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An Electronic Edition of Leonard E. Read's Library

Accent on the Right

Accent on the Right

Leonard E. Read

Accent on the Right

by

Leonard E. Read

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To Frederic Bastiat

Thanks to

Foundation for Economic Education

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Ricardo Pazos

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Why a Good Man Can't Be Kept Down

It is said that there is not enough darkness in the whole world to put out the light of one wee candle. Nor is there enough ignorance and wrongdoing on earth to submerge what's right. *Creation has endowed righteousness with a built-in buoyancy*; it persists in rising to the top, often in the most unlikely persons, always in good men!

Dedication

Dedication of a book is a writer's way of paying respect to someone, or of acknowledging a devoted helper, or of honoring a loved one—and, as a rule, the tribute is to a contemporary.

Why, then, my dedication to Frederic Bastiat (1801–1850)?

First, Bastiat is one of my heroes. I am unaware of anyone who saw more clearly through the political fog than he and who more brilliantly and copiously revealed his insights.¹

And what integrity! For instance, his re-election to the Chamber of Deputies was in grave doubt: his constituents had observed that he voted now with the Left and then with the Right, giving the appearance of inconsistency. This was his defense, “I have not made an alliance with anyone; I have not joined either side. On each question I have voted according to my own conscience.” He was re-elected.

Second, and unconventionally, I think of Bastiat as a contemporary, for he does in fact live on. The fruits of his fertile mind are better known in the U.S.A. today than at any time since he began to write nearly a century and a half ago—perhaps more widely understood and shared here than ever in his own country. This is an important kind of immortality.

However, I pay tribute to Bastiat primarily to portray a truth we so sorely need to recognize. Most antisocialists, frustrated by what goes on, and impatiently looking for immediate remedies, repeatedly resort to useless short cuts. They want action now! And get nothing for their pains, absolutely nothing except, perhaps, discouragement! The hard fact is that the trend lines in social thinking do not alter their direction—much less reverse themselves—at your insistence or mine, however voluble. These trends, particularly when headed toward social decline, move with a near inexorable force and are changed, if at all, by starter stuff—leaven—or, if I may coin a term, intellectual incubation.

The only persons of constructive influence, the ones who really count in social shifts for the better, are those who labor at the incubation level. And they must be those rare individuals who receive satisfaction from following the dictates of

¹ His collected works in the original French—in FEE's Library—run to some 1,200,000 words!

conscience; there is no other reward; they seldom, if ever, live to witness the fruits of their labor.

Bastiat's was a one-man performance, advancing concepts that found little hospitality in his native France, during his lifetime or since. A lesser soul would have been beaten down by discouragement and have thrown in the sponge. How many Americans die on the vine because their compatriots number in the thousands only, instead of in the millions! *It takes a man to stand alone!*

Free Trade in England

But who can ever know where ideas, once properly incubated, will take root! Here is a striking illustration: one of the most significant turnabouts in Western Civilization—a shift from mercantilism to free trade, from state interventionism to the free market—took place in England some time following the Napoleonic Wars. While Richard Cobden and John Bright have been largely credited with this unprecedented achievement, research reveals that Bastiat was the ideological incubator.² But he was entombed in Rome—Saint-Louis des Francais—ere his labors bore this English fruit.

An eminent economist³ expressed this view to me: “The two most influential books bearing on Western Civilization have been *The Holy Bible* and *The Wealth of Nations*.” A debatable opinion, perhaps, but there is no doubt about the enormous influence of Adam Smith's book. Yet Smith, as Bastiat, searching for what's right, working at the incubation level, serving as leaven, passed on before his labor bore its remarkable fruit. And more than likely, these men, as others who search for truth and report their findings, never suspected what the results would be. Indeed, they probably never hoped for results; to have focused on outcome doubtless would have corrupted the purity of their investigations. Such men seek truth and not outcome—and get results. Others seek outcome rather than truth—and get neither truth nor results.⁴

² See *Frederic Bastiat: Ideas and Influence* by Dean Russell. (175 pp., a multilithed, bound volume) (Irvington-on-Hudson, N. Y.: The Foundation for Economic Education, Inc., 1965.)

³ Dr. Thomas Nixon Carver, for 32 years Professor of Political Economy at Harvard University.

The spirit of seekers after truth, the attitude of those who do in fact serve as agents of civilization, is illustrated by Karl Jaspers. He was dismissed by the Nazis from his professorship at the University of Heidelberg and forbidden to teach or publish. Yet Jaspers used the years of his retirement for reflection and writing. He himself tells the story:

When in 1938 a young friend said to me: "Why are you writing, it can never be published anyway, and one day all of your manuscripts will be burned," I replied playfully: "One never knows; I enjoy writing; what I am thinking becomes clearer in the process; and finally, in case the overthrow should occur someday, I do not wish to stand there with empty hands."⁵

Frederic Bastiat was not present at the overthrow of mercantilism in England but, had he been standing there, his would not have been empty hands. May you and I be entitled to as salutary a verdict!

⁴ C. S. Lewis put it: "Aim at Heaven and you get earth thrown in. Aim at earth and you will get neither." (*Mere Christianity*. London: Geoffrey Bles, Ltd., 1953, p. 106.)

⁵ Taken from "A New Humanism" by Karl Jaspers, appearing in Adrienne Koch (ed.), *Philosophy for a Time of Crisis* (New York: E. P. Dutton Co., 1959), pp. 320-21.

The Source of Progress

All aspects of life are in flux; nothing stays put. There is progress in some sectors, accompanied by regress in others. For instance, there is economic progress, only to be followed by a decline of material wellbeing. And there is moral, social, political, scientific, technological, intellectual, as well as spiritual progress—and regress.

Most everyone prefers progress in the above areas to regress. Progress is the direction man goes when fulfilling his destiny; regress, his direction when “reverting to type.” Progressing, emerging, hatching, evolving are in the same harmonic scale.

Attaching such value as we do to progress requires, also, that we give a prime value to leadership, for it is an observed fact that progress is a phenomenon flowing from leadership. Thus, when leadership is not understood or when it is sought where it does not exist, progress is not only in jeopardy, it becomes impossible for it has lost touch with its source. It is important, therefore, that we try to discover for ourselves what true leadership really is. The following is an attempt to pinpoint that type of leadership from which progress springs.

A Judas goat, one trained to lead innocent sheep to slaughter, is a leader of sorts. But, obviously, this is not the kind of leadership which serves as the source of progress: the goat is no more conscious of betrayal than are the sheep of their fate. This is simply a case of the blind leading the blind, the leader having no role other than that of being followed.

Similar behavior among men is not difficult to observe: our history books are filled with accounts of leaders, so called, who have been in the vanguard of movements ending not only in economic disaster but often in slaughter. These “leaders” have been distinguished more by their lack of understanding than by any conscious malevolence. They knew not where they were going; they found themselves out front only because millions of people, suffering from prevailing fallacies and emotional enthusiasms, saw in the “leader” an energetic personification of their own illusions. Enormous energy and personality quirks—and little else—have marked these “leaders.” The sad part is that we need not turn to history for examples; we are now experiencing a rash of these “leadership” situations, not only abroad, but at home as well.

Let us not, however, confine our reflections to those in the vanguard of destructive movements. That would be to miss the point of this analysis. For example, those of us with a libertarian bent will, unless we are extremely careful, think of Frederic Bastiat as a leader. But that excellent spokesman for liberty would have been the first to reject any such accolade. He denied the leader-in-person notion when explaining to some of his supporters why he sometimes voted in the French National Assembly with the socialists and communists: “One must base his vote on *for what* instead of *with whom*.” Here we find a cue as to the meaning of true leadership. First, however, a few thoughts on the dangers of thinking of any *person* as a leader.

When we think of a person—Bastiat, or anyone else, for that matter—as a leader, two kinds of disaster are likely to follow. The first is more than likely; it is certain: we who commit this error in our thinking resolve ourselves into blind followers; we limit what we perceive to nothing more than the personality traits of an individual. *Whatever he does is right for no more reason than it is he who does it.*¹

The second disaster, if it happens, is an outgrowth of the first: any individual widely hailed as “our leader” is in grave danger of actually believing what he hears; he may conclude that multiple errors add up to truth—that he is, in fact, a Leader. Acceptance of this distorted view of self dangerously weakens one’s resistance to the messiah complex.

The messiah complex is a common failing, readily detected: those who suffer this psychosis think of themselves as *the* fountainhead of truth; they see nothing in the cosmos above their own finite minds and, thus, quite naturally become intellectual and/or political authoritarians: “Believe precisely as I do or act as I command lest you stand condemned in my eyes.” They will forsake their role as students or workers in the vineyard, and will pontificate as oracles, on any subject; indeed, they may even aspire to usurp the role of God! Thus, disaster comes to both the followed and the followers: “If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.”

¹ A noted clergyman of the last generation, S. Parkes Cadman, lamented, “Do you know what is wrong with my church? My people like me, but they don’t love God.” In short, they were following a person; they were not embarked on the Eternal Search for Truth.

Success May Destroy You

Dean Inge once observed, “Nothing fails like success.” Why is the good Dean’s observation so often confirmed? Success is heady stuff; few can experience it and remain sober. When a student of liberty, for instance, gets ahead of others in his own little orbit, he has a measure of success. But let the others embrace him as their leader (a common failing) and let him, as a consequence of this unwarranted flattery, look upon them as *his* disciples (an infatuating weakness), and his initial “success” must turn to failure. The studying, which accounted for his success, is at an end. As the saying goes, “He’s a big-shot.”

To bring this analysis into sharper focus, contemplate two relatively intelligent individuals exchanging ideas in a two-way inquiry of serious import. While both leadership and followership would then be in evidence, we could not accurately ascribe the attraction and response to either one of the individuals themselves, but to some object beyond both individuals, which one understands better than the other. *The leadership and followership we observe in this situation has only an ideational explanation:* one of the persons embodies an idea, an insight, a perception, a new spark of consciousness which he shares; the other, who perceives the point, remarks, in effect, “I follow you.” This means that he, also, perceives the idea. Leadership, in this significant sense, is enlightenment, not the making of carbon copies. Nietzsche once observed that it is no credit to a teacher if a student resembles him overly much.

Followership, in this sense, means to partake of the enlightenment. “To improve oneself,” wrote Ortega y Gasset, “one must first admire perfection in others.” If it is ideational perfection that is admired in another, then it is ideational perfection of self, not imitation, that one will strive for.

Individuals, when discoursing in a spirit of inquiry, will experience light and interchanges of light—that is, the teacher and student positions will alternate, each feeding on the other, the baton of leadership passing back and forth. It is worthy of note that writing, reading, and printing have done away with many of the limitations once imposed on this process by time and space; we find ourselves enlightened by ideas recorded in the distant past.

The Measure of a Man

Refer again to Frederic Bastiat. We of recent generations have not had him as a personal acquaintance; thus, the leadership we are prone to ascribe to his person is patently false. The *for what*—the work—of this French philosopher and statesman constitutes the sole leadership we follow. His writings are clear expositions of ideas he perceived or consciousness he attained or principles he deduced; *they are the fruits of his studies, gleanings from his devoted and intensive search for truth*. His awareness that leadership is an ideational phenomenon rather than a personality trait caused him to conclude, “One must base his vote on *for what* instead of *with whom*.”

When Abraham Lincoln in his Peoria speech said, “Stand with anybody that stands right. . . . Part with him when he goes wrong,” he was advocating a disregard of *who* the person was and a skeptical look at *what* the person stood for. In short, when looking for leadership, look right through the individual in order to see the nature and quality of the idea or principle he espouses; look through the person, be he labeled friend or foe, Republican or Democrat, clergyman or layman, the great, the near-great, or the commoner. If what is found be adjudged valid and also helpful and enlightening—that is, above or beyond one’s own lights—then there is leadership, the only kind that generates progress.

Leading Thoughts

To test yourself for qualities of this “thought leadership,” stand before a mirror. Then switch off the lights, or close your eyes, or imagine that your visible image completely disappears—that nothing remains but your invisible essence, your consciousness or range of perception, your thoughts and ideas. This is all the genuine leadership you possess; and the amount of it is to be measured by the extent to which others, looking through you, find enlightenment in your ideas.

Searching for and finding leadership as it shows forth in others is nearly as difficult as developing it in self. For no one can *comprehend* a superior consciousness except as his own consciousness, in some measure, approximates the higher one.² Thus, the search for leadership demands a continuing growth in healthy skepticism, discrimination, awareness, wisdom. That the search becomes more difficult as one advances is conceded, the difficulty accounting for much of

the misconception put on leadership; discrimination in ideas is denied to those who find the required labor and self-discipline too difficult. Yet, sensing the need to follow something—all of us are followers in most respects—many people turn to “leaders”; they follow the reputations of fallible men—ready-made and shallow answers to this native necessity—and thus never discover the kind of leadership on which all progress, all human emergence, is founded.

Where there is no leadership—that is, good ideas being sought, grasped, explained, understood—there is no economic freedom, no liberty. Thus, we need to know what true leadership is, lest we be misled in our quest. Such *truths* as are perceived, not the persons advancing them, constitute the sole source of progress; only these truths qualify for that type of leadership worth developing or following.

² “A man only understands that of which he has already the beginnings in himself.” An entry of December 17, 1854, in *Journal Intime* of Henri Frederic Amiel.

2

On Thinking for Self

During the discussion following one of my recent lectures, it occurred to me that the questions fell into a pattern, and that this pattern was the same—whether in Manila, or Boise, or wherever. Each question was based on something the inquirer had heard or read; no questions appeared to stem from a genuine impasse in the persons own effort to solve a problem. These people were merely repeating questions someone else had raised for them; they weren't seeking directions by reason of having lost their way for, in fact, they had done no exploration on their own!

What a fearful thought—if this situation is general: a nation of people the vast majority of whom do no thinking for themselves in the area of political economy! Positions on matters of the deepest social import formed from nothing more profound than radio, TV, and newspaper commentaries, or casual, off-the-cuff opinions, or the outpourings of popularity seekers! “The quality and influence of an idea, Ortega saw, was not so much in the idea as in a man's relation to it. Has he made the idea his own, or merely inherited it? . . . The man bom into a culture confident of its knowledge is in danger of becoming a barbarian.”¹

Granting the correctness of this gloomy thought, what are the political consequences? And what counsel can you and I offer individuals who are doing no thinking for themselves? So, let's explore the two significant questions this deplorable situation seems to pose.

To assess the political consequences, view the American populace as a market. Suppose, for instance, that the consumer tastes in literature have deteriorated until there is demand for pornography only. Pornographic authors and publishers will spring up by the thousands; authors and publishers of ethical, moral, and spiritual works will fade away for lack of a market. Reverse the market situation and assume only highly elevated tastes in literature. Authors and publishers of pornography will then be displaced by authors and publishers of high-grade literature.

¹ *Manas*, October 25, 1967.

One needs no poll to determine the literary tastes of a people. Merely observe the kind of literature that is gaining in favor and profit. We can infer from this that it is useless to blame commentators, authors, and publishers for purveying trash. They are merely irresponsible responses to the general taste—the market—whatever it is.² The market determines who are to be the successful purveyors.

The Political Climate

Market demand also determines the kinds of persons who vie with each other for political office.

Assume a people who do no thinking for themselves. Theirs is a stunted skepticism. Such people only react and are easy prey of the cliché, the plausibility, the shallow promise, the lie. Emotional appeals and pretty words are their only guidelines. The market is made up of no-thinks. Statesmen—men of integrity and intellectual stature—are hopelessly out of demand. When this is the situation, such statesmen will not be found among the politically active.

And who may we expect to respond to a market where thinking for self is absent? Charlatans! Word mongers! Power seekers! Deception artists! They come out of their obscurity as termites out of a rotten stump; the worst rise to the political top. And when our only choice is “the lesser of two evils,” voting is a sham.

Now assume a society of persons who do their own thinking and, as a consequence, possess a healthy and intelligent skepticism, persons who cannot be “taken in,” hardheaded students of political economy graced with moral rectitude. The market for charlatans is dead; we are scarcely aware of such people. Instead, we find statesmen of character and integrity vying for political office.

There is no need for a poll to determine whether original or introspective thinking is declining or rising. Merely keep in mind that whatever shows forth on the political horizon is the response to the market, an echoing or mirroring of the preponderant mode in thinking. When thinking for self is declining, more charlatans and fewer statesmen will vie for office. Look at the political horizon to learn what the thinking is, just as you look at a thermometer to learn what the

² Exception: Men of virtue and talents—the natural aristocracy, to use Jefferson’s term—would never irresponsibly respond to the lure of either fame or fortune should the response contradict their concept of righteousness. Man cannot stoop below his goodness.

temperature is. So, blame not the political opportunists for the state of the nation. Our failure to think for ourselves put them there—indeed, brought them into being. For we are the market; they are but the reflections!

An interesting fact intrudes itself into this analysis: approximately 50 per cent of those who do not think for themselves are furious with what they see on the political horizon—which is but their own reflections! And to assuage their discontent they exert vigorous effort to change the reflection from Republican to Democrat, or vice versa. As should be expected, they get no more for their pains than new faces masking mentalities remarkably similar to those unseated. It cannot be otherwise.³

No improving trend on the political horizon is possible except as there is an improvement—quantity and quality—in thinking for self. Thus, it is of the utmost importance that we seriously attend to our thinking. What helpful points can we make?

The Proper Role of Government

Given the present situation, where government is recklessly out of bounds and has its hand in practically every aspect of life, the well-informed citizen is expected to know all about everything: how to deliver mail, poverty the world over, give-aways to foreign countries, you name it, are up for public discussion. Most of these so-called national or world problems are of similar origin and nature—each one trying to manage everyone's business but his own. This hopelessly impossible challenge doubtless accounts in no small measure for so many having “thrown in the sponge” when it comes to thinking for self. *No person on the face of the earth knows how to make socialism work.* And don't try! Instead, concentrate the thinking on what the principled and proper scope of government really is. This is easily within the realm of any reasonably intelligent person, and is first of all the kind of thinking for self in political economy one should cover.⁴ All else—welfare, security, prosperity—is in the realm of the free market: you to your affairs, me to mine.

³ In the above I have assumed the two extremes: nobody and everybody thinking for self. In society this is never the case; it's always a *tendency* toward one extreme or the other. The societal tendency, of course, is not swayed or determined by the many who fail to think for themselves but by the few who strive to do their own thinking. The thinkers ultimately govern.

The Individual's Role

Most individuals who have abandoned thinking for self in matters of political economy are unaware that they thus dry up the source of Creative Wisdom. Such wisdom as society requires does not and cannot exist in any one person, though each of us should be responsible for his own part. Each of us views the world through a tiny aperture. No two apertures, no two views, are identical. Your and my disparate wisdoms, such as they are, these minuscule dividends of exercising the introspective faculty, can be likened to two wee candles, each different from the other and each, by itself, barely perceptible. But when all persons with any capabilities in this respect are realizing their potentialities, there is a remarkable wisdom, a Creative Wisdom that can be likened to an over-all luminosity, a great light.⁵ To understand the nature and origin of Creative Wisdom is sufficient to inspire many persons to introspective action.⁶ The responsible citizen insists on knowing what is his part and then doing it.

There are obstacles, of course, on this path to wisdom. One is a lack of faith in an over-all wisdom representing a coalescence of tiny bits of individual understanding. There are numerous reasons why it isn't trusted. Obviously, it cannot be seen with the eye; it can be apprehended only by abstract thinking. Nor have enough people been thinking for self to make an impressive demonstration. Yet, this is the nature of knowledge in society and it behooves each of us to make the best of it.

Another obstacle is busy-ness, a consuming preoccupation with housework, children, the job, a business, making a living, or whatever. But these amenities of life are impossible in the absence of a good society and a good society cannot be developed except through the process of thinking for self. Until such introspection becomes as natural as eating and breathing, there is little prospect for the good life.

The essential critical faculty cannot be developed when we copy-cat the questions and conclusions of others. Each to his own thinking! The rule, therefore, is not to take somebody else's word for it. And to be consistent, what must

⁴ Commended for reference reading is *The Law* by Frederic Bastiat (Irvington-on-Hudson, N. Y.: The Foundation for Economic Education, Inc., 1962).

⁵ See "The Use of Knowledge in Society" by F. A. Hayek. *The Freeman*, May, 1961.

⁶ More of an explanation of "Creative Wisdom" appears in Chapter 9.

my counsel be? *Don't take my word for it!* Scarcely any self-anointed seer or prophet wants to go that far; but, unless he will, write him off as an intellectual authoritarian, a be-like-me god.

Does this counsel, “Don’t take my word for it,” mean that others should close their minds to my word? Not necessarily. Indeed, one who would think for himself should look not only among his contemporaries but also among his predecessors, even among the ancients, for any bits of wisdom that can be garnered. Take full advantage of one’s environment, experience, and heritage, but let each thoughtfully do his own selecting, evaluating, and reasoning.

To trust this Creative Wisdom reflects an abiding faith in self and in all free men—really, a faith in the creative process. But don’t take my word for it; think that one through for yourself.

3

Accent on the Right

A student turned in his paper, “What’s Wrong with America.” After pronouncing it “excellent,” his teacher advised, “Now write another essay and show what’s right with America.”

Could it be that we of the libertarian persuasion have, like that student, spent too much time with the negative and the critical? Might it not be better to concentrate our thinking, talking, writing on what’s right with our country? This thought, at least, deserves a hard look.

Reflect on what, for the most part, we have been doing. We have clearly seen and duly deplored the striking shift toward Federal responsibility for security and welfare and prosperity, political determination and dictation of human affairs, “public” ownership and control of property, price and wage and interest and rent controls, and centralized government growing out of bounds.¹ We have been so engrossed in denouncing these things that are wrong that we have lost sight of much that is right. To verify this, try committing to paper everything you can think of that’s right and observe how short the list is!

Righteousness Loses by Default

I do not mean to suggest that what’s wrong is negligible; our society appears headed toward collapse. Nor do I mean to condemn the reporting and analysis of wrongdoing. The scholarly diagnosis of fallacies, as distinguished from diatribes and polemics, is an absolute necessity. But the direction in which we are headed may be a significant signal that the libertarian tactic itself, viewed over-all, has been wrong. Look at the result, in which we have been unwitting accomplices: It is self-evident that what’s right has no supporters among the wrongdoers; nor has right action any vocal protagonists among those of us who keep our eye on and criticize only the wrongdoing. The upshot is that right action has no voice, no announcers, no press; even worse, *the wrongdoing faces no well-known alternatives*. That which is right

¹ See my “Reflections on Coming of Age.” A copy of this monograph on request.

is buried in silence; it loses by default. How, then, can right action be expected to assert itself and, thus, prevail?

For a much more detailed outline of what's wrong, see "The Task Confronting Libertarians" by Henry Hazlitt. *The Freeman*, March, 1968. Copy on request.

Perpetual declaiming has another fault: it quickly becomes boring and tiresome; it tends to seal all ears. Would-be teachers and preachers of the libertarian philosophy reach a low point of simply crying on one another's shoulders, often misleadingly phrased as "talking to ourselves." This hopeless situation, as much as anything else, causes them to throw in the sponge, give up the ghost.

Were we to pursue the proper tactic, we would first acquaint ourselves with all the right actions we can inventory. We would next bring these to light, enshrine and ennoble and sanctify them as we do motherhood, for instance—make them politically untouchable. This is the kind of intellectual nurture that righteousness requires in order to expand and grow. Further, when we accent what is right, we put ourselves in the realm of the positive; our message becomes attractive, for it is one of hope rather than despair. This approach also strips the wrongdoing of its plausibilities and without any declamation on our part—leaves it bare, naked, and exposed.

While I am conscious of the libertarian plight brought on by our tactical errors and am aware of the dividends that would accrue were we able to accent the right, the positive, and the hopeful, I confess to a frustrating lack of ability to practice expertly that which I now commend. In the practice of what I am preaching here, I stand, as do many others, an utter neophyte. For this demands of me that I break with habits of long standing and embark on a wholly new and unpracticed approach. Bluntly, I have been so overwhelmed by the wrongdoing that I am hardly conscious of those actions that are right, nor am I capable of itemizing them without resorting to a difficult concentration. Any libertarian who questions the sincerity of this confession should give himself the test.

The Exceptions Make News

Yet, there is one obvious fact from which we may draw comfort and help: *What's right with America exceeds what is wrong!* Were this not true, the wrongdoing would have taken over completely by now. And it has not!

Why, then, is the wrongdoing so glaringly evident and right action so hidden from view? The answer to this is simple: The wrongdoing is exceptional and makes news; hardly anything else do we read about in the press and listen to over radio and TV. Doing right, on the other hand, is so commonplace that it never “makes the papers.” Actually, we couldn’t manufacture enough newsprint to report all the kindly acts, the honest transactions, the intelligent thoughts and observations. Right actions are taken for granted and no more impinge upon our consciousness than does the air we regularly breathe or the rhythmic beat of our hearts.

The wrong is seen; the right is not. So, let us try to become aware of the commonplace, that we may focus on what is right until we are better able to emphasize and enshrine it.

Consider, for instance, what it would be like to sponsor a FEE Seminar in Russia, or in any of the Iron Curtain countries, or in China, or even in Spain. You would be confronted by men with weapons.

In America, regardless of ominous signs, we are still free to speak and write our thoughts and to assemble, even though our views may be diametrically opposed to those of the presiding political establishment. Liberty can never be counted out where and when freedom of speech, of press, of assembly prevail. Why not take note of these blessings, praise them to the skies, and make them sacrosanct? While they stand, authoritarianism cannot overcome us!²

Despite the infringements upon religious freedom cast by programs such as social security and mass medication, freedom of worship is largely intact in the United States.³ This falls in the category of that which is right and stands in important opposition to the total state. Glorify religious freedom!

² A critic of this conclusion is correct in claiming that freedom cannot exist in the absence of private ownership, but he may not be right when he insists that private ownership can be abolished in the presence of free speech, press, assembly. Yes, it can be greatly impaired, as we are now witnessing; but, ultimately, the institution of private ownership must stand among a free people unless, of course, they degenerate to the point where they no longer prize the right to the fruits of their own labor. In this unhappy event, there isn’t anything remaining to argue about. *The idea of liberty must grow weak in the hearts of men before it can be killed at the hands of tyrants.*

³ For instance, a religious feature of the Latter Day Saints, of the Amish, and others is looking after their own. Compulsory social security is a denial of this. Fluoridation of the

A Powerful Constructive Force

Every time you make a phone call, this is a willing exchange and reflects a gain on the part of both you and the telephone company. Consider the grocer, the dairyman, the candlestick maker, and the countless others with whom you daily deal. Billions of these exchanges, free of coercion, take place every day. In their incredible sum total, they constitute a constructive force out of all proportion to the destructive, coercive forces. Adequately demonstrate the virtues of these right actions and you automatically curb the wrong ones.

Suppose, for example, that we had been extolling the economic, educational, political, and recreational advantages of travel to countries around the globe to the point of general appreciation and acceptance. The Washington hierarchy would no more dare suggest a restriction on foreign travel than it would dare to deny travel between the fifty states. We may be late in our enshrinement of this item among the things that are right; but if we are late, this further illustrates the value of accenting the positive.⁴

Aside from the restrictions imposed by minimum wage laws, licensing, trade union compulsions, and the like, there remain literally millions of willing exchanges between the sellers and buyers of personal services, transactions in which the market is unfettered. Let us take cognizance of these and show the benefits they confer on all parties concerned. By so doing, the legally rigged, coercively restricted transactions will be exposed for what they really are: impediments to the long-range interests of everyone.

It is true that we are people-controlled to a marked extent in the name of rent and price controls, farm price supports, and other political interventions.⁵ But, for the most part, producers and consumers are still free to engage in open competition, guided by the unerring signals of ever-changing market prices. It takes an enormous amount of observation and learning to uphold open competition

water supply is mass medication which contradicts the tenets of Christian Science. Freedom to worship as one chooses has been chipped away to some extent.

⁴ My associate, Dr. Paul Poirot, on reading this manuscript, volunteered to “accent the positive” as related to travel. See “Progress Through Travel,” *The Freeman*, April, 1968. My attempt appears as Chapter 10. But, more important, try your own hand at this.

⁵ See “Price Control Is People Control” by Dean Russell. *The Freeman*, October, 1961.

interestingly and attractively. But it is an important part of the tactic of accenting right action.

Angels and Whipping Boys

Perhaps these few examples may suffice to suggest that right action exceeds the wrongdoing in America. No mention has been made of the little personal charities, thoughtful deeds, kindly sentiments, helping hands, fair dealings, integrity, initiative, acceptance of responsibility, piety, love, wisdom—angels, Emerson called them—that manifest themselves in nearly every American to some extent. So, let us not only take note of these exemplary attributes but put them on parade, extol and pay tribute to them, that is, exalt them.

Do we run a risk in shifting from the declamation of wrongdoing to the enshrinement of rightdoing? Will we, perhaps, leave the wrongdoers without opposition? Would they not then be free to run rampant, even more so than now?

First, we should know that there is a better tactic than declaiming, grumbling, growling, name-calling.

Second, upholding right actions is a form of presentation that leaves wrongdoers nothing to scratch against; its practitioners remove themselves as “whipping boys” who serve to distract attention from the wrongdoers and their deeds.⁶ When we accent right-doing, we move into a realm beyond the range of wrongdoers. Darkness cannot penetrate light; it is the other way around. Increasing the candlepower is what counts!

Finally, there is the prospect that as one learns to put his emphasis on right actions, he simultaneously withdraws any support he may have been giving, however unwittingly, to the wrongdoing.

⁶ Supply your own names; the “whipping boys” are legion, the ones who indulge in extravagant, unverifiable claims, name-calling, and so on; in short, the opponents of socialism who say things the socialists can legitimately point to as absurd. The public eye is thus fixed on these absurdities and thereby distracted from the absurdities of the socialists. But the brash opponents serve the socialists in yet another way: *all* opponents, because they are associated as opponents, are made to look absurd.

I insist that the individual himself is upgraded to the extent he succeeds in understanding, accenting, and living by what is right. And if this isn't worth the candle, pray tell, what is!

4

Find the Wrong, and There's the Right

As in most disagreements, the current politico-economic controversy revolves around what's right. And contrary to what a socialist or a libertarian usually thinks of his opponents, each is as convinced of his righteousness as the other. A consciously malevolent person is seldom found.

That this contest as to what's right in social relationships will ever be resolved is doubtful; for what's right is to be found only in what's true, and who among us is qualified to settle on that? As do most others, I have numerous views which I believe to be right and not even debatable. But to list or classify them? Far easier, I think, to define right actions as those which are not demonstrably wrong. For it is possible to bring within our purview and make some reasonable assessment of the wrong; what's right is so vast that it hardly lends itself to any such analysis.

Those actions which are wrong in social relationships are the ones we should aim to prohibit by personal endeavor, by education and, as a last resort, by society's formal agency of organized force: government. Thus, to analyze what should be prohibited is a means of opening to our vision the infinite realm of righteousness.

As an introductory thought, reflect on how misled we so often are when judging people by first appearances! To dramatize the fact that what first meets the eye is often deceiving, imagine identical twins. They do indeed look alike, but how they can differ in other respects! One brother can be an out-and-out collectivist, statist, mercantilist, interventionist; the other an ardent believer in individual rights, free market practices, and private ownership of property. For reasons difficult to explain, one has a socialistic orientation while the other has a libertarian devotion.

But even these opposed designations—socialist and libertarian—do not accurately or revealingly stake out the significant differences between these two men. Such labels may have considerable emotional impact, but they do not precisely distinguish the conflicting philosophies. What really, in the ideological sense, marks the one from the other? Is there some one characteristic that can be identified and evaluated? Yes, I believe there is, and this brings me to my point: *The difference between the socialist and the libertarian thinker is a difference of opinion as to what others should be prohibited from doing.*

Let's use this claim as a working hypothesis, think it through, and test its validity. If the claim proves irrefutable, then we have come upon a fairly simple method of evaluating our own or anyone else's authoritarianism or, conversely, libertarianism.¹ Further we shall, by identifying what should be prohibited, discover what's wrong and, thus, expand our awareness of what's right. But first, some reflections on prohibitions in general.

Rules for Survival

How many animal species have come and gone no one knows. Many thousands survive and the fact of their survival, whether guided by instincts or drives or conscious choices, rests, in no small measure, on the avoidance of specie-destructive actions. Thus, all surviving species have, at the very minimum, abided by a set of prohibitions—things not to do; otherwise, they would have been extinct ere this.

Certain types of scorpions, for example, stick to dry land; puddles and pools are among their instinctual taboos. There is some prohibitory force that keeps fish off dry land, lambs from chasing lions, and so on and on. How insects and animals acquire their built-in prohibitions is not well understood. We label their reactions instinctual, meaning that it is not reasoned or conscious behavior.

Man, on the other hand, does not now possess a like set of instinctual don'ts: built-in prohibitions. Instead, he must enjoy or suffer the consequences of his own free will, his own power to choose between what's right and what's wrong; in a word, man is more or less at the mercy of his own imperfect understanding and conscious decisions. The upshot of this is that human beings must choose the prohibitions they will observe, and the selection of a wrong one may be as disastrous to our species as omitting a right one. Survival of the human species rests as much on observing the correct prohibitions as is the case with any other species.

¹ Some will make the point that the authoritarian employs compulsions as well as prohibitions. My thesis is that all compulsions can be reduced to prohibitions, thus making it easier to assess authoritarianism. For instance, we say that a Russian is compelled to work in the sputnik factory. But it is more accurate to say that he is prohibited from any other employment; he builds sputniks or starves, and freely decides between the restricted choices left to him. So-called compulsions by government are, in fact, prohibitions of freedom to choose.

But in our case, the *observance* of the correct must-nots has survival value only if preceded by a correct, conscious *selection* of the must-nots. When the survival of the human race is at stake and when that survival rests on the selection of prohibitions by variable, imperfect members of that race, the wonder is that the ideological controversy is not greater than now.

When *Homo sapiens* first appeared he had little language, no literature, no maxims, no tradition or history to which he could make reference; in short, he possessed no precise and accurate list of things not to do. We cannot explain the survival of these early specimens of our kind unless we assume that some of the instinctual prohibitions of their animal cousins remained with them during the transition period from instinct to some measure of self-knowledge for, throughout many millennia, we know nothing of man-formalized prohibitions. Then appeared the crude taboos observed by what we now call “primitive peoples.” These have survival value in certain conditions, even though the reasons given for the practice might not hold water.

Enforcing the Rules

If prohibitions are as important as here represented, it is well that we reflect not only on the man-contrived thou-shalt-nots but particularly on the several *types* of persuasion to make them effective. For it is self-evident that there can be no thou-shalt-not worth the mention unless it is backed by some form of persuasion. So far as this exploration is concerned, there are three forms of persuasion which make prohibitions effective or meaningful. I shall touch on the three in the order of their historical appearance.

The Code of Hammurabi, 2000 B.C., is probably the earliest of systematized prohibitions. This is considered one of the greatest of the ancient codes; it was particularly strong in its prohibitions against defrauding the helpless. To secure observance, the persuasiveness took the form of organized police force. The *Columbia Encyclopedia* refers to the retributive nature of the punishment meted out as a “savage feature . . . an eye for an eye literally.” Not only is this the oldest of the three forms of persuasion as a means of effectuating prohibitions, but it is today very popular and much employed all over the “civilized” world, in the U.S.A. as elsewhere.

The next and higher form of persuasion appeared about a millennium later—the form employed to effectuate the thou-shalt-nots known as The Decalogue. Here the persuasiveness was not organized police force but, instead, the promise of retribution: initially, the hope of tribal survival if the commands were obeyed and the fear of tribal extinction were they disobeyed and, later, the hope of heavenly bliss or the fear of hell and damnation. It may be said that The Decalogue was backed by moral rather than political law, that is, the persuasion advanced from a physical to a spiritual force. We witness in this evolutionary step the early emergence of mans moral nature.

The latest and highest form of persuasion is that which gives effectiveness to the most advanced prohibition, the Golden Rule. As originally scribed, around 500 B.C., it reads: “Do not do unto others that which you would not have them do unto you.” What persuasiveness lies behind this prohibition? Not physical force! And not even such spiritual force as hope and fear! This latest force is *a sense of justice*, perhaps the inmost law of one’s being. That this is a recently acquired human faculty is supported by its rarity. Ever so many people will concede the soundness of the Golden Rule, but only now and then is an individual to be found whose moral nature is elevated to the point where he can observe this do-not in daily living. The person who achieves mastery of this discipline moves beyond a satisfaction with external rewards and punishments to the profound conviction that virtue and excellence are their own reward. Doing what’s right counts above all else.

The Emerging Moral Faculty

It is relevant to that which follows to reflect on what is meant by an elevated moral nature. To illustrate the lack of such a nature: We had a kitchen employee who pilfered, that is, she would quietly lift provisions from our larder and tote them to her own larder. This practice did no offense to such moral scruples as she possessed; she was only concerned lest anyone see her indulge in toting; nothing was wrong except getting caught! My point is that this individual had not yet acquired what is here meant by an elevated moral nature.

What distinguishes the individual who has an elevated moral nature? For one thing, he cares not one whit about what others see him do. Why? He has a private eye of his own, far more exacting and severe than any force or fear others can impose: a highly developed conscience. Not only does such a person possess a sense

of justice but he also possesses its counterpart, a disciplinary conscience. Justice and conscience are two parts of the same emerging moral faculty. It is doubtful that one can exist without the other.

It seems that individual man, having lost many of the built-in instinctual do-nots of his animal cousins, acquires, as he evolves far enough, a built-in rational, prohibitory ethic which he is compelled to observe by reason of his sense of justice and the dictates of conscience. I repeat, proper prohibitions are just as important to the survival of the human species as to the survival of any other species.

Do not do unto others that which you would not have them do unto you. There is more to this prohibition than first glance reveals. Nearly everyone, for instance, will concede that there is no universal right to kill, to steal, or to enslave—because these practices cannot be universalized, if for no higher reason. But only the person who comprehends this ethic—the Golden Rule—in its wholeness, who has an elevated sense of justice and conscience, will conclude that such a concession denies to him the right to take the life of another, to relieve any person of his livelihood, or to deprive any human being of his liberty. Without an elevated moral nature, hell miss the point. And, one more distinction: While there are many who will agree that they, personally, should not kill, steal, enslave, it is only the individual with a first-rate moral nature who will have no hand in encouraging any agency—even government—in doing these things for him or others. Anyone who gets the whole point of the Golden Rule sees that there is no escape from individual responsibility by resort to the popular expedient of collective action.

Where Will Each Stand?

Let us now return to the question this chapter poses: “What shall be construed as wrong and, thus, prohibited?” For, I repeat, it is the difference of opinion as to what should be denied others that highlights the essential difference between the collectivists—socialists, statists, interventionists, mercantilists—and those of the libertarian faith. Take stock of what you would prohibit others from doing and you will accurately find your own position in the ideological line-up. Or, this method can be used to determine anyone else’s position.

Consider the following statement:

Government has a positive responsibility in any just society to see to it that each and every one of its citizens acquires all the skills and the opportunities necessary to practice and appreciate the arts to the limit of his natural ability. Enjoyment of the arts and participation in them are among man's natural rights and essential to his full development as a civilized person. One of the reasons governments are instituted among men is to make this right a reality.²

It is significant that the author uses the term “its citizens,” the antecedent of “its” being government. Such a conception is basic to the collectivist philosophy: We—you and I—*belong* to the state. We are “*its*” wards! Of course, if one accepts this statist premise, the above position is sensible enough: it has to do with a detail in the state’s paternalistic concern for its charges.

Inhibited Choices

But we are, in this chapter, on another tack, namely, examining what a person would prohibit others from doing. The writer of the above statement does not imply, at least to anyone who cannot read below the surface, any prohibitions. He dwells only on what he would have the state do *for* the people. Where, then, are the prohibitions? The program he favors would cost X hundred million dollars annually. From where come these millions? The state has nothing except that which it takes from the people. Therefore, this man favors that we be prohibited from using the fruits of our own labor as we choose in order that these fruits be expended as the state chooses. And take note of the fact that this and all other socialist-designed prohibitions have police force as the method of persuasion.³

One phase of socialism is the state ownership and/or control of the *results* of production. Our incomes are the results of production. That portion of our incomes is socialized which the state turns to its use by its prohibition of our use.

² See *The Commonweal*, August 23, 1963, p. 494.

³ If anyone doubts that the U.S. brand of police force is not an eye for an eye, see the chapter, “Violence As a Way of Life” in *Anything That’s Peaceful* (Irvington-on-Hudson, N. Y.: The Foundation for Economic Education, Inc., 1964).

It follows, then, that a person would impose prohibitions on the rest of us to the extent that he supports governmental projects which would socialize our income.

Areas of Control

Only a few, as yet, favor the socialization of the arts and the consequent socialization of our incomes for that “far-out” purpose, but there are ever so many who favor prohibiting our freedom of choice in order to:

Pay farmers for not growing peanuts, tobacco, and other crops;

Support socialist governments all over the world;

Put men on the moon;

Subsidize below-cost pricing in air, water, and land transportation, education, insurance, loans of countless kinds;

Socialize security;

“Renew” downtowns that consumers have deserted, build hospitals and other local facilities;

Give Federal aid of this or that variety, endlessly.

We have not, however, exhausted the prohibitions that the socialists are imposing on us. For another phase of socialism is the state ownership and/or control of the *means* of production. Included among the existing prohibitions of this type are:

The planting of *all* of a farmer’s own acreage to wheat, cotton, peanuts, corn, tobacco, rice—even to feed his own stock;

The quitting of a business at will;

The taking of a job at will;

The selling of a citizen’s own product at his own price, for instance, milk, steel, and others;

The free pricing of services (wages);

The delivery of first-class mail for pay;

Again, the listing of prohibitions is endless. Harold Fleming, author of *Ten Thousand Commandments* (1951), having to do with prohibitions of just one

Federal agency, The Federal Trade Commission, is presently bringing his book up-to-date, entitling it, *Twenty Thousand Commandments*.

Those who favor the socialization of the means of production would, of course, frown on the profit motive and prohibit profit.

Which of all the prohibitions listed above and implicit in socialism do you or others favor? This is the appropriate question for rating oneself or others ideologically.

Those among us with a libertarian devotion would, it is true, impose certain prohibitions on others. They quite accurately note that not all individuals have acquired a moral nature sufficient strictly to observe such fundamentally sound taboos as “Thou shalt not kill” and “Thou shalt not steal.” There are those who will take the lives of others, and those who will take the livelihood of others, such as those who will pilfer and those who will get the government to do their pilfering for them. Most libertarian believers would supplement the moral laws with social laws aimed at prohibiting any citizen from doing violence to another’s person (life) or another’s livelihood (extension of life).⁴ Thus, they would prohibit or at least penalize murder, theft, fraud, misrepresentation. In short, they would inhibit or prohibit the *destructive* actions of any and all, *and that is all!* Asserts the libertarian, “Freely choose how you act creatively, productively, for this is in the realm of what’s right. I have no desire to prohibit you or others in this respect. I have no prohibitory designs on you of any kind except as you or others would keep me and others from acting creatively, productively ourselves, that is, *as we freely choose*. I do not classify any creative action as a wrong action.”

Observe that the libertarian in his hoped-for prohibition of destructive actions does no violence to anyone else’s liberty, none whatsoever. The word liberty is a social term; it would never be used by an individual completely isolated from others. We must not, therefore, think of liberty as being restrained when fraud, violence, and the like are prohibited, for these destructive actions violate the liberty of others and, therefore, they are not in the composition of liberty. Destructive actions are the negations of liberty; it is self-evident that liberty cannot be made

⁴ How prohibited? Unfortunately, by organized police force or the threat thereof, the only form of persuasion comprehensible to those lacking a developed sense of morality and justice. Be it noted, however, that this is exclusively a *defensive force*, called into play only as a secondary action, that is, it is inactive except in the instances of initiated, *aggressive force*.

up of its negations. An accomplished libertarian would never prohibit the liberty of another.

There we have it: the all-out collectivists at one end of the ideological spectrum who would completely prohibit individual liberty and, at the other end of the spectrum, the libertarians whose prohibitions are not opposed to but are in support of individual liberty. And their prohibitions are few and as simple as the two Commandments against assaults on life and livelihood.

There Is Something Better

Finally, libertarians, as the socialists, do not believe the human situation to be in apple-pie order; imperfection is rampant. The libertarian, however, observing that human frailties are universal, balks at halting the evolutionary process which is the ultimate prohibition implicit in authoritarian schemes. Be the political dandy a Napoleon or Tito or one of the home-grown variety of prohibitionist, how can the human situation improve if the rest of us are prohibited from growing beyond the level of the prohibitionist's imperfections? Is nothing better in store for us than this?

The libertarian's answer is affirmative: There *is* something better! But the improvement must take the form of man's growth, emergence, hatching—the acquisition of higher faculties such as an improved sense of justice, a refined, exacting, self-disciplinary conscience; in brief, an elevated moral nature. Man-concocted prohibitions against this growth stifle or kill it. Human faculties can flower, man can move toward his creative destiny, only if he be free to do so; in a word, where liberty prevails.

What should be prohibited? *Actions which impair liberty!* Let us find these and be rid of them, for they are wrong. As this is done, the infinite realm of righteousness will hove into view.

5

Right and Wrong, Side by Side

The right and the wrong, progress and regress, occurring simultaneously!

A modern Dickens might well describe ours as “the best of times . . . the worst of times.” Our standard of living soars as opportunities for employment multiply in pace with the quantity and quality of goods and services available. Yet, at the same time, we experience on an unprecedented scale the reckless waste of work stoppages, political controls, and other restraints upon freedom.

This is the great anomaly, so pronounced on both counts and so hand-in-hand that many persons believe the wrong actions are really causing the creative outburst! This is perfectly illustrated when, on hearing a criticism of the growing governmental interventionism, many Americans reply, “We’ve never had it so good.” Such mistaken correlation will persist unless we understand and explain why wrong actions cannot bring about economic well-being.

The paradox of increasing prosperity with more extensive interventions is not new. In *The History of England* (1839) Lord Macaulay observed, “It has often been found that profuse expenditure, heavy taxation, absurd commercial restrictions, corrupt tribunals, disastrous wars, seditions, persecutions, conflagrations, inundations, have not been able to destroy capital so fast as the exertions of private citizens have been able to create it.”¹

Brazilian entrepreneurs have another way of explaining their simultaneous progress and regress: “We get things done while the politicians sleep.”

If the notion that wrong measures cause the right results, that regress brings about progress, becomes a firm and general conviction, then, assuredly, the regressive forces will overtake, consume, and eventually destroy the progressive forces. For example, should we become convinced that a minimum wage law is a means of raising wages and then base all facets of the economy on similar illusions,

¹ See Chapter III in Macaulay’s *The History of England* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1934), p. 217.

the American miracle will have ended. So, it is of the utmost importance that we dissect this anomaly and divest it of its mystery.

The explanation is quite simple: *exchange has been multiplying more rapidly than restraints on exchange*. Consistent with this answer is the fact that authoritarianism, so far, has lagged behind the release of creative energy; bureaucratic dictation has failed to keep pace with entrepreneurial ingenuity; capital has been formed faster than destroyed; citizens in pursuing their own interests have accomplished much while the political gods have been sleeping.

Changing Forms of Wealth

A systematic understanding of the importance of specialization and trade (exchange) is of recent origin.

Prior to the time of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* less than 200 years ago, wealth was concentrated in few hands and was reckoned mostly in inventories: precious metals, jewels, slaves, acres of land, size of manor or castle, and so on.

Then, with the advent of specialization which Adam Smith understood and explained so admirably, a new concept of wealth came into being. Instead of idle inventories possessed by feudal dukes and lords of the manor, wealth in the form of useful goods and services spread to the masses whose skills were needed to activate and operate the tools of industry. So marked has been this change that today's American laborer is wealthier in the variety of things he enjoys than the legendary Midas, Croesus, or any medieval king.

However, a shift from a near self-subsistence economy—foraging and the like—to a specialized economy presupposes not only the accumulation of savings and capital but also freedom to exchange.

Were a people to specialize and not exchange, there would be no wealth; indeed, all would perish. As the absence of exchange results in poverty, so does the proliferation of willing exchanges result in increased wealth.

That wealth increases through the process of willing exchange is understandable once we apprehend the subjective nature of gain.² To illustrate: I produce shoes;

² For a more detailed explanation of the subjective theory of value see "Freedom's Theory of Value." *The Freeman*, October, 1967.

you produce sweaters. If I cannot sell my shoes, and if you cannot sell your sweaters, is it likely that either of us would keep on producing these things? So, without exchange, there would be no further increase in wealth. But, should we willingly exchange, each gains. I value the sweater more than the shoes, and you value the shoes more than the sweater—two increases in value—as each of us judges value. Were this not the case, there would be no willing exchange between us, no increase in wealth, no further production. Clearly, willing exchange—right action—is the key to increased wealth and increased production.

Willing exchanges are incalculably more numerous now than in the days of Adam Smith, even than in the days of my grandparents. This is apparent to any observant person. But what most of us overlook is the enormous proliferation of exchanges during the past three or four decades; the increase takes on the nature of an explosion. Try to reckon the number of exchanges you engage in daily; they are so numerous that you are scarcely conscious of them. This is our economic progress.

During this period of exploding exchanges, we have also witnessed governmental intervention in the market, restrictions on willing exchange—wrong action—literally by the thousands. This is our regress.

But the regress has not—to date, anyway—kept pace with the progress. In this fact lies the explanation of the great anomaly.

For Reasons Unknown

It is doubtful if anyone can more than casually account for the explosion in exchanges. Quickened transportation and communication—some of it at the speed of lightning—assuredly plays an important role. Inventiveness, resulting in fantastic technological breakthroughs, must be included. Perhaps questionable motivations have had a hand in the phenomenon; for instance, a raging passion for material affluence, as if this were the highest object of life. While too complex to pursue, some of the restraints—obstacles—have doubtless generated the ingenuity to hurdle them and, thus, have accounted partially for the progress. Necessity is, on occasion, the mother of invention. However, my purpose here is only to set forth a fact; I haven't the effrontery to attempt a complete explanation for the exchange explosion.

Nor am I bold enough to posit all that lies at the root of our regress. Why does authoritarianism grow? Why do so many wish to lord it over the rest of us, that is,

why do they behave as gods, not as men? We may never know; we can only reflect as has Lionel Trilling: "We must beware of the dangers that lie in our most generous wishes. Some paradox of our nature leads us, when once we have made our fellow men the objects of our enlightened interest, to go on to make them the objects of our pity, then of our wisdom, ultimately of our coercion."³

But of one thing I feel reasonably certain: We should bring sharply into question the absurd notion that the wrong actions are the cause of our progress. Failure to do this may soon result in the end of progress. There are signs of this! At the very least, let us be aware that such progress as we have achieved is in spite of and not because of the regress.

The chief obligation is to identify the wrong that the right may be known, practiced, and accented.

³ Quoted in *The American Scholar*, Autumn, 1965.

6

Count Your Blessings

To count one's blessings is to accent what's right. But this might rarely be recognized as an item in the infinite realm of righteousness were we unaware of "Thou shalt not covet" as a wrong. This helps to illustrate the subject of a previous chapter, "Find the wrong and there's the right."

While many people deplore covetousness, few will compare it to murder, theft, adultery as an evil. Nor will they think of it as having any bearing on our current politico-economic problems. This wrong assessment may be due to the fact that "Thou shalt not covet" brings up the rear of the Mosaic thou-shalt-nots.

I suspect that the ordering of the Commandments had nothing to do with a sin-grading scheme. Only one of the ten had obvious priority and it became the First Commandment. The other nine were listed, perhaps, as they came to mind. And covetousness, more subtle and an afterthought, concludes the list. But on reflection, covetousness is as deadly as any of the other sins—indeed, it tends to induce the others.

Covetousness or envy generates a destructive radiation with ill effect on all it touches.

Psychosomatic illnesses can be traced as much to envy as to hate, anger, worry, despondency.

But consider the social implications, the effects of envy on others. At first blush, the rich man appears not to be harmed because another covets his wealth. Envy, however, is not a benign, dormant element of the psyche; it has the same intensive force as rage, and a great deal of wisdom is required to put it down. Where understanding and self-control are wholly lacking, the weakling will resort to thievery, embezzlement, piracy, even murder, to gratify his envy and "get his share."

Hiding Behind a Majority

Though weakness of character afflicts all of us to some extent, only a few are so lacking in restraining forces as to personally employ naked force, such as thievery, to realize the objects of envy. Fear of apprehension and reprisal tends to hold such open-faced evil in check.

However, if the evil act can be screened, if the sense of personal guilt and responsibility can be sufficiently submerged, that is, if self-delusion can be effected, gratification of covetousness will be pursued by the “best people.”

The way is an open secret: achieve anonymity in a mob, committee, organization, society, or hide behind legality or majority vote.

With the fear of exposure removed, millions of Americans feather their own nests at the expense of others, and on a scale never imagined by thieves, pirates, or embezzlers. Our “best people,” including the highly “educated,” gratify their envy with no qualms whatsoever. But their salved conscience in no way lessens the evil of covetousness; quite the contrary, it emphasizes to us how powerfully this evil operates at the politico-economic level. This subtle evil is indeed the genesis of more obvious sins.

We should also note the extent to which this “guiltless” taking of property by coercion is rationalized. Accomplices, bearing such titles as philosophers and economists, rise to the occasion; they explain how the popular depredations are good for everyone, even for those looted. Thus, we find that covetousness, unchecked in the individual, lies at the root of the decline and fall of nations and civilizations.

In considering the effect on the one who covets, we must be careful not to confuse the taking of another’s property with the taking unto oneself of a higher level of intelligence and morality exemplified by another. The former is depredation, harmful to both self and the other; the latter is emulation, helpful to all concerned.

As contrasted with the emulation of virtues, which takes nothing from but adds to the welfare of others, envy is nothing more than an avaricious greed to possess what exclusively belongs to others. Envy is a lust of the flesh as opposed to an elevation of the spirit. The Hindus saw it clearly for what it really is: “Sin is not the violation of a law or a convention but . . . ignorance . . . which seeks its own private

gain at the expense of others. . . .”¹ William Penn grasped the point: “Covetousness is the greatest of Monsters, as well as the root of all Evil.”

A Diverting Process

As a person cannot be in two places at the same time, so is it impossible for the eye to be cast covetously at the material possessions of others and cast aspiringly at one’s own creativity. Thus, envy leaves unattended the human being’s upgrading; it is a positive distraction from the “hatching” process—Creation’s Purpose. It’s either hatch or rot, as with an egg; envy leaves the soul, the spirit, the intellect, the psyche to rot, and there can be no greater evil than this.

When it is clear that covetousness thwarts Creation’s purpose and, thus, man’s destiny—that among the cardinal sins none is greater—it surely behooves each of us to find a way to rid himself of this evil.

I believe the way is simple to proclaim: *Count your blessings!*

Any person who is not aware of countless blessings, regardless of how low or high his estate, will be no more aware of his blessings should his envy be gratified. Awareness of blessings is a state of consciousness and is not necessarily related to abundance and affluence. He who is rich in worldly goods but unaware of his blessings is poor, and probably covetous; he who is poor in worldly goods but aware of his blessings is rich, and assuredly without envy.

How easy the advice: Count your blessings! But what about the person unaware of his blessings? As well advise him to acquire wisdom, for wisdom is awareness. Some individuals are aware of no blessings, others of a few, still others of numerous blessings. Yet, no one is more than slightly aware, just as no one is more than slightly wise.

Exactly how unaware we are of our blessings can be seen by committing them to paper—actually counting. While they are in infinite supply, observe how few are recognized. Now, throw the list away; for these must be alive each and every day in the consciousness, not stored on paper, not mechanically canned.

¹ From *The Bhagavadgita* (Translation by S. Radhakrishnan, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1948), p. 224.

Try again, later: this is an exercise that one should never abandon. The list is longer? Note, also, how much greater the wisdom is. Conscious effort, really trying, constantly pressing against the unknown for more light is the nature of this discipline.

As progress is made in an awareness of our blessings, we are struck by how greatly they outnumber our woes and troubles. In a state of unawareness, the woes loom enormous, and we tend to covetousness; in awareness the woes are but trifles, and the covetousness fades away.

What a remarkable cure for covetousness! While the cure rids us of our woes, it also puts us on the road to social felicity; and a further dividend is wisdom.

7

To Each His Own

Thou shalt not steal! To know that stealing is wrong again implies knowledge of an alternative that is right: in this case, *to each his own*, usually referred to as private ownership. The ancient taboo against stealing presupposes that an individual has a right to the fruits of his own labor.

Recognizing as evil the taking of that which belongs to another certainly antedated The Decalogue by many centuries. Indeed, to each his own preceded human reason for it is revealed as an instinctual trait; numerous animals defend the territories they have staked out for themselves.¹

So far as I know, the first recorded taboo against defrauding—stealing—appeared in the Code of Hammurabi. But, for certain, thievery was frowned upon and steps taken to discourage theft long before man was able to write codes. Why the certainty? There is every reason to believe that the observance of this taboo, this respect for the principle of private ownership, marked the dawn of civilization. Whether this thou-shalt-not is honored or breached primarily determines the rise or fall of civilization. This requires some explanation.

True, “thou shalt not covet” is even more basic than “thou shalt not steal”; if no one coveted the possessions of another, there would be no thievery. But the cure of covetousness—counting one’s blessings—requires a state of awareness rarely achieved unto this day; it is not to be found in primitive man; when such awareness exists, man is not primitive! So we cannot attribute the emergence of civilizations to man’s overcoming his covetousness; this is an achievement of man after he is civilized, that is, after he has attained a sense of justice, a moral nature.

Private Ownership a Must

To refrain from stealing is the genesis of civilizations! Only two points need to be understood and accepted for this assertion to ring true. First, civilizations rise and

¹ See *The Territorial Imperative* by Robert Ardrey (New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1966).

fall with the rise and fall of individual freedom. Second, individual freedom rises and falls to the degree that private ownership—the absence of stealing—is respected and adhered to. Individual freedom is out of the question wherever and whenever private ownership does not prevail!

As to the first point, such evidence as we possess supports the conclusion that creative outbursts—the mark of civilization—bear a direct correlation with increase in individual freedom. The Golden Ages of Sumer, Egypt, Carthage, Athens, Rome, Kiev, Venice, Amsterdam, Britain, and the U.S.A. invariably have been associated with enterprising producers, traders, travelers—activities that are nonexistent in the absence of individual freedom; I am unaware of any creative outbursts where individual freedom has been wholly suppressed. However, this point need not be argued; the record speaks for itself; let those who think contrarily present their evidence; the burden of proof is on them.

Now to the second point. The Soviets, distraught by their failure to make socialism work after a half century's effort, are cautiously resorting to a few features of capitalism: incentives, ersatz profit motives, and the like. However, as Henry Hazlitt points out, they are hopelessly lost, regardless of how many features of capitalism they imitate, unless and until the institution of private ownership is adopted.² This, of course, would mean the abandonment of their socialism.

This private ownership thesis rests, fundamentally, on a defensible assumption, namely, that one person has as much right to his life as any other. If an individual has a right to his life, it logically follows that he has an equal right to sustain his life, the sustenance of life being the fruit of one's own labor or what can be obtained for it in peaceful exchange. Conceding the foregoing, we must conclude that livelihood is but the extension of life.

Thus, to steal is to take life. Not to steal is to respect life; it is to endorse and to hold sacrosanct the institution of private ownership.

A Backward Practice

It does not necessarily follow that a civilization will be born where “thou shalt not steal” is observed, for other generative forces are required. But it is self-evident that

² See “Private Ownership: A Must!” by Henry Hazlitt. *The Freeman*, June, 1967.

no civilization could be born without the observance of this taboo. The institution of private ownership—to each his own—has spawned all civilizations!

My mind was on this subject as I waited to be checked out at a supermarket. The woman ahead of me had a dozen items. Quick as a flash, “when no one was looking,” she slipped half of her “purchases” into the shopping bag she carried. How short would be the life of that supermarket were such thievery not the exception! Were such behavior the general practice, we would quickly descend into another dark age. A resort to law would be useless; the gendarmerie also would be thieves! Are we failing to accent the close correlation between life itself and private ownership?

The Nonsense of Nonownership

Public ownership, so-called, bears no resemblance to private ownership. Indeed, public ownership is a misnomer, for ownership refers to one’s own—to own, really to control. To test your ownership of or control over TVA, for instance, try to dispose of your “stake” in it. TVA is neither mine nor thine.

The only ones who can remotely qualify as owners of TVA or the Post Office are those who control. Who are they? There is no precise answer. This explains why these business ventures, held in public title, are economic failures. It simply isn’t possible for one to have the same sense of responsibility toward an enterprise that belongs to whom nobody knows as toward one that is his, all his. Nor need we rest the case on theory. If TVA and the Post Office are not adequate demonstrations, then there is Russia. Or, back home again, we have the accounts of the Plymouth Colony, Oneida, New Harmony—some 200 communalistic utopias—all short-lived failures, and good riddance.

While the institution of private ownership has been given lip service over the centuries, by the people and governments alike, actual observance has been more of form than of substance.³ Give a people the title to the fruit of their labor and they will relinquish control of it to government with but little resistance. Few among us understand that private ownership can be universally endorsed in principle and completely obliterated in practice. Nor is it widely understood that

³ For an excellent treatise on the history of private property, see *In Defense of Property* by Gottfried Dietze (Chicago: Reg-nery & Company, 1963).

the forcible taking of income, beyond that required for the principled functions of government, has the same eroding effects on private ownership as stealing.⁴ Legalizing the compulsory transfer of control still amounts to the destruction of private ownership.

It takes no mental giant to realize that individual freedom and, thus, the flowering of civilization are possible only where private ownership prevails. Merely imagine owning absolutely nothing required for your own livelihood. Your life would be in the hands of others.

To each his own is a fundamental maxim for civilized men!

⁴ For a review of my ideas on the principled functions of government, see *Government: An Ideal Concept* (Irvington-on-Hudson, N. Y.: The Foundation for Economic Education, Inc., 1954).

8

Coping with Poverty

A lawyer from another country enrolled as a student in our FEE School of Political Economy. But, once the classroom lectures were under way, he announced that the philosophy we taught—free market, private ownership, limited government—was not for him. He frankly admitted his preference for socialism.

Since ours is not a reform school, we would normally, under these circumstances, return the tuition and bid the socialist a fond adieu—as was done with two of his fellow students. We made an exception in his case because (1) he expressed a desire to remain throughout the course; (2) he did not intrude his socialistic views into the discussions; and (3) he was of a most pleasant and gracious personality, attractive in his manners and behavior. So, he remained as an auditor.

Several weeks later, following a routine explanation of the free market in action by a FEE professor, our foreign friend interrupted his own silent curiosity by exclaiming, “*Why, you folks are for the poor people, too!*” FEE’s professor replied, “Of course we are; that has seemed so obvious to me that I hadn’t thought the fact worth mentioning; I have taken for granted that you understood it.”

What a mental block this well-intentioned socialist suffered! Like millions of Americans, he labored under the misapprehension that the philosophy of individual liberty is little more than an intellectual apology for entrenched wealth, a rationale for persons who have no concern for those below their own dollar stations. Like a few others, however, he was curious enough at least to listen and to see how much of “this free enterprise stuff” he could stomach. After all, the capitalists seem to succeed where socialists fail; there must be something to it. But become an ardent devotee? Never!

I must hasten to add that the moment our socialist friend “saw the light” he executed a complete ideological flip-flop; he became one of the best students of the freedom philosophy we have had at the FEE School. He returned to his country as a confirmed believer and an excellent exponent of free market principles. Furthermore, he has become a key figure in his native land.

Most of us who stand for liberty are as guilty, as was FEE's professor, of a tactical error. So firmly embedded in our own minds is the fact that liberty is the poor man's best ally that we mistakenly assume a like awareness on the part of everyone else. Failing to identify the free market and related institutions with kindly sentiments and noble objectives—such as a better life for the poor—we fumble the ball, so to speak, allowing the opposition to run with it—and play to the grandstand!

Progress a By-Product of Liberty

The era of free and willing exchange extends, roughly, over the past 175 years. In no other period of history have so many raised themselves out of poverty. Why, then, are those of us who champion free and willing exchange—the only antipoverty device in man's possession—so seldom credited with relieving the poor man of his burden? Quite frankly, it is because such relief is not the major end we have in view. *Freedom and wide open opportunity for all is the prime objective.* But—and this is the point—the fastest possible elimination of poverty is one of the inescapable byproducts of this liberty; it is one of the admirable effects that flow from the successful pursuit of a higher cause. And this effect cannot be achieved in any other way.

Unfortunately, when we keep an eye on freedom as our prime objective, we tend to omit any mention of relief from poverty as its by-product. Our failure to correlate the by-product with the prime objective may be a serious oversight on our part. The authoritarians grapple on to it and assume the role of the poor man's champion, all because we have failed to identify the politically attractive by-product of freedom with freedom itself. Fortunately, the finger of blame can be pointed at our own carelessness. Why fortunately? Because any calamity we can trace to our own shortcomings will respond to our own remedies.

Sharing Poverty Is No Cure

Little attention need be given here to the empty promises of political authoritarians. It is as much of a delusion to expect that government can end poverty as to expect that the local policeman can make us rich. Government has nothing at all on hand to dispense except what it has garnisheed from taxpayers—what it forcibly subtracts from private ownership. This, obviously, is a dead-end road: savings are drained from those who have, and consumed by those who have not—the

opposite of capital formation on which productivity rests and on which relief from poverty depends. It is all political give-away—redistribution—with absolutely nothing formative, productive, or creative about it.

Admittedly, there are those of the authoritarian school—many government officials, teachers, labor officials, even businessmen—who sincerely, if faultily, believe that inflation (increasing money volume by such schemes as monetizing debt) is a sure-fire way to relieve poverty and increase prosperity. They ‘reason’: Give these fictitious dollars to consumers of low purchasing power and transform them into consumers of high purchasing power, making for more business and, of course, more jobs. These jobs will then create more purchasing power, assuring still more business, and so on, round and round. Perpetual motion for the economy! The flaw in this economic alchemy is that inflation is itself a tax on all existing capital and fixed assets; it has only the power to deplete; it has no accrual force, whatsoever. Inflation is a cruel, unfair, and deceptive tax. One need not be an economic theorist to get at the truth; he need only look at inflation’s enormous record of destruction. Never in history has it wreaked other than widespread impoverishment, the poor being less able than others to endure it.

But regardless of how faulty their theories, the political authoritarians proclaim themselves the champions of the poor. They have fastened onto the poverty banner, and placed themselves in the vanguard of “the down-trodden.” They have gained a considerable following because (1) many people wish to believe in these easy promises and (2) the champions of freedom, failing to make their own case, have unwittingly tossed the baton to the authoritarians.

For an example of a country in which the principles of the free market and private ownership have been most widely practiced, with government limited to keeping the peace, most persons today would look to the United States. And they would be likely to concur with the popular view that free market practices generally favor those of affluence and generally neglect the interests of the poor. But this notion—as widely held by the affluent as by the poor—is wholly superficial, and false.

When champions of the free market recognize and correct this erroneous concept, they will have found the key to explain how freedom best serves the interests of all—especially the poor. Not until that is done may the poor be expected to look to liberty for their material well-being.

Affluence Springs from Liberty

Here is the overlooked fact: The unprecedented practice of freedom in our country has, one might say, catapulted many millions of “the masses”—including you and me—into a state of affluence previously unknown to history. Hundreds of today’s American millionaires and millions of our upper middle class, had they lived in “the old country” at or before the time of Adam Smith—less than 200 years ago—*would have had the status of serfs*. Of course, such an economy as existed at that time was unable to support a large population; thus, most of us would not have survived—not even our current millionaires. A large percentage of those born at that time perished in infancy of hunger and disease.

The reason that the free market, private ownership, limited government philosophy is popularly regarded as an apology for affluence rather than as a boon for the poor is that its practice has made possible such affluence. If we note only the accomplishment, as if it were automatically due us, we lose all sight of its genesis: liberty!

What Seek Ye First?

The alleviation of poverty is a by-product—a life-saving benefit—along man’s way toward the higher ideal of liberty. The benefit springs from no other source than liberty. If one’s ideal is no higher than the benefit, that ideal, paradoxically, will bring no benefit. A by-product does not have its origin in itself, but in something superior to it. Observe this principle at work in human relations: Another’s admiration is not obtained by seeking it; instead, admiration is a cherished by-product that grows out of one’s qualities, the giving of light, for instance.

While much of the wisdom to be found in the Bible has lost its “cutting edge,” the aforementioned principle, having countless day-to-day applications, is stated succinctly and precisely, “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.” A very earthly, economic subdivision of the principle would read, “Restore and preserve the practice of free market, private ownership, limited government principles; and one of the by-products will be as much removal of poverty as possible.”

Doubtless, we have been negligent about accenting this important dividend of liberty: *it is a boon to the poor*. However, if we set the alleviation of poverty as our highest goal we shall, by thus lowering our sights, not only spread poverty but lose our freedom—the penalty for ignoring the principle.

If FEE is distinguished for anything, it is a forthright stand for free market and related principles. Interestingly enough, several thousand of our financial supporters qualify as poor in worldly goods—each contribution a personal sacrifice. And, encouragingly, their long look is at liberty, not their poverty. From where I sit, these poor are the hard core of the coming renaissance. By accenting liberty they'll regain it for us and, as a by-product, alleviate poverty.

9

In Harmony with Creation

There is Creation: capital C! And then there is Creation's manifestation at the human level: creative activity—lower case.

Creative individual and social actions are those which harmonize with Creation's purposes. Enlightenment consists in discovering what is harmonious and guiding ourselves accordingly.

It is my thesis that the free market is a manifestation of this harmony in the workaday world; that it is an interesting, instructive, and excellent example.

But first may I hasten to forestall any false impressions the term "free market" may evoke. Like all generalizations, the term is also an oversimplification; it has fallen into a catchword status and thus conjures up such minor images as stock market, vegetable market, and other trade marts. While these are not excluded, I use "free market" in its broadest construction: the uninterrupted flow and willing exchange—free movement—not only of goods and services but of ideas, ideals, knowledge, wisdom, information, doctrinal concepts, faiths; indeed, all discoveries, inventions, intuitions, and the countless manifestations thereof. *Liberte de transactions*, as Frederic Bastiat phrased it, is boundless in its scope.

At this point, a possible misinterpretation should be guarded against. Later, two items of material affluence—an automobile and a jet plane—will be used as illustrations of creativity. In the minds of some this may assign to wealth a meaning I do not intend, namely, that wealth is an end in itself. Instead, wealth is a means to creative activity. It is a freeing agent, that is, it releases the individual from the enslavement poverty imposes. For instance, a person who is compelled to exert all of his energy in eking out an animal existence is not free to discover, let alone pursue, those potentialities which are unique to his own person. Wealth, in a moral and creative sense, is not for the purpose of escaping from life—retiring, vegetating—but rather for getting ever deeper into life along the lines of one's distinctive aptitudes. Wealth is neither an end in itself nor a means to avoid work but *a means to greater creative endeavor*.

Now to our thesis. When I posit that man can work more or less in harmony with Creation, a distinction is drawn between man and everything else to be found in the world of life: *free will, the power to choose*. Man, gifted by Creation with a measure of freedom, may steer himself out of or into a harmony with his Creator. Thus, even freedom, the feature exclusive to man which we so correctly extol, can lead to man's destruction as well as to his emergence, to disharmony as well as to harmony with Creation. Freedom can be either an enemy or an ally, depending on how ignorantly or wisely man employs his freedom to choose.

The Importance of Believing

We who favor the free market, as distinguished from authoritarian arrangements, have no way of realizing our ideal unless there be a flourishing belief in this way of life. The free market grows or shrinks as a belief in its desirability rises and falls. Its practice and the belief in its efficacy are inextricably wedded; they are forever embraced as one. Neither the Resolutions of Parliaments nor the Constitutions and Declarations of Conventions can alter the sovereignty of belief one whit.

Belief is sometimes no more than blind acceptance; this is credulity, a position that is inherited or that rests on someone else's say-so. Ever so much of the little belief that still remains in the free market is, unfortunately, of this shallow origin. Understandably, it is never to be relied on; it is fickle and wilts in the glare of contrary opinions that have gained popular acclaim.

The only meaningful, enduring, impregnable brand of belief is that which derives from some measure of understanding. Such an inner conviction is aided and abetted when we see how the free market is in league with Creation, that is, how its dynamics are consonant with creativity.

The Source of Wisdom

In harmony with Creation! This presupposes or, better yet, asserts a Source. That there is an Infinite Intelligence is my fundamental assumption. My conviction that there is Consciousness over and beyond the minds of men rests not so much on the fact that countless individuals, over the millennia, have had a similar faith, but on the fact that all of us come face to face with the evidence at every turn—even

though the evidence may pass unnoticed. In a word, this faith need not rely on metaphysics; daily observation supplies abundant proof:

First: Observe how unique is each human being on this earth. Not one is a carbon copy of another; not one views the world around him as does any other.¹

Second: Assess the aggregate knowledge, wisdom, invention, intuition, discovery required to make an automobile, for instance—or any one of a million other items.

Third: Note the infinitesimal knowledge and/or wisdom of any one person, even the wisest, the most knowledgeable.

Fourth: Conclude, as one must, from the above that the know-how going into the automobile is unimaginably greater than any individual possesses; that it is a remarkable coalescence of tiny, varied, disparate ideas, inventions, and intuitions flowing from the minds of discrete individuals since man found out how to harness fire. *It is an enormous wisdom, an in-gathering of trillions of varying minuscule knowhows!* Atomistic fragments, one might say, that take an aggregated form and shape in which we can comfortably and speedily transport ourselves!

Fifth: It is plain that there is an Intelligence over and beyond the minds of men for the simple reason that what goes on here is, in large measure, over and beyond human design. “Nations stumble upon establishments which are indeed the result of human action but not the execution of human design.”² We observe this Intelligence in nature where human design has no part whatsoever: for instance, in the mysterious, inexplicable coalescence of molecules resulting in a blade of grass, a tulip, a sturdy oak. “Only God can make a tree,” if not unanimously conceded, is rarely denied. Are we not warranted, then, in conceding that this Intelligence is responsible, to a marked extent, for the coalescence into patterns of the tiny, varied ideas flowing through the minds of men?

It is this enormous, aggregate knowledge, as strikingly distinguished from the minuscule knowledge to be found in any discrete person which, in the past, I have mistakenly referred to as “social wisdom.” It now dawns on me, by reason of the fact that this coalescing power largely transcends society, that the correct term

¹ For a striking explanation of how unique each of us is, see *You Are Extraordinary* by Dr. Roger J. Williams (New York: Random House, 1967).

² F. A. Hayek in his *Constitution of Liberty* (p. 57) in support of his own position, quotes this thought by Adam Ferguson.

is *Creative Wisdom*. We live by the resulting coalescence; we can no more live without it than one man, without other men, present and past, can live alone.

Opposing Points of View

There are at least three views that stand in opposition to this concept of Creative Wisdom.

The first is an unwillingness to concede an Infinite Intelligence: Primary Source. Many persons who call themselves “humanists” refuse to accept anything taking place at the human level which cannot be attributed to human beings.

Schopenhauer wasn’t far from correct in setting forth the second stumbling block: “Every man takes the limits of his own field of vision for the limits of the world.” I couldn’t fault him had he written, “Almost every man. . . .” For there are a few, along with Socrates, who have come to know how little they really know; they have discovered that each individual’s vision of the world is through a tiny aperture and that no two “peek-holes” are identical. Any person who naively believes his vision to be the whole vision can never grasp the concept of Creative Wisdom. Nor will he possess the force of intellect which effectively inhibits the authoritarian mentality: *If I see all why can I not manage all?* At the very least, no one in this state of blindness can have an unshakable belief in the free market, that is, a belief rooted in some measure of understanding.

The third is a fact which, at first blush, gives the appearance that individual know-how and Creative Wisdom stand in contradiction. For it is difficult to accept the idea that an over-all wisdom operating at the human level does not exist in any human being. Yet, we are faced with the unassailable evidence that the two-know-how fragments and over-all wisdom—exist side by side and simultaneously. Our tendency is to deny this, not for lack of evidence—it is all about us—but for an inability to explain it.

Contemplate an Infinite Intelligence, the all-inclusive Source: Creation. You, for one, catch a slight glimmer of its Light, that is, you pick up a fragment of Intelligence. Others do likewise, but no other’s fragment is identical to yours. This is an experience common to all human beings. Now, were there no coalescence of these fragments into an over-all wisdom, we could enjoy nothing above animal existence.

Creation at the Human Level

The coalescing process, this putting together of the fragments into an over-all wisdom, is first of all an act of Creation, that is, it is suprahuman; it is Creation working at the human level. And we can no more say how it works at this high level than explain how molecules can be put together to form a living tree.

In the instance of the tree, and of all else in nature, we readily acknowledge the Hand of Creation. *By what queer quirk of reasoning are we led to assume that the Hand of Creation has been withdrawn from the human situation?* Are we, who concede that only God can make a tree or create a dog, to assume that Creative Wisdom no longer operates at the personal level simply because we have been endowed with a modicum of free will? What a brightness men must assume to draw any such conclusion! Why, it is easily demonstrable that I know not one-trillionth about myself, far less about you, and still less about Creation. This concession can be made into a generality; it is as true of others as of me.

But a happy fact intrudes itself at this point: We are under no compulsion to define and explain Creation. No more is required than to concede the Creative Hand at work and to discover how, in our own actions, not to inhibit and do it injury. Indeed, we can have no higher aim in earthly life than to learn how to aid and abet Creation and, thus, to become instrumental in the creative process ourselves.

The Principle of Competition

That the free market, as I define it, is harmonious with Creation can be demonstrated in several ways, two of which come readily to mind.

We observe in Creation the law of polarity at work. Sometimes this is referred to as “the tension of the opposites,” also as “action and reaction.” Emerson’s phrase for this principle was “the law of compensation.” The renowned physicist, the late Robert A. Millikan, went deep for this observation:

All light or other short wave-length radiations are caused by changes in positions of electrons within atoms. . . . All elastic forces are due to the *attractions* and *repulsions* of electrons.

This principle at work is experienced daily by all of us: we improve ourselves by rising above obstacles, confrontations. The art of *becoming* is composed of overcoming! In a word, this principle is COMPETITION.

Prerequisites to Progress

When the rules of the market prevail, open competition exists. This is a prerequisite to all progress, be it material, intellectual, spiritual. And here, at this point, we can grasp that phase of the coalescing process in which man has a hand, a phase he did not design but has stumbled upon.

When there is open competition, there is free, unfettered pricing. Each individual with his fragment of know-how, be it in the form of goods or services, naturally and easily gravitates where price beckons. Price allocates scarce resources to their most advantageous use. Free pricing in-gathers skills and other resources in the most economical way possible.

That free pricing is not of human design but rather has been stumbled upon is borne out by the fact that so very few grasp the meaning of what they daily practice on an unprecedented scale in the U.S.A. Obviously, no man designed that which he does not understand after it exists! As in the case of many wonderful discoveries and inventions, free pricing qualifies as an inadvertency. But it gives every appearance of being in harmony with Creation.

Nature reveals another important characteristic of the Creative Hand at work, a feature we should not contradict in human relationships: free movement.

A World in Motion

Note how we marvel at the swallows in their aerial acrobatics! Fascinating movement! Yet, the ground on which we stand and observe, even be it rock, is moving; there'll come a time when it won't be here. This variation in movement between the swallows and the rock is one of frequency. And this goes for everything else in the Cosmos, including our lives and our living. Take this globe we call the earth: it is on a galactic rim moving through space at 10,000,000 miles a day, and the galaxies themselves are moving away from each other at many thousands of miles per second.³

All is movement; all is on the wing; nothing created appears to be permanent; movement in an infinite variety of frequencies is an observable phase of Creation; it is in the nature of things.

Man's idea of stability which, by and large, he passionately craves, derives from some frequencies being relatively lower than others. The rock on which he stands, for instance, he regards as stable but only because its frequency in movement is so low he cannot sense or perceive it.

But stability, really, is to be found only in movement, not in an at-rest state. If one wishes stability on a bicycle, he propels it forward; to sit on it motionless is to invite a fall. To sit on a tricycle motionless and permanently is to invite stagnation.

Contrary to the nature of things, we humans tend to seek stability in fixedness, rigidity, arrestment, permanence. Failing to conceive of ourselves as on the wing, that is, in Creation's flow, we embrace the status quo—whatever it happens to be at the time. We hanker for permanent youth rather than welcoming the oncoming years; we seek the guaranteed life along with “stable” prices: rents, interest rates, wages; in a word, a state of arrestment we call “security.” All of which is at odds with nature, out of tune with Creation.

Reliance on Freedom

Free movement is at least one significant and helpful instruction we can derive from observing the Creative Hand at work in nature. Molecules must be permitted a free flow in order to coalesce and manifest as a tree. Man cannot arrange them into a living organism; *only the Creative Hand can do this*. Man can, however, interfere; he can keep a tree from ever being.

In human affairs, as in nature, man can never arrange all the tiny ideas, intuitions, discoveries to form a jet plane; *the Creative Hand, with some harmonious human action, can do this*. But man can interfere; he can keep a jet from ever being.

The free market, as I use the term, is this free movement of all goods, services, ideas. Not only is it in harmony with Creation, but it appears to be the condition in which the Creative Hand works its wonders and in which we as human beings find it possible to partake in the creative process.

³ See *Frontiers of Astronomy* by Fred Hoyle (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1955).

10

Man's Mobility

In Chapter 3 I maintained that had we been accenting the values of travel, it would not now be politically expedient to restrict free movement. The following suggests some of the values worthy of accent.

Were you a citizen of Moscow and wished to visit Stalingrad for more than 72 hours, a permit from the Commissar would be necessary. The same would hold true were you from Dzerzhnisk and had in mind more than three days in nearby Vladimir.¹ And if you wanted to leave for another country, unless on a Kremlin political assignment, request doubtless would be denied.

To sense the tragedy of this, simply imagine these restrictions imposed on you and all other citizens of the U.S.A. Reflect on the “thinking” which has led to this arrestment, this *immobility*!

Of course, in Russia, there is no competition, and, thus, no need for traveling salesmen. As to workers, jobs are dictated by Moscow so it is useless to seek a new one in some other place. As to students, education is of the Kremlin brand, the same in one town as another; therefore, shopping around for a school which better suits your fancy is pointless. In short, where freedom to choose vacations, vocations, and avocations is outlawed, mobility is logically reserved to the immobilizers. Besides, who else has a car!

Interestingly enough, the Russian government uses force to keep its citizens at home; in the U.S.A. force is used to slow or deny immigration. The difference reflects how people feel about the two societies, wanting to flee the one and gravitate toward the other. It shows man's preference for free movement.

As emphasized in the previous chapter, everything is on the wing; all is movement. Nature, herself, is specialization and exchange; and man fares well or ill as he implements or obstructs the free exchange or movement of his numerous specializations.

¹ See *Workers' Paradise Lost* by Eugene Lyons (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1967), p. 226.

A fact much overlooked is that a man and his ideas and his labors and his products are all of a piece. Life and livelihood are inseparable. To arrest the movement of persons is no less destructive than to bring the movement of goods and services to a standstill. A man entombed—whether in a grave, a town, a country—is a man with his wings—ideas, goods, services—clipped. That your ideas, for example, can be restricted without enslaving you, or vice versa, is unthinkable.

Let us, therefore, assess the meaning to life and livelihood of the free movement or mobility—travel—of individuals.

Recreation and Education

Consider the recreational value of mobility. This is, of course, a subjective value judgment; of all the forms of recreation, it tops the list for some and is pure boredom for others. But should not each person be free to decide how he refreshes himself and, if he chooses travel, whither he goes? Is it Yellowstone, the North Platte, the Mojave Desert, the Swiss Alps, Venice, Loch Lomond, or a peek at how the Russians live? That which gives delight is conducive to mental and physical health. Pleasure is self-determined and where it is to be found ranges everywhere from one's reading chair to around the world. Choosing *where* is the prerogative of free men.

Second, reflect on the educational value of mobility. As with recreation, that which "broadens" one person is of no interest whatsoever to another. A few are edified when they examine original Gothic architecture; others are enlightened by touring the Louvre, or viewing firsthand the ruins of the Colosseum, or standing where Socrates taught, or studying mining operations in South Africa, or whatever.

Of one thing we are certain: To be there, *on the spot*, tends mightily to whet interest and introspection, these being steps to enlightenment. A spirit of inquiry concerning the Renaissance and its significance to modern civilization has hatched in many a mind by a visit to Florence; Pericles, Aristotle, and other ancient "greats" come to life by the mere sight of the Acropolis under a full moon; set foot in Hong Kong and free exchange takes on new depth and meaning. Travel educates the educable!

To Keep the Peace

Third, assess mobility as related to keeping the peace among men, this being the only principled purpose of political establishments.

Admittedly, freedom to move is no more a cure-all against conflict than it is a panacea for overcoming ignorance. And giving credence to its beneficent effects at a period when travel and wars and domestic strife are all on the increase is, to say the least, a bit difficult. Yet, we must not let the numerous destructive forces, unrelated to travel, blind us to the harmonizing influence of freedom to move. After all, men do not *necessarily* better themselves because they are free; the point is, they *cannot* better themselves unless they are free!

Compare the U.S.A. and Europe. The area of each is approximately the same. And Europe has nearly as many nations as the U.S.A. has states. The boundary lines circumscribing Europe's nations look the same on a map as the boundary lines that define our states. But Europe's boundary lines are borders, staffed with officials who permit entry and exit only on the presentation of a license. Movement is not free; it is at the discretion of officials backed by force. Reflect on Europe's wars and squabbles over the past two centuries!

So far as travel is concerned, our boundaries are no more than lines on a map. Crossing a boundary line between two of our states is as simple and easy as crossing the street. This open intercourse, this mobility unmatched on all the earth, banishes geographic distinctions, prejudices, hates. Our evaluations of one another do not depend upon the state from which each comes.

Other factors do, indeed, generate domestic strife. But our absence of forbidding borders makes possible cooperation with any citizen, whether he be a Californian or a New Yorker; the resident of Georgia may exchange as readily with one in Montana as with his next-door neighbor.

Observe the absence of strife between our several states; the people in Indiana no more think of making war against the people of Ohio than against their own children.

We should deduce from this evidence that mobility is important to peaceful relationships, whether between the people of different nations or between those of different states. As between nations, there perhaps is no border with fewer

restrictions than between the United States and Canada. Nor is there a better example of peaceful international relationships.

It would seem appropriate that government, whose aim is peace, never inhibit mans mobility, this being one of the great civilizers.²

Trade and Migration

Fourth, weigh the economic blessings of mobility. As stated above, man and his goods and services and ideas are of a piece. Thus, mobility of goods and services is an elaboration or extension of man's own mobility. It cannot be said that man has mobility except as the manifestations of his labors are free to move.

Nowhere else on earth, at any time, has there existed an area as large, as populous, and as uninhibited for purposes of exchange as is the U.S.A. Implicit in Bas-tiat's observation that "when goods do not cross borderlines, soldiers will" is the reasonably sound expectation that when goods freely cross borderlines, soldiers will not. The American record not only affirms this, but more: when men and their goods are mobile, economic well-being improves!

Anyone who has any capacity for economic thinking realizes that free exchange must attend specialization.

But the idea of goods and services freely flowing, regardless of its near-unanimous acceptance in theory, is often rejected when competition threatens established positions. This rejection is witnessed in its incipency when our towns and villages indulge in buy-at-home movements. There are numerous legal barriers to local trade, all in contradiction of sound economic policy. While these barriers are of minor nature, they illustrate the rejection of competition whenever it proves disturbing to the status quo.

That the general welfare is served by the free mobility of mans goods and services domestically is generally conceded. Then, why is mobility not equally desirable on the international scale? It is, of course.³ However, competition—the life of trade—fares badly in international dealings, primarily because arguments against

² I use "never inhibit" deliberately to avoid any suggestion that a government should encourage travel. The promotion of travel is no more a function of government than is the promotion of conversation. Organized force—government—has inhibi-tive possibilities, but not the positive powers of promotion or attraction.

competition can be made to appear more plausible when “foreigners” are involved. For example, we are forbidden to buy linen from China on the grounds that it is “red.” Not because it is competitive! I note that we buy Russian caviar which is just as “red.” But caviar is not competitive!

Where to Begin

When we think in nationalistic—collectivistic—terms as distinguished from the mobility of individual man and his works, we are led to the absurd notion that barriers to free exchange must be removed by other nations before we dare to remove our own. A citizen in Buenos Aires once asked me, “What would happen to Argentina were we to remove all embargoes, quotas, tariffs?” He was implying that they would be flooded with cheap, foreign goods, which would bring about the destruction of their businesses with the attendant unemployment. In reply, I asked him to go one step further and imagine that, in addition, all other nations had imposed absolute embargoes against all goods from Argentina. Now, what would happen? Nothing, whatsoever! Goods and services would flow neither into nor out of Argentina.

Competition is the life of trade! Granted, competition does remove the relatively inefficient producer in favor of the more efficient. This, however, is in the general interest, whether domestically or internationally. Nonetheless, it is argued, the little fellow can never get a start in the face of efficient, low-cost, foreign competition.

To refute this notion requires only to ask and answer these three questions:

First, where in all the world have business starts been the most numerous? In the U.S.A.!

Second, where in all the world have the most little businesses grown to bigness? In the U.S.A.!

Third, where in all the world has this little-to-big-ness development faced the strongest competition? Right here in the U.S.A., the most highly industrialized nation in history!

³ For an easy-to-read presentation of the rationale of free exchange and a critique of protectionism, see *The Tariff Idea* by W. M. Curtiss. (Irvington-on-Hudson, N. Y.: The Foundation for Economic Education, Inc., 1953).

The lesson is clear: business thrives, grows entrepreneurial muscle, in the face of competition. Industrial flaccidity marks the absence of competition.

True, many American businesses are less and less able to compete with foreign enterprises, but this is due to costs imposed by overextended government and by the coercive practices of trade unions. It ought to be obvious that the remedy is not in a further restriction of exchange but in removing the practices which are now hampering exchange.⁴

Man's mobility—his own uninhibited travel and the free movement of his goods and services—is the road to health, education, peace, wealth, that is, to human evolution.

Let us exalt, not stifle, man's mobility!

⁴ For a further explanation of this thesis, see "Why Run Ourselves Out of Business?" *The Freeman*, August, 1967.

Accent on Awareness

In ideology we can often find our way to what's right by first discovering what's wrong. The same holds true for methodology—our manner of working.

There are two opposed formulas for repairing the human situation. The first, and by far the most popular, is propagandizing, reforming others, declaiming our adversaries.

The second is self-improvement, that is, the perfection of one's own thinking. This method emphasizes a search for truth as distinguished from a clamor for outcome; the accent is on an expanding personal awareness.

Casting about for a problem that bedevils all of us and that might, at the same time, serve to highlight the distinction between the two methods, I have selected the idea that the growth of communism in America is the result of a conspiracy. I hope, by examining this idea, to demonstrate the superiority of the latter method over the former. But, first, what is conspiracy?

A conspiracy is defined as a *secret plot* to achieve an *unlawful* end. More often than not, in day-to-day usage, conspiracy is thought of as merely a concerted effort to achieve an undesirable end. But ends undesirable to one man may be regarded as desirable by many others. Conspiracy, then, is something the other side engages in.

Back in the early thirties when I was working with western business associations, I met a prominent leader, experienced in politics, who claimed that the 1929 depression was the result of a Wall Street conspiracy. Lacking their own explanations of this debacle, many accepted the charge as valid.

Later, I came to know personally numerous "tycoons of Wall Street" and found them strikingly similar to their western accusers. They were bumping along in the money markets as innocently as were the Westerners in their daily commercial dealings. Indeed, had the Wall Streeters foreseen a "killing" for themselves in a nationwide depression—I never heard of a person who did—none of them had the force of intellect to bring it off. They were as impotent to engineer The Great Depression as are you and I to scheme a restoration of fiscal sanity.

But what of the “Communist Conspiracy”? The conviction that this lies at the root of our politico-economic troubles has a wide following among opponents of socialism. How much real concern, earnest effort, and overt opposition does this deserve? If a great deal, let’s be at it; if none, let’s conserve our energies for activities having greater promise.

There are, unquestionably, thousands of card-carrying communists with but a single aim: the communization of the U.S.A. And they range all the way from influence peddlers in our educational, religious, and other key institutions, to spies in our industry, to high-placed agents in our several governments, to head men in the Kremlin. Far greater in number and doubtless in influence are the “fellow travelers.” But these two classifications together are as nothing compared to the millions of American citizens who quite innocently harbor, cherish, and promote almost every tenet in the communist credo. Indeed, it is difficult to find a person today who is entirely free of communist ideas. As we would say of another disease: Metastasis!

Unlawful and Secret Plotting

The three key words in the definition of conspiracy are *unlawful*, *secret*, and *plot*. Let’s take these in order.

Unlawful. This is rather difficult to pin down.

Obviously, the “conspiracy” does not break Kremlin law. And precisely where does the spreading of communistic ideas break with our law? Reread the ten points of the *Communist Manifesto*, number two being, “A heavy progressive or graduated income tax.” That’s as legal here as in Russia. The same can be said for number ten, “Free education for all children in public schools.” The eight other points have ardent supporters among our “best citizens,” and their advocacy is perfectly legal.

The confusion as to what’s lawful is remindful of espionage. Russian espionage is legal Russian and illegal American. We call the same thing on our part “counterespionage” which is legal American and illegal Russian.

I fail to see how we can combat the “communist conspiracy” on grounds of unlawfulness.

Secret. This scarcely deserves comment.

Most of us really believe in secrecy. Indeed, our Founding Fathers wrote the right of privacy into the Bill of Rights: “The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects. . . .”

Cooks have secret recipes, companies secret formulas, magicians secret tricks, and we respect their rights to these.

The common resentment against “bugging” or wiretapping is a plea for secrecy.

Consider the letters we write, headed, “Personal and Confidential,” or how often we say, “This is in strict confidence and for your ears only.”

But, when all is said and done, secrecy has a tendency to leak. Not even the communists can keep their secrets. As one wag put it, “It isn’t that I can’t keep a secret; it’s those loose-tongued folks I tell it to.”

I fail to see how we can combat the “communist conspiracy” because of its secrecy without doing injury to a right we highly prize.

Plot. It thickens!

So the communists plot against the ideas that oppose their doctrines! There is no end to their scheming to rid the U.S.A. of such institutions as the free market, private ownership, willing exchange, open competition, voluntary cooperation, limited government. They try to engineer the downfall of these institutions consonant with individual liberty and to replace them with the collectivization of all aspects of life. The state is their god, and their program rests on compulsion.

Lest We Trap Ourselves

But, just a minute! How shall we describe what most of us do? Education? Yes, of course. However, when that term is stripped of its dignity and we get right down to rock bottom, it is plain that opponents of communism, also, “scheme and plot” to replace authoritarian notions with libertarian ideas. That we are a small minority and that our tactic at FEE, for instance, calls for a better understanding of freedom does not diminish the fact that we, too, consult among ourselves to discover what is sound and right.

Thus, I fail to see how we can combat the “communist conspiracy” on the grounds that it is a plot without tossing education out the window along with the communists!

The above, however, merely suggests the futility of spending time and effort ridding ourselves of the “communist conspiracy.”

The general assumption is that communist scheming accounts for the growth of communism in our country. Why the assumption? We see two things taking place simultaneously: (1) an enormous communist propaganda, and (2) the growth of communism; thus, the former must be the cause of the latter.

No One Is That Smart

I contend that we are victims of an illusion. The “conspiracy” is no more than a coincidental event; it is not the cause of the growth even though the communists think it is and many of us think likewise. Opinions to the contrary, notwithstanding, this isn’t the way big social changes come about.

The reason I know that The Great Depression was not the result of a “Wall Street conspiracy” is that these people were utterly impotent to do such a thing. Were conspiracy a way to spread communism, then it would be a way to advance libertarianism. But give FEE a billion dollars and let us employ the greatest conspiratorial organizer and genius in the nation and we wouldn’t get to first base. Would that it were that simple!

Broadcasting and Receiving

I must resort to analogy to suggest what is meant. There are, according to recent research, some 5,000 “fringe groups” in the U.S.A.¹ Each one, including FEE, is committed to a philosophy of sorts; no two are identical. Think of these as broadcasting stations, each having a different wave length, no two identical. Next, look upon our millions of citizens as receiving sets, each with variable “tuning in” capacities. Broadcast to your heart’s content and, if no one tunes you in, lacking the capacity or inclination or both, the message has no more effect on society than on the aurora borealis; it is lost in space.

¹ Being classified as “fringe” assumes that the classifier holds to a line of thought to which the fringe thought is “way out.” So, whether or not a line of thought is “fringe” depends on the doctrine of the classifier. Today, for the most part, any line of thought is “way out” that does not fit neatly into socialistic dogma or the platform of one of the two major political parties.

True, messages presuppose broadcasters, but these are never in short supply. Given this presupposition, the impacts on society, the social changes, are governed exclusively by what's tuned in and "bought"!

Into Receivership

We can now understand the illusion. The receiving sets are tuned in to one of the stations better than to the others; it happens to be the station carrying the message of coercive collectivism, that is, communism. And the reason is not because the message is good or that it has a superior group of broadcasters; *it is because of the condition of the receiving sets!* Awareness is askew.

The communist broadcasters, observing communism on the upswing, pat each other on the back and ascribe a force of intellect to themselves which does not exist. Their "success" is purely coincidental; lightning hit them, is one way of putting it. Had the sets been tuned into FEE's wave length, libertarian rather than communist ideas would now be spreading. And, unless supremely levelheaded before applause, and the smell of victory, we probably would, like the communists, foolishly accept the kudos, mistakenly acknowledge the curtain calls. Such self-flattery is remindful of the fly on the hub of a chariot wheel, "My, look at all the dust I'm kicking up!"

It should be plain that it's the condition of the receiving sets that counts. The broadcasters being legion and of all wave lengths, what can the sets tune in? This boils down to a simple matter: What can I tune in—and out? What is the state of my awareness?

If I will attend to my own awareness and make some noteworthy progress, there may be some emulation by those in my orbit. Like it or not, this is just about as far as any one of us can go in improving society. And I, for one, am pleased that this is an incontestable fact. For, were it not true that each man controls his own receiving set, communist ideas could easily find their way into my mind.

The first reaction to the thesis that an expanding personal awareness is as far as one can go in bettering society is one of discouragement. Can I do no more than improve only me? What's so earth-shaking about that! A minor project if I ever heard of one!

Yet, really, this realization should be encouraging. First, the improvement of one's self is the world's biggest project any individual can undertake. And, second, reforming others is an utter impossibility, while gaining awareness is always within

the realm of the possible. Indeed, it is probable for anyone whose method is right—who puts the accent on awareness.

12

Don't Look Back

When a thing is done, it's done. Don't look back. Look forward to your next objective.¹

I repeat, everything is on the wing. Our Milky Way moves away from other galaxies at an astonishing rate; our earth speeds through space at 10,000,000 miles a day. Compared to the life of a planet man's earthly moment isn't "the blink of an eye." In less time than it takes to write this sentence, I am the possessor of one billion brand new red blood cells. And each cell is of atomic composition, each atom so small that 30 trillion could be placed on this period (.) with no overlapping. Examine the atom; it's the cosmos all over again—in miniature! Everything in the Universe is different from what it was a second ago; it is also in a new and ever-changing relationship to everything else.

Nothing can be put back together again the way it was yesterday or yesteryear—no more than there could be the repetition of one's birth.

Such reflections focus attention on another common failing of freedom's devotees: looking back on "the good old days" and wastefully attempting their restoration. This backward longing not only is useless but also diverts one's eye and one's energy from the job at hand.

Parenthetically, this caution against looking back is not to advise a neglect of history, far from it. We should, indeed, glean as much as possible from past experience in order to avoid the errors and to observe the truth. I am only emphasizing that life moves inexorably on—as a plane in swift flight—and that the destination lies ahead, not back.

Try to practice the admonishment, "Don't look back," if for no other reason than to discover how ingrained is the tendency to dwell in the past. All pleasant and rewarding experiences—personal minutiae and social events of historical import—seem to beg for repetition, an almost overpowering nostalgia. But, in no

¹ General George Marshall

instance is repetition possible, for the components of a past experience are on the wing as everything else. Today's experiences are determined in the face of today's combinations and our reactions thereto.

Let us now apply this reasoning to political economy. Of all political documents of which I have knowledge, none more excite my admiration than do our Declaration of Independence, the Constitution of the U.S.A., and the Bill of Rights.

Today, the Declaration is hardly mentioned inside or outside our academies; the intent of the Constitution, for all practical purposes, has been amended away; and the Bill of Rights, a series of prohibitions against governments rather than citizens, is little more than a museum piece.

My hat is off to the architects of these remarkable documents. But consider the problems they faced as contrasted with the difficulties which beset us. Our Founding Fathers were dealing with an old-world despotism; we are confronted with countless democratic despotisms. They had to cope with an enemy from without; we must deal with ideological errors from within, that is, ours is the task of out-thinking and rising above a thousand and one ideas alien to freedom that have crept into millions of American minds.

Their problems and ours are not comparable. The materials from which they fashioned the American Design do not resemble the ingredients at our disposal. Theirs was one kind of challenge, ours is quite another. And, heretical as it may appear to many of the libertarian faith, there is no "going back to the Constitution," for instance, or back to anything else. We are in flight!

A Continuing Challenge

So, we come to what I believe to be the heart of the problem. We may conclude that our Founding Fathers were political architects of unprecedented caliber. An enduring society, however, does not rest on there *having been* great architects; to endure requires more than to ride the coattails of former seers; it demands a perpetual parade of distinguished architects. Indeed, if I read correctly the lesson history teaches, every new generation must be graced with individuals superior—intellectually, morally, spiritually—to the generation it succeeds. If evolution in awareness, perception, consciousness is human destiny—and nothing else makes sense to me—then this ever-increasing severity of demands on each new

generation is to be expected. Mans emergence does not allow “resting on the oars,” simply enjoying what our revered ancestors created; it demands more from us than it did from them! The penalty, if we fail, is the decline and fall of nations and civilizations.

Our Founding Fathers bequeathed to us a lesson in the pursuit of excellence; they did not hand to posterity a design for social felicity with no strings attached, a utopia affording gifts without requiring the practice of difficult virtues. Nor did they believe they were doing so. “You have a republic,” said Benjamin Franklin. “You have a republic IF YOU CAN KEEP IT.”

Our question is this: Are we lacking architects equal to the current crisis? The answer wavers between “yes” and “no.”

Assuredly, there are among us today numerous men equal in moral and intellectual stature to Washington, Adams, Jefferson, Madison, and the several dozen others we revere as our Founding Fathers, the architects of the

America that was. In this sense, the answer is a definite “yes.”

But the answer is negative if we carefully examine what is required for the emergence of a successful social architect.

Something Solid to Stand On

No one of the Founding Fathers alone, nor all of them together as we might list them, turned the trick. These men were riding a crest, were out front; they were in the vanguard of what in a previous chapter I have described as “Creative Wisdom.” They were representative of and articulate spokesmen for the preponderant leadership thinking of their time. Had these men not been widely backed and supported by high-grade thinking consonant with what they did, they would not be known to us as our Founding Fathers.

For the sake of my point, let us concede that we have among us literally hundreds of men, say of Madisons quality. Why is it that we do not recognize this stature in these contemporaries of ours? It is precisely for the same reason that Madison would have been unknown for his high qualities had the preponderant leadership thinking of his day been substantially less than it was. Had the preponderant leadership thinking then been what prevails today, Madison would have passed on as an historical nobody.

Unless they find support beneath the surface, the greats among us cannot be seen; they are sunk in the sea of thinking unfavorable to freedom. Each resembles, in one respect, a small sheet of steel plate. Tossed upon the water, it sinks; buoyancy—rising to the top—is out of the question. But if enough steel plates are properly welded, the great ship can ride any sea. It is seen; we know of it and its components.

The Greatest of These

Analogies are treacherous; separate steel plates never automatically coalesce and form a ship. But in the case of individual excellence, if there be enough, the disparate wisdoms of discrete individuals cooperate naturally, taking the form of an over-all Creative Wisdom. A few will be in the vanguard, and will gain recognition before men; but most of the greats, the ones without whom the spokesmen are impotent, remain forever in anonymity, content to follow the dictates of conscience. Praise before God suffices.

The point is, we can never know how nearly, at any time, we may approximate the situation where our spokesmen may rise from obscurity and be heard. For all I know, it may require but one more individual attaining a higher state of excellence.

Who or where is he? Of one thing we can be certain, such persons cannot be found by looking back. We must look about us—perhaps in the mirror.

When our problem is thus identified, a look at tomorrow is not the occasion for despair. It is a challenge to be welcomed! Meeting it is what is expected of us; indeed, this is what we should expect of ourselves!