all-ness determines the consensus, its rule will be authoritarian—in the form of oppressive laws or of rampant lawlessness. The inescapable consequence of know-it-all-ness is human devolution.

The consensus which rules the societal situation must grow more out of wisdom than of know-it-all-ness if the rule is to

Wisdom is Awareness

The more one knows, the greater is the awareness of not knowing. To illustrate:



A—One's light—knowing—ten years ago

B—Today: the knowing has expanded

Observe how much more darkness—the unknown—is now visible to the growing person than formerly, and the point is clear.

There was little awareness of the unknown ten years ago; today the awareness is greatly magnified.

The more awareness—consciousness, perception—the wiser, wisdom being awareness!

improve. And that wisdom can originate only in humility, awe, wonderment. For it is awareness of the miraculous that aligns the individual with reality. Everything in life is mysterious, particularly man and society.

In the humble awareness of how little we know, we may seek, probe, try to understand more. This searching brings to light the best we are capable of seeing. The reflection in word and deed of this, the source of such wisdom as is within us, helps to improve the reigning consensus.

As I see it, we should never let familiarity breed contempt or disrespect or lack of humility. The unknown is infinite, the mystery eternal.

By what arrogance dare one assume he sees it all? Does not the wise man stand in awe of everything—even the most familiar? For surely the miraculous is not explained by familiarity. Nor does familiarity mean understanding.

This much I know, and it tells me my modest place in the total scheme of things. I wonder if this may not be a recipe for good citizenship!

5.

The Unruly Consensus

AS AN INTRODUCTION TO “the unruly consensus,” let us reflect on a proposal gaining acceptance in libertarian circles. It has to do with the financing of education.

A confirmed believer in the free market would no more endorse government education than state religion. Yet, numerous individuals who profess faith in the market are advocating the so-called “voucher system” for education.

To explain this proposal: Presently, a parent who sends a student to a private school pays twice; he is taxed to support public schooling and pays tuition for private education. Under the “voucher system,” parents who elect to send their children to a private school would receive taxpayers’ money equal to the cost of keeping a child in the public school. In brief, this would amount to government financing of students for private school education.

Is such a scheme any escape from socialism? While it appears to offer the student his choice among government and private schools, the fact is that the taxpayers, with or with-

out children, are still forced to pay the bill and are afforded no choice; they are still the victims of socialism.

An advocate of this scheme—a noted economist—when asked why he made this concession to socialism, replied, “We must lead them our way—get to our goal of free market education—a step at a time.” This so-called gradualism, as a technique to promote freedom, is both so popular and, to my way of thinking, so untenable that it deserves examination.

First, there is no way to know whether one socialistic scheme is better than another. Professed socialists do not know how to make socialism work; certainly, we do not. The explanation is simple: No creative end can possibly be born of a coercive, that is, of a destructive means, for the end pre-exists in the means; a truth is never composed of fallacies. However, leave aside the impracticality of socialistic schemes and consider the main point: endorsement of any socialistic notion puts the endorser on the side of socialism. Logically, this inconsistency destroys his case for the free market.

Second, he who pays the fiddler calls the tune. When government stakes students to private school education, it is only a matter of time before private schools and their curricula come under governmental control and dictation. The word “private” will lose its meaning; the schools presently private will become government schools. Thus, the “voucher system” endorsers are working at odds with their own aspirations.

Third, reflect on, “We must lead them our way.” This presupposes that “we” are in some sort of a driver’s seat, more or less personally in charge of what goes on in society, an assumption of omniscience that does not, even remotely, square with reality.

What actually controls the societal situation? Assuredly, I

do not, nor do I wish to. Neither is any other person in control, nor should he wish to be. We cannot live with uniformity, for if all were precisely as you or I, all would perish; this is easily demonstrable. What then? At the human level, the controlling force in society is *the consensus*. Free market education, for instance, will never replace government education until there is a consensus favoring the change. The same condition must be met if TVA is to be returned to private ownership, or labor unions divested of coercive power, or social security abolished! We who desire a change for the better must look to a higher grade consensus—nothing less.

That Immemorial Heritage

What is this controlling force, the consensus? It cannot, in my view, be defined with any precision. The best I can do is to refer to it as the current condition or state or quality of the over-all luminosity, sometimes called knowledge in society. This is a body of underlying assumptions, of ideas taken for granted and held more or less in common. It is part of a peoples' immemorial heritage, creative wisdom, culture, custom—the knowledge or wisdom, or the lack of it, by which we prosper or perish.¹ It is a nebulous, ever-changing, unpredictable, and a somewhat indiscernible force. A corrupted consensus is associated with societal decline; an

¹ "Custom, therefore, is not the accidental, trivial, and meaningless thing which we sometimes think it to be. It is the imperishable record of the wisdom of the illimitable past reaching back to the infancy of the race, revised, corrected, enlarged, open to all alike, and read and understood by all." See *Law, Its Origin, Growth and Function* by James Coolidge Carter (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1907), p. 127.

enlightened consensus accounts for societal ascendancy. In any event, this is the force that presides.

Let us say I have been born into a particular civilization—Occidental, Oriental, Polynesian, African, or whatever. Whichever one it is, I am a lone individual among many millions. Next, assume that I have my heart set on improving the civilization into which I have been cast. What are my chances? Roughly, somewhat better than my chances of improving the societal situation in the United States! For the consensus is of a greater magnitude than any particular civilization; it is the cultural, spiritual, moral, intellectual, political, and economic upshot of them all. This is not to imply any similarity among the numerous civilizations of which the present consensus is an “upshot.” To picture the consensus of our time, think of the mighty Amazon, and the civilizations as the countless tributaries which feed it—some tiny, others large, and each of varying composition.

Today’s consensus is the residual legatee of mankind’s history; it is the latest stage in human evolution—or decline, as some might have it—but, rising or falling, it’s all of one piece, and we of our time stand at the growing edge of it. Realizing the enormity of the consensus that presides over social affairs, I hesitate to think of myself as being able to move it this way or that; and, thus, I would never agree that “we must lead *them* our way, a step at a time.”

Role of the Individual

Why this attempt to discover the individual’s relationship to the consensus? In my view, it is necessary that each recognize his own limitations before he can even begin to realize his potentialities. To assume that I have a greater say-so than

is actually the case is to place myself at an impotent level. When I think I can do that which I cannot, then my actions will be in the realm of the impossible, governed by sheer fancy, and the effort thus in vain. To focus on controlling the consensus is as unrealistic as to focus on controlling continental drifts. Am I saying that the individual has no role to play? Indeed, not! All depends upon where the eye is cast.

Reflect on the unruly consensus. Living on its growing edge we can, even in the short span of a lifetime, observe its shifting. During the past few decades it appears to be deteriorating, as it has on earlier occasions. However, history reveals that the consensus occasionally has shown improvement, this being the aspiration of concerned citizens. And every shift—up or down, now or whenever—has been or is a consequence of actions by those who live on its growing edge. This is to say that the consensus is a by-product of human action, and any shift in the current consensus is a by-product of our own actions.

Let us not waste words on how the consensus deteriorates except to note that it is the easiest process conceivable, simple as falling off a log: the absence of thinking, of disciplines, of high moral standards—the pursuit of excellence abandoned; in brief, people deterioration!

An improving consensus, on the other hand, results solely from the practice of difficult human virtues; it is the over-all luminosity of a people on the upgrade. No single person among us rules that luminosity, and it is utterly useless to try to do so. Instead, the eye has to be exclusively on the source of that luminosity, that is, on the illumination of one's self. The consensus at any point in time is composed of what is handed down to a people plus what they put into it.

What they put into it! If this analysis be correct, then

those of our time who are devoted to the freedom philosophy should never endorse any socialism—coercive collectivism—none whatsoever. For, by so doing, socialistic ideas are put into the consensus, and by us! This we do whenever we advocate a form of socialism, supposedly less bad, in order to “lead them our way, a step at a time.” Away with gradualism! It is an ill-advised methodology.

And let not anyone underestimate the effect on the consensus when the eye is focused on self-illumination rather than on the consensus. Literature of the past—history—tells of brilliant stars by the thousands, men actively in pursuit of truth who, by exemplary behavior, shifted the consensus in an improving direction. Then, too, there have been millions of unpublicized contributors over the centuries whose names have never come down to us!

Can the personal quality that generates light—the dynamo, so to speak, of an enlightened consensus—be identified or pin-pointed? Unquestionably, it is *growth* in perception, awareness, consciousness. To play one’s role in the enlightenment requires only that he attend to his own growth, and express it honestly. And here is the interesting fact: it makes no difference from what level an individual begins his growth. Socrates contributed mightily to an improved consensus only because he was always growing. Precisely the same can be said of a “lowly fisherman of Galilee.” Growth, from whatever level, is the generative force.

The unruly consensus rules, but its rule, if improving, is determined exclusively by the human beings who are upgrading themselves in consciousness, in word, and in day-to-day deeds. The formula is simple, and its execution is the way to extract from life its greatest offering.

6.

The King Can Do No Right!

THE NOTION that “the king can do no wrong” derives from the divine right doctrine, namely, that sovereigns are appointed by God as rulers and, thus, not responsible to the people. This doctrine “ceased to be important in England following the revolution of 1688, but on the Continent it lingered until the early twentieth century.”¹ For an example of its lingering, hear Bismarck before the Prussian Parliament in 1847:

The Prussian Sovereigns are in possession of a crown not by the grace of the people, but by God’s grace.

Two points call for reflection: (1) this very same doctrine, with “divine” dropped from the phrasing, not only persists to this day but is on the ascendancy in the U.S.A., as well as all over the world, and (2) the king can do no *right*—none whatsoever.² I believe these claims are demonstrably true.

¹ See *Columbia Encyclopedia*, Second Edition, p. 546.

² I am referring only to the king as king, not as husband, father, and so on.

In using the “king” concept, I am referring to rulership in its overriding or dictatorial sense, as James I and Bismarck conceived such roles. Sovereign, indeed—“above or superior to all others.” If this concept be generally accepted, it follows as the day the night that your rights and mine derive from these kingly characters, not from the Creator, as our Founding Fathers had it. Only the king’s rights are by the grace of God. Phrased in this manner—their phrasing—the concept evokes disdainful chuckles from us. But, just a moment, until we assess our own behavior.

The Passion for Power

The lust for riches is a poor second to the craving for power over others. Nor need we confine our examples to such celebrities as Cheops, Alexander the Great, Charlemagne, Genghis Kahn, Napoleon, Hitler, Perón, Stalin for confirmation of this deplorable fact. Examples are to be found by the millions; indeed, there are few among us in whom there are no traces of this malady. Who does not, to some extent, lord it over others: children, wife, husband, neighbor, countrymen! The notion that the king can do no wrong and is thus qualified to cast you and me in his image is an egotistical and untenable extension of the idea that father knows best. We—all of us—are the king’s children.

When power over others becomes a passion—is it ever exerted otherwise?—the seeker after power inevitably finds ways to justify what at best is a psychosis: “I am doing it for their own good,” or “they are too dumb to recognize their own interests,” or “I know what our national goals should be.” There is simply no limit to these trumped up excuses. Actually, “I have been appointed by God to rule over men,”

is no more farfetched than, "I have appointed myself to rule over the creative activities of citizens." Both are nonsensical. The teacher, clergyman, businessman, labor union official, or politician who advocates or practices coercive interferences with the peaceful exchanges of creative human energy has a position no more tenable than that proclaimed by James I or Prussian sovereigns. It is the king syndrome in either case.

If these kings on the home front are not appointed by God to rule over us, from whence come their appointments? Majority vote, perhaps? If so, then the appointments were sparked by the power-seekers' claims of omniscience—in a word, self-designation—for no individual confessing an inability to rule the life of another receives bids to kingship. And people who invite a king or an assemblage of kings to rule over their lives—an invitation to slavery—are too short of understanding to qualify as competent appointors.

Most incongruous of all, however, are the kings themselves: they claim authority to rule over us as a grant by a majority of us for whose judgments they have no respect. Else why not let us be our creative selves! If the power to rule be by the grace of God, is the ruler then to be God's lord and master? Obviously not! Why, then, if by the grace of a majority, is the ruler to be the majority's lord and master? This is double talk!

But a king is a king regardless of what excuses are conjured up to dignify his coercive rule.

This brings into focus the old saw, "The king can do no wrong," as well as the myth daily beamed at us by our own little kings on the home front, "We are doing this for your own good." What is the difference? If what they do is good for us, it cannot, therefore, be wrong. Based on their claims, our little kings can do no wrong. We must conclude that

every person who coercively intervenes into creative actions of others, from whatever walk of life—politician, labor union official, businessman, or whoever—is on precisely the same wave length as James I.

Holding views similar to James I does not in itself warrant censure. Thus, we must ask: Is it true that the king can do no wrong? Or, is it false? My answer: The king can never do right; he is destined always to be wrong, as wrong today as in the seventeenth century. This is easily demonstrable.

In the first place, no one can ever rule another; the most that a James I or our little kings can ever do is to keep others from being themselves.

Parenthetically, there is a role for a societal agency to play in keeping others from being themselves if it be their nature to commit theft, murder, deception, violence, and the like. I am not alluding, however, to the retarding of wrongdoing but, rather, to a person's freedom to be himself creatively. Kings—those with the sovereign mentality—concern themselves only secondarily, if at all, with inhibiting destructive actions. They are primarily concerned with the control and direction of creative actions. But this is precisely what no king can ever do; he can only suppress, deaden, destroy such actions. Creative actions can never be ruled, *but only ruled out!* If this be accepted, then it follows that a king, whenever he exercises his kingly or dictatorial role, can never do right; he must always do wrong—and without exception!

Our Unique Endowment

These observations rest on two propositions: (1) the right of a person to be his creative self and, (2) a creative action is not a transplant possibility.

If it be accepted that only the king is sovereign, that he alone rules over us by the grace of God—or by the grace of a majority—then we have no right to be our creative selves, for our rights derive from him; we are his children and his pawns. This psychotic premise denies that an individual has a right to be his creative self.

But accept the premise “that *all* men are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among them are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness,” and your endowment as well as mine is by the grace of the Creator. Each of us is thus endowed, the king no more so than everyone else—his pretensions to the contrary notwithstanding.

Both justice and reason abundantly support this premise. Yet, an appeal to a transcendent source of rights seems hardly necessary; merely look at the record. Compare the creativity of James I or Napoleon or Perón or any Prussian sovereign with that of an unknown waif by the name of Tom—known later to the world as Thomas Alva Edison. Or the creativity of the kings of any dictatorial agency—OPA, NRA, labor union, or whatever—with the creativity of Einstein, Jules Henri Poincaré, Beethoven, Bastiat, Adam Smith or other tens of thousands. The evidence is all about us, overwhelmingly in support of what justice and reason proclaim.

I care not who or where he is or about his creed, color, race, nationality; he has as much right to be his creative self as any person who lives. Thomas Wolfe expressed this right-of-man concept in attractive prose:

. . . to every man his chance—to every man, regardless of his birth, his shining, golden opportunity—to every man his right to live, to work, to be *himself*, and to become

whatever thing his manhood and his vision can combine to make him—this . . . is the promise of America.

A king's only rebuttal to this concept is arrogantly to proclaim himself a god and men his pawns!

Every creation at the human level springs exclusively from discrete persons. A discovery, insight, invention, intuitive flash, idea, is an outcropping of the generative faculties of the individual. We have but vague explanations as to the causal forces. Both Edison and Poincaré could do no better than confess, "Ideas came to me as if from out of the blue."

But we do know that—

1. Most of these sparks of insight radiate from unexpected sources—utterly unpredictable, just as you are unable to predict an idea you may have tomorrow;
2. Freedom to be one's own man is more conducive to creativity than to be someone else's man or slave;
3. The less interference with the creative powers of individuals, the greater will the total creativity be.

The Limitations of Force

The proposition that a creative action is not a transplant possibility need not be labored. Neither I nor anyone else can force you to have an idea, even with a gun at your head. Fright is no spawning ground for creativity. True, you might accept or embrace an idea of mine but it would not be your idea. An idea of yours stems exclusively from your own complex and unfathomable faculties. We are speaking of insight—seeing from within—an original that cannot be transplanted.

What can a king do? With the backing of coercive forces—a constabulary—he can keep you from working at what

you choose, from accepting a wage agreeable to you, from exchanging what and with whom you please, from retaining the fruits of your own labor, on and on. In brief, he can diminish your freedom of choice and thereby narrow the extent to which you can be your creative self. This is all he can do!

And it is in this manner that the king achieves his goal to the exclusion of our individual goals. His is nothing more than a herding action. If his goal be sputniks, going to the moon, the Gateway Arch, "full employment," or whatever, he restrains us from straying off as far as we might wish in the direction of our own goals. Down *this* lane—his lane! He effects his aims by *verboden* techniques such as disallowing exchanges with whom and on what terms we choose—embargoes, quotas, minimum wage laws, and the like—and, also, by taking the fruits of our employments and putting them to his employment—taxes, inflation, and the like.³ While his goal is always couched in fancy and seductive language—"I am doing this for your own good"—herding is what it amounts to when all is said and done.

Every interference with human creativity is patently wrong. When we come sufficiently to understand this, then it will be impossible for any government official to do wrong. Such understanding will simply relieve him of the power and the temptation. Each of us can then be his own man—creatively!

³ Details of the king's mechanisms will be found in succeeding chapters.

7.

Leave It to the Free Market!

WHEN THINGS go askew in the economy planners in and out of government “rush to the rescue” with countless panaceas. Those of us who question their schemes are confronted with the challenge, “Well, what would you do?” And our reply, “Leave it to the free market,” is shouted down as being impersonal, heartless, inconsiderate, cold, and not quite humane.

The question is, can I correct this grossly mistaken and all-too-common evaluation of the market? Is this in my power? If it is not, then why think and write about it? Why not dismiss the matter? Here is a fascinating passage that sets the stage for my answer:

Roman Stoicism had been developed in times of despotism as a philosophy of lonely and courageous souls who had recognized the redeeming power of philosophical reason in all the moral and social purposes of life. Philosophy as a way of life makes men free. It is the last ditch stand of liberty in a world of servitude.¹

¹ Albert Soloman in his Introduction to *The Enchiridion* by Epictetus (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1955).

The important offshoot or outgrowth of Stoic philosophy, if not its essence, is the idea of distinguishing what is in our power from what is not in our power; concentrate on the latter and let the former roll off as water from a duck's back. We might describe the modern "stoic" as one who refuses to fret about matters that are not in his power to correct. And this, I submit, includes all the world's woes—all except the shortcomings of self.

While I can find no passage in this phrasing, I am beginning to wonder if Stoicism, especially as set forth by Epictetus, may not be the genesis of the mind-your-own-business way of life. If so, we owe a great deal to Epictetus.

So, what is in my power? It is in my power not to be taken in by catchwords and shibboleths invented by designing partisans; it is in my power to arrive at a just understanding by observation and reason; it is in my power to share my findings with anyone who cares to listen. All else not in my power I refuse to fret about. For, as Shakespeare expressed it, "Doleful dumps the mind oppress."

I believe that the market, if free, is intimately personal;² it renders justice in the only sensible definition of that term; it continuously and automatically moves ever-changing satisfactions and ever-changing aspirations—supply and demand of particular goods and services—toward a harmony one with the other; it is humane to the extent of the human kindness that is within us.

The alternative to the free market is the rigged, planned,

² The term "free" as I use it presupposes no man-concocted restraints against the release of creative energy, whether by governments, trade unions, businesses, private piracies, or whatever; that is, no special privilege for anyone. These hindrances to free and willing exchange are codified for all to see and, then, inhibited by government—its proper role!

dictatorial, coercive, interventionist, authoritarian market, variously known as the planned economy, the welfare state, omnipotent government—the kind of an arrangement into which we in the U.S.A. are rapidly drifting. As contrasted with the free market, this is definitely disruptive and antisocial; it is, by its nature, incapable of rendering justice; it is forever and of necessity forcing ever-changing satisfactions and ever-changing aspirations toward a state of disharmony one with the other—shortages of this, surpluses of that, and so on; it stifles and eventually kills human kindness.

My understanding of the free market flies in the face of popular sentiment, so let me examine its validity.

Each His Own Decision-Maker

The free market is intimately personal. If there be 100 million individuals in the unfettered market there will be precisely this number of persons deciding each for himself what to produce, where to work, what to buy and sell, and what are to be acceptable terms of exchange. I, who know more about me than anyone else, in charge of me! How possibly can a way of life be more intimately personal than each individual his own decision-maker!

In the alternative situation, a bureaucrat presides over these decisions. As related to those of us for whom he decides, he is as inconsiderate as a computer, and the data he uses are derived entirely from his imagination. He cannot know, can only guess, what may be your countless and ever-changing preferences or what constitutes your idea of your welfare. Indeed, he does not know, really, what goes on in the deep recesses of his wife's or his children's minds, let alone what goes on in the minds of millions he has neither seen nor

heard from. Someone who knows nothing of you and me in charge of you and me. Dictatorial to the core!

The free market renders justice. Justice is a social term; it relates to relationships one with another and is achieved when our relations with each other are fair. How is a just exchange to be determined? It is simply a matter of respecting subjective judgments. If you prefer what I have to offer more than what you stand ready to give in exchange, that is all there is to it: economic justice. This is willing exchange—both parties willing—a prime tenet of the free market way of life.

It is a contradiction in terms to claim that a bureaucrat can render a subjective judgment for other than self. His judgment is his alone and can never be yours or mine. Thus, to the extent he intervenes in our relationships, to that extent are exchanges unwilling, that is, not in accord with your own preferences. If it be conceded that you and I have as much right to life, livelihood, liberty as anyone else, then all exchanges forced upon us are, by definition, unjust. Only by positing “big brother” as a god—an absurdity—can his running of our lives make sense.

Balancing Supply and Demand

The natural tendency of the free market is to point supply and demand toward a balance. Implicit in the free market is free pricing. A rise in the price of a good or service discourages demand and encourages supply; the opposite effect is produced when price falls. If tomatoes rise to \$10 per bushel, consumption declines and production increases. If they drop to 50 cents a bushel, consumption increases and

production decreases—hence, supply and demand are always tending toward a balance.³ Observe that this most efficacious way of economic life requires no more knowledge on the part of any participant than the ability to read a price—attunement with reality!

The alternative is political rigging: wage, price, rent, interest, exchange, and production controls and the essential concomitant—rationing. A catchword for this legerdemain, borrowed from the British, is now being introduced to us: “incomes policy.”

Wherever free pricing is more or less the rule—as in the case of women’s hats, corn flakes, pencils, and even mink coats—supply and demand equate; it is only political interference with the market that makes us think in terms of “shortage” and “surplus.” To illustrate: The lady who today has no mink coat does not blame her plight on a shortage for she sees them plentifully displayed; she only thinks that the price is more than she can afford. Now, let the government put a ceiling price of \$50 on mink coats. Immediately, there will be a “shortage” of say 10 million mink coats, for there are that many women who have \$50 and would like a mink coat. “Shortage,” prior to a coercive control of the market, is a nonconcept; it grows out of political price fixing. The same applies to “surplus.”

Education has been politicized for years in our country. There is now an enormous “surplus” of teachers.⁴ Or, turn to the commodity market. Among the hundreds of commodities daily traded, only a few are deemed to be in shortage or

³ Should the taste for tomatoes go out of vogue entirely, supply and demand would still equate—at zero!

⁴ See “Subsidizing a Crisis: The Teacher Glut, 1971,” *The Freeman*, March, 1971.

surplus; and these few, without exception, are those politically priced in one way or another—wheat and cotton, for instance. We need only look about us for other examples; interference, thy name is legion!

Finally, observe that this least efficacious way of economic life presupposes a knowledge on the part of bureaucrats that does not exist, even remotely. No one of them knows any more of the infinite data implicit in the market complex than you or I. The very fact that they think of themselves as possessing such knowledge ought, in itself, to disqualify them.

The Humane Society

People in a free market are humane to the extent of the human kindness that is within them. The most successful war on poverty ever fought has taken place during the past two centuries when the free market has been most nearly approximated. This has revealed an incontestable fact: the most helpful service we can render our fellowmen is assiduously to attend to our own knitting—not theirs! Yet, withal, there remain some persons in distress inviting that the Judeo-Christian principle of charity be practiced. This spirit of charity exists more or less in each of us. Whatever this spiritual content—bountiful or niggardly—it is the fact given; there is no more or less; and it will achieve its total outpouring among men when free, which is to say, among men when self-responsible—free and self-responsible being one and the same. There is no way for you or me to manifest more compassion than is within us. We manifest all there is when unhampered.

The alternative is a resort to coercive devices—the welfare state. Every conceivable cause, considered worthy by this or that looking-out-for-others group, is tossed into the political

hopper. If there be compassion in their hearts, how do they propose to exercise it? With the fruits of their own labor, as the practice of Judeo-Christian charity suggests? Indeed, not! They insist that you and I, the taxpayers, do their good for them—currently to the tune of perhaps \$150 billion annually.⁵

Observe how human kindness is stifled and eventually killed by this process. In the first place, the proponents of these programs are letting it die in themselves. It is not an act of kindness for me to forcibly take from you and then give to the object of my concern. Robbing Peter to pay Paul is unkind to Peter and, certainly, there is nothing kindly in the act of bestowing such loot on Paul.

Second, this process destroys kindness in the whole population. When government assumes the responsibility for the welfare of your neighbor, your sense of responsibility toward him vanishes. Grover Cleveland clearly saw through the sham of this:

The friendliness and charity of our countrymen can always be relied upon to relieve their fellow-citizens in misfortune. This has been repeatedly and quite lately demonstrated. Federal aid in such cases encourages the expectation of paternal care on the part of the Government and weakens the sturdiness of our national character, while it prevents the indulgence among our people of that kindly

⁵ The \$150 billion figure is roughly half of total governmental expenditure at all levels and covers not only the more commonly recognized welfare programs but such others as unemployment compensation, aid to agriculture, government schooling, housing, transportation, and so on. It represents a compulsory transfer payment of considerable amount each year from each of the more productive to each of the less productive persons in the United States, over and beyond what parents and friends voluntarily bestow upon children and other dependents.

sentiment and conduct which strengthens the bonds of a common brotherhood.⁶

Not only is the “kindly sentiment” destroyed but the “conduct” is rendered impossible. When government takes from you and me, for whatever purpose, it takes the funds we might otherwise have used to relieve the distress that comes within our purview. We cannot give that which we do not possess.

Doubtless, the greatest mischief of all is the false impression of humanity this process induces. Kindliness stifled and killed—less and less of it practiced or seen. And unthinking people, viewing each other in this stultified condition, conclude that this is their natural state: charitable good-for-nothings! How far from the truth! Judging the behavior of slaves to be the way men would act in freedom is no more intelligent than expecting the dead to act alive.

The Lure of Something for Nothing

What else, beyond the reason just cited, accounts for this astonishing blindness to the free market way of life? Why is it that so few appreciate its efficacy, why so many seeking refuge in the only alternative, namely, the planned economy, welfare state, omnipotent government way of life? How is it that so remarkable an achievement remains invisible to the multitudes? If we could only ferret out the answers!

One explanation may be the recentness of the break with age-old custom, tradition, heritage. Allowing everyone to act creatively as he pleases, to go as far as his aspirations and

⁶ From a veto message by President Grover Cleveland, February 16, 1887.

abilities permit—regardless of birth, race, creed, color—and with no special privilege for anyone, is the newest of all politico-economic concepts. Until about seven generations ago the idea of kingly sovereignty and authority more or less prevailed. Relegating government to a peace-keeping role flies in the face of mankind's experience. For a people suddenly to break the shackles of history requires an exceptional rationality.

The appeal of something for nothing is overwhelming to most people. The welfare state technique permits concerned individuals to satisfy their compassion by compelling others to foot the bills. Further, they do not find it necessary to do the compelling; the government does it. Truly, nothing seems required of them, and they enjoy an angelic sense of charitable accomplishment! On the other end of the process are those who receive the largess in exchange for nothing. The "welfareers" and the "welfared" combine to form an enormous sentiment favoring "welfarism" without so much as a thought or glance at the free market way of life. "We never had it so good!"

Resort to Coercion

The welfare state mechanism is part and parcel of the current labor union movement. It is the only means by which the unemployment caused by the union's excessive wage demands—coercively implemented—can be screened from public view. The so-called full employment program by government—Federal urban renewal, moon ventures, and countless other noneconomic projects—absorb workers barred from the market by coercive pricing. Thus, the unions manage to conceal their actions which cause unemployment. We can hardly

expect the free market to find favor among the millions following their own short-range and unenlightened interests.

Unquestionably, the millions are unable to see the free market's accomplishments and potentialities. So remarkable have been its wonders, even when freedom has only been approximated, that most people in their credulity have credited the wonders to everything except the free market: natural resources, fertile soils, friendly climates, expansive frontiers, even the foolish attempt to spend ourselves rich. The free market stands mutely responsible for all the progress we have enjoyed, but with only a few aware of the fact, and still fewer able to explain it.

This will not be regarded as a fanciful or extravagant claim by anyone who defines and understands the free market as that institutional or societal arrangement in which there are no man-concocted restraints against the release of creative energy. It is the maximum release of creative energy that assures maximum moral, spiritual, intellectual, economic progress; to me, the point is incontestable.

Even when the above is conceded, there still remains an annoying force and drive to the planned-economy phase of omnipotent government. It is a pervasive fear that resort to the free market would result in a society at sixes and sevens, purposeless, minus goals, everyone going every which way—a helter-skelter situation. Thus, it is assumed, someone must be in the driver's seat, planning, overseeing, giving direction and integration to the social process. The assumption is nonsense because the fear is groundless.

I share Bastiat's faith: "All men's impulses, when motivated by legitimate self-interest, fall into a harmonious social pattern." It is only in a free market relationship that harmony and balance can exist; it is the introduction of coercion

—the overseeing force—into our relationships that sets up antagonisms, that pits us against each other, that creates imbalance, that brings on the social conflicts.

Reduce the social equation to you and me and one other that it may be clearly viewed. I do whatever I choose so long as it is peaceful; the same for you. We exchange when it is mutually advantageous to do so. The third party's delegated role is to do absolutely nothing unless one of us infracts a right of the other. Or, if there be a dispute, he invokes the rules of the game. This is the free market in miniature. A greater harmony is unimaginable.

Now let the third party force his goals upon you and me or take from you and give to me. All three of us will become antagonists. Social chaos! And the same applies if we multiply the three of us by millions.

I shall always try to expose the flaws of all panaceas by the social planners, and my response to their "Well, what would you do?" will continue to be, "*Leave it to the free market!*" This much, at least, is in my power.

8.

How to Be a Benefactor

THE WORLD'S woes may have been greater and more numerous in 1850 than now. But, if they were, my grandfather as a young man was unaware of them. There were no radios, TV's, or telephones. Isolated in backwoods country, he had no newspaper, not even a magazine. All the troubles of mankind, so far as he knew, were those which fell within a distance he could walk or ride horseback; and they were minor problems, few and far between. In brief, grandfather had no social problems except grandfather-size ones.

But today! There is hardly a disaster or a social mess on the face of the earth that isn't immediately dinned into our ears or emblazoned in glaring headlines. News! And unless one is instinctively or rationally immune to this calamity barrage, he will incline toward the untenable belief that every ill of mankind is his problem. Thus misled, he is an easy victim of the fallacious notion that the solution of all of these is his "social responsibility."

True, each of us is at once a social and an individualistic being and, therefore, each does in fact have a social responsibility. However, we should know what that responsibility is,

and what it is not, else we will work against rather than in harmony with our fellow men.

The grandfather-size problem, as it turns out, is about the maximum size any of us is able to cope with. When we get it into our heads that other people's problems are our responsibility to solve, we "rise" to a level of utter incompetence. However good our intention, our meddling makes matters worse rather than better.

To illustrate: I am a writer of sorts. It must be obvious to you, whoever you are, that I cannot solve your problems. Elect me to Congress and I remain as I am, my competence not improved one whit by reason of this change in occupation. Nor will it upgrade my competence to place me in the highest political office in the land, or to make me the head of A.T. & T.!

Wild Goose Chases

Before considering how we can become true benefactors, that is, how we can soundly discharge our social responsibilities, let's reflect on the mischief done in the belief that social responsibility requires everybody to solve everybody else's problems.

For example, take business firms, especially those with the most customers, workers, and investors. They are today's "whipping boys." Such firms are picked on by politicians, muckrakers, and those millions who can be sold any nonsense—if it is repeated often enough. Pied Pipers with enormous followings are everlastingly insisting that these corporations assume their "social responsibility," such as training and hiring the so-called hard-core unemployed.

So beset are many executives with these widespread collec-

tivistic notions that they tend to neglect their proper functions of hiring the most competent personnel, turning out better products at lower prices, and making larger profits; they concentrate instead on preserving the corporate image. These outpourings draw businessmen into a popularity contest for which they have no competence, and cause them to de-emphasize their skills in production and exchange, the skills that brought them to the top. Instead of serving as spokesmen for free entry and competition and how the market economy best serves everyone, they drop into a defensive role. They shift from portraying what is true to denouncing what is not true. Or they may succumb altogether to these unrealistic notions, in which event, they apologize for profits and become parties to the growing collectivism.

This is a mischievous trend. If continued, it will prove disastrous not only to investors and workers but to the very customers many of whom are doing the condemning. When the emphasis is on the image rather than the performance, not only will the performance deteriorate but so will the image. And everyone involved must bear a share of the inevitable failure.

To Serve Consumers

Public policy, it seems to me, should be geared to consumer interest—that's all of us. And as a consumer, I cringe when business executives behave as if theirs is first and foremost—or, even secondarily—the job of looking out for pockets of poverty or the level of employment or the general welfare or any other so-called social goal. These men will serve us best in every way—including alleviation of our poverty and so on—when they stick to their own knitting!

Born a shoemaker, stay a shoemaker was, by and large, the lot of the masses until the idea of opening the market to competition was recently discovered—about seven generations ago. What a revolution that brought about! Open opportunity for masses of people and the most successful war on poverty in the history of mankind!

John Stuart Mill, gifted with insight, was among the numerous men to grasp the pursuit of self-interest as an efficacious way of life:

The only freedom which deserves the name is that of pursuing our own good in our own way, so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of theirs, or impede their efforts to obtain it.

Earlier Adam Smith had observed that:

. . . by directing that industry in such a manner as its produce may be of the greatest value, [the individual] intends only his own gain, and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention. Nor is it always the worse for society that it was no part of it. By pursuing his own interest he *frequently* promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it. I have never known much good done by those who affected to trade for the public good. It is an affectation. . . .

If “to trade for the public good” is at best an affectation, one must then conclude that he should trade for his own good, which is to say that each of us should observe the rules and pursue his own self-interest. Thus will he best serve others and fulfill his social responsibility. What a switch from current thinking! But events of the past 200 years, if I read them aright, confirm this view—absolutely.

There is in this thesis, however, a presupposition that an

individual knows what is to his best interest. There's the rub; few have this knowledge; no one has it perfectly. This presupposition may explain why the brilliant and cautious Adam Smith inserted that word "frequently" into his famous paragraph. Every now and then—frequently—there are individuals who more or less intelligently perceive their self-interest; and in these cases the ardent pursuit of that interest promotes the interests of society—contributes to the public good.

A Word for Self-Interest

The pursuit of self-interest as one's objective is not widely applauded. Generally, such action is associated with greed, avarice, selfishness. Low-brows! This only demonstrates the extent of the confusion.

Self-interest is the motivator of human action. Regardless of pretensions to the contrary, a communist is as much motivated by self-interest as am I. In this sense, everyone is self-centered; self-interest is the ultimate given. And to be purely selfless is to be dead.

There are two main variables in this matter. The first relates to the motivating power of self-interest. In some people it is a feeble force, often too low to be recognized. Such people sometimes think of themselves as selfless, and they nearly are. In others, self-interest is a powerful motivator of action.

The second variable is the one at issue; it has to do with how intelligently self-interest is interpreted. For instance, the thief thinks of his interest as best served by stealing from others. This is an interpretation so narrow and antisocial that *the more it is pursued, the more is the public good subverted*. There are, on the other hand, those who so intelligently in-

terpret their self-interest that they would never think of trying to pursue their own good by depriving others of the same right, or in any way impeding the efforts of others to obtain their own good.

What this amounts to in the final analysis is serving or observing the self-interest of others in order to best serve one's self. This is an interpretation so intelligent that the more it is pursued, the more is the public good served. To repeat, it is the frequent appearance of these enlightened individuals that led Adam Smith to an obscure truth: "he [man in pursuit of his own interest] frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it."

The ardent pursuit of self-interest is the way to social felicity or the public good, *presuming* that individuals are *not allowed* (by government) or do not allow themselves to act at cross purposes with the freedom of others, thereby damaging their own interests. To my way of thinking, this is *the way*; and the more powerfully the individual is motivated to pursue his enlightened interests, the better. If this is the right way, then we should not lightly abandon it simply because we find only a few among us who are intelligent interpreters of self-interest. *Stick to the right way and concentrate on increasing an enlightened self-interest.* This is the only procedure that makes sense.

On Minding Each Other's Business

Consider the alternative. Suppose each individual were to abandon his own interests whenever he observes others misinterpreting theirs.

What are some of these misinterpretations of self-interest?

All will agree that theft is wrong. But of the millions who wouldn't personally steal from any other, what about those who will, without the slightest qualm, get the government to feather their own nests at the expense of others? What, really, is the difference? Were all to do this, all would perish. If this isn't a mistake, pray tell, what is! The list, of course, is long and must include every individual who does unto others that which he would not have them do unto him.

And to be included, also, are the muckraking critics of producers who are trying their best to outdo competitors, to profit by best serving consumers. To make "whipping boys" out of those who serve us most efficiently is to display an ignorance of our own interests.

What, then, is the alternative to the pursuit of self-interest? It is that these people who do not even know their own interests should pursue your and my good—the public weal! This is to compound ignorance in society. For, surely, an individual who does not know his own interest cannot remotely know mine, let alone the countless interests of millions.

On Minding One's Own Business

Now to the final question: How best can I become a benefactor to mankind? By assuming my social responsibility. Of what does this consist? There are three steps.

Number one is to do all in my power not to interfere with the business of others.

The danger of minding other people's business is twofold. First, there is the danger that a man may leave his business unattended to; and, second, there is the danger of an impertinent interference with another's affairs. The "friends of humanity" almost always run into both dangers.

Number two is to mind my own business.

Every man and woman in society has one big duty. That is, to take care of his or her own self. *This is a social duty.* For, fortunately, the matter stands so that the duty of making the best of one's self individually is not a separate thing from the duty of filling one's place in society, but the two are one, and *the latter is accomplished when the former is done.*¹

Number three is implicit in minding my own business: practicing as best I can the difficult and sensitive Judeo-Christian philosophy of charity.²

Minding one's own business is the doctrine of liberty. Admittedly, this has no glamour for the "friends of humanity," the social architects, the ones who would mind other people's business. To rule out their masterminding of others is to deny their peculiar pursuit of happiness.

Minding one's own business, on the other hand, serves self by serving others and is a task of a size to fit the individual—big or little. This can be life's most fascinating venture—self-interest in its most intelligent conception, benefaction at its very best.

¹ This and the previous quote are from the chapter, "On Minding One's Own Business," in *What Social Classes Owe to Each Other* by William Graham Sumner.

² See "What Shall It Profit a Man?" in my *Deeper Than You Think* (Irvington-on-Hudson, N.Y.: The Foundation for Economic Education, 1967), pp. 108-117.

For an instructive and inspirational book on this subject, see *Magnificent Obsession*, a novel by Lloyd Douglas (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1938).

9.

A Laborer Looks at Freedom

A LABORER is a worker in life's vineyard. That includes most people, and I, for one, refuse to relinquish my identification as a laborer in deference to those special interest groups who wish to monopolize that honorable term for themselves. Nor do I go along with those writers in the social sciences who find it convenient to accept such pigeonholing to better serve their theorizing. I like laborers—that is, workers as distinguished from nonworkers—and insist on being classified as one of them. Let's see if I qualify.

Happily, I grew up prior to the child labor laws. My work week from age eleven to eighteen was 102 hours. Up every morning at four o'clock, cleaning stables, milking cows, six hours at school, the evening chores, and clerking in the village store until nine o'clock week days, and until midnight on Saturdays. Cows are milked and stables cleaned on Sundays, too! As a child, then, I was a laborer.

At eighteen, I joined the American Expeditionary Forces as an airplane mechanic. Hours were governed by the work

that had to be done, not by limitation to a 40-hour week. Planes had to be readied—regardless! Working around the clock was required on occasion. Still a laborer!

After World War I, I started my own wholesale produce business in Ann Arbor. Up at two o'clock in the morning—Monday through Friday—driving a truck to Detroit, returning in time for breakfast, and working till suppertime—with 10 hours on Saturday to complete a 90-hour week. Did owning my own business disqualify me as a laborer? Hardly!

And what about my various jobs during the past 45 years—in the course of which I have logged two million miles and ground out a million words. True, the work has been more mental than physical, but what has that to do with it? Lecturing and writing are far more difficult for me than cleaning stables—and the hours are longer, too! Indeed, if deeply interested, one labors in his sleep: he dreams about his work. So, I remain a laborer to this day, notwithstanding those who would rule me out of that category.

I am not boasting here, but simply acknowledging my good fortune. Being permitted to labor unfettered—working as much as one wishes—is like being able to breathe freely. Laboring in its best sense is the fullest employment possible of the creative faculties and is as essential as breathing to life's fulfillment.

Why have I been so lucky? Doubtless, there are reasons of which I am unaware. But an outstanding fact is that I generally have managed to mind my own business. This is to say that I have been substantially free from the interventions of those who use coercion in an attempt to make others over in their little images.

As mentioned above, I happened to have been born before

child labor was outlawed. There were then no effective man-co concocted restraints against my productive energies. Freedom was my luck in childhood.

And I have been fortunate in adulthood, also. Always, since returning from the AEF, I have been in employments free from union organization. Note that only "necessary" occupations are unionized, for neither power nor wealth can be gained in unionizing occupations that have no grip or stranglehold over some parts of the economy. For instance, were chamber of commerce managers (one of my employments) to unionize and demand a wage of \$57,000 annually or "we quit and will use force if necessary to keep others from taking our positions," my guess is that "we" would quit—and forever. Chamber of commerce managers are dispensable. But let the 747 jet captains deliver the same ultimatum to the airlines—where the choice is giving in or going bankrupt—and the airlines will accede to the coercive demand. Those who produce necessities—things on which we have become dependent—can, as a rule, be unionized: garbage collection in big cities, the electrical trades, the automobile industry, hospitals, and the like.

Luckily, I have rarely labored at any job where, were all of like employment to quit, the economy would be strangled.

But why does a laborer have to be lucky in the job he chooses if he is to realize the fullest expression of his faculties? What is the difference between laboring as a chamber of commerce manager, the head of a company, a jet pilot, a housewife, a garbage collector, a teacher, or a mechanic in an auto factory? All are laborers. Why should one more than another be coercively managed by "labor" laws or "labor" unions? Why should any restraints against the release of creative energy be imposed on anyone? Why not freedom for all?

Why rely on luck in employment? Why not turn to rationality?

The reasons are manifold, more numerous than this laborer will ever be able to fathom or enumerate. Topping the list is an all-too-common naivete: people who do little if any thinking for themselves in political economy can be sold any "bill of goods." They are the easy victims of plausibilities, bromides, clichés. So proficient are the cliché peddlers, in and out of government, that millions of laborers can be persuaded to work against their own interests. Apparently, the wage level or years of schooling have little to do with this lack of comprehension.

Take Say's Law, for example: "Production generates its own purchasing power." All production—goods or services—is labor applied to natural resources; thus, labor can be said to generate its own purchasing power. Were ours a barter economy, Say's Law would be clear to everyone. A pint of milk has exchange value, that is, purchasing power. But first, the milk has to be produced. Production and purchasing power are correlatives. Simple enough. Now, introduce money—the medium of exchange in the economy—and the door is open for legerdemain. We can spend ourselves rich or into prosperity, claim the monetary magicians. What, really, are they saying?

They are advancing the fiction that *consumption* generates purchasing power! Anyone should be able to see that a pint of milk cannot be exchanged for anything—has no purchasing power—after it is consumed. Yet, a vast majority of our citizens are taken in by this "new economics," so eloquently advanced by John Maynard Keynes and his thousands of academic and political followers. People who are led into this trap honestly think of themselves as performing a public ser-

vice when obtaining an above-market wage by force. "See how much more of your product we can buy," goes this foolishness.

Another: The exploitation theory on which Karl Marx based his socialism sounds plausible enough to those who fail to think things through for themselves. Instead of regarding all who work as laborers—manual, intellectual, spiritual—Marx and his kind type us, that is, they resort to occupational pigeonholing: workers and capitalists, for instance.¹ With this sleight-of-hand performed, they then advance the claim that "workers," if not armed with coercive powers, would be exploited by the "capitalists." It is the widespread belief in this fiction that accounts, in large measure, for the special privileges and immunities granted to "labor" unions. As this way of life takes over, freedom to produce and exchange—freedom to labor as one pleases—diminishes, as does private ownership. No one can be said to own that which he does not control.

Based on my experience as a laborer, I choose freedom. I do not want "labor" union protection. The officials of these power structures are absolutely unaware of what my best interests are; indeed, more than likely they do not know their own. Had their ways prevailed over my life, I could not have been a laborer until age sixteen. Those flying machines of my WW I experience—Sopwith Camels—would have been more on the ground than in the air. That small produce business would have been out of the question. And had my subsequent employments been unionized, it is doubtful that I could have "broken in" to any one of them—probably would

¹ See the chapter, "Getting to Know Beans," in my *Talking to Myself* (Irvington-on-Hudson, N.Y.: The Foundation for Economic Education, Inc., 1970), pp. 62-70.

not have wanted to! What might have been my fate under such circumstances? Neither I nor anyone else can even guess, beyond the certainty that it would have been dismal, at best.

Each laborer is possessed of unique potentialities, unknown to others, even to himself. These have no outlet or release except as the individual is free to probe, to weave and wend and find his own way to them. Every step forward becomes a further discovery of one's own uniqueness. Remove the obstacles, that's all!

And with the obstacles removed, exploitation of one laborer by another laborer is impossible or, to use the pigeonhole terms, a "capitalist" could not exploit a "worker." What are these obstacles?

The obstacles to finding and working out one's own destiny are fraud, theft, misrepresentation, and violence. It is the chore of society's agency—government—to list these obstacles in their numerous manifestations, to prescribe the penalties for infraction, in short, to enforce the observation of such law. This done, no person or organization—unions or governments—could stand in the way of any individual's creative actions. Each free to labor as he pleases!

Reflect on freedom as thus defined. Without a resort to force, that is, in the absence of violence, no laborer or any combination of laborers, regardless of roles, could monopolize any activity. Monopoly is possible only when force is employed to inhibit free entry. Where and when there is free entry, there is competition—a fair field for everyone, no favors for anyone. Exploitation of some by others, possible only by a resort to violence, becomes nonexistent.

This laborer chooses freedom, and has some background experience for so doing!

10.

A Consumer Looks at Freedom

I AM a consumer. But, then, who is not! We are all consumers—every last one of us. And, as such, we have an interest so much in common that consumer interest and public interest are interchangeable terms. In the politico-economic realm of life, all policies—private as well as governmental—that offend consumer interest injure the public interest; policies that promote consumer interest harmonize and advance the common weal. Consumer interest is the premise from which all economic reasoning should proceed!¹

Because of this similarity of interest among us, it follows that if I can accurately define my own true interest as a consumer, I will, at the same time, identify yours and that of all consumers. What is this, in a nutshell?

Bearing in mind that we live in a highly specialized economy and, thus, are thoroughly interdependent, *my consumer*

¹ To my knowledge, no one has explained this point more adequately or with greater simplicity, clarity, and wit than Frederic Bastiat. So valuable is this remarkable Frenchman's contribution, that I have chosen to reprint his chapter, "Abundance and Scarcity," as an Addendum. See p. 161.

interest is progressively served by an increase of goods and services obtainable in willing exchange for my offerings. That's all there is to it. So, there remain only three tasks: (1) identify those policies and practices which subvert our common interest, (2) discover the ones which promote it, and (3) drop support for the former and lend encouragement to the latter.

Coercion vs. Freedom

There are only two basic approaches to consumer interest: the planned economy, welfare state way, on the one hand, and the free market, private ownership, limited government way, on the other. In the final analysis, the issue is between coercion and freedom. The fact that the coercive way is so popular in today's world is all the more reason why we should see through that error and discover the advantages to everyone of the freedom way.

Every increment of economic progress any people enjoy has its origin in the release of creative energy—a product of freedom. In the light of our own unprecedented progress in numerous areas, with “education” in the vanguard, one might expect a growth in understanding of how freedom works its wonders. Yet, we observe just the opposite: over the decades, the common understanding of freedom has declined rather than increased. Why this breakdown in perception?

During America's early days, when our simple and largely agrarian economy featured some measure of self-subsistence, consumer interest was easily discerned by nearly everyone; people saw the fraud, the futility, of coercively taking the fruits of one's husbandry—pigs, horses, plows—and handing them over to others. The injustice of such tactics was readily

apparent; the coercionist had no ideological leg to stand on; his arguments, however clever, were seen to be against consumer interest.

But let the economy become increasingly specialized and complex—a concomitant of the free market way of life—and no one can grasp its intricacies, that is, no person can begin to visualize the trillions of actions, reactions, interactions, the daily data of the market. People thus acting freely in the market evolve patterns of interactions so complex that they defy comprehension. Each a mystery to behold!

This quite natural, pervasive blindness is precisely the situation best suited to the modern soothsayers, witch doctors, seekers after power, coercionists, who prey on any and all observed dissatisfactions in society; or, if none are observed, they invent and whip up the clamor on which they thrive. A problem? You name it! They have an answer. And millions of people, having no answers of their own, are taken in. Consider the countless “professors of economics” in our “best” universities who insist that supply and demand is passé and that scarcity is an outmoded concept—to mention but two of their heresies.

Complexity of relationships in no way alters the propriety of moral, spiritual, social, or economic principles. The principles stand, though we may fall. A law is a law. Newton's First Law of Motion applies whether a wheel is at rest or spinning at 40,000 r.p.m. The dictum that thievery is evil holds as true for the theft of a dime as for the theft of a thousand dollars. The moral principle that I owe respect to your life, livelihood, liberty applies no less to all others than to you alone.

The authoritarians, however, have a case and we should know what it is. When their premise is accepted, namely,

that it is appropriate for them to lord it over us—implying that our rights derive from them—then they have no choice but to discard the natural law and to concoct “laws” of their own. And these “laws” must be of a kind that they think befits their premise. Their premise being faulty, it follows that their “laws” cannot rise above mere aberrations. For instance, they must deny Gresham’s Law: “Bad money drives out good.” They conjure up and substitute numerous catch phrases—specious, but plausible to some—such as: “We can spend ourselves rich,” or “A three per cent inflation annually is essential for the attainment of national goals.” One can never know what to expect from those who reason from untenable premises.

Relevant to this thesis is a celebrated cliché which originated in the early thirties: “The more complex the society, the more government control we need.” What this says, in effect, is that the more diversified our specializations and the more numerous our exchanges—manifestations of free, creative energy at work—the more must we submit to authoritarian regulation. In short, the more freedom works its wonders, the more coercion we need! Talk about conjuring up contradictions! But such is the nature of the soothsayers’ “laws.”

Choose the most brilliant person of your acquaintance and ask yourself how competent is he to run your life, that is, to decide where you shall work, how many hours, at what wage, what and with whom you shall exchange, or what thoughts you may entertain. “Utter nonsense!” is your answer, whoever you are. Now increase the complexity by multiplying you by a dozen, or a million, or 200 million. Obviously, the more complex the society, the greater is our need to be free—the less can we tolerate government control!

How Freedom Is Lost

Let me now evaluate how my consumer interest is affected by the planned economy, welfare state way of life. A few examples should suffice. Take the Gateway Arch in St. Louis. Some of my income and capital assets—and yours as well—went into that decoration. What do we receive in exchange? Absolutely nothing! All loss and no gain!

Or, reflect on the Federal farm program. What about the corporate farmer who last year received more than \$4 million for not farming? And the thousands of others who syphoned off lesser amounts from the purchasing power of the rest of us—and for doing nothing! The annual cost of this farm subsidy program represents five or six times the total Federal budget when I was a farmer boy. This is no service to my consumer interest of yours; it is a disservice.

“Government, in its last analysis,” wrote Professor Woodrow Wilson, “is organized force.”² And it would seem irrefutable, also, that the prevailing force is government, whether or not it be given that name. If the controlling or prevailing force is government, then labor unions may be termed government. They have legal sanction to employ coercive force and, when it comes to ruling the nation’s economy, they often prove to be more powerful than the agencies known as government; indeed, they more and more frequently rule Federal, state, and local governments.

What, really, is a present-day labor union? It is an organization of otherwise independent sellers of labor to manipulate the price of labor to their own advantage—by coercion or the threat thereof.

² See *The State* by Woodrow Wilson (Boston: D. C. Heath & Co., 1900), p. 572.

While coercive tactics can never lead to anyone's real advantage—any more than a wrong can beget a right—the question here is, how do above-market wages relate to my consumer interest?

An above-market wage is a higher rate than would be derived through willing exchange. Whatever is attained by others in this manner must be to my disadvantage as a consumer. As the price of a good or service rises above my willing exchange level, I have but two choices: (1) to go without that particular good or service or (2) to suffer a loss of purchasing power for other goods and services. Labor union coercive practices are definitely antagonistic to consumer interest.

One further sampling of coercive devices should suffice to demonstrate that the welfare state way of life is adverse to consumer interest: unemployment compensation, low-income housing, tax-financed education, aid to dependent children, medicare, disability payments, food stamps, in short, the whole so-called welfare program.

The Intervention Grows

As noted in a previous chapter, the current total cost of these programs—Federal, state, and local—may be \$150 billion annually, 150 times the total Federal budget 57 years ago—an interval during which the population little more than doubled! By now, it should be clear to anyone that the drain on the economy increases with each passing year. Once the gates of something-for-nothing are opened, more and more people from every walk of life rush to the trough. Many senior citizens among the well-to-do accept medicare—that is, they let others foot their bills!

Even if I were a pauper, my consumer interest could not be served by this Marxian procedure: "from each according to ability, to each according to need." Why? Presupposed is a bottomless warehouse or supply of never-ending goods and services, a presupposition made plausible to some by the Keynesian scheme of inflating the money supply. Sooner or later, the trough will have nothing in it—all parasites and no hosts; in a word, all paupers!

As in all of these coercive schemes, such income and capital as you and I possess are syphoned off, and with not an iota of goods and services in exchange.

Do away with coercion; limit force to defense against fraud, violence, predation, misrepresentation—that is, against all destructive actions. What then? What remains? The free market, private ownership, limited government way of life—the greatest discovery in human history for working one's way out of poverty!

If we will judge each practice and policy—private as well as public—in terms of how well it serves consumer interest, we will be on the right track. In the way of life thus deduced, everyone will make only those exchanges which he believes to be to his own advantage—*all* gain and *no* loss. Quite a switch from the coercive way!

As a consumer, I choose freedom. But even if the coercive way had economic advantages, I would still choose freedom. There is much to be said for being one's own rather than somebody else's man.

11.

A Conservationist Looks at Freedom

THE TERM “conservationist” is generally applied to those who concern themselves about our ecological situation and look to government to do the conserving. We who do not look upon government as the Great Conservator are generally regarded as not interested in conservation.

Despite this confusion of terms I, too, am a conservationist!

Advanced students of the freedom philosophy readily recognize that mail delivery should be taken out of governmental operation and turned over to the free market, that is, to men in voluntary, private, competitive, cooperative action. And they will make the case for nonintervention in housing, welfare, and a host of other creative activities—even education and religion.

But there is one troubled situation which few approach with faith in freedom: conservation of natural resources and wild life. Leave the blessings of nature to free men? Perish the thought! Why, men left to their own devices are so profit hungry—avaricious—that in no time at all the forests would

be denuded, natural recreational areas and wild life but a memory of bygone days! Most people abandon freedom as a means of conservation, which is to say, they turn the problem over to society's coercive arm: government.

The case for freedom as related to conservation is difficult because it requires exploratory thinking about experiences that have gone pretty much unnoticed. We must assess the unheard, the unseen, the unknown. No wonder we stand confounded as would have Adam Smith or Frederic Bastiat had they been asked if freedom could be trusted to deliver the human voice at the speed of light! Unthinkable! Extracting meaning from the unthinkable is no easy matter.

But I am convinced that conservation can be far more safely entrusted to men in freedom than to the verboten techniques—figuratively, “keep off the grass”—which seem to feature and set the limits to governmental achievement.¹

The reasons for my deep-seated conviction derive in part from glimpses of free market achievements and of governmental failures, but even more from my faith in the miraculous results that can be obtained by men when free to try and an utter lack of faith in the possibility of any creative accomplishment by coercive devices. Conservation is clearly in the creative realm!

Preservation vs. Conservation

But first, what *really* is conservation and how is it distinguished from preservation? “Melville Bell Grosvenor has

¹ This is not to preclude a reliance on the courts and other governmental procedures to stop the upstream polluter or nearby smoking chimney or slaughterhouse that clearly damages or threatens the property or lives of others. See “The Pollution Problem” in my *Let Freedom Reign*, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-8.

artfully defined the difference between preservation and conservation. Preservation is retention undisturbed and in a natural condition, much as a museum. *Conservation is the wise use of our environmental resources for the best interests of man.* Of necessity, it involves a sense of stewardship and responsibility in the use of those resources. We undoubtedly need some preservation. But it cannot be the answer to the control of man's environment, for we are an ecological part of that environment, and to preserve it makes us a museum-piece as well."² (Italics added).

Had mankind been around throughout the ages and succeeded in preservation—"retention undisturbed"—dinosaurs would still be with us. As it is, we have only reconstructed skeletons of these reptiles in museums. These admittedly have their value: they permit us to gain some knowledge of the Mesozoic Era. Assuredly, however, the existence today of prehistoric animals would not be considered as "the wise use of our environmental resources for the best interests of man," which is to say that their preservation would not qualify as conservation.

Can we not make a similar observation about all natural resources? Trees, for instance? No question about it, the Giant Sequoias are a feast to the eye. And who among us does not yearn for their preservation? But had the preservation of trees—"retention undisturbed"—been the rule, would that have been "the wise use of our environmental resources for the best interests of man"? Hardly! We'd still live in nothing better than adobe huts!

² Extracted from "Young Forests Aid Global Oxygen Supply" by Dr. John Rediske. See *Weyerhaeuser World*, April, 1970. Melville Bell Grosvenor is Editor-in-Chief and Board Chairman of *National Geographic Magazine*.

Apparently the preservationists would have all of us in our present state of affluence being able to tour the forests in their pristine glory. What they fail to realize is that a strict preservationist policy applied to all natural resources would reduce "all of us" to the population of a foraging economy. How many would that be? The number of Indians who lived in this land—less than one-half of one per cent of today's population! A conservation policy, on the other hand, counsels the use of trees for homes; indeed, timber now has not less than 5,000 uses. "Retention undisturbed" would hold our numbers at a few hundred thousand and condemn us to huts and tepees.

The Market as Conservator

Let me sketch here a few glimpses and thoughts which have turned my mind toward freedom as the effective means to conservation.

Bearing in mind that man, too, is part of the ecology, observe how governmental preservation schemes work on human beings, American Indians on the reservation being a case in point. Preserved they are indeed—and as museum pieces.³ Now note that the Indians who have escaped this preservation and have entered into society and competition are among our finest citizens—conservation in its best sense.⁴ Arbitrary and artificial preservations scarcely suffice for the survival of a species—human or other.

³ See "Wards of the Government" by Dean Russell, and "The Guaranteed Life" by Maxwell Anderson (Irvington-on-Hudson, N.Y.: The Foundation for Economic Education, Inc.)

⁴ For a clear analysis of human resources as related to conservation, see "The Greatest Waste" by Paul L. Poirot. *The Freeman*, March, 1964.

Doubtless the world's outstanding example of animal preservation is to be found in India—perhaps more than 200,000,000 sacred cows. Are they put to a wise use in the interests of man? These animals largely destroy rather than conserve scarce natural resources.

In contrast, note the program of animal conservation in the United States. Aberdeen Angus, Hereford, and other breeds of cattle—109,000,000 head—have largely displaced the bison that roamed the western plains. Under these circumstances, one might expect the bison to go the way of the dinosaurs, but conservationists have come to the rescue. Whether for novelty or profit or fun or whatever, there are now thousands of bison under private ownership—far from extinct.

Those who look to government as the Great Conservator should reflect on its “achievements”—for example, in forestry. Russia is the ultimate in this respect, for there is no private ownership of land. The whole Soviet area—8.6 million square miles—is owned “lock, stock, and barrel” by government. And what do we find? The Commissar charged by the Kremlin planners with achieving lumber and pulp quotas, and with a minimum labor force assigned to him to do the job, finds it necessary to harvest lumber along the river banks and highways. Talk about denuding the landscape! This is precisely the opposite of what most preservationists have in mind.

Or reflect on the U.S.A.—3.6 million square miles—39 per cent of which is governmentally owned and controlled, and the percentage increases. As the shadow of government has lengthened, the plea for more government ownership and control—“keep off the grass”—has also increased. Back in 1920 the voices of preservationists were barely audible. Today their loud speakers reach us everywhere. The more con-

trol we relinquish to government, the more control is demanded of it. Why? Simply because the right way—freedom—is thereby displaced and thus obscured. The merits of freedom grow ever less imaginable to those who are abandoning it in theory and in practice.

Most people, because they won't even take a look, are blind to what private ownership and control is accomplishing in this field.

Private timberland owners—at least 5,000 of them—are on a *sustained yield* basis. That is, they are planting and growing more than is being harvested. The first tree farm was established in 1941. At that time 20 per cent more trees were being harvested than grown. Today, 61 per cent more wood is being grown than is harvested and lost to fire, insects, and disease.

But more: most major forest corporations and many small operators are engaged in *intensive high-yield forestry*. This includes intensive soils site classification, researching for genetically superior seed, optimum spacing, fertilization, thinning, and timber utilization—not a wasted chip! And investments are being made today with an eye on yields a century hence. Could anything like this be expected in Russia, or of any governmental operation, here or elsewhere? Not remotely! Governments can and often do enforce preservation, but only men in freedom can achieve conservation.

But what about parks and playgrounds and other recreational areas? Leave these to free men? Are you crazy!⁵

Again, my mind is turned toward freedom, not by searching through infinite details but, rather, by what is glimpsed in passing. I note, for instance, that 63,000,000 acres of pri-

⁵ See "Exploring the National Parks" by John C. Sparks. *The Freeman*, December, 1964.

vately owned forests are open to the public for recreation, including hunting and fishing.

Among the lands most valuable per acre on earth are two government properties: London's Hyde Park and New York City's Central Park. I have driven through the latter and past the former many times and on each occasion I have tried to relate public use to public expense. I have viewed the beautiful trees, the lawns, and clear ponds of each place—empty spaces, often with no human beings in evidence. True, the passing motorist has an aesthetic appreciation of Hyde Park as does the tourist who looks down on Central Park from the Empire State Building. But is it properly a function of government to thus limit these valuable properties?

Yellowstone National Park—larger than Rhode Island and Delaware combined—last year had slightly over 2,000,000 visitors.

In contrast, consider three private operations in California—conservation in manifestation. If we would but look, every state affords somewhat similar examples.

There's Disneyland—about 160 acres—now accommodating some 10,000,000 individuals annually, a recreational delight.

Knott's Berry Farm, of no more than 150 acres, with its perfect replica of Independence Hall, has 4,500,000 visitors each year.

The 22 acres bordering San Francisco Bay—Fisherman's Wharf, The Cannery, and Ghirardelli's Square—give pleasure to 3,700,000 people annually.

These private operations, occupying but a tiny fraction of one per cent as much space as Yellowstone National Park, give enjoyment to 9 times as many people! Acreage-wise and recreation-wise, these would seem to be overwhelming odds in favor of freedom, that is, on the side of conservation as dis-

tinguished from preservation. Such facts persuade me that we should not rely on government as the conservator of our resources.

Yes, goes the rebuttal, but I have other preferences. Disney's playground, Knott's Americana theme, and the gastronomy and views at Fisherman's Wharf hold no lure for me. I relish the great open spaces or the mountains or the seashore or the forests in their natural state. And all I say to this is, "Fine and dandy. But why not encourage the proper means to these ends: freedom!"

Two Kinds of Profit

There are countless myths and fallacies which blind people to the miracles that can be wrought only in the practice of freedom.

I suppose the ranking myth has to do with profit. It is generally assumed that profit seekers, in aiming for their own gain, will not serve others aesthetically or culturally or spiritually. The fact is that he who peacefully seeks his own gain can succeed only as he serves others. This is lesson number one in economics, and applies as rigidly to the clergyman or teacher as it does to the baker of bread or the builder of Disneyland.

We must keep in mind that there are two kinds of profit: monetary and psychic, the latter, in many instances, more strongly motivating human action than the former.⁶

There are several reasons why we fail to see how these two forms of profit work their wonders. Foremost is governmental

⁶ See "What Shall It Profit a Man?" in my *Deeper Than You Think*, *op. cit.*, pp. 108-117.

pre-emption. When government takes over parks and recreational areas, profit-seeking men simply turn elsewhere. Incentive is at zero. It's precisely the same as when government assumes the responsibility for the welfare of your neighbor—you feel no responsibility for helping him in time of need.

Also, we are inclined to look upon present-day profit seekers as representative of free and self-responsible men. For, so it is imagined, we are a free people! Far from it! We are living in a highly rigged and interventionist society. Instead of the rectitude expected of those whose profit depends on efficient service to willing customers, we find men grasping for special political privilege. Interventionism lowers the moral standard.⁷

Abandon the myth of government as the Great Conservator; confine this power structure to insuring against fraud, violence, predation, misrepresentation, and other destructive actions, and watch the profit seekers go to work in the interest of everyone!⁸ If we may judge by performance where profit seekers have been allowed open opportunities, their accomplishments will far exceed anything we can imagine.

Seekers of monetary profit will supply whatever the demand warrants and do so with the least possible waste of either natural or human resources. Who can justifiably ask for more than this? If an individual insists upon a vast park for his own enjoyment, let him provide it at his own expense.

But here is where the psychic profit seekers will come to

⁷ For a further explanation of this point, see "Why Freedom Is Not Trusted," *Notes from FEE*, March, 1970.

⁸ The price system is among the greatest and most powerful conservators. As a resource—renewable or irreplaceable—becomes scarce, its price rises, cutting down less important uses and encouraging more discoveries and equally good or even better substitutes.

the rescue, and extravagantly! They'll build parks, playgrounds, bird and other sanctuaries, and recreational areas of every conceivable kind and all over the place, just as today they give billions to educational and religious institutions, art galleries, museums, monuments, civic centers, libraries, and what have you. There are thousands of individuals who would gladly turn their fortunes to something of this nature. That's psychic profit! And no more is required to put this remarkable profit process into action than to stop governmental pre-emption. It's that simple, and far more promising than anyone can possibly portray.

Conservation is the wise use of our environmental resources for the best interests of man. Who is to determine "wise use" and "best interests"? Free men—that is, men in voluntary action with no restraints against the release of their creative energies. These are the only true conservationists!

12.

Nothing Fails Like Something-for-Nothing

WILLIAM RALPH INGE, “the gloomy Dean” of St. Paul’s Cathedral, once observed that “nothing fails like success.” Based on the American success story and the current prospect of its failure on many fronts, the Dean’s aphorism appears plausible—even if not quite demonstrable, as stated. What can be explained is a related observation: nothing fails like something-for-nothing.

Success—attaining one’s ambition, be it material, intellectual, moral, or spiritual—does not necessarily spell downfall and doom. True, getting topside relative to others has its dangers: headiness, self-exaltation, a fool’s paradise. Failure threatens any person thus afflicted. Much depends upon how success comes about. If by inadvertence, accident, or inheritance, success has little, if anything, to sustain it.

On the other hand, success that has been won or earned by a growth and development of the faculties has body to it, and one can say with Alexander Dumas, “Nothing succeeds

like success." The individual who thus earns success is more likely led to wanting-to-know-it-ness than to know-it-all-ness. Achievement, thus founded, opens untrod vistas to be explored, beckoning the achiever to new heights; his faculties are employed and he has the habit of growing. Such deeply rooted success in creativity—thinking, writing, discovering, inventing, and the like—does not induce failure but is a prod to further improvement.

But our prime concern here is with the something-for-nothing variety of "success." For instance, a deeply religious person needs much more than a set of hand-me-down creeds. Minus personal insights, introspection, spiritual experiences, thoughtful delving into the nature of God and man, ready-made creeds are unstable; indeed, they tend to topple at the slightest suggestion that "God is dead." Whenever religion is a handout of something-for-nothing, it tends to become nothing!

Nor is that individual educated who is but a carbon copy of others, even if the others be the wisest who ever lived. Ability to repeat by heart everything in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* is not the mark of an educated man but rather of a memorizing man—one having a high power of recall. Where lies the initiative? That's the question.

Education in its finest sense can only be the product of self-seeking; the initiative has to be with the individual and the accompanying expansion of the faculties—every step personally taken and, thus, earned. This is the drawing forth or educative process, each turning his own eye to such lights as he can discover. Actually, the educated man—a finished product—has never existed; there is, at best, only the educable man!

Now observe what happens when the initiative is the

other way round: with "the public" rather than the individual, that is, when it's socialized. Wisdom and knowledge, it is assumed, can be injected into the minds or forced down the necks, as we say, of youngsters whether or not they seek enlightenment. The technique employed is coercive: compulsory attendance, government dictated curricula, and the forcible collection of the wherewithal to finance the procedure. This is called "free education." A more accurate term would be something-for-nothing schooling. The results are all about us, and they are frightening indeed! The disorder we witness from kindergartens through universities stems mainly from this unnatural, carbon copy process—although this is rarely recognized by the revolters themselves. When people insist on aping as a way of learning, they display fewer and fewer human attributes, including the capacity to understand why they behave as they do. In education, as in everything else, nothing fails like something-for-nothing.

Turn now to the material or economic realm. Many of us are old enough to remember an America before political paternalism was the rule and the mode. And some of us can recall times of struggle, of hard work and long hours, when the choice was being industrious or not eating. If such "hardships" were not our personal experiences, at least there is history with its reference to ancestors—early settlers—obliged to "root hog or die," as they used to say. Material success—affluence—was in the dream stage, an aspiration.

Given the proper societal framework of self-responsibility and to each his own—freedom in its best sense—struggle spells the use and thus the growth of the faculties. Self-interest, in these circumstances, is forever goading one on, impelling growth, driving the individual not only toward ma-

terial achievement but toward self-disciplines and a strict attention to the virtues. Not only must one work to eat but he must also respect the rights of others and deal honestly with them, or he will be shunned. There is starvation outside the social bond, so men tend to grow morally when struggling to get ahead; it's grow, or else!

In all the world's history there has never been a situation that even comes close to the American phenomenon: millions upon millions rising to material success, affluence on an unprecedented scale, individuals in our "lower income brackets" having more conveniences and gadgetry, better food, clothing, housing, transportation than lords of the manor ever had. America is populated with affluent individuals, and here's the point: affluence in ever so many instances is no longer associated with struggle. So productive are specialization and free exchange that success has come almost as if by magic—not something-for-nothing but a great deal for almost nothing. This is not to suggest that the present affluence is unearned but only to state a fact: much of it has been *easily* earned. Millions of individuals are behaving as if the struggle were over: do next to nothing and still live in luxury!

Merely observe what happens to those who are no longer required to put forth their most industrious efforts in order to remain topside economically. There are exceptions, of course, but often atrophy takes the place of growth. The faculties, instead of being exercised and flexed, are allowed to stagnate. Getting out of life—retirement—is more a goal than getting ever deeper into life. The disciplines and virtues are no longer prized and heeded by many of these affluent individuals who feel they have it made. *We are successes!*

Material success in the absence of struggle is a dangerous

temptation to inactivity. If one would avoid this danger, his will to grow must overpower the temptation to retire from life. The citizens of an affluent society, in exchange for almost nothing, enjoy an abundance of goods and leisure as well. They must not stop there, but go on to learn the art of investing their time and things so that material blessings shall be a means of enriching other sectors of their lives. The critical task today is maintaining intellectual, moral, and spiritual fitness in the face of luxury. This is a challenge of a sort that mankind has never faced before; it is the sink or swim problem affluence poses.

All play and no work—all gain and no cost—makes Jack a dull boy. In other words, the prospect of something for nothing would destroy the presumed beneficiary, even if there were some way to maintain such a one-way flow of resources.

Today, multitudes live exclusively on the dole in one or another of its numerous forms. The only qualification is that one be a warm body not gainfully employed. But the something-for-nothing plague is not limited to the “hard-core” unemployed; it extends to the well-to-do. For instance, in 1969 no fewer than 1,000 “farmers” were paid more than sixty thousand dollars each (the largest payment was over \$4 million) *not to farm!*¹ There are many affluent businessmen who gain monopoly powers in lush markets and give nothing in return: outlawing competition. Indeed, who is entirely exempt from this something-for-nothing destroyer! Even I, who so much deplore this economic nonsense, am a victim: using the socialized mail and flying the subsidized airlines at

¹ For the names and amounts, see *Congressional Record*, March 24, 1970, pp. S4316-S4323.

less than cost, and so on. No one can count our something-for-nothings, nor is it useful to do so. This whole catastrophic breakdown can be summarized: the expenditures of governments in the U.S.A. are now at about 42 per cent of the people's earned income! Many people get something for nothing which means nothing for something for the rest.

The question finally boils down to this: are we doomed? Is the final chapter of the American success story now being written?

The German historian, Oswald Spengler, contended that civilizations, like organisms, are born, go through babyhood, adolescence, old age, and finally pass on—an inevitable sequence! Agree to this, and we're done!

The British historian, Arnold Toynbee, on the other hand, theorizes that the death of a civilization is not necessarily predestined, is not inevitable. Whether or not oblivion can be averted depends on the capacity of a people to meet and overcome the challenges peculiar or unique to their own situation in their own time. Agree to this, and we have a chance.

Our challenge—to live with affluence—is indeed unique to human history. No society has ever been faced with this one before.

First, we must understand what the challenge is, for only then can we meet and overcome it. Are there enough Americans having the intellectual, moral, and spiritual stamina and politico-economic sense to do so? More than likely, provided enough of us see that it is in our own interest to find a solution. Each of us has a personal stake in a going society. Only those who see this—which is to say, only those who are aware that man is a social as well as an individualistic being—can be counted on to help. If we are up to it, America's best days lie ahead.

13.

Progress Depends on Freedom

DURING a barren stretch—having had no ideas worth writing about for several days—it occurred to me that I was enjoying freedom of a sort: freedom from ideas! After all, any idea of consequence is as raw ore—worthless until refined, thought through, industriously labored over. This requires concentration, to the exclusion of many pleasures which beckon for indulgence. When an idea, as first perceived, cannot be given top priority, it is best forgotten. Refinement brooks no indifference; it comes first or not at all.¹

Thus ends the barren spell! For now I have an idea that deserves refinement: *from* what should anyone wish to be free? If it means to be free from ideas, I would forswear my allegiance to freedom.

But first, why try to think this one through? There are two good reasons: (1) no social concept is more important to understand than freedom, and (2) no word, standing by itself,

¹ See Henry Hazlitt's brilliant essay, "The Art of Thinking," *The Freeman*, August, 1970.

conjures up a greater variety of meanings and connotations than freedom. Used alone, that is, in the absence of definitive phrases, the word explains nothing. When I say only that I stand for freedom, all people, even communists, will agree with me, although what they have in mind may well be the very opposite of what I mean; I have not communicated.

Is Freedom Necessary?

In the midst of these reflections came a letter which illustrates the confused and varied meanings ascribed to freedom:

I do not feel that freedom is man's goal, nor *his most important tool*, but rather *just one of man's essential tools*. Thus, I view FEE as I would the American Medical Association—as I would any other very important, but *narrowly interested*, professional group—a collection of people interested in solving similar *limited* problems. . . . However, I feel you are in error, just as any other professional group errs, when you claim your particular field of activity is the most important. (Italics added)

This letter “turns me on,” not in defense of FEE, which is only incidental, but in defense of freedom, which is *fundamental*. For the writer misses the whole point as, doubtless, do many others—and it is a total and costly miss! True, freedom is not man's goal, but without it man can never achieve his goals. Freedom is, I insist, man's most important “tool,” the essential means to his progress, to his highest destiny on this earth: to grow, emerge, evolve in awareness, perception, consciousness. And let us bear in mind that freedom is not a social relationship to be designed, constructed, or created; freedom exists unless prevented, that is, it exists *in the absence of restraints*.

Freedom from What?

Perhaps the best way to examine this matter is to continue with the question, *from what* should anyone wish to be free?

While it is true that there are people who wish to be free from having ideas in order to avoid the labor these flashes of enlightenment entail, the wish is a craven one; it befits only those addicted to the vegetative process and, thus, is sub-human. This is a wish to get away from rather than into life. It is like wishing to be free from one's brain!

However, there's more to this semantic confusion than first meets the eye. People not only demand freedom from various disturbing influences but demand it as a *right*.

Should a person claim a right to be free from having ideas? I will concede but not applaud the claim. So far as I am concerned, one has a right to do anything he pleases—silly or brilliant—if the action in no way infringes upon the creative aspirations of any other person.²

Having dismissed freedom from having ideas as an absurdity, let's dispose of several other absurdities. By this process of elimination, we may be able to arrive at what we should really be free from and, thus, find an appropriate definition for freedom. Then we will know why freedom is not some incidental gimmick but is *fundamental* to all progress.

Reflect on freedom from want, a highly popularized and broadly accepted concept. Is this valid? Yes, so long as it remains a strictly personal aspiration. It is legitimate to seek freedom from destitution—poverty—and other deterrents to fulfillment.

² See "The Right to Do as I Please," a chapter in *Talking to Myself*, op. cit., pp. 98-103.

But have we a *right* to be free from want? The word “right” in this context can have but a single meaning: a claim on the resources of others. And this is the only meaning it does have in today’s political world. The mere fact of my existence, regardless of my indolence, laziness, incompetence, misfortune, or whatever, entitles me, so it is argued, to a “decent standard of living” at the expense of you and others. And, further, you are negligent, antisocial, and unrighteous if you object—for is not my claim on you a *right*? What this absurdity really means is that you have no *right* to refuse my demands!

Or take freedom from fear, another common political phrase. All of us wish to escape fear. But do I have a *right* to be free from fear? This, again, implies that you and others have a commitment to shelter me against fearsome events to which I may be exposed, possibly through my own action or negligence. Plainly, an absurdity!

The Role of Competition

Freedom from competition appears to be a natural or at least an instinctive aspiration. In the light of competition’s unquestioned stimulus to improvement, how are we to account for the near universality of this desire? It may be this: were a person to progress further than all others in his field, that is, to excel everyone—such excellence being in harmony with man’s growth and development—competition would exist only as a potential threat. This person would have no competitors; he would have an exclusive position in the market. *Perhaps most of us have an instinctive aversion to that which measures our shortcomings, to that which is continually announcing to us that we are not champions.* In any event,

most people favor competition for everyone except themselves. Rare is the individual who welcomes and invites competition in his own specialty. Can competition against me be wrong if it is right for all others to compete?

But has anyone a *right* to be free from competition? Or, is this of the same order of absurdity as a *right* to be free from want or fear? Implicit in the noncompetition argument is a denial of entry by others into one's chosen domain. It is nothing less than a claim to the championship founded not on a contest in creative efficiency and consumer-pleasing ability but, rather, a tantrum-like urge to be champion. Each person who suffers this monopolistic fever is saying in effect, "Stay out of my ring all of you would-be contenders; I cherish my privileged position and insist that it remain exclusively mine." And note the arguments they'll conjure up to "prove" that their cases are exceptional!

Self-Responsibility

There appears to be no end to life's obstacles and contests and the nagging desire to be free from them. If any one of them tops the list, it probably is the itch to be free from the responsibility for self. Obviously, there's no *right* to free myself from me, that is, for me to foist myself and my problems upon you. Merely reflect on the sad state of affairs were everyone to do this.

Responsibility for self is a privilege to be embraced, not a terror to be shunned or a burden from which to be freed. *Becoming* is man's highest goal—achievement consonant with each individual's uniqueness, whatever it is—and it is an observed fact that the art of becoming is composed of acts of overcoming. Obstacles, problems of varying sorts, are step-

ping stones to achievement. When I turn the responsibility for me over to you and others, or let government take it away from me, the essence of my being is removed; I have nothing remaining against which to brace myself for any forward thrust—no footing from which to step or jump or climb; I am a nonhuman in a vacuum.

Should one succeed in freeing himself from responsibility, he would automatically be free from having ideas or competitors; there aren't any creative thoughts or stimulative contests at the zero level. Be it remembered that all ideas, inventions, discoveries, insights, flashes of intuition take place only in those moments when responsibility for self is being experienced.

Parenthetically, self-responsibility becomes increasingly difficult to appreciate, sense, or retain in a specialized trading economy. Most of what we receive has a source other than self—that is, all of us enjoy countless blessings not of our own making. My contribution toward these conferments is infinitesimal. But I dare not take my eye off this intricate relationship between me and what I receive lest my sense of self-responsibility be lost. It is a precious possession.

Remove the Restraints

With a few of the absurdities out of the way, is there, then, something *from* which we should be free and have a *right* to be free? Indeed, there is!

Keeping in mind that man's highest goal is intellectual, moral, and spiritual progress along the line of each individual's creative uniqueness and that this is a condition which exists at its best in *the absence of restraints*, it follows

that to be free from restraints is the most important means to man's ends or purposes.

Restraints at the social level come under the heading of original sin: man lording it over men; man attempting to usurp God's role by casting others in his little and very imperfect image; man trying to make others carbon copies of himself; know-it-alls with a sword; coercionists; authoritarians. We have a *right* to be free from the power plays of those possessed by the little god syndrome.

From all of this can easily be deduced an appropriate definition of freedom as related to the social realm: *no man-concocted restraints against the release of creative energy.* Freedom, as thus defined, is all-important to man's highest goals, to his progress. Freedom is neither "narrow" nor "limited." Freedom is fundamental!

14.

Behind the Synthetic Curtain

WERE WE to abandon our spending for war, fanciful flights to the moon and Mars, and literally thousands of other boondoggles or nonmarket ventures, unemployment would soar and a depression of frightful magnitude would be upon us—or, so it is argued. For it seems that politicians, labor officials, and businessmen alike have lost faith in our ability to recapture a going, thriving, free market economy. Unfortunately, there is more to this contention than first meets the eye and we should know the reasons for this loss of economic resiliency and what is required for its recovery.

There are only three ways to go; we are faced with making a choice; ours is the day of decision.

The first is to go right on with the spending spree. But, as we should know by now, it is politically impossible to finance this entirely by direct tax levies. The only political method for financing those expenditures over and above what can be obtained by direct tax levies is to expropriate capital assets. The procedure is to dilute the medium of exchange; in a

word, inflation. Since 1939 our money supply has gone from \$36 billion to more than \$200 billion!

The harmful impact of inflation as a tax is readily seen once we realize that inflation, in a strict economic sense, is the same as counterfeiting; they differ only in that (1) inflation is legal whereas counterfeiting is not, and (2) inflation is by the Federal government rather than by individuals. Whether the dollar is inflationary or counterfeit, it is a purchase order and, thus, is a means by which government acquires your capital and gives no goods or services in return. This, of course, discourages saving, investment, and production; we run out of working capital and tools.

In a highly specialized economy such as ours where no one is self-subsistent, everyone is dependent on the free, uninhibited exchanges of our thousands upon thousands of specializations. Barter, as a means of exchange in a division-of-labor economy, is out of the question. Required, instead, is a medium of exchange—an economic circulatory system—which works so long as the integrity of the medium is maintained. Inflation, however, destroys the integrity of the medium. As our money depreciates, it becomes less and less useful for exchange purposes.

A policy of inflation to finance excessive governmental expenditures calls for increasing doses or injections with each passing year. Nor does it matter what the excess spending is for: going to the moon or keeping the peace. Those who advocate a diversion of war expenditures to domestic welfare schemes miss the point entirely. Federal urban renewal, medicare, and similar programs are just like war in drawing goods and services out of the market without putting back anything useful or productive—no savings, no investments, no tools, no production; in brief, just waste or consumption of

scarce resources. As in the Germany of 1923 when 100 million marks would not buy a single loaf of bread, this road leads eventually to collapse.¹ There are no exceptions recorded; history is filled with examples of confirmation. Who wishes to pursue this course!

Barriers to Employment

The alternative to disaster, then, is to abandon excessive governmental spending. But there is more to the problem than mere retrenchment of spending—much more. The millions of people presently employed in war and space hardware, urban renewal projects, the thousands of other boondoggle or nonmarket ventures, as well as those in the enormous supporting bureaucracy, become unemployed the moment governmental expenditures are withdrawn. Without other job opportunities, unemployment would soar to revolutionary proportions. And this also spells collapse. There remains just one possibility if we would avoid total collapse, and that is to do away with our synthetic curtain!

Precisely what is this synthetic curtain? It hangs as a barrier between the desire to produce, to exchange, to work, and the opportunities to do so. This curtain is not of natural origin; it is synthetic—"artificial, not real or genuine." It is man-made of a thousand and one politico-economic concoctions and aberrations found on the statute books: wage, price, rent, interest, and production controls—that is, everything that inhibits, prohibits, restrains the peaceful exchange of goods and services.

This synthetic curtain is a tighter barrier than we realize.

¹ I equate collapse with a loss of freedom, that is, with all-out statism.

Why is it, for instance, that capable people, unemployed by a cut in expenditures for nonmarket ventures, cannot readily find other things to do? Simple enough: they bump directly into the synthetic curtain, and instead of breaking through to jobs, bounce right back to their unemployed status. The very curtain that once sheltered or protected them in their artificial jobs, now screens them from return access to the market.² And there is no help for them or any of us until this barrier is exposed and withdrawn. The employed no less than the unemployed, the wealthy as much as the poor, have everything at stake on the outcome.

Minimum Wage Laws

Among the countless threads of the synthetic curtain are the minimum wage laws. Any person who thinks through this political device must conclude that it does not increase a workman's worth; rather, it increases unemployment. All of us know persons we would not want to employ at as much as \$1.60 per hour;³ for the most part we do not hire workers for more than we believe they are worth to us, so such persons remain unemployed. Even some who once earned a high wage or salary may have lost their competence and are no longer wanted at the minimum wage—\$1.00 perhaps, but not \$1.60. These, then, are added to the unemployed. The only persons who are willingly paid the minimum wage are those

² This curtain not only deters the individual by force; in most cases he cannot even see through it—doesn't realize that it is just a curtain and that beyond it lie dormant resources and unimaginable opportunities.

³ This basic rate does not include fringe benefits which in most cases would boost the employer's cost an additional 50 cents an hour or more.

who are worth that much to employers. Were this not the case, then we should raise the minimum wage to five or ten dollars! Obviously, however, at such high wage rates, job opportunities would conspicuously decrease, unemployment increase.

A minimum wage of five or ten dollars per hour is ludicrous. I am unaware of any socialist in his wildest moments who has made such a proposal *in these terms*. Yet, note this: the minimum wage of the head man on a 747 jet varies from \$40 to \$60 per hour. Would you offer your services for less than this? You cannot get the job, regardless of your competence.

Or, let's assume that you are an electrical engineer in a company making electronic gadgetry for the government and that a retrenchment program closes the business. Further, assume that you are a good carpenter or plumber. Any haven in a storm! What are your chances? Practically nil! The minimum wage for carpenters in Westchester County approximates \$10.00 per hour; plumbers get more. This minimum wage is so far above the market price that many carpenters have been unemployed by the "private sector"; they are then absorbed into the government's "full-employment" program based upon Federal urban renewal and the like. But what if the government in its retrenchment efforts were to eliminate all of these boondoggles—a necessary cutback if inflation is to be halted! The unemployment of carpenters would be enormous.

All arbitrary wage rates set by labor unions properly classify as minimum wage laws. Consider the enormity of their impact on employment possibilities. Here we have a very important component of the synthetic curtain.

Special Privileges

A question may be expected at this point: If all of these minimum wage laws destroy job opportunities, as claimed, how do you account for the many millions of people who are presently employed at exorbitant rates?

Above-market wages are obtainable only in stranglehold or no-choice situations. Suppose, for some reason, you are unable personally to water your valuable garden. Rather than let it die, you will pay someone \$1.60 per hour to handle the hose. Or, your airline has bought a dozen 747's at \$23 million each. You will pay the captains \$57,000 annually rather than leave the planes grounded. Or, you have a big investment in a manufacturing plant or in perishable raw materials. You will pay far above market wages in preference to losing the investment or being shut down indefinitely.

When such a situation dominates the economy, as it does today, employment practices change drastically. Potential employers, ranging from households to large corporations, tend not to employ persons to whom they would be obliged to pay above-market wages. Employment of carpenters at \$10.00 per hour, for instance, is an act of last resort—put it off or do it yourself! Further, above-market wage rates are an incentive to automate, that is, to invent machines to replace human beings. This is forced automation, brought on by coercive practices which are unnatural and which unbalance the market economy.

The current "beneficiaries" of above-market wages seldom understand that they are as much disadvantaged as are those currently unemployed. The latter cannot get jobs; the former must sooner or later lose theirs; unless the synthetic curtain is withdrawn, our whole economy will tumble into a

shambles. In an economy where all are specialists and, thus, interdependent, no one can injure others without thereby injuring himself. Our situation demands strict observation of the Golden Rule.

I have used governmental and labor union minimum wage laws only to sample the fabric of the synthetic curtain; it is composed of too many diverse threads to enumerate. The limited work week is another. But politicians and labor union officials are not the only ones at fault. The businessman who seeks protection against competition is saying, "I have a right to that transaction," and this differs in no respect from the union member who insists, "I have a right to that job." All thwarting of competition and free entry is a part of the fabric as are all subsidies, exclusive franchises, special privileges, and so on.

Rely on the Market

What is the third way, our only sensible option? It is, first, to stop inflation by governmental retrenchment. Trim government to the bone, that is, reduce government to its principled role of codifying and enforcing the thou-shalt-nots or taboos, invoking a common justice, and keeping the peace. *Simultaneously, remove the synthetic curtain—all of it!* The result? The free market, private ownership or, as I sometimes say, willing exchange, and to each his own.

To the many who have given no thought as to how freedom works its wonders, this is a frightening prospect. If they would open their eyes, there is always more work to do than there are people to do it. In such an open society, anyone can get a job at whatever wage someone else will freely and willingly offer. Granted, the wage you offer may be below

what I think I am worth; but who else should decide what you should offer of your substance in exchange for what I can deliver? No one!

Nor, in an open society, need we fret for a moment that a ruthless employer may exploit us. True, there will always be those who will try to hire at less than market wages; but they will try in vain. Competition attends to economic justice; other employers will bid us away from those who would pay less than we are worth. The true value of any good or service—mine or yours—is what others will freely and willingly offer in exchange. Just make certain that others are free to bid—that they are not screened out by a synthetic curtain.

Freedom is the absence of man-concocted restraints against the release of creative energy. Whoever concludes that wages would be depressingly low in a free market simply has not done his economic homework. All wages must come from production. Even the thief, or anyone else who gets something for nothing, should know that the something first has to be produced.

In the give and take—the resiliency of the free market—everyone who wishes to work can do so. There need be no involuntary unemployment other than the time lost in changing jobs. Production will rise to a given population's potential; and wages, salaries, earnings will rise accordingly.

Why not exercise the one sensible option open to us! No more synthetic curtain; no more authoritarian intervention in economic affairs, no one coercively directing our creative activities! Trust in the market and keep it open—a fair field and no favors.

15.

Why Flatter the Communists?

I'M NOT TRYING to butter up our Seminar audiences when I tell them that we, the lecturers, will likely learn more in the next few days than the participants. The reason? On nearly every such occasion at least one question is raised for which we have no ready, carefully-reasoned answer. Thus, a problem is posed which challenges us to do some serious thinking and writing. In such thinking is our learning.

Nor does the matter stop here. For every man who formulates and asks a question there are—it is safe to assume—thousands who harbor nebulous notions on the subject which they have never put into words. But when they read an answer—if it is any good—to one man's question, the thousands are also served.

Here's the latest question: *Is it not true that campus strife and riots can be blamed on communist organizers?*

Fortunately, the question got a spontaneous "No!" from me, even though I hadn't framed an adequate back-up argument. Doubtless, the spontaneity was caused by my instinctive aversion to any and all excuses for social ills which reek

of plausibility or smack of oversimplification or the obvious.¹ On the surface, it seems that my answer should have been affirmative for, no question about it, communists are diligently at work organizing student disorder.

Reflect on this a moment. Could communists organize you and me—devotees of the freedom philosophy and the rule of law—into undisciplined, irresponsible, anarchistic, revolutionary action such as we observe in our enormous “educational” establishments? Indeed, they could not, nor do we find them even trying. So, there must be more to campus disorders than organizers at work. *The organizer of a demonstration comes onto the scene after much of the groundwork is laid; his contribution is to convert the disorganized minds into an organized terror.*

Responding to Demand

It appears to me that organizers are but the spawn of what can be organized. They spring up in response to pre-existent situations. Organizers are always an outgrowth of organizable human material, and they are secondary, not primary, forces; reactors, not initiators; effects, not causes. Put it this way: fungus is an outcropping from a muck heap; it isn't the fungus that causes the muck heap but the other way round. Similarly, communist organizers are equally natural responses to demands of something for nothing by thoughtless, uncivilized, immature people, be they oldsters or youngsters. Each human situation, whether lofty or base, draws forth the organizers best suited to its level.

¹ Professor Yale Brozen's Law comes to mind: “Most obviously true economic policy propositions are false.” (See “The Untruth of the Obvious,” *The Freeman*, June, 1968, p. 328.)

Assume a society of out-and-out atheists. Could you organize a Christian church? Of course not! Nor would any such organizers be in evidence. Now, assume a society of Christian believers. Church organizers will spring up all over the place.

In the economic realm, consider the closed society prevailing in England when mercantilism was the mode and the rule. Or today in Russia. Or in any nation where freedom of choice and free exchange are nonexistent. Could you organize a successful free enterprise venture? No! Nor would one find any entrepreneurs—organizers of resources to serve demands. There are never organizers for persons or things that do not stand ready to be organized. Now assume an open society, such as has been most nearly approximated in the U.S.A. Organizers of productive business enterprise appeared by the hundreds of thousands—reactors to the prevailing conditions.

We hear of organized crime. This, however, presupposes the existence of criminals. We also hear of organized religion. This, too, has its presuppositions: individuals with religious commitments.

FEE exists. What made its organization possible? Numerous individuals with intellectual and spiritual commitments to an essentially free society!

It seems plain that we should not ascribe campus disorders to communist organizers; to do so is to flatter them overmuch. Further, when this error is made, the eye is focused not on the root of the matter—the muck heap—but, rather, on what is spawned: the fungus. To thus err is to misdirect all corrective measures at a will-o'-the-wisp, at the bang and not the gun, at an effect and not the cause. Better that we focus our eye on the cause!

On the surface, the situation appears to be deteriorating,

but a deeper probe reveals how rapidly corrective forces are in the making. There are countless students, along with adults by the tens of thousands, who are keeping their heads; they are sober, serious, law-abiding, self-disciplined, responsible; they are not only endowed with moral scruples, but eager to learn. These students are deeply concerned, even as you and I. How then are we to account for those who have lost their way? Why so many on an irrational, empty-headed rampage? Here is my answer for what it's worth.

When Standards Fall

The exemplary standard has been lowered! With all too rare exceptions, persons holding positions of leadership in every walk of life—religion, education, politics, business, you name it!—are guided more by what will get applause or votes or dollars than by what their highest consciences dictate as sound and moral and right. They are led more by public opinion polls or box-office returns than by an inflexible integrity. The pursuit of excellence is in a slump; it has seriously floundered!²

Professor Jacques Barzun has an enlightening observation:

Intellect deteriorates after every surrender to folly: unless we consciously resist, the nonsense does not pass by us but into us.³ (Italics added)

While he was explaining the reasons for pedantry and literary decadence, the same holds true in the politico-economic

² For a splendid portrayal of what excellence is, see "A Person of Quality," *The Freeman*, August, 1967.

³ *The House of Intellect* by Jacques Barzun (New York: Harper & Bros., 1959), p. 222.

realm. When one rationalizes his "right" to the goodies of the welfare state or thoughtlessly repeats any of the socialistic clichés or fallacies, the nonsense passes into him; he thereby becomes a party to it and downgrades the ruling consensus. Intellect deteriorates!

Imbecilic ideas in the minds of men are no more numerous in 1971 than in America's heyday, but bad ideas are more in evidence now than on some former occasions because the exemplary standard is down. When the standard is high, in the pink of condition, as we say, when excellence is the mood and the mode, these low-grade notions are held in abeyance; they are checked and kept to self. And for the simple reason that people, by and large, do not crave to make fools of themselves. This they do, assuming that good and wise men are present and looking on.

But lower the exemplary standard by the high priests, in whatever walk of life, and let parents surrender to the state the responsibility for offspring,⁴ and the results will be what we now witness: filthy stories told at church parties, vulgarity practiced in public, pornography emblazoned in publications, property destroyed, purses snatched, rights disregarded, anarchy endorsed, mediocrity enshrined, rioting substituted for learning. All because righteousness is on the wane!

We should not blame those who have lost their way; they don't know any better. Put the blame where it belongs: on the nonexemplary conduct of those who have failed to point the way, that is, on those who have substituted the love of truth for such illicit loves as fame, power, frivolity, sensuality.

⁴ For the case against government education and for free market education, see Chapters 15, 16, and 17 in my *Anything That's Peaceful* (Irvington-on-Hudson, N.Y.: The Foundation for Economic Education, Inc., 1964).

Whenever we hear, "I'm going to get mine while the getting is good," or any other comparable nonsense, by *anyone who knows better*, we are listening to the stuff that composes the muck heap.⁵

And for heaven's sake, let us not blame, and thus flatter, the communist organizers; they are spawned by the muck heap; they are but the fungus.

⁵ For 76 other examples, see *Clichés of Socialism* (Irvington-on-Hudson, N.Y.: The Foundation for Economic Education, 1970).

16.

Defiance of Law

The great law of culture is, Let each become all that he was created capable of being; expand, if possible, to his full growth. . . .

—CARLYLE

MY THESIS IS that defiance of law is not a way of life but is, instead, away from life!

To begin with, I believe that I am not a mere chance development in a disorderly and unpredictable universe. Rather, there is order and purpose here and I am part of it. I am free to try: to discover the laws of nature, including human nature; to live in harmony with God and man; to grow, emerge, and to develop those talents uniquely my own. These observations are premised, of course, on what I believe to be man's destiny, namely, the liberation of the human spirit—in a word, freedom.

There is first and foremost the psychological aspect of freedom: the individual freeing himself from his own superstitions, fears, imperfections, ignorance. As this liberation pro-

gresses, the individual is freed from those instinctive behaviors common to animals; further, he ceases to be merely reactive to his environment. Thus freed, he is in a position to acquire those attributes distinctively human: an ability to think for himself, to see long range; to will his own actions, and to grow in consciousness. Evolution is my name for this process of personal unfoldment.

Freeing self from these shortcomings requires that one observe and obey numerous intellectual, moral, and spiritual laws, some of which are well known, others quite obscure. To defy these laws, either willfully or in ignorance—the Ten Commandments, for instance—is to short-circuit the evolving process and to debase oneself. The person who covets, cheats, lies, steals, kills is on the way down; growth is out of the question. Defiance of law at this level is clearly devolutionary and not evolutionary. Very little argument!

You'll note my implication here that the Ten Commandments are a part of the Laws of Nature. And in that same category, I would include many of the more recent man-discovered scientific and economic laws, the defiance of which also seems devolutionary to me.

Take *Boyle's Law*: "The volume of a gas varies inversely as the pressure." Here is a scientific, man-discovered law, rigid and inflexible. Defy it and a bomb can blow up in your face. Devolutionary!

There is *Gresham's Law*: "Bad money drives out good." Any considerable defiance of this law leads to social chaos, a fact to which all history attests. Devolutionary!

Or, *Say's Law of Markets*: "Production generates its own purchasing power." Trying to out-produce inflation, for example—pure defiance of this law—is precisely as absurd as attempting to outrun one's own shadow. To defy this law

is to assure price, exchange, wage, and other controls; it is to plunge society into dictatorship. Devolutionary!

While rarely if ever called such, there is the *Law of Value*: "The value of any good or service is that which others will give for it in willing exchange. Defiance of this law denies that the individual has a right to the fruits of his own labor and spells the death of private ownership; it is the enslavement rather than the liberation of the human spirit. Again, devolutionary!

The above are only samples of numerous laws—uncovered truths—pertaining to society that brook no breaking except at social peril. These are not man-made but rather man-discovered laws; indeed, our forebears, for most of the past 2,000 years, would have included them as a part of the Natural Law.

To summarize at this point: there is little if any argument as to the devolutionary thrust whenever the moral laws are broken by an individual. It is generally conceded that the thief is moving away from, not toward, human fulfillment. Nevertheless, we find among us, by the thousands, those who entertain no doubts about their ability to reconstruct society and who pay no heed whatsoever to the man-discovered laws I have mentioned, or to countless others. These would-be social architects, by defying these laws, resemble the alchemists or perpetual motion theorists; they disdain the Natural Law and are the source of mischief and human devolution.

Too Many Laws

We come now to the plethora of man-made laws that overflow the statute books at every level of government. The greater the number of such laws, the greater is the defiance

of them. Yet, here, too, the role of the defier seems to me to be devolutionary. This is where my explanation becomes difficult, partly because it is so much at odds with current opinion. Nonetheless, in view of the devolutionary trend in America, we must look beyond the obvious errors if we are to account for our troubles. Probing, however novel, appears to be a must.

This is not to say that I necessarily condone these man-made laws, the vast majority of which seem to me to be against the interests of everyone. Limiting government, as I would, to the codifying of taboos and their enforcement, to the invoking of a common justice and keeping the peace—I favor repeal of literally thousands of man-made laws. Away with every law or regulation which stands against the release of creative energy! Government has no place in or responsibility for welfare or prosperity or religion or education! These are areas for me in free, voluntary, cooperative, competitive, private endeavor—as in everything creative.

My reason for this unorthodox stand as to the role of government? I do not know how to run the life of a single human being, certainly not a society of 200 million people—nor does anyone else! Such wisdom has never existed, even remotely, in a discrete individual. This is why I choose freedom because it is only in freedom that the wisdom by which we live can possibly develop and function. The wisdom to which I allude has a social source—trillions times trillions of tiny ideas, discoveries, enlightenments emanating from millions of individuals over the millennia. I refer to these intellectual and spiritual flashes—in their totality—as “the overall luminosity”; Professor F. A. Hayek uses the phrase, “knowledge in society”; Edmund Burke meant precisely the same with his “immemorial heritage”; the noted anthropolo-

gist, William Howells, calls it "culture—all the inventions and all the conventions ever made by humanity"; and Konrad Lorenz speaks of "the potential immortality of thought, of truth, of knowledge."

The Social Side of Man

Why, then, should I question anyone's defiance of these laws I regard so unfavorably?

My case rests on a fact and an assumption. The fact: man is a social as well as an individualistic being. The assumption: an agency, representing the social side of man—government—is, to my way of thinking, an absolute necessity. It is unthinkable that the social phase of human beings can be attended to by each individual acting as his own gun-toting constable, each a law unto himself, nothing over and beyond personal caprice. Justice, in these circumstances, is impossible; anarchy as a social device is an out-and-out contradiction! This is by way of affirming the rule of law which, in turn, presupposes a lawmaking society.

Consider the fact: man is a social as well as an individualistic being. This fact embraces me. I am as surely born a member of my society as I am a unique individual. To declare myself a nonmember is no more rational than to insist upon impersonality. I have been cast into a dual role, an individual within society, be that society good, bad, or indifferent. And its problems are no less mine than anyone else's. To run away from social responsibility is as devolutionary as to renounce self-responsibility.

So I am stuck with what I do not approve! But is this not the eternal human condition? Does mere disagreement warrant divorcement from society's agency? Lawbreaking or

defiance says, in effect, "Count me out," and amounts to social abdication, no more rational than resigning from the human race.

I, for one, am as firmly resolved to abide by those man-made laws obnoxious to me as to the man-discovered and moral laws attractive to me—"so long as I am free to speak my piece and write about it."¹ And hear this: not as a means of prolonging the laws I abhor is this position taken but as my only practical way to be rid of them!

As already implied, I am as related to humanity and to the over-all luminosity as the cave man who discovered how to harness fire, or as the Arab who invented the concept of zero. I am part and parcel of this heritage or culture, as is everyone else. And society is mine in the same sense that America is my country. True, I do not cherish society's blemishes any more than I do my own imperfections. But there is no point in my denying that these blemishes are partly mine. Reason requires that I acknowledge this, and conscience dictates that I continue to live life as it is!

Consider the one who defies these man-made laws. If, for instance, he drinks alcoholic beverages when such imbibing is against the law, and gets away with it, what cares he about repealing a misguided law! He obtains satisfaction and, thus, has no incentive to remove from political control a problem that does not belong there at all. If, however, he greatly relishes wine as did Galileo—"light held together by moisture"—and heeds the law, he is a force for the law's repeal.

Let us assume that Joe Doakes is opposed to all the laws which grant special privileges and immunities to labor unions and is among those working for repeal. Assume, also, that he

¹ See "Civil Obedience," Notes from *FEE*, July, 1970.

is an anarchist, one who defies all laws disagreeable to him, and behaves as he pleases. Next, assume that labor's special privileges are repealed. Were labor unions to pattern after Mr. Doakes, the change in the laws would make no difference. The labor unions would simply defy the laws against coercion and violence or the threat thereof. Labor unions would go right on in the future behaving precisely as they do now under grant of special privilege. And all because defiers of the law have shown them the way; Mr. Doakes and his kind, by their actions, endorse defiance of the law.

Of all the man-made laws on the statute books, an inestimable number are examples of bad law. This was so in the past, and the future will be little different, for man is now and forever imperfect. Nor is it difficult to see how these imperfections are pyramided through the collective action involved in the making of laws. Men acting as individuals always behave more responsibly, sensibly, and in accord with conscience, than men acting in committee.

Nonetheless, governance we shall have with us always. It may range from the vigilante to the dictator; hopefully, it may approximate our ideal of inhibiting only destructive actions. The question is not whether we'll have governance; it is, instead, a question of which brand we shall have.

Whether or not the ideal is approached is determined by the preponderant leadership thinking. It is a matter of quality—statesmanship! A statesman, in this context, is any citizen of superior judgment and an inflexible integrity, one who will not bow out the moment anything fails to go his way. The statesman is not a law defier; rather, he participates to upgrade his country's affairs, particularly when they are in a devolutionary slump.

17.

Resist Not Evil

SOME TWENTY YEARS ago FEE published a small book by Henry Hazlitt, *Will Dollars Save the World?*, a critique of the Marshall Plan. Over 90,000 volumes were sold and the response was overwhelmingly favorable. Later, a national magazine of enormous circulation condensed the book. The reaction from their readers was generally unfavorable. Why?

Condensation is the art of skeletonizing, leaving the subject bare of explanation, that is, with categorical statements standing alone. Ideas are communicated simply and understandably by explanation, not by abbreviation. Brevity may be the soul of wit, but only for those who already apprehend the idea; others miss the meaning.

Consider the Decalogue. Here we have Ten Commandments rather than 10 explanations. These Commandments suffice for those who believe them to be the revealed Word of God, but these wonderful and righteous thou-shalts and thou-shalt-nots have little if any enlightenment for nonbelievers; in their case, apprehension requires further explanation.

The above is but background for another Biblical injunction (Matthew 5: 38-39):

“Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.”

These words, I believe, contain a remarkable truth, but in the form of a mere admonishment. Unless one explores the reasoning and insight behind it, this truth lives in darkness. Let us see if it can be brought out into the light.

I confess at the outset that my interpretation is possibly at variance with numerous other interpretations. Variation here is to be expected, for who can say for certain what was *really* meant?¹ Perfect communication presupposes the perfect sayer and the perfect hearer. Conceding Jesus to be the Perfect Sayer, who among us can claim to be the perfect hearer? No one! Not only are all of us imperfect hearers but also we are up against the inaccuracies words have suffered by translation: Aramaic to Greek to Latin to English and so on. Absolute accuracy is out of the question as any competent linguist will attest.

To illustrate: What is meant by “The meek shall inherit the earth”? Assuredly, not the Mr. Milquetoasts which the present usage of “meek” suggests. That doesn’t make sense to me. What does seem sensible is the old English usage of “meek,” meaning the teachable, the humble in spirit, the learners as distinguished from those afflicted with the little god syndrome, the know-it-alls.

¹ See *The Interpreter’s Bible* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, Vol. VII, p. 301).

Thus, any person's interpretation of "Resist not evil" logically rests on what makes sense to him, which is to say, on his idea of the ideal, on what his highest conscience dictates as right. This may not in fact be right but is as near to right as he can get. The original context, "Resist not evil," may simply counsel nonviolence, but I am sure that the saying has wider overtones of meaning. It suggests that we do not try to construct our lives around a negation.

To assess the relevance of "Resist not evil" in today's world, it is necessary to recognize several civilizing ideas that have come to light—though never wholly understood and practiced—since its pronouncement. Slavery then was morally acceptable, but today it is regarded in the West as an evil institution. The closed society is at least intellectually demolished and the tenets of the open society are no longer esoteric. During the last seven generations the principles of limited government and the rule of law have gained some recognition. Equality of opportunity for each individual, regardless of creed, color, race, or station, is not in question among enlightened people; the dignity of each human being is accepted, indeed, insisted on by many people! In numerous respects there has been some change for the better during the past nineteen centuries.

In the light of this moderate enlightenment, the admonition, "Resist not evil," relates to a different form of retribution than in New Testament days. It advised then against the practice of forcibly inhibiting evil; now it may be interpreted otherwise, for in an enlightened society it is the malefactor himself who invites being brought to justice. Ideally, at least, the taboos are codified, posted, and the penalties made known: "Do not jump off this cliff except at your own risk!" In the essentially free society the penalty for evil is

not “an eye for an eye” as in Hammurabi’s time or Matthew’s time. The retribution is self-inflicted; the one who performs an evil deed initiates the penalty meted out to him. He asked for it!

Assuming mankind to have advanced in moral insight does not mean that good and evil have vanished from the human scene; they contest on higher levels. An act that was not thought of as an evil centuries ago—enslaving a person, for instance—may later be regarded as evil. With this recognition, freeing a slave is for the first time regarded as good. Or, to use another example: in the absence of moral sensitivity, certain overt acts may be evil, but there is nothing evil in only thinking about the acts. As the moral nature of an individual advances, the thought becomes as evil as the deed and freeing self from such thoughts becomes good. In brief, as the moral nature ascends, man becomes conscious of evils never previously thought of as such. The opposites are forever at work, once at a brutish level and later, perhaps, at a saintly level.

I infer from this line of thought that “Resist not evil”—assuming an enlightened society—moves to a new and higher plane. The confrontation not to be resisted is no longer at the eye-for-an-eye level of physical vengeance but at the thought level. Let me quote Aldous Huxley on witchcraft to make my point:

By paying so much attention to the devil and by treating witchcraft as the most heinous of crimes, the theologians and the inquisitors actually spread the beliefs and fostered the practices which they were trying so hard to repress. By the beginning of the eighteenth century witchcraft had ceased to be a serious social problem. It died out, among other reasons, because *almost nobody now bothered*

to repress it. For the less it was persecuted, the less it was propagandized.²

During the first two years of FEE, a celebrated columnist of a persuasion quite the opposite of ours, devoted five of his columns to FEE, each a tirade loaded with gross misrepresentations. To us, at least, this was evil. But we turned away from this "evil"—that is, we in no way resisted it—nary a rebuttal or acknowledgment! We provided this scribbler nothing whatsoever to scratch against, without which he could not continue. He gave up, never again mentioning FEE as long as he lived.

As in the case of witchcraft, I am convinced that much of the rioting and anarchy presently in vogue is stimulated and worsened by all of the attention paid to the malefactors, that is, by the resistance to these evils. What unenlightened people won't do to get themselves on TV or otherwise in the public eye! Publicity and notoriety hold more charm and inducement for such people than does greatness and fortune for others. "Resist not evil" counsels that they as persons be ignored, in the sense of not berating them.

And observe how attention to this axiom works its wonders in daily transactions. While most of our dealings with others are honorable and above board, now and then we experience shysterism: a broken promise, overcharge, underquality, an attempt to "get the best" of one. Resist not this evil; that is, pay no heed; not a scolding word; simply walk away and fail to return. While resistance will harden the malefactor in his sins as he rises to his own defense, non-resistance leaves him alone with his soul, his shop, and his jobbery, a plight that even he will ponder and understand.

² See *The Devils of Loudon* by Aldous Huxley (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., 1952), p. 128.

Confrontation is always of two parts: the confrontee and the confronter. Neither one can exist without the other. This brings to mind the old Arab proverb, "He who strikes the second blow starts the fight." There can be no fight without a retaliation.

But is one to "turn the other cheek"? That seems to be what "Resist not evil" commends! Only to get socked again? Wrote Konrad Lorenz, the noted animal psychologist:

A wolf has enlightened me: not so that your enemy may strike you again do you turn the other cheek toward him, *but to make him unable to do it.*³

Consider what happens if one does strike the second blow. There follows a fusillade of blows until one or the other is done in, the victor no less a model of rectitude than the vanquished. All loss and no gain! Witness wars!

This analysis, however, is meant to engage our Biblical axiom at the ideological level. As previously suggested, this presupposes a civilization less brutish and more moral than marked earlier times. That the presupposition may be somewhat extravagant is attested to by the difficulty all of us encounter when trying to apprehend, let alone practice, "Resist not evil." Should this run counter to your instincts, you're not alone; it does to mine. And only by a resort to reasoning at an untrod level are my combative instincts revealed to be faulty. I have arrived at the point of not overtly "telling 'em off," but what I still think to myself isn't under control! Covertly, I still resist, and if that isn't all bad it is at least half bad.

³ See "Morals and Weapons," the final chapter in a fascinating book, *King Solomon's Ring*, by Konrad Z. Lorenz (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1961).

Rationally judged, "Resist not evil" is counsel of the highest order. It cautions me not to argue with anyone. And let my case go by default? To the contrary, as the best way not to lose it!

. . . assume to dictate to his judgment, or to command his action . . . and he will retreat within himself, close all avenues to his head and his heart. . . .⁴

In a word, away with confrontation!

Strict attention to this axiom has yet a further refinement. It is to refrain from ideological or philosophical discussion with any person unless I be seeking light from him or he from me. And what a waste of words and time this eliminates! Is this to hide our lights under a bushel? To retire to a do-nothing status? Again, to the contrary.

To waste neither words nor time is to make way for productive and constructive effort: learning the principles of freedom and the fallacies of its opposite, and how to explain them. If we learn these things—which presupposes your and my seeking—then others will seek from us. When confrontations are abandoned, the way to enlightenment is open. Instead of two squared off against each other, there stand two peacefully gaining from each other or, at least, one from the other.

To resist evil is to sustain, encourage, and prolong it; to resist it not is to substitute questions and answers for blows and counterblows; it permits the practice and the sharing of such truths as any of us may come upon. And is this not the proper path for human progress?

⁴ Abraham Lincoln.

18.

On Spreading the Word

TRUTH IS ENLIGHTENMENT. As darkness gives way to light, so error recedes as truth is pursued and grasped. Trial and error, perhaps; but error is not truth, and it is sheer folly to insist they be given “equal time.”

I find it nowhere recorded that Saint Thomas Aquinas invited an atheist to share his pulpit that “both sides might be heard.” Nor does history reveal that Galileo ever willingly allowed the use of his platform for someone to argue that the earth is flat, or that Carl Menger asked Karl Marx to his classroom.

Further, I doubt that any third party, intent on staging a show, could have enticed Saint Thomas to publicly debate with an atheist, or Galileo with a flat-earth exponent, or Menger with Marx. And for good and sufficient reason: implicit in such spectacles is the notion that the truth cannot be known until after opponents cross swords, and that it is validated only by vote of the audience. Seeking entertainment more than enlightenment, members of the audiences largely base their conclusions upon which of the contestants

is the more clever. Who in good conscience would rest his concepts of truth on any such fickle, untenable verdict!

This critique of two-side confrontations before audiences is not meant to disparage dialogue. The latter, where we seek understanding from one another, is all to the good—enlightening! But he who seeks truth “must resist the temptation of becoming a ‘popularizer’ if that in any way makes him swerve from, or slow down, his pursuit of truth. . . . He must strive for the truth, not for popular acclaim.”¹ If public office, or popular acclaim, or wide acceptance of one’s product be the aim, majority vote is in order; but this is no way to determine truth.

Yet, what dominates today’s scene? So great is the anxiety for popular acceptance of diverse views and doctrines that countless confrontations are ingeniously schemed; and, I must add, participants are plentiful. Public media of all sorts—newspapers and magazines no less than TV and radio—university classrooms and auditoriums, so-called seminars across the land, all tend to specialize in these wordy, both-side displays. Contestants are flattered to be heard and seen by the audiences, and regard such contests as a fruitful way to win others to their concept of truth.

Fighting for Freedom?

While the two-side, majority-vote approach is a questionable means to truth in any case, my concern is with devotees of the freedom philosophy and the extent to which they are taken in by this methodology—lured to the podiums, micro-

¹ Gottfried Dietze, *Youth, University and Democracy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1970), p. 50.

phones, and cameras in jubilant expectation that they are getting in another lick for freedom.

The rejoinder is well known: "What! Let our case go by default! Why, the mass of people will think that freedom has no proponents; that the only question is whether this or that form of socialism shall rule mankind. We simply have to stand up and be counted." This comeback has two flaws: (1) It presumes that the case for freedom can be as quickly and attractively presented as can any of countless plausibilities; and (2) these hasty, sketchy, oversimplified attempts to present the freedom philosophy leave the impression that freedom has, at best, a shaky case; listeners are more repulsed than drawn toward freedom. This is not the way to win friends for freedom.

Even the most devout believers in freedom have barely scratched the surface in understanding and exposition. Let him who thinks himself an exception raise his right hand! Our rationale is still in the formative stage; all of us are neophytes, our homework far from done. Merely being against socialism rates no "A" in this subject. In short, no one knows how to make the case for freedom, and especially not in capsule form demanded by the two-side confrontations. Perhaps the whole case, if it were known, could be compacted into a bible-length book; but I doubt it.

All of us have witnessed these spectacles with two opponents squared off against each other. But who ever heard a contestant say: "I now see your point and concede that I have been wrong." If the contest draws neither of the direct participants toward the truth, how can better results be expected among the spectators? Instead of looking for light, the contestant is seeking plaudits from the audience: "What can I say to stump him and put me in a better light?" En-

tainment, perhaps, but where's the enlightenment? There must be a better way, if truth be the objective.

In these two-sided affairs, the forensic artist will win audience cheers every time, regardless of the truths presented by his opponent. Suppose the winner of cheers is of the freedom persuasion. What, precisely, has been won? Understanding? Hardly! These cheers are emotional responses—thoughts in flight—here today and gone tomorrow.

The Doors of Perception

The folly of these popular confrontations as a way to enlightenment can best be seen by reflecting on how truths are really grasped and spread. This is a radically different procedure.

To illustrate: You may be able to see a beacon light; that light cannot see you and, thus, has no way of directing itself into your field of vision. You may comprehend the wisdom of a Shakespeare; that wisdom does not know of your existence and, thus, is utterly incapable of adding itself to your store of wisdom. The meaning of this? Enlightenment cannot be injected or forced into other minds of your choosing. I cannot insinuate my ideas into the consciousness of you or anyone else. You are in charge of your own doors of perception; each of us admits to his mind what he chooses.

Only the individual who chooses to enlighten himself can experience enlightenment. A truth seeker begins with a spirit of inquiry, a state of wanting-to-know-it-ness. We must infer from this that enlightenment is a taking-from, not an injecting-into, process.

From whom? From those, past or present, who have been or are enlightened—in the truth-seeker's judgment. To no

one else will he turn; only to what he judges to be enlightened thoughts will he open his doors of perception. The truth seeker, if on a rewarding course, is forever probing for enlightenment. *He pays little if any heed to sayings or writings motivated by other than truth seeking.* He is impervious to those verbal bids for cheers, fame, fortune, office, power. And, properly so!

Do I wish to improve the thinking of others? Then see what can be done about self-improvement! And leave all of those poor, wandering souls to their own upbringing? That is precisely what I mean.

Learning from a Slave

The popular assumption is that if we do not attend to the improvement of others, they will remain forever unimproved. The easiest way to poke a hole in that fallacy is to ask a simple question: "Would you personally fail to improve were you not the object of my concern?"

To cite but one impressive example of how the taking-from process works: The Roman slave, Epictetus, knew nothing of you and me. Nor was he in any respect a propagandist among his contemporaries. To the contrary, he concentrated on his own understanding, developing intuitive qualities, experiencing insights—an exemplary truth seeker. What he did—this is all any of us should do—was to share with all who sought such wisdom as he possessed. His light shone brightly and those people in search of light turned toward it.

The Introduction to his *The Enchiridion*² refers to its "disproportionately large role in the rise of modern attitudes and

² *Op. cit.*

modern philosophy.” And emphasized is the enormous influence he had on other great truth seekers, men who lived more than fifteen centuries after him: Montaigne, Grotius, Descartes, Montesquieu, Adam Smith, Kant, and ever so many others.

Until recently, Epictetus was only a name to me; I would have confessed to knowing nothing of his philosophy. Yet, on reflection, I know much of it. For so great has been his influence on those whose writings are familiar to me that I have been, quite unconsciously, the beneficiary of his truth seeking. Here I am, nearly twenty centuries later, looking up to a Roman slave, and scarcely realizing it. Imagine a beam of light penetrating through the ages to this very day! Or, better yet, a light so strong its mirroring never ends. An apt phrasing of this methodology was expressed by its perfect exemplar, just prior to Epictetus: “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.”³

Lifting self “up from the earth”—that is, above the commonplace and into a state of enlightenment—is how truth is discovered and spread. As light attracts the eye, so truth is its own witness; it needs no melodramatic minions, just earnest seekers. Those of us interested in an improved perception, awareness, consciousness of the freedom philosophy on the part of others have only to increase our own candle power. To the extent we succeed, to that extent will eyes intent on truth turn to our light.

Spreading the word is this simple and this difficult, and its great advantage over the advertised shortcuts is that it works.

³ John 12:32.

19.

On Labeling an Ideal

WHAT FOLLOWS may be regarded as a series of speculations or, better yet, wanderings in the dark about a matter that has confounded me and to which no clear answer is yet forthcoming. I am bothered by our insistence on pinning a name or label to an ideal—which may not in fact be namable. The reason for these ruminations? I fear we are playing with mischief when we try to fit everything into neat pigeonholes.

We give ourselves names just as we tack names onto things; that man is Joe Doakes or that thing is a pencil. Names are appropriate for all beings and things that bear the earmarks of specificity or where discretion can be exercised. We would have no means of intelligently communicating with each other were we not to ascribe names to the namable.

But what about those phases of life that are not discrete or that appear to lack specificity? Shall we give names to these as we do to beings and things? Not knowing, I am only raising the question with the hope of thinking it through to some sort of an answer. For instance, we peer at a clouded sky. Here we use only broad generalizations: cirrus or cumulus or stratus clouds. It seems that our habit of not going

further is correct, that is, we are right in not attempting to name each cloud. A cloud is no more discrete than a passing fancy; it is intangible to the point of being nameless.

However, my concern is not with clouds or shadows and such wispy nebulosities but, rather, with politico-economic philosophy and, then, only with one phase of it which possibly could be left unlabeled. I wonder.

The Politico-Economic Spectrum

Politico-economic philosophy spreads over a wide spectrum and is loosely analogous to the light spectrum: red at the left produced by the longer wave lengths—the easiest observed—extending with ever shorter wave lengths through orange, yellow, green, blue, and finally, to violet—the least discernible by the human eye. Color-blind people can often see red but their discernment decreases as the wave lengths shorten; many people with “good” eyesight cannot discern violet.

Reverting to the politico-economic spectrum, let us substitute the long and short arms of government for the long and short wave lengths. At the extreme left we observe the long arms of government reaching into nearly every phase of human existence—authoritarianism, full force! Everybody can see this, and even feel it. Then as we move to the right on this spectrum, the arms of government become shorter, reaching into fewer and fewer facets of life. Finally, and comparable to the ultraviolet lying just beyond the visible spectrum—*were such an ideal situation ever to exist*—we would find the arms of government so short that they could not reach into and have control over a single creative activity—government no more than a peace-keeping arm of society. This ideal can only be imagined for it never has existed and, probably,

never will. It is nebulous as a dream and lacks the quality of specificity. The question is, should we try to label this ideal? Or, more particularly, its seekers or votaries?

It is, of course, appropriate to label the extreme left for it is composed of hard stuff: brute force. We call it communism, socialism, fascism, and so on. It is a masterminding scheme the parts of which can be seen as can a blueprint. It is a discrete politico-economic mechanism and specific to the core. This is definitely namable as is a constitution or any document, or thing, or person.

As we move to the right on this spectrum, the schematic phase gradually lessens; the arms of government are shorter. Yet, we quite properly ascribe names to each of these, labels ranging all the way from liberal to conservative. That the labels fall short in descriptive accuracy—confusion worse confounded—is conceded. While this is to be deplored, it is a point outside the scope of this inquiry.

The concern here is with the ideal that lies beyond the right end of the visible spectrum where schemes to manage the lives of others would be nonexistent—the imaginable only. I am always alluding to this as the freedom philosophy¹:

¹ True, "freedom philosophy" is a name of sorts as is "ideal." While no answer to the dilemma here posed, it is more a generalization than a specific label, connoting not something definitive and settled upon but a matter still open for exploration.

To logically believe in freedom is necessarily to believe that men's interests are harmonious. Otherwise, if men's interests are believed to be naturally and inherently in conflict, one's faith must rest on coercion.

This is man's dilemma: harmony and freedom, or conflict and coercion? Note that this is no clearcut contest between good and evil; perfection vs. imperfection. Indeed, the very attempt to identify and describe human perfection or to fully visualize and predict the nature of the harmony that freely acting and self-responsible individuals might achieve is to limit and thus defeat that very ideal.

no man-concocted restraints against the release of creative energy. But, first, why dwell on this at all? Is it not unrelated to the real world and beyond the realm of practicality? Why bother to pose the ideal?

Every advance in civilization, every improvement in society, has been in the direction of, not away from, what's right, that is, toward the ideal. Further, the ideal itself, if man improves in intellectual and moral stature, is always advancing—now and forever out of reach. True, we are committed to living in the world as it is, with all its flaws and imperfections. But this practical fact does not and should not bind us to the status quo; this is the height of impracticality! As one of countless examples: I use the socialized mail but this does not deter me from standing foursquare for the ideal: free market mail delivery.

The truly practical man is he who searches for the ideal and takes his ideological position accordingly, regardless of how far removed are his environmental circumstances. This is the only way the ruling consensus can be shifted in an improved direction. And, if this is not practical, pray tell, what is!

A Quest for the Ideal

We come now to the problem here posed. Fortunately, there are a growing number among whom I like to include myself—many thousands, for certain—who are striving to refine our understanding and exposition of the freedom philosophy. This is to say that we are forever trying to formulate a rationale that has never been perfected. Ours is a quest for the ideal, a societal arrangement that can only be imagined, never fully realized. Ours, then, unlike the ideologies to the

left, has no schematic characteristics; it is without specificity and, thus, does not lend itself to labeling as do the others on this politico-economic spectrum.

What, however, is the tendency? It is to pin a label on the dream, the ideal, as well as on its votaries. Liberalism was once the label for this hoped-for way of life that sought the liberating of individuals from state tyranny. Proponents called themselves liberals. But observe what happened: the labels were expropriated by those of a statist faith. The labels still read the same but the ideological package contains opposite views and convictions.

So, having had our labels taken from us, what have we done? We—I as much as anyone—pinned libertarianism to our ideal and libertarian on ourselves. Have a look at what is happening: extreme statists are now calling themselves libertarians, and so are those who believe in no government at all—anarchists! This label as a means of identifying a belief or philosophy has become utterly meaningless. Further, were we to uncover or invent some other term, conveying favorable overtones, it would suffer precisely the same fate as liberal and libertarian. Why?

The idealistic freedom philosophy—no man-concocted restraints against the release of creative energy—has no scheme to it at all; it is completely devoid of masterminding. Here is the question it poses: what would happen in this ideal situation? Nothing that is predictable, that is, nothing beyond creativity more in evidence. The answer is no more precise than to the question, what insight, or invention, or discovery, or intuitive flash are you likely to experience tomorrow? In a word, the unknowable! How can a meaningful label be found for the unknowable? Is it possible that our ideal falls in the nameless category? When a label is placed on anything

that's nameless, it won't stick and, thus, is always up for grabs. Witness what happened first to liberal and now to libertarian.

Imperfect Man

It is one thing to seek and stand for the ideal; it is quite another matter to say, "Behold in me the ideal." This is precisely what we do when we label the ideal as libertarianism and then call ourselves libertarians. Ideological fence-straddlers, wondering which way to jump, take a look at me—my ideal and me wrapped into one—observe my numerous, personal shortcomings, and conclude that they want none of my ideal. Is the fault not mine rather than theirs? Perhaps our ideal would prosper better if it had only enemies; it is the friends of the ideal, by reason of their penchant for labels, who do it in. At least, this is what I am beginning to believe.

What then? Am I to go nameless? No, only ideologically unlabeled! This has advantages. Should I reply "libertarian" to a curious person when inquiring about my politico-economic faith, he will immediately relate me to his preconception of a libertarian: some statist or anarchist or other in-between who has labeled himself a libertarian. His certainty of being right will bring the inquiry to an end; no more exploration on his part. Certainty? Actually, the only certainty is that he will be wrong!

Suppose, instead, that I confess to having only an ideal in mind; that I do not qualify for a single one of the labeled pigeonholes. If he is at all curious—and why bother with anyone else?—he will wish to know what I mean. At this point, a dialogue will begin. Who knows? Perhaps I shall

learn more from him than he from me.

Finally, are we to leave our ideal unlabeled? Logically, it seems that we should if we could; but learning how to do so is the problem, so deeply ingrained is the habit of labeling the nameless along with the namable. Indeed, it is beginning to dawn on me that learning how to think, talk, and write without a resort to false or misleading labels may be the all-important first step in a realization of our ideal. Perhaps this is the initial move toward the perfection of our rationale.

If there be a person who calls this procedure idealistic, then he is helping us to make our case.

20.

A Return to Reading

MY FRIEND is devoted to freedom, and thoroughly agrees with me as to ends. But we are not in agreement about the means to those ends. He argues that ours is a selling problem—we must, says he, work out techniques for “putting across” the freedom package. And when I contend that ours is a learning problem—self-improvement and a better understanding of freedom—he counters, in a tone of finality, “*They won’t read.*”

He has a point. Many people never crack a book, and these are unlikely to improve their understanding of politico-economic complexities. As a last resort, the temptation is to reach them through advertising techniques: animated pictures bolstered with talk, as employed in selling soap, and so on. But these techniques are worthless as related to the ends we have in view.¹ In brief, no reading, no freedom!

I do not dispute the observation, “*They won’t read.*” Reading at the trash level may have reached a new high, but

¹ Support of this claim has been too much covered in articles and books of mine to warrant repetition here. Particularly, see Chapter 4, “*Eduction versus Propaganda,*” in *Talking to Myself*, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-26.

doubtless to the neglect of serious study of thoughts, ideas, philosophy on which hang the chances of a free society. More and more we hear, and presumably from the best educated, "There is too much to read" or "I don't have the time to read."

Nor am I disputing the importance of reading for the sheer enjoyment of it, or reading to become a better artisan or doctor or whatever. My concern, and all I wish to examine, is that kind of reading which has to do with a society in which we can best live, prosper, and fulfill our individual destinies. While serious reading of this kind is not everything, it is among the "musts." Return to it or forget a free society—this is my thesis.

Let's examine the excuse: "There is too much to read." True, if one refers to everything now being printed, no person could possibly read it all. My complaint is of another sort: of the total that is coming off the presses, *there is too little worth reading!* No one attempts to eat each of the foods or swallow all the medicine produced. Why not be equally selective in reading intake, giving attention only to that which is suited to one's unique intellectual requirements?

Or, take the other excuse heard day in and day out: "I don't have the time to read." Such busyness rarely, if ever, exists. Substitute serious reading for just two of the hours each day spent peering at TV, listening to radio, or otherwise frittered away on trivia; that would be time enough for more than 100 average-sized books annually.²

² Conceded, the number of books is no more laudatory than the lack of hours is excusable. Comprehension is what matters and may make numerous readings of the same book more important than the reading of numerous books.

It is not time we lack; time is *fantastically elastic and accommodates itself precisely to our intellectual alacrity*. Some people cannot accomplish in a lifetime what one person might achieve in a minute! If there is a tough job to be done, it is the busy person, never the laggard, who will get it into the past tense quickly. Instead of the excuse, "I don't have the time to read," let's face the truth: "I lack the inclination and the discipline to read."

To Strengthen the Will

A return to reading, then, requires of the individual a strengthening of the inclination and the will—discipline—to do so. The proposition is quite simple, though putting it into practice may seem difficult.

The inclination to include serious reading as an integral part of daily life is unlikely unless it can be identified with self-interest. Outside motivation is too feeble a force; hardly anyone will take on a chore, seemingly so difficult, for someone else's good. But even the person who realizes that reading is for his own good cannot embark on such an effort short of the will to do so. People simply do not abandon habitual trivialities for the sake of serious habits without the intervention of will power.

Nor can will power be relied upon except to get a reading program started; it peters out if the serious effort does not soon become joyous. No one can will or force himself for long to give a high priority to distasteful or unrewarding activities. Thus, if serious reading does not prove fruitful and joyful following a reasonable trial, the aspirant is well advised to forget it; this is not his cup of tea; we can never expect him to be numbered among serious students.

So, we have two questions which require answers. First, can a return to the kind of reading here suggested be identified with self-interest? Second, what are the chances of joy from such an activity?

Motivated by Self-Interest

Self-interest, as I attempted to explain in Chapter 8, is not easy to identify. It is the guide to or sparkplug of all human action and is what motivates your actions and mine. It sets the philanthropist on his course and accounts for how the thief behaves. Everyone is self-interest oriented and, in this, we are alike. Regarding self-interest, we differ only in our interpretations of how it is best served. These range from the thief's short-range ignorance to the seer's long-range intelligence.

Every one of us is at once a social and an individualistic being. As Henry Bergson phrases it, "There is a little bit of society in each of us." Therefore, if we are to interpret our respective self-interests intelligently, we can no more neglect the social side than the individualistic.

I am indebted to others not only for the enormous amount of goods and services I can exchange for my minuscule offerings but for my very existence. Life would be impossible at the thievery level. Or, suppose all were liars, then no one's word could be trusted. Or, no respect for the Golden Rule, or no understanding of freedom whatsoever—moral scruples nonexistent. Life would be miserable at best.

I owe a great deal to others. Indeed, I owe them the same respect I want them to show toward me in order that all of us might live our lives to the fullest. Am I to expect moral and spiritual rectitude and intelligent economic actions from

others without giving the same in return? That would be lopsided, narrow, short-range thinking.

However, for me to pursue excellence in a manner that would advantage me were others to do the same, demands more from me than I can ever perceive or ferret out all by myself. It must be remembered that I, as everyone else, peers at the total scheme of things through a tiny peekhole. Were I to go it alone, I could no more discharge my indebtedness to others than were I a Kalahari bushman.

To do my part, to intelligently interpret my self-interest on the social side, requires that I draw on the wisdom of the ages. And this calls for serious reading. Francis Bacon observed that "reading maketh a full man." Thomas Carlyle said:

All that mankind has done, thought, gained, or been: it is lying in magic preservation in the pages of books.

And Ralph Besse added:

There is no knowledge, practically speaking, that is not recorded some place in writing. The whole realm of knowledge known to man is written out—with very few exceptions.

Why not take advantage of this heritage, for how else can any one of us play the role in the scheme of things that we hopefully expect of all men? It is in one's self-interest to do so.

Next, what about self-interest as related to the individualistic side? Doubtless, the answer depends on the premise—life's purpose—the person has set for himself. If that purpose be no more than fame or fortune, then reading is hardly necessary so long as there are enough others to assure a society from which fame or fortune can be easily extracted. Numer-

ous affluent individuals never “crack a book,” the books on their shelves being only for decoration.

However, if one’s premise be individual growth, emergence, “hatching,” as set forth in Chapter 3, reading is an essential means to the end in view. Without reading, enlightenment would be confined to one’s own limited insight and vision. Assuming this premise, self-interest demands that one search for light today and always—from the present and the past.

Finally, what about joyousness? Will a return to reading be a painful or a happy experience? Dull or exciting? Distasteful or rewarding? No one can answer this for another. Nor can he answer for himself until he sticks his toe in the water, so to speak, to test how agreeable it is: whether too cold, or too hot, or perhaps invigorating, depending on his intellectual metabolism. Dipping into wisdom is either discomforting and disagreeable or stimulating and joyous. But it is worth the try just to find out. If the individual is fortunate enough, then every ray of light will bring more joy than “acres of diamonds” or great fame. And, in this event, discipline will no longer be required for serious and studious effort. “All the king’s horses and all the king’s men” could not pull one away from it.

It is reasonable to assume that one is headed in the proper direction when the seeking of light turns out to be joyous. An unimaginable enlightenment is to be found in a return to reading.

One thing for certain: the supply of knowledge far outstrips the demand. Why not correct this imbalance?

21.

Readiness Is All*

HERE IS A CONCEPT requiring readiness: Private ownership, specialization, and freedom to contract and to trade make possible a general abundance but, as this way of life advances, a growing interdependence ensues. The latter is the "price" of the former. And the coin of this price is an observation of the Golden Rule.

Not only is the Golden Rule a prime tenet of sound economics but, doubtless, the oldest ethical proposition of distinctly universal character:¹

Confucianism

What you don't want done to yourself, don't do to others.

—Sixth Century B.C.

Buddhism

Hurt not others with that which pains thyself.

—Fifth Century B.C.

* From Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

¹ See *Pictorial History of Philosophy* by Dagobert D. Runes (New York: Bramhall House, 1959 by Philosophical Library, Inc.), p. vii.

Zoroastrianism

Do not do unto others all that which is not well for oneself.

—Fifth Century B.C.

Classical Paganism

May I do to others as I would that they should do unto me.

—Plato, Fourth Century B.C.

Hinduism

Do naught to others which if done to thee could cause thee pain.

—Mahabharata, Third Century B.C.

Judaism

What is hateful to yourself, don't do to your fellow man.

—Rabbi Hillel, First Century B.C.

Christianity

Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.

—Jesus of Nazareth, First Century A.D.

Sikhism

Treat others as thou wouldst be treated thyself.

—Sixteenth Century A.D.

Now to my thesis that readiness is all.

A scholarly friend insisted on the importance to me of Immanuel Kant's *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*.² I read this book with but slight comprehension, unable to break through the author's obscurity. Months later, on a second reading, many of Kant's ideas tumbled into sense. What, really, went on here?

The text was the same on both readings. The only change was a minor improvement in my perception. Kant, bent on

² New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1959.

the pursuit of truth, did not have in mind any reader's lack of readiness. Thus, for me to get his message required that I rise nearer to his level of thought, that I come to a higher state of awareness—in a word, readiness!

Be Prepared

Readiness is all! And those of us committed to the freedom philosophy might as well recognize this fact, which is to say, we are well advised to align ourselves with reality. Let us, therefore, examine readiness and its relevance to our aspirations.

Take *Gresham's Law*, for example: "Bad money drives out good."³ Sir Thomas Gresham had readied himself for the perception of this truth. Bear in mind that the truth he perceived was no less a truth prior to the time he apprehended it. A truth is a truth, apprehended or not.

Gresham made his pronouncement, doubtless, to Queen Elizabeth. During more than four centuries, his law has been heard or read millions of times. And, to what account? *The general perception has been precisely at the level of general readiness of listeners and readers—above zero, yes, but not impressively so. Readiness is the governing factor in any and all individual enlightenments. "A man only understands that of which he already has the beginnings in himself."*⁴ Countless truths are all about every one of us and are unknown as if nonexistent, all because we are not ready for them.

³ According to Palgrave's *Dictionary of Political Economy*, this dictum appears to have been used first in 1560. While it cannot be found in his handwriting, this precept has been generally accepted as "Gresham's Law" by economists since 1858.

⁴ An entry of December 17, 1854 in *Journal Intimé* of Henri Frederic Amiel.

Any student of ideas knows from experience how thoughts become clearer on successive readings. A phrase in the Bible, for instance, may never fully penetrate one's mind until after fifty years of repetition. To "know it by heart" is not necessarily to be *mindful* of it. The words remain forever the same; when it comes to insight, only the readiness counts.

Any individual, regardless of his experience and training, encounters a thousand and one areas of thought, knowledge or wisdom which are alien territory to him. One of my thousands, for instance, is musical notation. Readiness for musical notation, let alone composition, is no more within my range than is computer design. These are not within the range of the potentialities peculiar to me. And no amount of talk or writing by experts, however skillful, would make one whit of difference. Who among us would not admit similar blind spots concerning countless areas!

Not a Numbers Problem

Consider now the matter of readiness for the freedom philosophy. Is it conceivable that as many as one per cent of our adult population have any aptitudes for the complexities of economic, social, political, and moral philosophy? The overwhelming majority not only lack readiness but couldn't acquire it if they tried. This simply is not their cup of tea; it is not consonant with their unique potentialities. This may seem to be a harsh fact, but it is a reality to be faced.

One can easily conclude that our situation is rendered hopeless by this overwhelming ineptitude for the freedom philosophy. But such is not a right conclusion, not at all. Awareness of this reality is a blessing for it warns us not to labor at the impossible—"selling the masses"—but to search

for other openings to understanding and progress. So, what do we find?

As we look about us, we find a great deal of specialization, advanced further in the U.S.A. than elsewhere at any time. As this way of life progresses, the greater is the opportunity for each individual to find and employ his own unique capabilities. The shoemaker no longer has to stick to his last; he may become an aviator, a poet, a painter, a chef, or even President of the United States. This, it seems to me, is all to the good.

Specialization Means Interdependence

In any event, the diversification today is fantastically greater than in the time of my grandfather. Meaning what? The more we specialize, the more *interdependent* we become—that is, the more must we rely on the performance of others. Removed as we are from self-subsistence, you tend to your specialization, I to mine, and the millions to their varied specialities. It is no longer presumed that each must know how to do more than his own “thing.” I do not have to know how to mine coal or make generators to enjoy the advantages of electricity. There is no need for you to know how to raise wheat or to manufacture and operate grist machinery to have bread on the table. Required only is that you know well your own specialization. And a moment’s reflection confirms that this is about all we do know. We—everyone of us—are but specializing participants in a phenomenal performance. I repeat, this is all to the good—perhaps a glimpse of man as he is destined to be!

Specialization—each to his own uniqueness—spells progress but with a generally unrecognized proviso attached. For it is inconceivable that these blessings can be expected to last

without virtues to match. This, which we have been experiencing, is no more than a sampling of what mankind's potentialities and possibilities are. It is quite evident that we must find out for ourselves what the price tag is. It is higher than we think!

Merely reflect on the implications of interdependence. Your welfare no longer hinges exclusively on your own performance. Nonperformance on the part of others can cut off your food, transportation, electricity, your very life—a fact demonstrated day in and day out. Furthermore, unsound monetary policies can destroy the circulating medium without which the exchange of our numerous specializations is impossible. Indeed, our interdependence is so pronounced that I can only serve my own interests by serving others; anything I might do to injure you or them also harms me. This now applies to everyone.

A Golden Rule Society

The ideal economy we have been approaching is meant for and can only endure in what might be termed a Golden Rule Society: citizens who would not do to others that which they would not have others do to them. Such citizens can be identified as those who pursue excellence in every walk of life; who never take advantage of others, either personally and directly or through organized governments, unions, or whatever; whose word is as good as their bond; who take pride in their work; and whose pronouncements and deeds are accurate reflections of whatever their innermost consciences dictate as right—in a word, inflexible integrity. These are the virtues required to match what we in America have been given the privilege of sampling. The price for such

blessings is not more laws and governmental gadgetry; instead, it is an unprecedented morality. We simply cannot hope to enjoy the untold material possessions that flow from private ownership, specialization, and trade if at the same time we deny self-responsibility for moral growth and try instead to socialize or collectivize that part of our lives.

In view of the fact that our society is now featured by thousands upon thousands of specialized engagements, it is unrealistic to expect more than a very few to possess aptitudes for any particular activity or discipline: the aerodynamics of the swept-back wing or nuclear physics or hybridizing corn, for instance.

And we have had demonstration enough that this division of labor not only works to the benefit of all but, further, it works miracles. Assuming, of course, free and unfettered exchange and each activity and discipline *practiced with integrity!*

The point is that we should not expect more than an infinitesimal few to possess aptitudes for political economy. And there are not more than a few!

In most activities and disciplines, we stick to our own knitting; we do not invade those fields requiring aptitudes we do not possess. As a consequence, most of the goods and services and thoughts flowing therefrom are models of integrity. *We trust them!*

Everyone an Expert

But when it comes to political economy—a discipline so difficult that it has challenged the best minds throughout history—nearly everyone tries his hand. Who doesn't think of himself as an "authority"? The result? Mishmash and non-

sense pour from public media as well as from educational, religious, business, and labor platforms. What a hodgepodge! And if there is one quality lacking in most of these attempts, that is the quality of integrity!

To demonstrate this latter point: Consider the technicians and mechanics who make our automobiles and jet aircraft, men who apply themselves to activities and disciplines consonant with their unique capabilities. The resulting products are featured by integrity. Day in and day out, millions of us trust our lives to these means of transport; hardly a second thought is given to their trustworthiness.

Now, observe these very same men deigning to pontificate on politico-economic affairs, an area in which few if any of them have any greater aptitude than I have for musical composition. Are their outpourings—often showing up formally in labor union pronouncements—to be trusted? Not one whit more than a pronouncement by me concerning a discipline about which I know nothing. Integrity is simply out of the question.

Integrity, I repeat, is an accurate reflection of whatever one's conscience dictates as right. *What incentive or chance has one to obey conscience on any matter about which he is not conscious?* Conscience in such matters is nonexistent and integrity impossible except as one confesses, "I do not know."

"I Do Not Know"

That there is or ever will be a political economist who has all the answers is as far from reality as Plato's philosopher-king aspirations. This, we can forget. The required wisdom is in the "over-all luminosity," the culture that has its source in

minute flashes of insight that are reported with absolute integrity. Thus, trust and integrity are companion virtues, enhanced by readiness.

“I do not know” is the first step to readiness, for it is axiomatic that the know-it-all cannot learn. From then on it is a succession of steps in readiness, now and forever, by those having an aptitude for political economy. And, who may this be? Possibly, a mechanic or, perhaps, a “lowly fisherman of Galilee,” or maybe a professor of political economy. Through whom truths will flow, one can never know.

Readiness is all! Let us then ready ourselves for the accurate reflections of what our consciences dictate as right, making certain that we have some consciousness of our subject. This is within the range of anyone who can will his own actions. And let this be the hallmark particularly of those devoted to the freedom philosophy.

Integrity dispels suspicion and enthrones trust, this being as close to the Golden Rule Society as we can get.

22.

The Will to Prevail

THIS CONCLUDING CHAPTER has to do with the magic of believing: he who believes he can sink a putt, move a mountain, or make a go of anything will excel those of equal talent but little faith. It is an observed fact that believers prevail where doubters fail! At issue here is the nature or character of one's being.

A society takes its heading from the people who comprise it. The ideas and actions, the strengths and weaknesses, of individual citizens determine whether or not a society will endure and, if it does, what heights it will attain.

How is it presently with the people of these United States? People must not be lumped or put in pigeonholes; such generalizations are always faulty, no person ever being wholly this or exclusively that—but we can evaluate certain characteristics.

The characteristic that dominates is of the "let George do it" variety and shows forth in people by the tens of millions. While perhaps outstanding in their chosen specializations, persons thus afflicted do no thinking for themselves in political economy. Followers!

The second characteristic is the king syndrome, commented upon in Chapter 6. Persons infected by this notion behave as gods, not as men. These, according to C. S. Lewis, are not bad men but, rather, not men at all in the old sense: "They are, if you like, men who have sacrificed their own share in traditional humanity in order to devote themselves to the task of deciding what 'Humanity' shall henceforth mean." Kings!

The third characteristic is to be found among thousands of potentially capable individuals—brilliant thinkers—who have given up the ghost. Quitters!

Finally, there are those who exemplify the opposite characteristics: the virtues of thinking for self, behaving as men instead of gods, and adhering to purpose against all odds. The Remnant!

Help from the Quitters

There is no need to stress the importance I attach to those who qualify to be numbered among the Remnant. Yet, if we are honest with ourselves, we must question their capacity to cope with the present plunge into all-out statism: socialism! The few among the Remnant need help; and it is to be found, if at all, among the quitters, those who have fallen by the wayside or are about to do so. For these are the ones so intelligent that they clearly see the financial and social trouble we are in. Paradoxically, this same intelligence which constitutes their potential value accounts, also, for their becoming dropouts. The explanation is that they see and are overwhelmed by the complexities of our muddled politico-economic situation. They cannot figure out how to unscramble it, so, what's the use!

I insist that this is not a sufficient reason for surrender. Getting out of the mess we are in does not require that anyone see in advance *the way out of it*. Knowing precisely how to put this Humpty Dumpty back together again is neither possible nor necessary. The Remnant needs additional seers, but no one has to be a see-it-all. The human record is studded with accomplishments that outrun any preceding plans, and human cooperation achieves ends that no man could possibly envision.

The following doggerel may help with my point:

There lived two frogs, so I've been told,
In a quiet wayside pool;
And one of these frogs was a blamed bright frog,
But the other frog was a fool.

Now a farmer man with a big milk-can
Was wont to pass that way;
And he used to stop and add a drop
Of the aqua pura, they say.

And it chanced one morn in the early dawn
When the farmer's sight was dim,
He scooped those frogs in the water he dipped,
Which same was a joke on him.

The fool frog sank in the swashing tank,
As the farmer bumped to town.
But the smart frog flew like a tugboat screw,
And he swore he'd not go down.

So he kicked and splashed and he slammed and thrashed,
And he kept on top through all;
And he churned that milk in first class shape
In a great big butter ball.¹

¹ Extracted from "Story of a Kicker," by Holman F. Day.

Never Say Die

What strength of character can we assign to the bright frog? Only this: *Never say die!* That frog could not guess what would save his life. He knew less about butter-making than I do about unscrambling the mess we are in, if that be possible. He did not know what form his salvation would take, not even that he would be saved. But he did have the proper spirit; that is, he had the will to prevail. He was only that bright; no more!

Like those frogs, we are in trouble; and many of us know it. We also are like the frogs in that no one has the foresight to visualize the form salvation will take; we are no more clairvoyant than they. When we get it into our heads that there can be no turn-about unless we can imagine the form it will take, we are as lost as the fool frog. But when we develop or retain the will to prevail, then our "butter ball"—the unimaginable—becomes at least a possibility.

How dark and dim the prospect has nothing to do with the matter. *Many a day has been darker than this.* Turn back to the land of Sumer, classically known as Babylonia—today's Iraq—at the very beginning of recorded history:

Its climate is exceedingly hot and dry, and its soil, left to itself, is arid, wind-swept, and unproductive . . . no minerals whatever and almost no stone . . . no trees for timber . . . a region with "the hand of God against it," an unpromising land seemingly doomed to poverty and desolation.

How could the prospects be darker? Yet, observe what happened:

But the people that inhabited [this land], the Sumerians, were endowed with an unusually creative intellect and a

venturesome *resolute* spirit . . . they turned Sumer into a veritable Garden of Eden.

The people who lived in the land of Sumer some 7,000 years ago had no idea what wonders lay in store for their progeny. But, they were a *resolute* people. Further:

The Sumerian was deeply conscious of his personal rights and resented any encroachment on them, whether by his king, his superior, or his equal. No wonder that the Sumerians were the first to compile laws and law codes, to put everything down in "black and white" in order to avoid misunderstanding, misrepresentation, and arbitrariness.²

After enduring for several thousand years, this first great civilization fell so flat that from the time of Christ till 100 years ago no one knew that it had existed. History, however, is punctuated with darkness-to-light epochs—from Athens to America. In no instance was anyone able to foresee the enlightenment that lay ahead. But we can be certain of one thing: No enlightened era ever came out of a population of quitters! The rewards have always gone to the *resolute*, to those who never say die, to those with the will to prevail.

Were Oswald Spengler alive today—as I remarked in Chapter 12—he would say that what is happening to America was in the cards; our fall was a foregone conclusion. Toynbee, however, argued that a nation or civilization can continue to thrive provided its people face and master the challenges peculiar to their time and situation. All challenges are unique; they do not come in carbon copies—ever!

With respect to this point, I am on Toynbee's side. We

² These three quotes have been extracted from *The Sumerians, Their History, Culture, and Character* by Samuel Noah Kramer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963), pp. 3-4.

need not decline and fall as did the Roman Empire. Such a fate is for the fool frogs. However, if we pin our hopes of societal survival on a form of salvation we can predict and blueprint—that is, if we refuse to play the game of life unless we can foresee how Creation will work its wonders—we are doomed; Spengler, turning over in his grave, might remark, “I told you so.” Let us, then, acknowledge the obvious: we cannot foresee the unimaginable.

A Matter of Insight

Progress has its origin in insight, not foresight. Penicillin, for example, was not foreseen. Thousands of medical students, over the years, failed to develop a certain culture, and were graded zero for their pains. Then came a student who observed under his microscope precisely what all the failing students had seen: a ring of mold surrounding the undeveloped culture. A question flashed to mind, “Might not this mold explain why my culture does not develop?” That mold was penicillin; that question was insight.

Observe how nicely lighted is your room. This kind of illumination was not foreseen before an idea popped into Edison’s mind. That idea was insight. This great inventor admitted that he did not know the source of his ideas and, assuredly, he could never have foreseen the ideas before they dawned upon him. Nor could anyone else.

It is thus that every step in scientific and societal progress gives the appearance of being fortuitous. As with Edison’s idea, each step is as if “from out of the blue.” All are unimaginable, unpredictable, unforeseeable, and mysterious.

William Cowper, two centuries ago, entitled a poem,

“Light Shining Out of Darkness,” and put the mystery in this memorable verse:

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants his footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm.

Cowper suggests—and confirms my faith—that we humans are not in charge of Creation, that the Universe continues to be guided by more than human design and reason. Not only are future events largely beyond the power of our contrivance, they also are beyond the scope of our imagination. So, let us take heart, rather than deplore the fact that we cannot foresee the unforeseeable. Let us hearken, not to the voices of doom, but to the magic of believing.

Look to the Light

True, many of today’s happenings grievously offend the sentiments and convictions of those of us who believe there should be no man-concocted restraints against the release of creative energy. Due to our limited vision, the darkness deepens, causing ever so many to ask, “How possibly can any light shine through it?”

But it is the very nature of darkness to enhance the brilliance of any light! Why does the doctor condition his eyes to darkness before peering through his fluoroscope? In order to see more clearly the dim shadows cast on the screen. The deeper the darkness the more conspicuous is even a tiny light!

Darkness, we must remember, has no power against light. Darkness recedes, retreats, vanishes without resistance as light

increases. Rather than be frightened by darkness, let us take the only rational step there is: look to our lights!

Our friends who are tempted to weep by the wall because they cannot see how Humpty Dumpty can ever be put back together again are asking that light illuminate tomorrow—a feat that light cannot perform. Light has only the power to illuminate the eternal *now*!

Today's darkness signifies that yesterday's torches are burning low and sputtering out. The hope for luminosity today or tomorrow depends upon what we do now to increase our candle power. Increase is possible. Indeed, it is a high probability for a resolute people—for those who have the will to prevail.

ADDENDUM

Being a reprint of the first chapter from *Economic Sophisms* by Frederic Bastiat (Irvington-on-Hudson, New York: The Foundation for Economic Education, Inc., 1968), pp. 7-15.

I

Abundance and Scarcity

Which is preferable for man and for society, abundance or scarcity?

“What!” people may exclaim. “How can there be any question about it? Has anyone ever suggested, or is it possible to maintain, that scarcity is the basis of man’s well-being?”

Yes, this has been suggested; yes, this has been maintained and is maintained every day, and I do not hesitate to say that the *theory of scarcity* is by far the most popular of all theories. It is the burden of conversations, newspaper articles, books, and political speeches; and, strange as it may seem, it is certain that political economy will not have completed its task and performed its practical function until it has popularized and established as indisputable this very simple proposition: “Wealth consists in an abundance of commodities.”

Do we not hear it said every day: “Foreigners are going to flood us with their products”? Thus, people fear abundance.

Has not M. de Saint-Cricq* said: “There is overproduction”? Thus, he was afraid of abundance.

Do not the workers wreck machines? Thus, they are afraid of overproduction, or—in other words—of abundance.

Has not M. Bugeaud† uttered these words: “Let bread be dear,

* [Pierre Laurent Barthélemy, Comte de Saint-Cricq, member of the Chamber of Deputies, Minister of Commerce from January 4, 1828 to August 8, 1829, and later a Peer of France.—TRANSLATOR.]

† [T. R. Bugeaud de la Piconnerie (1784–1849), known chiefly as a military leader. He was also a member of the Chamber of Deputies, was interested in agriculture, and endorsed protectionist principles.—TRANSLATOR.]

and the farmer will be rich"? Now, bread can be dear only because it is scarce. Thus, M. Bugeaud was extolling scarcity.

Has not M. d'Argout* based his argument against the sugar industry on its very productivity? Has he not said again and again: "The sugar beet has no future, and its cultivation cannot be extended, because just a few hectares of sugar beets in each department† would be enough to supply all the consumers in France"? Thus, as he sees things, good consists in barrenness and scarcity; and evil, in fertility and abundance.

Do not *La Presse*, *Le Commerce*, and the majority of the daily newspapers publish one or more articles every morning to prove to the Chambers‡ and to the government that it is sound policy to legislate higher prices for everything through manipulation of the tariff? Do not the Chambers and the government every day comply with this injunction from the press? But tariffs raise the prices of things only because they reduce their *supply* in the market! Thus, the newspapers, the Chambers, and the government put the theory of scarcity into practice, and I was right to say that this theory is by far the most popular of all theories.

How does it happen that in the eyes of workers, of publicists, and of statesmen, abundance seems dangerous and scarcity advantageous? I propose to trace this illusion to its source.

We observe that a man acquires wealth in proportion as he puts his labor to better account, that is to say, as *he sells at a higher price*. He sells at a higher price in proportion to the shortage, the scarcity, of the type of commodity produced by his labor. We conclude from this that, at least so far as he is concerned, scarcity enriches him. Applying this mode of reasoning successively to all workers, we deduce from it the *theory of scarcity*. Thereupon we proceed to put the theory into practice, and, in order to favor all producers, we artificially raise prices and cause a scarcity of all

* [Antoine Maurice Appolinaire, Comte d'Argout (1782-1858), administrator and fiscal specialist, Governor of the Bank of France.—TRANSLATOR.]

† [A hectare is 2.471 acres. A department is the largest administrative subdivision of France, averaging about 3,000 square miles.—TRANSLATOR.]

‡ [The legislature of France, comprising the Chamber of Peers and the Chamber of Deputies.—TRANSLATOR.]

goods by restrictive and protectionist measures, the elimination of machinery, and other analogous means.

The same holds true of abundance. We observe that, when a product is plentiful, it sells at a low price; thus, the producer earns less. If all the producers are in this plight, they are all poverty-stricken; hence, it is abundance that ruins society. And, as every person holding a theory seeks to put it into practice, one sees in many countries the laws of man warring against the abundance of things.

This sophism, phrased as a generalization, would perhaps make little impression; but, when applied to a particular set of facts—to this or that industry or to a given class of producers—it is extremely specious, and this is easily explained. It constitutes a syllogism which, although not *false*, is *incomplete*. Now, what is *true* in a syllogism is always and necessarily present to the mind. But what is *incomplete* is a negative quantity, a missing element that it is quite possible and even very easy not to take into account.

Man produces in order to consume. He is at once both producer and consumer. The argument that I have just set forth considers him only from the first of these points of view. From the second, the argument would lead to an opposite conclusion. Could we not say, in fact:

The consumer becomes richer in proportion as he *buys* everything more cheaply; he buys things more cheaply in proportion as they are abundant; hence, abundance enriches him; and this argument, extended to all consumers, would lead to the *theory of abundance!*

It is an imperfect understanding of the concept of *exchange* that produces these illusions. If we analyze the nature of our self-interest, we realize clearly that it is double. As sellers, we are interested in *high prices*, and, consequently, in scarcity; as buyers, we are interested in *low prices*, or, what amounts to the same thing, in an abundance of goods. We cannot, then, base our argument on one or the other of these two aspects of self-interest without determining beforehand which of the two coincides with and is identifiable with the general and permanent interest of the human race.

If man were a solitary animal, if he worked solely for himself, if he consumed directly the fruits of his labor—in short, *if he did not engage in exchange*—the theory of scarcity could never have been introduced into the world. It would be all too evident, in that case, that abundance would be advantageous for him, whatever its source, whether he owed it to his industriousness, to the ingenious tools and powerful machines that he had invented, to the fertility of the soil, to the liberality of Nature, or even to a mysterious *invasion* of goods that the tide had carried from abroad and left on the shore. No solitary man would ever conclude that, in order to make sure that his own labor had something to occupy it, he should break the tools that save him labor, neutralize the fertility of the soil, or return to the sea the goods it may have brought him. He would easily understand that labor is not an end in itself, but a means, and that it would be absurd to reject the end for fear of doing injury to the means. He would understand, too, that if he devotes two hours of the day to providing for his needs, any circumstance (machinery, the fertility of the soil, a gratuitous gift, no matter what) that saves him an hour of this labor, so long as the product is as great, puts that hour at his disposal, and that he can devote it to improving his well-being. He would understand, in short, that a *saving in labor* is nothing else than *progress*.

But *exchange* hampers our view of so simple a truth. In society, with the division of labor that it entails, the production and the consumption of an object are not performed by the same individual. Each person comes to regard his labor no longer as a means, but as an end. Exchange creates, in relation to each object, two interests, that of its producer and that of its consumer; and these two interests are always directly opposed to each other.

It is essential to analyze them and to study their nature.

Take the case of any producer. In what does his immediate self-interest consist? It consists in two things: (1) that the smallest possible number of persons engage in the same kind of labor as he; and (2) that the greatest possible number of persons be in quest of the product of his labor. Political economy expresses this more succinctly in these terms: that the supply be very limited,

and the demand very extensive; in still other terms: limited competition, and unlimited market.

In what does the immediate self-interest of the consumer consist? That the supply of the product he wants be extensive, and the demand limited.

Since these two interests are mutually incompatible, one of them must necessarily coincide with the social or general interest, and the other must be hostile to it.

But which one should legislation favor, as being the expression of the public weal—if, indeed, it should favor either one of them?

To know this, it suffices to discover what would happen if the secret desires of men were fulfilled.

In so far as we are producers, it must be admitted, each of us has hopes that are antisocial. Are we vineyardists? We should be little displeased if all the vines in the world save ours were blighted by frost: *this is the theory of scarcity*. Are we the owners of ironworks? We want no other iron to be on the market but our own, whatever may be the public need for it, precisely because this need, keenly felt and incompletely satisfied, brings us a high price: *this too is the theory of scarcity*. Are we farmers? We say, with M. Bugeaud: Let bread be costly, that is to say, scarce, and the farmers will prosper: *this is still the theory of scarcity*.

Are we physicians? We cannot blind ourselves to the fact that certain physical improvements, such as better public sanitation, the development of such moral virtues as moderation and temperance, the progress of knowledge to the point at which everyone can take care of his own health, and the discovery of certain simple, easily applied remedies, would be just so many deadly blows struck at our profession. In so far as we are physicians, our secret wishes are antisocial. I do not mean to say that physicians actually give expression to such wishes. I like to believe that they would welcome with joy the discovery of a universal cure; but it would not be as physicians, but as men and as Christians that they would yield to such an impulse: by a laudable act of self-abnegation, they would take the point of view of the consumer. But in so far as the physician practices a profession, in so far as he owes to that profession his well-being, his prestige, and even the means of supporting his

family, it is impossible for his desires—or, if you will, his interests—not to be antisocial.

Do we make cotton textiles? We wish to sell them at the price that is most advantageous *for us*. We should heartily approve the proscription of all rival manufacturers; and though we do not dare to express this wish publicly or to seek its full realization with any likelihood of success, we nevertheless attain it to a certain extent by roundabout means: for example, by excluding foreign textiles, so as to diminish the *supply*, and thereby to produce, by the use of force and to our profit, a *scarcity* of clothing.

In the same way, we could make a survey of all industries, and we should always find that producers, as such, have antisocial attitudes. "The merchant," says Montaigne,* "prosper only by the extravagance of youth; the farmer, by the high cost of grain; the architect, by the decay of houses; officers of justice, by men's lawsuits and quarrels. Even the ministers of religion owe the honor and practice of their high calling to our death and our vices. No physician takes pleasure in the good health of even his friends; no soldier, in the peace of his country; and so it goes for the rest."

It follows that, if the secret wishes of each producer were realized, the world would speedily retrogress toward barbarism. The sail would take the place of steam, the oar would replace the sail, and it in turn would have to yield to the wagon, the latter to the mule, and the mule to the packman. Wool would ban cotton, cotton would ban wool, and so on, until the scarcity of all things made man himself disappear from the face of the earth.

Suppose for a moment that legislative power and executive authority were put at the disposal of the Mimerel Committee,† and that each of the members of that association had the right to introduce and enact a favorite law. Is it very hard to imagine what sort of industrial code the public would be subjected to?

If we now turn to consider the immediate self-interest of the consumer, we shall find that it is in perfect harmony with the

* [Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592), famed humanistic essayist of the Renaissance.—TRANSLATOR.]

† [A businessmen's association headed by P. A. H. Mimerel de Roubaix (1786-1871), a textile manufacturer.—TRANSLATOR.]

general interest, i.e., with what the well-being of mankind requires. When the buyer goes to the market, he wants to find it abundantly supplied. He wants the seasons to be propitious for all the crops; more and more wonderful inventions to bring a greater number of products and satisfactions within his reach; time and labor to be saved; distances to be wiped out; the spirit of peace and justice to permit lessening the burden of taxes; and tariff walls of every sort to fall. In all these respects, the immediate self-interest of the consumer follows a line parallel to that of the public interest. He may extend his secret wishes to fantastic or absurd lengths; yet they will not cease to be in conformity with the interests of his fellow man. He may wish that food and shelter, roof and hearth, education and morality, security and peace, strength and health, all be his without effort, without toil, and without limit, like the dust of the roads, the water of the stream, the air that surrounds us, and the sunlight that bathes us; and yet the realization of these wishes would in no way conflict with the good of society.

Perhaps people will say that, if these wishes were granted, the producer's labor would be more and more limited, and finally would cease for want of anything to occupy it. But why? Because, in this extreme hypothetical case, all imaginable wants and desires would be fully satisfied. Man, like the Almighty, would create all things by a simple act of volition. Will someone tell me what reason there would be, on this hypothesis, to deplore the end of industrial production?

I referred just now to an imaginary legislative assembly composed of businessmen, in which each member would have the power to enact a law expressing his *secret wish* in his capacity as a producer; and I said that the laws emanating from such an assembly would create a system of monopoly and put into practice the theory of scarcity.

In the same way, a Chamber of Deputies in which each member considered solely his immediate self-interest as a consumer would end by creating a system of free trade, repealing all restrictive laws, and removing all man-made commercial barriers—in short, by putting into practice the theory of abundance.

Hence, it follows that to consult solely the immediate self-

interest of the producer is to have regard for an antisocial interest; whereas to consider as fundamental solely the immediate self-interest of the consumer is to take the general interest as the foundation of social policy.

Allow me to emphasize this point, at the risk of repeating myself.

There is a fundamental antagonism between the seller and the buyer.¹

The former wants the goods on the market to be *scarce*, in short supply, and expensive.

The latter wants them *abundant*, in plentiful supply, and cheap.

Our laws, which should at least be neutral, take the side of the seller against the buyer, of the producer against the consumer, of high prices against low prices,² of scarcity against abundance.

They operate, if not intentionally, at least logically, on the assumption that *a nation is rich when it is lacking in everything*.

For they say it is the producer who must be favored, by being assured a good market for his product. To achieve this end, it is necessary to raise its price; to raise its price, it is necessary to limit the supply; and to limit the supply is to create scarcity.

Just suppose that, at the present moment, when these laws are in full force, a complete inventory were taken, not in terms of monetary value, but in terms of weight, size, volume, and quantity, of all the objects existing in France that are capable of satisfying the wants and tastes of its people—meat, cloth, fuel, wheat, colonial products, etc.

Suppose further that the following day all barriers to the importation of foreign goods into France were removed.

Finally, suppose that, in order to determine the consequences of this reform, a second inventory is taken three months later.

Is it not true that there will be in France more wheat, livestock, cloth, linen, iron, coal, sugar, etc., at the time of the second inventory than at the time of the first?

This is so true that our protective tariffs have no other goal than to prevent us from importing all these things, to limit their supply, to forestall a decline in their prices, and to prevent their abundance.

Now, are we to believe that the people are better fed under the

laws that prevail at present, because there is *less* bread, meat, and sugar in the country? Are they better clad, because there is *less* linen and woolen cloth? Are their houses better heated, because there is *less* coal? Is their labor made easier, because there is *less* iron and copper, or because there are *fewer* tools and machines?

But, you say, if foreigners *flood* us with their products, they will carry off our money!

Well, what difference does that make? Men are not fed on cash, they do not clothe themselves with gold, nor do they heat their houses with silver. What difference does it make whether there is more or less money in the country, if there is more bread in the cupboard, more meat in the larder, more clothing in the wardrobe, and more wood in the woodshed?

Restrictive laws always present us with the same dilemma.

Either we admit that they produce scarcity, or we do not admit it.

If we do admit it, we thereby confess that they inflict upon the people all the harm that they can do. If we do not admit it, then we deny that they limit the supply of goods and raise their prices, and consequently we deny that they favor the producer.

Such laws are either injurious or ineffective. They cannot be useful.⁸

Index

Prepared by Vernelia A. Crawford

The letter "n" following a figure refers to a footnote.

A

Abundance and scarcity, 144,
163-71
Aquinas, Saint Thomas, 125
Affluence, 87
Amiel, Henri Frederic, 146n
Animal preservation, 78
Authoritarianism, 37, 69
Awareness, 27

B

Babylonia, 156
Bacon, Francis, 142
Barzun, Jacques, 108
Bastiat, Frederic, 14, 51, 67n, 161
Believing, magic of, 159
Benefactors, 53-60
Bergson, Henry, 141
Besse, Ralph, 142
Bismarck, Otto, 35
Boyle's Law, 112
Brozen, Yale, 106n
Buddhism, 144
Bureaucrats, 44, 47
Burke, Edmund, 114

C

Campus strife, 105
Carlyle, Thomas, 111, 142
Carter, James Coolidge, 31n
Cervantes, Miguel de, 20
Charity, 47
Choice-making, 97
Christianity, 118, 144, 149, 153
Citizenship, 26
Civilizations, views of, 1, 89, 157
Cleveland, Grover, 49n
Clichés, 70
Collectivism, 55
Communication, 119, 126, 138
Communism, 105-10
Competition, 56, 93
Confrontations, 123, 125
Confucianism, 144
Consciousness, 5, 12
Consensus, 26, 29-34
Conservationism, 74-83
Consumers, 55, 67-73; see also
Production and consumption
Counterfeiting, 98
Cowper, William, 159
Creation, mysteries of, 24

Creativity, 38, 40, 68, 96
 Custom, 31

D

Day, Holman F., 155n
 Dietze, Gottfried, 126n
 Divine right of kings, 35
 Douglas, Lloyd, 60n
 Dumas, Alexander, 84

E

Ecology, 74, 77
 Economic understanding, 4, 68
 Education, 29, 46, 85, 109
 Elizabeth (Queen), 146
 Employment, 88, 99
 Enlightenment, 33, 125, 128, 143
 Epictetus, 43, 129, 130
 Evil, resistance to, 118-24
 Evolution, 112
 Excellence, 108
 Exchange concept, 45, 56, 97, 184,
 188
 Expenditures, government, 48n,
 72, 97

F

Failure, 84, 153, 159
 Faith, confession of, 1-2, 153-60
 Familiarity, 23
 Fear, freedom from, 93
 Forestry, 78
 Foundation for Economic Educa-
 tion
 anniversary, 3
 criticism, 118, 122
 friends, 11
 philosophy, 16, 91
 Free market
 abundance and scarcity, 163
 definition, 51
 evaluation, 29, 42-52
 pricing, 45, 82, 183
 production and consumption,
 45, 55, 64, 67, 104, 184

role, 103
 specialization, 98, 148
 supply and demand, 45, 186,
 189

Freedom

case for, 14, 127
 competition, 56, 93
 consumer's view, 55, 67-73
 definition, 43n, 96
 fear, 93
 laborers, 61-66
 license, 2
 lip service, 16
 meanings, 91
 philosophy, 133
 progress, 90-96, 158
 psychological aspect, 111
 readiness for, 147
 refinement, 17
 restraints on, 71, 91, 95
 spreading word, 125-30
 want-satisfaction, 92, 188

Friendship, 11-20

Frogs, 155

Fulbert of Chartres, 7n

G

Galileo, Galilei, 125
 Golden Rule, 144, 149
 Good and evil, 118
 Government
 arms of, 132
 authoritarian, 37, 69
 bureaucratic, 44, 47
 charity, 47
 coercion, 50, 68, 71
 collectivistic, 55
 communistic, 105-10
 conservation, 74-83
 education, 29, 46, 85, 109
 expenditures, 48n, 72, 97
 inflation, 98
 interference, 46, 72
 majority rule, vii, 37, 126
 omnipotent, 51

power, 36, 103
 recreational areas, 79
 role, 114
 rules, 26, 35
 socialistic, 8, 29, 65, 86, 154
 sovereignty, 35
 subsidies, 46, 71, 88
 tariffs, 189
 taxation, 29, 97
 wage laws, 100
 welfare state, 47, 50, 72, 109
 Gradualism, 30, 34
 Gresham, Thomas, 146
 Gresham's Law, 70, 112, 146
 Grosvenor, Melville Bell, 75

H

Hayek, F. A., 114
 Hazlitt, Henry, 90, 118
 Hinduism, 145
 Honesty, 5, 6, 9, 150
 Howells, William, 115
 Huxley, Aldous, 121, 122n

I

Ideal, labeling, 131-37
 Incomes policy, 46
 Individualism
 creativity, 38, 40, 68, 96
 educable, 10
 growth, 111
 initiative, 85
 integrity, 5, 6, 9, 150
 life's purpose, 12, 142
 limitations, 32
 responsibility, 18, 53, 86, 94,
 109, 115
 see also Free market; Freedom
 Inflation, 98
 Inge, William Ralph, 84
 Initiative, 85
 Integrity, 5, 6, 9, 150
 Intellect, 108

Interdependence abundance, 144,
 163

J

James I, 38
 Jesus of Nazareth, 145
 Judaism, 145
 Justice, 39, 45

K

Kant, Immanuel, 145
 Kindness, human, 43, 47
 Kingdom on earth, 3-10
 Kings, power of, 35-41
 Knowledge, 21-28, 108, 142, 186
 Kramer, Samuel Noah, 157n

L

Labels, 131-37
 Labor
 division of, 150, 185
 employment, 88, 99
 exploitation theory, 65
 freedom, 61-66
 means and ends, 185
 unions, 50, 63, 71, 101
 wages, 100
 Land ownership, 78
 Laser, 22
 Law
 defiance of, 111-17
 kinds, 13, 69, 70, 112, 113
 man-made, 117
 wage, 100
 Leadership, 108, 117
 Lewis, C. S., 5, 154
 Liberalism, 135
 Libertarianism, 135
 Liberty, doctrine of, 60; see also
 Free market; Freedom
 License and freedom, 2
 Lincoln, Abraham, 124n
 Lorenz, Konrad, 115, 123
 Luxury, 87, 144, 167

M

Majority rule, vii, 37, 126
 Marx, Karl, 65, 125
 Meloy, Tom, 22n
 Menger, Carl, 125
 Mill, John Stuart, 56
 Minding one's own business, 58,
 62
 Miracles, 24
 Money, 46, 70, 112, 146
 Montaigne, Michel de, 187
 Morality, 4

N

National parks, 79
 Natural resources, 74, 76
 Newton's First Law of Motion, 69

O

Opinion, exercise of, vii, 9
 Organizers, 106
 Ownership, 78

P

Paganism, 145
 Palgrave, 146n
 Parental responsibility, 109
 Parks, 79
 Plato, 144
 Playgrounds, 79
 Poirot, Paul L., 77n
 Politico-economic philosophy, 132,
 150
 Poverty, 47
 Preservation and conservation, 75
 Price system, 45, 82, 183
 Production and consumption, 45,
 55, 64, 67, 104, 184
 Profit, kinds of, 81
 Property, 78
 Progress and freedom, 90-96, 158
 Prussian sovereigns, 35
 Public media, 65, 108, 126
 Purchasing power, 64

R

Readiness, 144-52
 Reading, return to, 138-43
 Reason, 39, 42
 Recreational areas, 79
 Rediske, John, 76n
 Religion, 1, 118, 144, 149, 153
 Remnant, 154
 Responsibility, 18, 53, 86, 94, 109,
 115
 Restraints, 71, 91, 95; see also
 Government
 Right-of-man concept, 39
 Roman Stoicism, 42
 Rulership, 26, 35
 Runes, Dagobert D., 145
 Ruskin, John, 1
 Russell, Dean, 77n
 Russia, land ownership in, 78

S

Say's law of markets, 64, 112
 Scarcity and abundance, 144, 163-
 171
 Self-consciousness, 21
 Self-improvement, 129, 138
 Self-interest, 56, 57, 140, 184, 188
 Shakespeare, William, 144
 Sikhism, 145
 Slavery, 129
 Smith, Adam, 56, 58
 Social duty, 53, 60, 115
 Socialism, 8, 29, 65, 86, 154
 Society, 31, 153
 Soloman, Albert, 42n
 Something-for-nothing, 49, 84-89
 Sovereignty, 35
 Sparks, John C., 79n
 Specializations, 98, 148
 Spengler, Oswald, 89, 157
 Standards, 108
 Statesmanship, 117
 Stoicism, 42
 Subsidies, 46, 71, 88
 Success, 84, 153

Sumer, 156
 Sumner, William Graham, 60n
 Supply and demand, 45, 186, 189
 Synthetic curtain, 97-104

T

Tariffs, 189
 Taxation, 29, 97
 Ten Commandments, 118
 Tolstoy, Leo, vii, 13
 Toynebee, Arnold, 89, 157
 Trade, 45, 56, 97, 184, 188
 Truth, search for, 5, 118, 125,
 134, 146

U

Unemployment, 88

V

Value, law of, 113
 Voucher system for education, 29

W

Wage laws, 100
 Want-satisfaction, 92, 188
 Wealth, 87, 144, 163
 Welfare state, 47, 50, 72, 109
 Willing exchange, 45
 Will power, 153-60
 Wilson, Woodrow, 71
 Wisdom in knowing, 21-28
 Witchcraft, 121
 Wolfe, Thomas, 39

Z

Zoroastrianism, 145

