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The
Coming
Aristocracy

The Coming Aristocracy

Leonard E. Read

The Coming Aristocracy

by

Leonard E. Read

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The Coming Aristocracy.

To Horatio Bunce

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—Sydney Smith

The Coming Aristocracy

It was nearly a century ago that Herbert Spencer wrote prophetically of “The Coming Slavery.” His use of the term included the familiar thing called chattel slavery, but primarily he had something far more profound in mind. The genuine essence of slavery eludes most people even today, so let us turn to Spencer:

What is essential to the idea of a slave? We primarily think of him as one who is owned by another. . . . That which fundamentally distinguishes the slave is that he labours under coercion to satisfy another’s desires. . . . What . . . leads us to qualify our conception of the slavery as more or less severe? Evidently the greater or smaller extent to which effort is compulsorily expended for the benefit of another instead of for self-benefit.”¹

Negro slavery, as practiced here, was but one form of enslavement. Any citizen—black or white, rich or poor, illiterate or Ph.D.—might be a slave, more or less, by Spencer’s definition. Any man whose income is confiscated by taxation, the proceeds used to subsidize other men, is a slave! And how accurate his prophecy, not only in his native Britain that is today’s prime example of the welfare state, but also in America, once a colony of that Empire.

“The Coming Aristocracy,” as I speak of it here, also breaks with traditional usage. Furthest from mind is that hereditary aristocracy whereby high rank depends not upon achievements in life but upon accidents of birth. As with the term slavery, so with the word aristocracy; it is too useful a word to be lost in some semantic limbo.

Based on Virtue and Talent

Jefferson gave the word my meaning: “There is a natural aristocracy among men. The grounds of this are virtue and talents. . . .” Ortega referred to these natural

¹ Herbert Spencer, *The Man Versus the State* [1884] (Caldwell, Idaho: The Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1940), pp. 41–42.

aristocrats as noblemen. And Hanford Henderson revealed who are eligible and what the qualifications are:

He may be a day laborer, an artisan, a shopkeeper, a professional man, a writer, a statesman. It is not a matter of birth, or occupation, or education. It is an attitude of mind carried into daily action, that is to say, a religion. It [the aristocratic spirit] is the disinterested, passionate love of excellence . . . everywhere and in everything; the aristocrat, to deserve the name, must love it in himself, in his own alert mind, in his own illuminated spirit, and he must love it in others; must love it in all human relations and occupations and activities; in all things in earth or sea or sky.²

The aristocratic spirit as related to my field of deepest interest—political economy and moral philosophy—is nowhere better exemplified than by a farmer named Horatio Bunce. Congressman David Crockett said of Bunce:

It was one of the luckiest hits of my life that I met him. He mingled but little with the public, but was widely known for his remarkable intelligence and incorruptible integrity, and for a heart brimful and running over with kindness and benevolence, which showed themselves not only in words but in acts. He was the oracle of the whole country around him, and his fame had extended far beyond the circle of his immediate acquaintance.³

What was there in Spencer's time that enabled him to see "The Coming Slavery"? Certainly, what lay ahead of him 85 years ago could have looked no more ominous than coming events look to most thinking people today. But, his prophecy has come to pass! Why, then, have I the temerity to expect an outburst of exactly the opposite, namely, the aristocratic spirit?

After being in the thick of this fray for well over three decades, and observing the changes for the better that have come about in a relatively small minority, I am convinced that there exists among us persons with the intellect, moral toughness, integrity, strength of character, and idealism to compose an adequate aristocracy. I

² Hanford Henderson, "The Aristocratic Spirit," *The North American Review*, March, 1920.

³ *The Life of Colonel David Crockett*, compiled by Edward S. Ellis (Philadelphia: Porter & Coates, 1884). An excerpt, "Not Yours to Give" is available on request from The Foundation for Economic Education, Inc., Irvington-on-Hudson, N.Y.

am unaware of any movement, good or bad, that has had a leadership comparable to what is now in the making.

Signs of Progress

Several fundamental gleanings are becoming so clear to these individuals that they cannot resist taking the road to excellence.

The first is a compelling impression that our foundering civilization is slated for a decline and fall unless—unless we have the most pronounced moral awakening and pursuit of righteousness known to mankind. For it is in the nature of human destiny—man emerging—that each civilizing step must meet with obstacles more difficult to overcome than preceding steps. Evolution decrees that the art of becoming hinges upon acts of overcoming. And the higher the stage of progress, the harder the climb!

The second is an acute awareness that the oncoming aristocracy is out of the question—an utter impossibility—short of an indomitable belief that it will come to pass. Those who can see only slavery ahead cannot imagine or take part in anything else. Faith comes first; results are the fruit.

The third begins with the startling recognition that the spirit of aristocracy is no more in need of any one individual than is righteousness or wisdom; the dependency is the other way around! This leads to the greatest enlightenment of all: You and I are dependent on excellence, righteousness, wisdom. The aware individual correctly concludes: The need is all on my side!

Had our projected aristocracy nothing more to undergird it than a call to duty, or an obligation to society, or a sense that the virtues are dead unless you or I uphold them, the aristocracy would never come to pass. Such drives are tenuous, weak, and never to be relied upon; they simply are not the true mainsprings of human motivation.

An Inner Drive

The motivation that drives man toward excellence comes from within. The Greek philosopher, Heraclitus, gives us the clue: “Man is on earth as in an egg. Now, you can’t go on being a good egg forever; you must either hatch or rot.” The oncoming aristocrats know that they must grow, stretch out, expand their awareness,

perception, consciousness. Otherwise, they might as well be dead. Once a person has gained this deep conviction, he has a motivation strong enough to carry him through any crisis.

Anyone wishing to identify an aristocrat in the making must, as Henderson implies, ignore occupational categories, social status, wealth, fame, education, race, creed, or color. Look for a person, whether he be a janitor, waiter, gardener, mechanic, teacher, or in any other walk of life, who takes a “fierce pride” in his work: there is the aristocratic spirit in emergence! This spirit does not need him; he needs this spirit, *and he knows it!*

I have found, over the years, that the more I share my ideas with others, the better are the ideas that come to me, a fact not difficult to explain: when sharing with others, one refines ideas as best he can. And each refinement enriches the idea in one’s mind.

Thus, the following chapters are offered primarily as a means of self-improvement. Should just one thought prove helpful to a single person, what a cherished dividend that would be!

2

In Quest of Maturity

This is my favorite book, not because it is better than the other books, but because it is later. Every one of its nineteen chapters has been written in an eight-month period surrounding my seventieth birthday and with no let-up in travel, lectures, or other chores. These chapters represent attempts at attaining some measure of maturity against the stubborn opposition which the senior years tend to impose. It is my contention that longevity is for the sake of maturity, not longevity.

Does life really begin at forty, as popular expression has it? Or, does it begin, instead, with each moment one grows in awareness, perception, consciousness? Is not the budding process a continuous beginning? The moons that have come and gone do not necessarily measure growth or its ending; now and then life flags in the teens; on occasion it accelerates in the nineties. If seventy seems less likely than forty for a new beginning, the reason is that so many have died on the vine in that interval.

Glory to the man who can truthfully attest, "Life begins at ninety!"

Twenty years ago—at the age of fifty—I discovered that: "The normal human brain always contains a greater store of neuroblasts than can possibly develop into neurons during the span of life, and the potentialities of the human cortex are never fully realized. There is a surplus and, depending upon physical factors, education, environment, and *conscious effort*, more or less of the initial store of neuroblasts will develop into mature, functioning neurons. The development of the more plastic and newer tissue of the brain depends to a large extent upon the conscious efforts made by the individual. There is every reason to assume that development of cortical functions is promoted by mental activity and that continued mental activity is an important factor in the retention of cortical plasticity into late life. Goethe . . . [and others] are among the numerous examples of men whose creative mental activities extended into the years associated with physical decline. . . . There also seem sufficient grounds for the assumption that *habitual disuse of these highest centers results in atrophy or at least brings about a certain mental decline.*"¹

And now, on rereading Ortega, I find that "as one advances in life, one realizes more and more that the majority of men—and of women—are incapable of any

other effort than that strictly imposed on them as a reaction to external compulsion. And for that reason, the few individuals we have come across who are capable of a spontaneous and joyous effort stand out isolated, monumentalized, so to speak, in our experience. These are the select men, the nobles, the only ones who are active and not merely reactive, for whom life is a perpetual striving, an incessant course of training.”²

Ever Onward!

There is more to the observations of these two scholars—a biochemist and a philosopher—than first meets the eye. A worthy ambition, they quite correctly imply, is “to die with your boots on” or “go down with your colors flying.” For what other reason are we here than to get ever deeper into life? And if there be any certain key to personal happiness, it involves the use and development of the faculties—the expanding mind being the most important and, by and large, all that remains for the elder citizen.

But there is another reason for looking so favorably on those who insist on “a perpetual striving, an incessant course of training”: Each of us has a vested interest in these “select men, the nobles.”

We can live our own lives to the fullest only insofar as they dwell among us. The society in which we live—the environment—is conditioned by the absence or presence of those who persistently pursue excellence. The rise and fall of society depends upon this kind of nobility. These “select men” are essential to us, and striving to be numbered among them is a worthy effort and aspiration.

Yet, many persons lack such aspiration. Analogous is the tree with every appearance of health, its blossoms beautiful to behold, fruit developing normally toward full size. But, alas, before it ripens, the fruit falls to the ground—big and well-shaped, but useless!

¹ Renee von Eulenburg-Wiener, *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1938), p. 310.

² Ortega y Gasset, *Revolt of the Masses* (New York: W. N. Norton & Co., Inc., 1932), p. 71.

We witness so many promising individuals falling by the wayside, stepping away from life, forsaking the effort essential to life's full cycle, just when the process of maturing is to begin! In a word, *the fruit of life abandoned!*

To associate old age with mature judgment is indeed a mistake, simply because, as Ortega suggests, too many elders react only to external compulsion. The inner development that is prerequisite to maturity tends to terminate too soon. Old age, more often than not, can be associated with senility. Yet, the greater the age the richer the maturity, assuming, of course, that the budding process is alive and functioning. In these rare cases, old age and mature judgment go hand in hand; the older the wiser!

If I am not mistaken, freedom is to be expected only in societies distinguished by a significant number of mature and wise men. And maturity and wisdom of the quality required is reserved to those who can retain the budding phenomenon—cortical plasticity—into those years normally associated with physical decline, that is, into the period when maturing of the intellect becomes at least a possibility.³ In any event, I am certain that the type of maturity here in question will never issue among those who, for whatever reason, permit themselves to “die on the vine.” Thus, it is of the utmost importance that we reflect on the obstacles to maturity. If they can be identified, we can, hopefully, reduce them.

The Retirement Syndrome

The most formidable obstacle on the way to maturity is covered by the idea of *retirement*. Two forces move us toward retirement, namely, temptation and compulsion.

Many are congenitally lazy, if not physically, at least mentally. Their mental activities have stagnated, leaving them uninteresting even to themselves, let alone to others; they cannot stand their own company or abide being alone with their thoughts. They seek merriment and diversion supplied by others, like a man

³ Conceded, many a young person reaches a higher state of maturity than does the octogenarian. This is because some are born more highly endowed than others. However, my point is not aimed at such comparisons but, rather, at the need of maturity regardless of how high or low the endowments. Mankind loses most when those of high endowment fail to mature.

walking down the street with a radio glued to his ear. Any excuse, however flimsy, to avoid thinking for self! Such persons have no fruit to ripen, no mental activity to mature.

There are others who have had no thought since early adulthood but to “get it made.” By the time that goal is achieved, abstract thought has been too long neglected for reactivation or renewal; half-hearted attempts prove unrewarding, so the temptation is to forswear any conscious effort. Mature thoughts are out of the question.

Ever so many persons of high potential look to a vocation for fame or fortune and forget to choose one in harmony with their unique capabilities. As a consequence, the job is likely to be boring; holidays and vacations—little retirements—are highlights of the seasons; and as the years pass, full retirement seems more and more attractive. There is no incentive to extend mental activity to its maturity.

The thought of retirement is anathema to me. I have not experienced any of the temptations and, thus, can list only a few of the more obvious examples. But it seems clear that there would be little drive for compulsory retirement if retirement were not a common goal. It seems to add up to this: Let’s formalize and legalize that which the vast majority so ardently favor! The following examples of compulsive forces stem from these common temptations.

Retirement, of course, is a relative term. The shortened work week, enforced by edict, is a case in point. One must retire, not work beyond the legal forty hours, or the employer will be forced to pay a higher hourly rate, in effect, a fine.

Legal holidays seem never to be abandoned even after the cause they were meant to celebrate has been forgotten. Instead, there are countless excuses for increasing their number. Minor retirements en masse!

Social security payments are withheld from senior citizens who elect to work and earn. Activity is penalized; inactivity is rewarded.

Governmental unemployment payments often exceed what some persons could earn by working, thus inducing retirement.

Most corporations, educational and religious institutions, chambers of commerce, trade associations, and other organizations compel retirement at 65; many make it attractive to retire at 60; and we hear more and more of retiring at 55. The sole criterion is the number of moons that have come and gone; whether

the budding process is dead, or at its very peak, is not even considered. As a consequence of this indiscriminate, rule-of-thumb procedure, many of the nation's best men are "put out to pasture."

These illustrations suffice to emphasize the retirement syndrome. It is, today, the common fetish and the end is not in sight. Under these circumstances, it is remarkable that even a few individuals are capable of spontaneous and joyous effort, that is, able to experience the maturing period. No wonder that the perceptive Ortega observed such individuals to "stand out isolated, monumentalized"!

In one sense, it is lamentable that those who have advanced in wisdom and maturity should "stand out isolated, monumentalized." Far better if there were more such persons—the few less conspicuous than they are. Not everyone will make it, of course, but maturity surely is within the reach of thousands at the modest price of conscious, persistent, dedicated, prayerful effort. The reward for realizing one's potentialities, whatever they are, may be the highest earthly life has to confer.

That my life still begins with each moment can be assigned in part to a stroke of good fortune—vocation and avocation are identical; work and pleasure are one and the same.

Beyond this, I have a first-rate retirement policy: short of effective compulsions to the contrary, I propose to ride my bicycle till I fall off!

3

Expanding Selfhood

What a thought-provoking title, “The Undiscovered Self”!¹ For it implies a dark continent in the mind awaiting exploration, and suggests that the discovery and development of the inner life is the only way to lengthen the perimeter of all that man can call reality. The expanding universe, in this sense, is but the measure of man’s expanding mind. Only a moment ago, in evolutionary time, this orb of ours was thought to be flat. The expanding self—increasing awareness—not only is responsible for that correction but accounts for the appearance of the electron, countless galaxies, and numberless other wonders that recently have come within the range of man’s concept of all that is real. And the end will never be in sight!

Nor need we confine our observations on the significance of the expanding self to the physical universe. As the inner life is more successfully explored, spiritual qualities are increasingly perceived, embraced, and experienced: creativity, inventiveness, piety, love, justice, charity, integrity, a moral nature.

We conclude, therefore, that man’s destiny, earthly goals, purposes, aspirations—properly focused—are linked inextricably to a deeper understanding and meaning of expanding selfhood.

And, by the same token, we can infer that any abandonment of selfhood is dehumanizing; it is devolutionary as distinguished from evolutionary; it is collapse!

The collapse has numerous manifestations: strikes; riots; mass hysteria; political chicanery; licentiousness in the name of art, music, poetry; in a word, public bawdiness; in classrooms and pulpits alike the pursuit of excellence is more pardoned than praised. The signs, to say the least, are ominous.

It is, thus, of the utmost importance that we try to pinpoint the cause of this dwindling self-respect for, as I see it, this is the taproot of the deplorable effects we observe.

¹ Carl Gustav Jung, *The Undiscovered Self* (New York: New American Library, a Mentor Book, 1958).

Abandoned Responsibility

The mere phrasing of the collapse or decline as “the loss of self-respect” comes close to suggesting what the cause really is: *a marked removal of responsibility for self*. And while the individual who is forced to relinquish responsibility may take comfort in the fact that he did not divest himself voluntarily, the end result—coercively taken or willingly given—is *no responsibility for self*. Next to life itself, self-responsibility is the most precious possession one can lose, and it matters not how he loses it.

Before discussing the careless and lackadaisical attitude toward self-responsibility, let’s review its importance. For, unless an individual is aware of its deep meaning, he will regard it lightly and will not cling to it as one of the most priceless of all possessions.

Frederic Bastiat sets the stage for my thesis: “We hold from God the gift which includes all others. This gift is life—physical, intellectual, and moral life. But life cannot maintain itself alone. The Creator of life has entrusted us with the *responsibility* of preserving, developing, and perfecting it. In order that we may accomplish this, *He has provided us with a collection of marvelous faculties*.”²

Marvelous *potential* faculties would be more to my liking. A faculty is marvelous only when there is some attempt to realize its potentiality. There is nothing marvelous about the faculty of sight if one will not see, or of insight if one lets it lie forever dormant. The “marvelous” quality rises and falls with the development or atrophy of faculties. Put our faculties to use and they develop; neglect to use them and they decline.

Tie the arm to one’s side and it withers; cease exercising the mind for a prolonged period and thinking can no more be recovered than spoiled fruit can regain its freshness. It is use, practice, exercise that gives muscle to the faculties, all faculties—intellectual and spiritual as well as physical.

Observe a person in extreme difficulty—over his head in water or financial problems or whatever. Except in rare instances, he’ll frantically hope for someone to rescue him. But what happens when no helper is to be found? He finds only himself; he’s on his own responsibility; it’s sink or swim, as we say. And nine times

² Frederic Bastiat, *The Law* [1850] (Irvington-on-Hudson, N.Y.: The Foundation for Economic Education, Inc., 1950), p. 5.

out of ten he'll work his way out of the mess he's in. Faculties, if not too far gone, rusty though they may be, will rise to the occasion; creakily they'll begin to function.

Responsibility for self not only rescues the faculties from nonuse and atrophy but serves to renew, invigorate, and expand them; these faculties are the very essence of self, that is, of one's life. Further, self-responsibility has no substitute; it is *the* mainspring of the generative process.

Any individual who intelligently interprets and identifies his highest self-interest—the growth or hatching of faculties—and then clearly perceives the role self-responsibility plays in achieving this objective, must cherish, prize, and cling to its retention. Toward this right of being responsible for self he has a defiant possessiveness; it is among the last of all rights he will permit others to take from him—next to life itself. And the idea of voluntarily transferring one's self-responsibility to someone else is unthinkable. How could anyone call such a thought his own?

As If Shedding a Burden

But what, actually, is the situation? Millions of citizens are doing all within their power to rid themselves of responsibility for self as if it were a dreaded burden. They implore government to be responsible for their prosperity, their welfare, their security, even their children.³ They voluntarily drift—nay, militantly march—toward total irresponsibility.

And on the other side of the coin are the governmental power seekers—all too ready to accommodate. Members of the hierarchy who devoutly wish to assume responsibility for the people's lives and livelihoods—with the people's money!—are greeted less with resistance than with eager acceptance. Laws are then written

³ The child is but the extension of parental responsibility. So far as responsibility is concerned, parent and child begin as one and the same. Ideally, parental responsibility is relinquished as the offspring acquires responsibility for self; self-responsibility thus suffers no loss. But, to an alarming extent, this proper transition is ignored. Instead, the responsibility for children—education, for instance—is more and more turned over to government, an apparatus incapable of transferring the responsibility it has assumed to the child. It is this parental irresponsibility which accounts, in no small measure, for the juvenile delinquency we observe all about us.

to enforce compliance; that is, government forcibly takes the responsibility for problems, as much from those who oppose as from those who applaud the transfer of responsibility.

Together—those who eagerly shed responsibility and those who as avidly assume it for others—they present not only a collapse of self but a landslide to tyranny.

Strikes, riots, and other provocative demonstrations are but the actions of a people bereft of self-respect. These millions are no longer anchored to responsible behavior; they have cast themselves adrift, their trade union or the government or some other “benefactor” assuming the responsibility for their lives. The disciplined behavior required for social felicity, which responsibility for self imposes, is so lacking that they suffer no obvious penalties for their follies. To absolve human beings of this corrective force is to populate the world with people recklessly on the loose; every base emotion released, vent given to the worst in men.

Individuals responsible for self are rarely found in mobs. They concern themselves, rather, with spouses, children, perhaps aged or helpless relatives and friends—others who are less fortunate than themselves. Above all else, they pay attention to an emerging, expanding selfhood. In a word, there’s work to do—no time or even inclination to indulge in actions unrelated thereto.

Look to the Thinking

So, when lamenting the current trends, point the finger of blame where it belongs, at The Establishment, namely, at the preponderant thinking of our day: the mischievous notion that it is the role of government to look after “its people.”⁴ Point the finger, also, at the dwindling respect for our most priceless right: the right to look out for ourselves.

Observe that the finger of blame points at the mischievous notion of paternalism and the loss of self-respect—not at discrete individuals. Without question, we make a grave error when we try to shame persons because they espouse ideas which we believe to be false. One can take no credit for this tactic; it is as shallow as, indeed, it is identical to, name-calling. Such personal affronts generate only resentment;

⁴ Many of the persons who deplore riots are those who support one or another Federal handout—free lunches, Medicare, subsidies, the Gateway Arch, you name it—little realizing that their type of action set the riots in motion.

under this kind of fire, these human targets of our criticisms rise to their own defense and are thereby hardened in their ways. Utter silence is preferable to this.

We should, instead, work at the impersonal level, which means coming to grips with the ideas at issue. All of us share in common a feeling of gratitude toward those who keep us from making fools of ourselves. That it's the function of government to look out for "its people" is no more valid than the ancient belief that the earth is flat. Were we adequately to work at the intellectual level, the former notion would no more be upheld than the latter, and for the same reason: its invalidity!

It is clear that expanding selfhood is possible only in a state of freedom. And it is equally clear that freedom is out of the question among an irresponsible people, seemingly a vicious circle. Yet, this circle can be broken, the collapse ended, and a reversal begun by little more than a recognition that self-responsibility is the master key. Man then may see that his earthly purpose is not to be a ward of the government but *his own man*, under God—self-respecting and self-responsible.

4

Finding Words for Common Sense

Fortunate, indeed, is the person who has learned to “*say what he means and to mean what he says.*” While meaning what you say is within the reach of anyone who can master integrity, saying what you mean is never fully realized. The reason is simple: saying implies communicating and that puts as much burden on what is perceived by the listener as on what is said by the speaker. And the breach is widened between writers and readers if they be strangers, particularly when the message is in the realm of abstract thought.

Small wonder that it takes a great deal of word-searching to communicate effectively on such an abstract subject as political economy; the freedom thesis is like a foreign language to most persons!

Summer Seminars at FEE emphasize not only the problem you and I face but also suggest how “wordy” the solution is. Numerous teachers, for instance, though fully acquainted with the written words in our publications, remain highly skeptical of the ideas. But they enroll, nonetheless; that is, they dare to expose themselves to FEE’s “far out” rationale. And then, after listening to a few of the lectures—the spoken word—and gaining a better idea of what we *really* mean, the skepticism vanishes; a deep interest takes place; they become devotees of liberty.

Words! Words! Words! “Far out” is illustrative. Why is FEE so often categorized in this manner? What an unfaithful caricature that is! The illusion has its origin in what we teach: the free market, private ownership, willing exchange, limited government way of life, with its moral and spiritual antecedents. This philosophy seems “far out” only because it is at odds with prevailing popular sentiments which, preponderantly, are socialistic. Should there be a reversal of prevailing sentiments, then socialism would be called “far out”—that is, were words to remain at this noncommunicative and confusing level.

Yes, indeed, the teachers and students of liberty—each of us should be both—are faced with a word problem: the language of liberty is strange to ears long attuned to the notions, clichés, plausibilities of statism, interventionism, socialism. To most people, it’s almost akin to speaking in a foreign land without knowing the tongue; to listeners or readers, “it’s all Greek.”

Assuming—as we do—that the ways of freedom make sense, ours then is the task of finding words for common sense. And I am unaware of any term that better illustrates our dilemma than “the free market.” We have one concept in mind, but frequently a different idea comes through to the reader or hearer. The image that “free market” conjures up is rarely a faithful reproduction of the intention.

Only Free in Part

The free market—as we use the term—has only been approximated, never realized. Thus, to understand our meaning, those aspects of the economy which have never been free must be imagined as free. And here is where we run into communication troubles: not many people can make the leap to imaginary situations; they can draw only on experience. This explains, in part, why so many take our term, free market, to mean no more than private enterprise, as if the two were one and the same. The failure to make the distinction leads to ideological confusion and educational mischief.

This also explains why we hear such diverse clichés as: “If private enterprise really works, why the great depression?” and “The free market ignores the poor.”¹

Daily events supply examples of how confusion is created, of how words and terms convey meanings not intended. For instance, as this is written, UPS (United Parcel Service) in the New York Metropolitan Area has been shut down by strike for many weeks. Our argument that mail delivery should be divorced from government and left to free market delivery—free entry, willing exchange, competitive pricing—brings to most readers’ minds such alternative services as UPS. Because UPS is a private enterprise carrier, its type of operation is thought of as the sole alternative to our present socialistic service and, thus, the best that we of the freedom persuasion have to offer as a free market example. Imagine the chaotic situation if there were no mail delivery for weeks on end in the world’s largest commercial and financial center! Turn mail delivery over to the free market? No, thank you! So goes the response to our free market argument, and all because of a confusion over words.

¹ For answers to these and 74 other clichés, see *Clichés of Socialism*, (The Foundation for Economic Education, Inc., Irvington-on-Hudson, N.Y.)

UPS—like most of the private enterprises in the nation—is not precisely what we mean by the free market. Were that enterprise truly free, it would be operating today. A truly free operation shuts down only because there is too little demand for its services to yield a profit, or because some competitor supplies the services better and/or cheaper. UPS shut down only because some anti-free market forces crept into its operation; in that respect, the UPS is an imperfect free market example.

The free market is that which prevails when all exchanges are free of coercion; it is willing exchange only, that is, freedom in transactions.

The Evil Is Aggression

But what, precisely, is coercion? Here, again, is a word that often confuses rather than clarifies. Rarely does it convey to a reader what the writer has in mind. So, to find words to explain what we mean by the free market first requires the words to explain what we mean by coercion, the free market's antithesis.

The dictionary definition and the common understanding of the word “coercion” does not fully convey what we mean. Generally, coercion is thought of as force, with no distinction as to the kind of force. What we have in mind as the antithesis of the free market is *aggressive* force which can best be understood by contrasting it with *defensive* force. Let me be explicit: the forcible taking of life and/or livelihood is aggressive force; fending off the takers of life and/or livelihood is defensive force. Aggression is always an initiated action; defense is exclusively a secondary action, never coming into play except as a life-saving, rights-preserving, peace-keeping action. Aggression is a malignancy, antithetical to free market existence; defensive force, on the other hand—dormant until antagonized—is an ally and the armor of freedom.

When one can imagine a situation in which no aggressive force exists or, if it does, where it is promptly suppressed by defensive force, then one envisions creativity flowing freely and uninhibited from all citizens—the free market! With this ideal in mind, it is easy to observe the countless current practices that exemplify what the free market is not.

Before explaining why UPS and thousands of other enterprises are not precise examples of the free market, a brief clarifying commentary on private enterprise is in order.²

Piracy is an enterprise and is definitely private. But observe that piracy's distinguishing feature is aggressive force. Now, as aggression lessens in any private operation the enterprise moves from the piratical state toward the ideal: the free market. All I wish to emphasize here is that being private is not the feature that controls the position of an enterprise on the piracy-free market spectrum. Aggressive force is the distinctive feature. Any enterprise, be it destructive or constructive, can be and often is private. Thus, the mere fact that an enterprise is privately initiated lends it no special virtue, economic or otherwise.

With the above in mind, it is now relevant to ask by what means was the United Parcel Service brought to an absolute standstill? If this enterprise had been the area's *exclusive* mail carrier, how could it have paralyzed the world's greatest business center?³ The answer to both questions is clear: aggressive force!

Unions and Coercion

The aggressive force in the UPS situation issues from trade unions. Dissatisfied with the wages or working conditions or whatever, some workers quit—they refuse to perform their allotted tasks—and they forcibly prevent willing workers from continuing! Note that there is no aggressive force in the simple act of quitting, nor should we condemn the practice. The right of anyone to quit his engagement—short of contract violation—is a precious right, a distinguishing feature of free men. Nor can we logically condemn quitting in unison. The deplorable practice of aggression by trade unions occurs at the time and place when force or the threat of force is used to keep others from accepting the positions union members have vacated.⁴ This is the aggressive force that shut down UPS.

² As should be clear, this is not a criticism of UPS. My acquaintance with the company is only with its remarkable service which millions of us have enjoyed. Any one of countless private enterprises could as easily be used to illustrate my point.

³ The dangers inherent in an exclusive (monopolistic) mail carrier can be avoided by adopting the simplest policy conceivable, namely, free entry. In short, let anyone—UPS or whoever—deliver mail. Should any carrier be shut down for whatever reason, have no fear, plenty of others would be seeking the opportunity to fill the vacancy. The present socialistic postal system is a complete monopoly and highly unionized. In addition to socialistic inefficiency, we are forever at the mercy of trade union sufferance. We are always in danger of a nation-wide shut-down!

A trade union is an enterprise of sorts and it is just as private as a corporation. Each is an authorization by government; each is a legal entity. The primary distinction between these two types of private enterprise is that government improperly authorizes and encourages trade unions to use aggressive force and, quite properly, denies its use by corporations.

One should bear in mind, of course, that the existence of trade unions depends on the pre-existence of entrepreneurs; there would be no industrial unions were it not for those who organize capital, management, and production, who seek and find markets, and who discover ways to cut costs. Yet, in spite of the fact that trade unions take root only in entrepreneurial arrangements—draw their life from them—it is the union as such that initiates the aggression and forces others to comply. They can, and often do, force their way into and become an integral part of the entrepreneurial structure. They can, and often do, demand corporate obedience as related to wages and working conditions. The penalty they are allowed to impose for disobedience is closure of the business—even permanently. Their message is: Do as we say, or else!

Theoretically and legally, a business and its trade unions are separate entities. But the over-all effect, once an alliance between the two is formed—willingly or unwillingly—is an organizational oneness. The managerial function merges; on occasion it is even difficult to tell who is working for whom. And because trade unions introduce aggressive force into the alliance, the business entity, be it UPS, GE, GM, AT&T, or any one of thousands, cannot be classified as strictly free market. Private enterprise, yes; but free market, rarely!

My point is that these corporate instances of private enterprise may or may not accurately exemplify the free market. Indeed, where the aggressive forces are dominant, private enterprises may be as far from free market in their operation as is the TVA or the Post Office!

Perverting the Law

The free market can properly function only as aggressive force is diminished. Government, theoretically at least, is society's agency of defense, its role being

⁴ Compulsory membership in trade unions, a growing practice, is another aggressive action.

to rid society of aggressive force in its numerous manifestations: fraud, violence, predation, misrepresentation. Yet, today, government itself is by far the outstanding practitioner of aggressive force: for instance, the forcible extortion of your income and mine to put men on the moon, to pay workers for not working, farmers for not farming, on and on.

A compelling reason for this reversed role of government—aggression rather than defense—is that countless minorities and localities insist upon special privileges, that is, the gratification of their wishes at the expense of others.⁵ This type of gratification is attainable only by aggressive force. While nearly everyone can see the fallacy of this as a way of life when indulged in by others, very few can imagine getting along without their own special privilege. Aggressive force, they concede, is wrong—except in *our* case; *we* couldn't get along without it!

We couldn't get along without it! Proof that this is a common point of view is evident on every hand, from growers of peanuts to educators of youth. For an example relevant to the free market and its antithesis, aggressive force, reflect again on the trade unions. Most of their 17 million members believe they would be in poverty were aggressive force not allowed in their case. The right to strike denied? No more force or threat of force to keep others from taking jobs they have vacated? Unthinkable! *We*, of all people, must be allowed this special privilege. So runs the “reasoning.”

Were strikes—not mere quitting—effectively prohibited, aggressive force would disappear in labor relations and in the over-all corporate structure. Services, as well as commodities, would then be on a willing exchange basis—the free market in labor relations!

Some Fallacies About Unions

Again, we must find words that mean what we say—that make common sense—for the idea of a free market in services, as in commodities, has been effectively squelched. If we are to bring the idea back to life, we must first explain and expose the false notions that lend support to trade union power or aggression. Two notions are prominent.

⁵ See “When Wishes Become Rights,” *The Freeman*, November, 1964.

The first common fallacy is that labor and commodities are economically different and, thus, must not be treated identically. Yes, let a bushel of potatoes find its price on a free and unfettered market; that's all right. But labor find its wage in such a market? Never! Yet, there is no difference in principle between the pricing of goods and the pricing of services. The potato grower's labor goes to market in the potatoes he raises. The worker's labor goes to market directly. The market is pricing labor in either case. If potatoes should go to market, so should my labor—or yours, whoever you are.

The second fallacy is that wages are at their present high level by reason of trade unions having forced them where they are. The force implicit in strikes—all anti-free market activity—has had nothing whatsoever to do with raising the general wage level. Quite the contrary: to the extent that such activity deters production, to that extent is the effective wage level lower than would otherwise be the case.⁶

A move toward an approximation of the free market is possible only as aggressive force is lessened—in trade unions, government, or wherever. The conditions necessary for a trend in the free market direction are (1) an appreciation that the free market is the ideal toward which our efforts should be pointed, (2) a recognition that aggressive force is always regressive, (3) an ability to identify aggressive force in all of its subtle forms, and (4) the strength of character never to contravene these findings and insights.

No question about it, meeting these conditions is within the realm of possibility, if not probability. Meeting them is as possible and as probable for any individual as are his chances of mastering arithmetic and learning always to tell the truth. And what's so insurmountable about these challenges!

⁶ This point is a study in itself, that is, it's the problem of finding ever so many more words for common sense. For a scholarly analysis, see *Why Wages Rise* by Dr. F. A. Harper (Irvington-on-Hudson, N.Y.: The Foundation for Economic Education, Inc., 1959).

5

The Cartel Way

Local option closed the saloon in my little village before I was old enough to steal a peek through the swinging doors. But I wasn't too young to be impressed with a feature common to saloons of that day: the free lunch. Rumor had it that the food was good, and all you could eat. Intriguing to a ravenous youngster!

Of course, the free lunch was purely a business getter. If the customer went home to eat, he might not return for another drink. The profit in drinks exceeded the cost of the food; and that was the economics of the situation.

I was reminded of the free lunch by a recent edict of the Civil Aeronautics Board: no more free drinks on commercial airlines! Another business getter outlawed by government, and a popular ruling at that; a high proportion of airline passengers—and perhaps every last one of the nonpassengers—will exclaim, “Good riddance!” Nor will I argue for free drinks; anyone who can afford to ride first class is able to pay for his own spirits. The real issue, however, is not this minor item but rather the trend it portends. What concern is this of government? Carry such interventionism a few steps further, and I won't be allowed to buy you a cup of coffee!

The no-drink edict is symptomatic of a trend that frets me, and for good reason. I have been riding airplanes for 50 years—more than two million miles—and have grown up alongside the remarkable development of this industry. Today, it is in a state of perfection beyond my fondest dreams. But, I recall paying a similar tribute to railway passenger service and the “crack trains” of a short while ago. Observing what has happened to the railways by reason of governmental and trade union interventionism and the consequent denial of competitive pricing, I wonder if the same forces are not at work in air transportation!¹

Do you see what I see? Why, for instance, do our privately-owned airlines find themselves competing for business by resorting to such fringe attractions as a free

¹ It is careless talk to assert that the airlines ran the railways out of the passenger business. I can beat any prize fighter if his hands are tied behind his back. Had the railways been free to compete, no telling what miracles they might have wrought. They were given no chance!

martini? Why has their appeal for passengers been reduced to such advertising sophistry? We hear of “Fan” jets and “Whisper” jets as if these were better than competitors’ engines. One airline features “Yellowbirds” and another spends a fortune on a dozen color variations. We are offered meals aloft by “Club 21” and by “Voisin.” Motion pictures! And stereophonic recordings ranging from “rock” to Beethoven! Airlines compete in how nattily the stewardesses dress and how “mini” their skirts! One airline flies “the friendly skies,” implying that the heavens may be less gracious to the others. A stranger to flying might easily gain the impression that the airlines are competing with each other as night clubs in the sky. What accounts for this shadow competition?

Protection with a Vengeance

The answer is simple: Government does not permit *realistic* competition; the CAB, not the airlines, governs the pricing of airline services. Unhampered pricing is taboo; without it, competition is essentially meaningless, leaving only trivia as marks of distinction. When freedom to price their own services does not exist, how else can they compete for business except by appeals to inconsequential embellishments? To rephrase one of their punch lines, “Is this any way to run an airline? You bet it *isn’t*!”

Americans, by and large, have frowned on cartels, these being arrangements where members of an industry get together and fix prices. The intent of the popular but ill-advised Antitrust Laws was anticartel.² Only recently, some executives of leading electrical manufacturers were sent to prison for price fixing. In other words, they were condemned for *not* pricing competitively. Yet, the airline industry, like railroads, is a cartel, pure and simple: free entry is taboo; prices are fixed. Had the airline or railroad owners effected this rigged arrangement themselves, they would be prosecuted as criminals by the Antitrust Division of the Justice Department. But they are absolved of any guilt because, in these two instances, the cartels are of governmental construction.

Parenthetically, I make no claim that the airline owners are opposed to their cartel or that they are anxious for competitive pricing. For all I know, they may

² As to how ill-advised, see “Do Antitrust Laws Preserve Competition?” by Sylvester Petro. *The Freeman*, October, 1957.

like the arrangement; it has a dual attraction: no price competition and no public or governmental disapproval. While most Americans will concede that competition is sound in principle—when applied to others—not many will actually seek it for themselves. Unless one enjoys a contest for fitness' sake, competition is avoided.

My concern, however, is not so much for the airline owner who finds his industry controlled by the CAB. I am concerned as a passenger, and my concern extends to those who may never fly at all.

What about those persons who choose not to fly? The subsidies granted to all airlines since, say, 1925, add up to some staggering, unestimable figure.³ Who pays this bill? The taxpayers, as much by those who never fly as by those of us who regularly take to the air. Why should the nonflying Widow Doakes, for instance, subsidize my trips? This is rank injustice, but unavoidable under a government-backed cartel.

As for those of us who prefer to fly, why should we not be offered the full competitive range of services and prices free-market airlines would provide as a means of attracting our business? Introduce free entry along with competitive pricing, and watch their ingenuity out-do even today's remarkable performance. And assure continuous improvement by removing the coercive forces that have crippled the railroads! Such outstanding performance by free market practices has been demonstrated time after time in all areas where they are not prohibited!

Why not? The reason is plain: once an activity has been under government control, no one can imagine how the problems could be met were it decontrolled. This is the reason why the President's Commission for postal service improvement does not recommend that mail delivery be turned over to the market, that is, to free entry and competitive pricing. And it explains why there is little likelihood that the airlines will be decartelized.

Unimaginable!

It is true beyond question that no one, however ingenious, can envision how free-market airlines would operate. No one has ever had such foresight—or ever will!

³ Subsidies take many forms: government operated airways, weather stations, control towers, mail contracts, to mention a few. Then, there are the airports, the cost of which runs into the billions.

But hindsight shows that when an activity is left to the market the miracles happen; examples abound by the tens of thousands. Just look at the record!

For instance, no one, at the turn of the century, foresaw how free entry and competitive pricing would work in the auto industry. What does hindsight reveal? A remarkable selection-of-the-fittest took place; some 1,000 companies tried their hand and fell by the wayside. Those who failed in the competition didn't like it; but I am looking at our problem from the standpoint of a consumer. How have we consumers fared? Every one of the past three-score years has witnessed a service to us superior to that of the previous year. Today, there are just a few survivors; but from these few we can purchase an enormous variety of autos, any one of which would have confounded the imagination sixty years ago. And, so far as autos are concerned, we feel confident of improvement next year, and the year after. But how confident would we be were that competitive industrial complex merged into a government cartel?

U.S. based airlines are privately owned; most of the world's major airlines are government owned. Observe how much lower are the operating costs of the private lines.⁴ Private ownership, even in the absence of competitive pricing, generates a considerable ingenuity and accounts for the excellence of our airlines.

Except as Men Have Faith

However, we must bear in mind that there is no meaningful ownership except as there is owner control, and that as control by the CAB increases, private ownership of the airlines correspondingly disappears. The CAB's control is increasing!

This is why the edict, "No more free drinks," is ominous; it is symbolic of what's happening: competition, even in trivia, is destined to become less and less. Management of the airlines is slated to pass from the title holders to a government agency, as has the management of the railroads.

Once we grant that the industry is not suited to free entry and competitive pricing, that it is a natural monopoly of the government cartel type, we can expect nothing different for the airlines than has already happened to the railroads. Granting this error, our airlines will, sooner or later, be staffed alike, the workers

⁴ For a comparison, see "Flying Socialism" by Sam H. Husbands, Jr. *The Freeman*, February, 1965.

dressed and paid alike, the meals and movies and drinks served alike, and the planes decorated alike. We need only remember that competition, even in trivia, is not in the lexicon of collectivism; and we might expect that our airlines, like the government owned *Air France* or *Air India*, will eventually bear some such name as *Air America*. Conformity and uniformity, not distinctiveness, is the collective way.

This is assuredly the destiny of our airlines unless, of course, we turn to the one and only alternative: free entry and competitive pricing—even a drink on the house or a free lunch if the competitor so chooses. And this can happen only as more of us than now know for certain that the results will be more remarkable than we can ever imagine.

6

Faith in the Unimaginable

The case for the free market in transportation, of course, means more private responsibility for the airlines' operation than presently exists under CAB regulation. It would require private rather than government control, free entry and open competition, including competitive pricing. But, I acknowledge the improbability of any such happy outcome unless "*more of us than now know for certain that the results will be more remarkable than we can ever imagine.*"

And there you have the libertarian stumbling block, the main reason why we fail to make the case for the miraculous market. In a word, we haven't yet learned how to spread the good news. One simply cannot "sell" people on something they can't even imagine. Indeed, selling anything that cannot be conceived is inconceivable!

The inconceivability of the future under the principles of the free market can perhaps be illustrated by a look at the present from some point in the past. Imagine George Washington's spirit seated beside me as I now write these thoughts. Within arm's reach are several devices that increase the possibilities of individual achievement—potential aids to human energy. There is an electrically-powered typewriter; a machine that registers dictation on the same belt over and over again, magnetically erasing what was on it before; a microphone wired to an apparatus that records conversations; an instrument that will transmit the human voice around this world of ours at lightning speed.

We have allowed George Washington to peek at what was future to him and is present to us. Astonishing! Incredible! These things were unimaginable in his lifetime. And, granting the free market, the future has to be equally unimaginable to us. Yet, there are only a few who have a calm assurance that the results will be miraculous, that is, more remarkable than anyone can imagine. Without question, the free market rises and falls as this faith, this kind of certainty, comes and goes. Right now, there is too little faith; unless it is increased, even the present remnants of the free market are doomed to extinction. Our problem, then, is how to find or motivate such certainty, such faith in freedom.

Please understand, I am not arguing here that more of these technical miracles is life's supreme objective. Far from it! These miraculous gadgetries, in the absence

of an increasing wisdom and an ever-improving sense of righteousness, may prove to be hindrances to human progress—could even, blow us off the face of the earth! Nuclear giants who are ethical infants will get us nothing but trouble.¹

The Miraculous Market

Now to the important question: From whence stems the required certainty in free market miracles? It begins with the knowledge that all of these miracles are the outcroppings of individual liberty. Creativity, being of the spiritual realm, is frustrated by coercion. Were it otherwise, I could approach you with a gun and obtain not only your pocketbook but an on-the-spot invention. Preposterous!

Human progress is not guaranteed, and this is true whether we are thinking in terms of spiritual, intellectual, moral, or material progress. We can, however, assure decline. Institutionalize coercion and progress is strangled; freedom in society makes unimaginable progress at least possible.

Translated into market terms, this means free entry or open competition, private ownership and control as distinguished from government control, willing rather than unwilling exchange, and competitive pricing—with government limited to invoking a common justice and keeping the peace. For confirmation, merely observe that the societal situation as here described has never been more nearly approximated than in the U.S.A. from Washington's day until quite recently. This situation, as distinguished from authoritarian or interventionist arrangements, has accounted for the miracles George Washington might have seen by peeking into his future—our present.

We can imagine bringing George Washington from past to present, but he could never have imagined what there would be for him to witness. Nor can you or I dip

¹ The sputnik is one of many technical miracles. Unless one is extremely skeptical and discerning, it may lead to a false idea as to what the organized force of government can do for human advancement. *Such things as sputniks are the consequence of a coercive force applied to free, volitional, intuitive, inventive forces, swerving them away from freely chosen goals and toward authoritarian ends.* Applying coercion to creativity must result in such grotesqueries as the sputnik. Why is this true? As Emerson put it, "Cause and effect cannot be severed." Coercion (evil) cannot result in good, for the end pre-exists in the means. For instance, had the release of atomic energy awaited human needs, the result would have been a boon to mankind instead of a bomb.

into the future. And, obviously, we cannot sell or convey or even hint at that which cannot be imagined. This is why a belief, amounting to certainty, in the miraculous potentialities of the free market cannot be spread by advocacy, by selling, or by importuning.

The free market way of life is not something one person can sell to another! Its rise or fall is not determined by such external influences.

The free market way of life depends entirely upon an internal force: faith—intimately personal and individual. Faith is not spread or even taught; at best, it is caught, by insight and observation. It is, as St. Paul tells us, “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” (Hebrews 11:1)

Faith is a quality of variable intensity; it ranges from zero to fickle to deep and abiding. In terms of our problem, I have a faith, deep and certain, in the miracles that will flow from free men and a zero faith in what slaves or coerced mankind can bring to pass!

This abiding faith in freedom explains why I must reject all forms of socialism at a time when socialism is on the increase and gaining in popularity.

It is this faith that accounts for my free market position concerning air transportation.

It is this faith that causes me to say, “Let anyone deliver mail as anyone may deliver drugs or groceries or whatever.” And this is my position precisely at the time when the President’s Commission on Post Office improvement is exploring ways to make socialism work, never daring to entrust mail delivery to the free market. Our different positions are to be explained by our differences in faith.

A Proper Humility

Because faith is so intimate and personal, I can account only for my own—not for theirs, or for yours. So, whence comes my free market faith? It comes from the only kind of knowledge it is not egotistical to claim.

I know I do not know very much! The fact that I can’t even imagine—let alone know-how mail would be delivered or airlines operated if these enterprises were left to free market practices does not shake my faith. My faith rests on the understanding that I *cannot* know this! On the other hand, persons who lack

this understanding are inclined to reject what they cannot conceive; thus, they are without faith in the free market.

I know that if the free market were able to tap only my knowledge and ingenuity—or yours—its potential would be no higher than that of socialism.

I know, however, that the free market taps and brings to our advantage ideas and creativities—flowing and growing—since the dawn of consciousness.²

I know how limited is the role of any one of us in any of these miracles: the head of AT&T, for instance, in the transmission of the human voice at lightning speed.

I know I cannot imagine the outcome.

I know my faith in this over-all wisdom is warranted; I can affirm it by simply comparing the present with the past—a truth-revealing and rewarding exercise.

Finally, the prospects are brightened rather than dimmed by the fact that this faith cannot be sold or taught—can only at best be caught. If the faith is well-grounded, deep and abiding, strong enough in any individual, it radiates; it communicates by its force of attraction, that is, others gain an apprehension of it by being drawn to it. We do not know nor need we concern ourselves over *who* will “catch” this faith. Our sole responsibility is to be good and faithful carriers; the contagion will take the message from there!

² For a considerable development of this thesis, see the chapter, “The Miraculous Market,” in my *The Free Market and Its Enemy*. (Irvington-on-Hudson, N.Y.: The Foundation for Economic Education, Inc., 1965).

7

Consider the Alternative

Why not try freedom? The alternative question is, Why not give in to dictatorship? Society-wise, the trend is always toward one of these alternatives, and the direction of this societal drift is determined by the choices, the preferences, of individuals. True, one decision may carry more weight than another; one person's action may matter more than another's; but the choice, the act of deciding, is an individual act—no exception!

Consideration of alternatives may help to highlight the blessing of freedom and expose the fraud of authoritarianism. There are countless ways to make the explanation, of course, but experience reveals that none of those we've tried so far is sufficient. A particular explanation may be heard by a few; and so it is with every set of reasons, however brief or expanded: a few may listen and understand. I mention this only because the problem is as much yours as mine. To expect a single, sure-fire explanation of the case for freedom is to ask the impossible, and it leads to discouragement. So, this "alternative" approach is simply another attempt to communicate on the wonderful theme of freedom, to find words for common sense.

Selecting among alternatives is sometimes referred to as decision-making. But, by whatever name, reflect on how it accounts for where we are and what we are. Why, for instance, one's present abode? Why not some other place? Why isn't one's position other than it is? Or one's spouse some other person? Or one's friends an entirely different set?

Regardless of the question posed, the answer—if one lives in an open society—is largely the result of a choice he has made, wisely or unwisely. Where or who or what I am largely depends on the alternatives I have chosen.

The lifetime of any normal, adult individual encompasses literally millions of such choices; they range all the way from decisions as spontaneous as the conditioned reflexes—unconscious, perhaps instinctive—to long and carefully deliberated choices. I took this street instead of that and met a man who changed my life. I accepted one job instead of another and was introduced to a girl who became my wife. Rather than striking back, I turned the other cheek and won a

friend. I chose the ditch as the alternative to a head-on. And here I am for whatever I am, all by reason of choosing this, rather than that alternative.

The initial point to be emphasized is that the choosing of alternatives is intimately and exclusively personal. Even when I say, "I leave it to you," that choice is mine. Nor does the length of time I may consult and deliberate before acting render a decision any the less mine than if I had acted instantaneously. Ditching to avoid a head-on crash is strictly the driver's choice; there is no intervention unless, of course, another grabs the wheel—in which case the other becomes the driver. The very idea of choice implies the right or privilege of choosing freely—on one's own responsibility—whether done quickly or slowly.

The extent of one's freedom to choose vitally influences the person he is to become. Decision-making is undeniably man-making! Precious, indeed, is the freedom to choose.

Some Things Beyond Our Control

There are various determining factors that are not a matter of personal choice; and a man's life is not self-made to the extent that such factors prevail.

For instance, the child does not choose his parents, the hereditary factor. And heredity, in some measure, accounts for the uniqueness of the individual. But isn't it amazing how much some persons are able to do with the little they inherit and how little others appear to accomplish with all that graces their birth? That difference hinges on the alternatives each chooses, when he is free to choose.

Nor do we choose the society into which we are born, the environmental factor. Think of the millions in China or India whose choices are curbed by the limitations poverty imposes; the opportunities from which they may select are severely restricted, in contrast to our own. As a consequence, individual development is stunted in these stricken lands.

Or consider the politically foreshortened alternatives open to the millions in Russia who are the victims of authoritarianism. Freedom to choose is largely denied. A Russian does not choose this or that school, or job, or wage, or the length of work week. How can he choose the style and make of an automobile when the few available are identical? He has only minor choices as to the crops or stock he raises, nor can he travel here or there at will. The alternatives open to his choice have been grievously closed to him.

The life of the individual in Russia is far from his own; most of the alternatives open to you and me do not exist for him; decision-making is pretty much reserved to the political dictatorship. The Russian may do as he is told, or face the wrath of the dictator. But what kind of a choice is that! The emphasis there is not on self-made men but on carbon copies, as if the pattern already had been perfected!

Our concern is for freedom. In the light of the foregoing observations, we may conclude that freedom grows in terms of the number of alternatives open to personal choice. And we may judge that a new proposal advances freedom if it opens additional alternatives for choice. Such choosing is the essence of freedom. All social programs and activities may be thus tested, however sponsored or initiated. A minimum wage law, for example, reduces an employers alternatives to hire, and eliminates entirely the alternative of paid labor for many individuals; the only choice remaining to them is whether or not to go on relief. The billions spent to put men on the moon, or to erect the Gateway Arch, or whatever, subtract from the fruits of our own labor and, thus, diminish the alternatives otherwise open to us. Consider how freedom of choice is affected by compulsory membership in labor unions and by strikes! It is easy to classify any move or measure as antifreedom whenever it removes alternatives.¹

A Precious Opportunity

I am reminded here of a line from *Cyrano de Bergerac*:

I tell you
There comes one moment, once—and God help those
Who pass that moment by!

There is a moment for each choice, be it a split-second decision or the more deliberate one involved in choosing one's occupation. There is always the right moment. But consider to whom that moment belongs, with whom it has exclusive identification, and who, alone among all who live, can act upon it or pass it by. That moment is as private and self-possessed as a thought. The outcome of that moment

¹ There are alternatives, of course, that should not be open to anyone: to steal, kill, do injury to others, and the like. The principled function of government is to codify these destructive, antifreedom alternatives and to curb offenders.

is determined in the deep recesses of the individual mind as it fails or succeeds in assessing, receiving, reacting, thinking, intuiting, reasoning. Each individual chooses, and how he chooses determines the unique individual that he is—unique in the sense that there are not nor can there be any duplications on the face of the earth. Every human being, in freedom, can proclaim with equal validity, whether he acts on a dozen or a million decisions, “This choice is mine, all mine!”

What counts, above all else, are the alternatives at one’s disposal; and the freedom of choice that prevails in this regard is the alternative to authoritarianism. The distinction between the blessing of freedom and the fraud of dictatorship, from this perspective, boils down to an enlargement versus a constriction of the alternatives from which the individual may choose.

8

Social Reformers as Keepers of the Peace

Three city blocks were systematically burned to the ground as hundreds of the local police stood by and viewed the violence. They were obeying orders not to harm the arsonists. The National Guard was called, adding more armed watchers. A passive gendarmery consorting with open rebellion has rarely been seen in American history, until recently.

Except for variation in detail and numbers, this sort of thing is happening today on college campuses, in the streets, on the farms, in places of business, in the nations capital.

And if we turn to France, we see the same breakdown:

After almost four weeks of often bloody turmoil in the streets, the factories and even the placid rolling fields of rural France, this was the picture:

Ten million striking workers. Hundreds of thousands of striking students occupying their universities. Thousands of farmers on the march in the rural provinces. Public transport at a virtual standstill.

Young doctors taking over the seat of the National Medical Association for 48 hours. Young architects and young lawyers rebelling against the officers of their professional organizations. Actors occupying the theaters. *Policemen warning the Government not to pit them against the workers.* (Italics mine)¹

Pinpointing the Problem

These increasing depredations, here as well as abroad, pose the question: Have we of the “free world” lost the art of keeping the peace and, if so, why? What really lies at the root of this rampaging violence? Obviously, it is not the colored problem, for all shades and hues are among the rioters. Nor is it a religious affair; the varying creeds are as widely represented in the mobs as are atheists. No nationality problem

¹ See Henry Tanner, “Turmoil in France,” *New York Times*, May 26, 1968.

is identifiable. Can it be economic? Hardly! The offspring of wealthy families go berserk along with those incapable of earning the legal minimum wage.

What then? Where lies this fault? A good part of the blame rests upon the electorate which has put social reformers into Federal, state, and local government office.

Keeping the peace is the highly specialized task of government, and social reformers are peculiarly unqualified to perform this function; they are agitators, not peacemakers. When it comes to keeping the peace, social reformers are misfits—deplorable failures!

With some notable exceptions, we are electing reformers to city councils, state legislatures, the Congress, and to top administrative posts. This being the case, is it any wonder that the rioters go unrestrained? The mobsters are among the clients of these agitators for change. This explains why, every now and then, policemen are observed helping mobsters carry off their loot; they are acting sometimes under direct orders and all too often in a manner consistent with the avowed policies of the social reformers.

Consider the Promises

Now, how can we tell whether a candidate for public office is a social reformer? By simply listening to his platform, the things he intends to do if elected.

If a candidate so much as mentions what he is going to do for some group or class or minority or locality with other people's money, that is, if he proposes to feather the nests of some at the expense of others, he must be classified as a social reformer, and an unprincipled one, at that. These reformers promise to do good things, not voluntarily with the fruits of their own labor, but through the use of coercion; they rely on the force of government to achieve their ends; they coercively expropriate the fruits of your labor and mine to do their "good."

Let me be explicit: I am not pointing the finger of blame at these politically-oriented reformers who would apply coercion. They are exceedingly honest with the voters; they eloquently boast of what they intend to do. They compete, after a fashion, to decide which of them can do the most for us with our money! They surely deserve applause for their honesty. Naïve voters, taken in by this nonsense, are the ones at fault. They are fascinated by the prospects of "social gains"—and greatly disappointed when those who promise such gains fail to keep the peace!

Prevailing sentiment to the contrary notwithstanding, I insist that America politically is off course! There remains only a vestige of the idea that the role of government is to keep the peace; in its stead is the notion that the force implicit in government is to implement social reform. Thus, the political debates are less concerned with keeping the peace than disturbing it; the argument is over the best way to use coercion to redistribute earnings and savings acquired peacefully through production and exchange. So long as this redistributionist sentiment prevails, social reformers will vie with each other to accommodate the sentiment. We are not likely, under these conditions, to find individuals vying with each other to keep the peace; until there is a popular call for peacemakers they will remain in obscurity.

Any change for the better must originate in the minds of voters as a more realistic appreciation of the essence of government. To know the nature of government is the first step in knowing what not to ask of it.

Backed by Force

*The essential characteristic of government is organized force.*² Use yourself to test the truth of this assertion: The distinction between you as an agent of government and you as a private citizen is that, as an agent of government, you are backed by a constabulary. When you issue an edict, backed by force, I tend to obey.

Subtract this instrument of force, the constabulary, and you resume private citizenship. You issue an edict and it has no more effect on me than a chamber of commerce resolution; I do as I please.

Reflect on what organized force can do. It can inhibit, prohibit, penalize, restrain, suppress.

Organized force cannot be an agency for creativity. Creativity is spiritual: discovery, invention, intuition, inquisitiveness, insight.

With these points in mind, we can logically deduce the proper role of government by merely asking: What in good conscience should be prohibited, penalized, suppressed? The answer has been given in the moral codes: the destructive actions of men such as violence, fraud, predation, misrepresentation—thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not kill, and the like. Limit

² "Government, in its last analysis, is organized force." Woodrow Wilson, *The State* (Boston: D. C. Heath & Co., 1900), p. 572.

government to this policing function, for here is its principled role. The balance of the message comes just as clearly: never use force to achieve a creative end, be it housing, power and light, education, medicine, welfare, security, prosperity, charity. Leave these desirable achievements to the creativity which can flourish among men only when they are free!

Were government limited to its principled role, as opposed to the statist or social-reformer concept, officials at all levels would concern themselves with the codification of the thou-shalt-nots and their enforcement. Common justice—everyone equal before the law as before God—would be their hallmark. We, the voters, would judge candidates on their sense of justice, on their ability to maintain a fair field and no favor, on their competence at writing prohibitive law, and on their skills in keeping peace and order.

What would these campaigners have to say? I am certain of only one thing: the speeches would bear little resemblance to what candidates are promising today. As to what precisely they would say, I do not know.

For keeping the peace is a highly technical matter requiring a wisdom and kinds of skills I do not possess.³ And having heard a very few such speeches, I have no specific techniques to pass on.

Improving the Audience

Men with the potential statesmanship so sorely required are unquestionably among us. They will be drawn from obscurity—rise to the top as spokesmen—when an audience exists, and not before. And this audience can be defined as numerous persons who understand the difference between a government of social reformers and a government to keep peace and order—with a strong preference for the latter. The change must come first in the audience—in you and me. We shall hear answers to our hopes and prayers when we know what to ask for.

Finally, let us beware of the vigilance committee form of government. As law and order break down, private groups may try to keep the peace. For instance,

³ Just as an example, where is the man with the wisdom and skill—the know-how—to assure an honest medium of exchange? Maintaining justice as related to money is so complex that most candidates ignore the matter. Indeed, few of them would recognize an expert should one appear. The current emphasis is away from this required expertise.

there were the students who chased the rioters off their campus! These cases of determination and courage—on the increase—tend to excite our admiration. Yet, anarchy is born when citizens “take the law into their own hands.” The end of this road is the big, strong man.

There is no place for social reformers in governmental posts, for these positions endow them with coercive power which they mistakenly use to achieve their “reforms.” Reform, to be meaningful, is a volitional turn for the better to which coercion is obviously antagonistic.

We need to bring from obscurity the potential statesmen who can keep the peace. To effect such change requires little more of us—the people—than a reasonable sense of justice and a knowledge of what government should and should not do.

9

Rising Above Mediocrity

We will all agree that there have been periods in history darker than our own.

But few devotees of liberty will agree that there was as much wrong in the world, say three or four generations ago, as today. It doesn't *seem* that there could have been! This raises the first question. Why?

My grandfather knew what went on under his nose—and little else. The wrongs and woes he observed were only those in his little orbit and these were few and minor. If some poor soul were hungry, the problems were dealt with personally by feeding him. Grandfather saw but few instances of theft or other threats to life and livelihood, nor did he and his neighbors make much fuss in dealing with such offenses. Their world—the one they viewed—was microcosmic and, as such, was not beyond their powers to manage. The wrongs and woes, and blessings as well, were more or less comprehended by their limited mentalities.

Our mental abilities are not to be distinguished from theirs, but the wrongs and woes coming within our vision are without limit. Radio, TV, and other public media report to us daily about all of the ills on earth, many of which are grossly exaggerated; squabbles among primitives thousands of miles away, riots and poverty situations in any of the states, are as intimately familiar to us as was the report of the chicken thief who wronged grandfathers next-door neighbor. The technological explosion in communication and transportation has opened our window not just into our own back yard but to cover the world. We see everybody's problems. As a consequence, most of us, instead of alleviating, are aggravating the wrongs and woes we'd like to remedy. This poses the second question. Why?

Always Anxious to Help

No less in our case than in grandfather's, we react to wrongs and woes—nearby or far off—with, "I must do something!" For our compassion, be it noted, remains on a level with that of our recent ancestors, as does our limited capabilities to right the wrongs and relieve the woes. As to sensitivities and mentalities, no historian will ever be able to tell the difference.

Grandfather, however, reacting to the little he perceived, could and did rely upon his own efforts governed by his moral scruples. No problem! But we? No such solution is open to us for these far-out problems; we don't have access to them and, thus, their handling is beyond our personal capacity. What, for instance, can I personally do about quarrels in Indonesia, riots in Watts, poverty in ghettos, foreigners running our steelmakers out of business, collapse of the British pound, the hopes for higher prices on the part of some and lower prices on the part of others, wages too low and too high, and so on? My compassion bumps head-on into my limited ability. What, pray tell, can I do?

A prepackaged answer is waiting for me. Swarms of social reformers in government not only express a willingness to cope with these countless wrongs and woes, they actually plead with me to let them shoulder the burdens of my distressed brothers. And unless I am aware of the dreadful consequences, I will salve my conscience by giving them the go-ahead. What are the consequences? This is the third question. My answer falls into three parts.

We Can't Afford It

First, the price we are compelled to pay, once we resort to the reformers legerdemain, will be more than we can bear. They rely on inflation as a means of financing their shallow schemes which, in turn, must destroy our economy. My explanation of this point, demonstrated over and over again throughout history, is in another book.¹

Second, mediocrity will be institutionalized. What we should recognize about the social reformers is that their mentalities and capabilities are not above our own. Indeed, the fact that they aren't even aware of their limitations suggests that they be graded below the rest of us. Nevertheless, there they are with these far-out problems on their hands, no one of them knowing any more about how to solve them than do you or I.

So, what is the social reformers typical move? Almost without exception, he appoints a committee! And this gives him the same satisfaction of having

¹ See the chapter, "The American Setting: Past and Present," in my *Anything That's Peaceful* (Irvington-on-Hudson, N.Y.: The Foundation for Economic Education, Inc., 1964).

accomplished something as we felt originally in turning the wrongs and woes of mankind over to him. We salved our consciences by nothing more than a gesture, and the social reformers, by another gesture, salve theirs. And all is joy in the sense that ignorance is bliss. Yet, we and they together have only built monuments to our ignorance, that is, institutionalized our collective mediocrity. The error is compounded by our apparent satisfaction at thus having solved everything so easily.

Solved everything? Merely observe that we, after turning the wrongs and woes over to social reformers, retire from the field. So far as we are concerned, that's that! And then observe that the social reformers, after appointing a committee, also retire from the field. So far as they are concerned, that's that!

A committee? What is it like? It's nothing but another set of persons as limited in capabilities as you or I or the social reformers. And what is committee procedure? The members construct a montage of their views, a blending of the same nonknowledge possessed by the rest of us. Indeed, typically, a committee report is even worse: it's only that portion of the nonknowledge which a majority of the members will agree to proclaim in concert; it's nonknowledge "watered down." And when the members of a committee have issued their proclamation they, also, retire from the field. So far as they are concerned, that's that!²

Third, salving our consciences in this easy and wholly irresponsible manner blinds us to reality; we have no eye for such solutions as lie within our power. When we pursue the impossible, we lose all sight of the possible.

In summary, destructive inflation, institutionalized mediocrity, and blindness to sound alternatives are the dreadful consequences of attempting to cope with far-out problems. How, then, are the wrongs and woes of mankind to be solved? This is my final question.

Minding One's Own Business

The first step is to recognize that not all of the wrongs and woes of mankind are my problems. Nor yours! For anyone—social reformer or whoever—to assume otherwise is to claim a self-divinity: the welfare of humanity is my responsibility! Let's be realistic about this: a riot on the Berkeley Campus is no more my problem

² For a more thorough critique of committee procedure, see "On That Day Began Lies," *The Freeman*, April, 1956.

than is a spat between you and your spouse, or an intergalactic explosion! My problems are those potentially within my reach, the ones I can solve by personal practice—and no others!³

While I cannot help bemoaning the far-out wrongs and woes of mankind with which I am daily confronted, I must, to be sensible, mind my own business, tend to my own knitting, labor in my own vineyard, not someone else's. Grandfather wasn't aware of all these problems; I am. But such awareness hasn't upgraded my competence to cope with such problems; it has only tempted me to do so, a temptation to which I must never yield. *Attending well to my problem, you to yours, and others to theirs, prescribes the formula for solving the world's wrongs and woes.*

Should this mind-your-own business formula seem too hopeless, merely bear in mind the amazing extent to which most of the wrongs and woes will right themselves if not disturbed by outside intervention. Righteousness has a built-in buoyancy—a tendency to prevail—whereas evil, when left to itself, tends to disintegrate; it is self-destructive. When I try to set others straight, correcting what I believe to be their errant ways, they rise to their own defense, rationalize what they have been doing and, thus, come to believe their wrongs are right. My intervention provides the tension that upholds their ways and, finally, hardens them in their sins.

When we confine ourselves to our own upgrading and try to solve problems that are within our scope and orbit, we present an exemplary image—become givers of light. And by this light may wrongdoers see their errors. To confront and accuse another of wrongdoing is to overshadow him, cut off any light he might otherwise have received. This only delays or precludes the corrective action that the wrongdoer himself must undertake when he comes to see the self-destructive nature of his evil ways.

When each of us focuses on far-out problems—those we cannot handle—the wrongs and woes of society multiply; instead of solving problems, we institutionalize mediocrity. But when each of us tackles the problems that are within his capabilities, problem solving occurs efficiently in our respective areas of

³ In saying “no others,” I am referring to positive as distinguished from negative actions. All of us, of course, must play our part in codifying what shall be prohibited: fraud, violence, and the like—the role of society's agency of defense.

responsibility. In this manner we rise above our mediocrity and pave the way not only to our own but to society's excellence.

10

Faulty Correlations

When a child puts his finger on a hot stove, he suffers pain. He discovers the relationship or correlation between heat and pain, and thus learns not to repeat the performance; he is instructed in what *not* to do. Later in life, perhaps, he may discover that kindness elicits a like response from others; thus, he is instructed in what *to* do.

Correct correlations accurately relate cause and effect, and their importance cannot be overestimated; indeed, they are too numerous for us to count the ways they govern our lives. Understanding the correlations between two sets of data is necessary for survival, and also for individual growth and emergence; further, this is the method of science and the means to much of our technological progress.

Faulty correlations, on the other hand, are the source of untold mischief, and they are especially numerous in the fields of economics, political economy, sociology. The reason, I suspect, is that these disciplines are but slightly more amenable to the scientific method than are morality and religion.¹ Societal shifts are, at best, nebulous; and nebulosity is not in the lexicon of science.

Societal shifts, trends, movements are rarely as sudden as changes in women's styles, for instance. An upswing in enlightenment or a downswing toward decadence, a movement toward liberty or toward its opposite in the form of the all-out state, civilizations flowering or dying on the vine, moral scruples gaining or losing, a trend toward statesmanship or toward demagoguery, prosperity building or waning, goods and services in free exchange or under restriction, and a thousand and one other shifts take years, often decades, sometimes centuries. In a word, these

¹ Most of those rated as economists will disagree with me on this point. True, some irrefutable theorems have been formulated but, for the most part, the "top" economists of the world find themselves in as much disagreement as do moralists or clergymen. I happen to believe that the goal of economic and political understanding can be more fruitfully pursued by a resort to what the philosophers call "discursive reasoning" than by a reliance on the scientific method. The relative correspondence between two sets of data is misleading if the data be inaccurate—which is usually the case in societal phenomena.

great social trends are all in slow motion, so slow sometimes that little motion can be detected over the entire life span of an individual. And it may happen that two or more of these vast movements occur more or less simultaneously—seemingly side by side—in which case it may be tempting to conclude that one is the cause of the other. Such a conclusion may be the source of a faulty and mischievous correlation.

To illustrate: For several decades, our government has been on an ever-increasing spending spree. And during the same period the typical American has been accurately proclaiming, “I’ve never had it so good.” There is a seeming correspondence between these two sets of data, leading a majority of our citizens to conclude that the spending is the cause of their prosperity.

As Seen in Perspective

The falsity of such a correlation might be apparent were we able to take these two trends from the year 1930 to, say, the year 2000 and, as in time-lapse photography, speed them up for a quick appraisal. If I am correct in assuming that a destruction of the medium of exchange, which excessive Federal spending induces, makes a highly specialized economy unworkable, we would observe the spending in a forward movement and prosperity for the general population in reverse. This is what we would see right before our eyes, granting, of course, no correction of the ever-increasing spending spree. In that view, we would be less likely to attribute our prosperity to excessive spending. If we could time-lapse societal trends, false correlations would not be so numerous.²

² Reading the signs of major social trends and drawing correct correlations and conclusions often is an exercise in no-man’s land. Keynes had a reply for critics concerned about the long-run consequences of his inflationary policies: “In the long run, we are all dead.” But men die one at a time, in the short run, and in different ways. And at every stage of an inflationary process that eventually will wreck an economy, various individuals are losing their savings, their incentives, their livelihoods, their self-respect, their very lives—by reason of that inflation. It is easy enough to see the cause-and-effect relationship when an elderly couple or a widow dependent on a few dollars of pension or other fixed income is reduced to half a living as dollars lose their purchasing power. Cause-and-effect likewise can readily be traced in the failure of this or that established business as government spending and tax policies politically divert resources to moon shots and other flights of fancy. It is the

But I have in mind for this chapter an analysis of another faulty correlation, one that tricks some of our better minds into believing that the good society has a correspondence with mere organization, that the latter is the cause of the former. This error causes many of our potentially best thinkers to concentrate fruitlessly on organizational gadgetry as a means to social felicity. It isn't that good organization is unimportant; but unless its possibilities and its limitations are known, we will be looking in a wrong direction for measures to correct social problems.

Beginning roughly 150 years ago, people the world over observed in America something most unusual. For the first time in history, every individual, regardless of station or status, was his own man.³ Each could employ himself as he saw fit, each retain the fruits of his own labor, each decide his form of worship; in a word, freedom of choice in all aspects of life was as open to one as to another. Foreigners heard of an explosive creativity and an unprecedented prosperity—a new world in which the lowliest laborer might rise to an affluence greater than that of lords and dukes!

The upshot? There began the greatest migration to a single country ever known. And something more: curious individuals, such as Alexis de Tocqueville, as well as governmental commissions from many nations, came here to discover the magic that had been loosed. If they could find it, they themselves could experience the miracle.

Focus on Organization

What was the message most of them took back to their countries? What was the magic word? It was *organization*. They focused their eye on the Constitution and the Bill of Rights featuring limitations of governmental authority, separation of powers as between the legislative, judicial, and executive branches, and so on. Simple enough; we shall merely duplicate these political instruments and then we, also, can share in America's social and economic felicity!

cumulative effect of these short-run casualties that finally make inflation so disastrous in the long run.

³ The exception, of course, was Negro slavery, a horrible infraction of the American principle.

And many nations did just that, patterning their new Constitutions after our own. Indeed, it may be that Argentina's Constitution was an improvement over ours. But take a look at any Latin American nation today, especially Argentina during the past three decades. Perón! Military juntas! Outrageous inflation! Meatless days in what was the greatest meat-producing country on earth! Ten to twelve million pesos for one of our good autos, well-equipped! Export and import at a virtual standstill! Another veritable Garden of Eden in a state of social and economic chaos! And bear in mind that their Constitution is still there—a scrap of paper, no more!

For further proof that “organization” is not the magic word, we need only consider our own situation, the current state of affairs in the nation that provided the organizational model. I think it is not necessary to document here the nature or extent of our social collapse. That we have not fallen as low as Argentina is only because we began our fall from a higher perch. We need only bear in mind that good organization alone did not bring on our good society, nor did it insure a continuance of it.

The American Constitution was no more than a written record of what the preponderant leadership at the time believed. It was a recording of the thoughts, sentiments, and principles that existed in their minds and that they were capable of practicing. This document merely put their high thoughts into writing. The Constitution did not produce their qualities; it was the other way round: their qualities produced the Constitution. And that's all a Constitution can ever be; it's an effect, not a cause. Instead of paying obeisance to our Constitution, we ought to be probing and admiring the thoughts of those who wrote it.

Seen in this light, it becomes clear why other nations gained nothing by copying our Constitution. Copying is useless unless the thinking be up to such a standard. And when our thinking falls below that of our Founding Fathers, our Constitution, like the copies of it in other lands, becomes but a scrap of paper. To expect anything more is like expecting a rogue to change his ways by pinning on him a “good conduct” medal.

Beware of Gadgetry

I am arguing that we should beware of organizational gadgetry. Social remedies are not to be found in writing a new Constitution, by amending the present one, or

by adding laws upon laws. We must keep in mind that a good society and good organization are not two different sets of data to be correlated; they are simply two different aspects of the same set of facts.

Of all the foreign investigators who sought an explanation of the American miracle, Alexis de Tocqueville came closer to the right answer than anyone else known to me. At least, he knew that the miracle could not be accounted for by organizational gadgetry:

I sought for the greatness and genius of America in fertile fields and boundless forests; it was not there. I sought for it in her free schools and her institutions of learning; it was not there. I sought for it in her matchless Constitution and democratic congress; it was not there. Not until I went to the churches of America and found them aflame with righteousness did I understand the greatness and genius of America. America is great because America is good. When America ceases to be good, America will cease to be great.⁴

Aflame with righteousness! Of one thing I am certain: there can never be a good society except it be of persons distinguished by righteousness. That this alone is the magic word, I seriously doubt. A passionate striving for intellectual excellence, a will to overcome obstacles, an energetic enthusiasm turned inward to self-improvement, an abounding entrepreneurial spirit would, also, appear to be among the essential attributes. Given all of these, such a people would automatically possess the deep sense of justice and the love and understanding of freedom characteristic of those comprising a good society.⁵

One point ought to be crystal clear: No manner of organizational gadgetry can make a great society out of unworthy people. Further, a nation of great people can suffer considerable imperfection in organization and still have a fair society. The ideal, of course, is a great people in flawless organization.

⁴ This remarkable statement has been attributed to Tocqueville by numerous authors, though I have not been able to find the document in which it appears. If he did not write it, the thought is a logical deduction from his monumental works.

⁵ For additional thoughts on this complex and, perhaps, unanswerable question, see the chapter, "What Seek Ye First?" in my *Deeper Than You Think* (Irvington-on-Hudson, N.Y.: The Foundation for Economic Education, Inc., 1967), pp. 15–27.

Limitations and Possibilities

This brings me to the final objective of this chapter: Identify the basic principle of organizational structure and process in a way that makes sense, one that will divest the term of its confusion and, thus, reveal its limitations and possibilities.

Associations, corporations, labor unions, churches, community groupings, or whatever are called organizations. These range all the way from formalized herds to excellent agencies for cooperation in creative effort. Thus, the term organization, in common parlance, is next to meaningless; it has become a useless generalization.

Yet, organizing has become a fetish. When a perplexing problem arises or when driving objectives enter the minds of men, be they worthy or not, the inevitable first response seems to be, "Let's organize, for in unity there is strength."⁶ But organization, as a panacea, stems from a careless correlation: success is observed to attend certain organized efforts; thus, the mere act of banding together is often thought to be the cause of the success!

Overlooked is the key principle at work, a principle sometimes practiced but rarely formulated clearly enough to be copied. When the principle is not stated, how can others know what accounts for the occasional successes? Not knowing, they credit a mere banding together as the cause and insist, "Let's organize."

Practice Precedes Theory

Eugen von Böhm-Bawerk said of man before 1870, ". . . he practiced the doctrine of marginal utility before economic theory discovered it."⁷ Likewise, can it be said today: some persons practice the principle basic to good organization in the absence of a theory to explain it. I believe that the principle can be reduced to a theorem:

*Responsibility and authority always in balance—assumed proportionately and/or dispensed commensurately—induce cooperation for creative release.*⁸

⁶ In unity there is also weakness. For example, when thoughtless, irresponsible people band together with a madman in authority, such unity spells their destruction.

⁷ Eugen von Böhm-Bawerk, *Capital and Interest* (South Holland, Ill.: The Libertarian Press, 1959), II, 203–4.

For a simple explanation: Marriage is an institution—an organization of two persons—but it can never happily endure unless the foregoing principle is observed either instinctively or consciously. For instance, when my wife is chef, I serve as second cook. She is responsible for the dinner and has the authority that goes with it. If she asks me to make the salad, I am delegated the authority that should accompany the responsibility. No matter which of us does the honors, we make it a point never to get the responsibility-authority lines confused. Were we to do so, a short circuit would result with the sparks flying.

My associate, Dr. Paul Poirot, is Managing Editor of our journal, *The Freeman*. He has been given the responsibility for publishing an enlightening 64 pages each month. He has also been given the authority as to its contents. I expect him to reject or accept an offering of mine as readily as he would a contribution submitted by a stranger.

What could be more appropriate as a societal objective than cooperation for creative release! And if that be the goal, the responsibility-authority principle stands as effectively for complex societal relationships as for the less complicated business affairs of this Foundation or of the two persons involved in a marriage. The principle holds regardless of any increase in numbers; it is as valid for 200 million persons as for forty or for two.

In a large corporation, for instance, the executive is invaluable who can establish a balanced distribution of responsibility and authority throughout his organization. He may be no more aware of the theorem than are his employees; but if this kind of management comes naturally to him, he will induce all the cooperation for creative effort that exists among the corporate personnel. And most onlookers, observing the achievement, will miss the key point; they will make a faulty correlation, assigning credit not to the observation of this principle but to some irrelevant coincidence.

It now seems clear to me why so many onlookers—at home as well as abroad—credited the American miracle to the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. They perceived only the frame and not the picture, the form and not the substance, the “Constitution” and not the principle.

⁸ This principle does not apply when the objective is banding together for destructive purposes: mob violence, wars, and the like. Organizational gadgetry—a chain of command—is necessary for everything that is compulsory.

I have no evidence that our Founding Fathers were working from any such theorem as set forth here. Yet, they did the job as though sharply aware of it. Reread the Constitution and the Bill of Rights with this thought in mind, and note that these documents employ the words “no” or “not” 46 times in restraint of governmental authority. In the main, they insisted that the authority go with the responsibility, namely, in the hands of the individual.

How are we to account for such practice of a principle that had not yet been formulated? Perhaps this is the explanation: “We live our way into our thinking vastly more than we think our way into our living.”⁹

So long as their way of living prevailed, there was cooperation toward the greatest creative outburst ever known, all of it subject to individual choice. This, of course, is to be distinguished from the current inventive outburst which gratifies authoritarian choices: moon shots, erecting of the Gateway Arch, tabulation of polar bear meanderings, and the like. Indeed, when responsibility and authority are assumed proportionately and/or dispersed commensurately, we note that competition, a natural human trait, results in the highest form of cooperation.¹⁰

But we must not overlook the fact that when the way of living changed—that is, when responsibility and authority were severed, when authority without responsibility fell more and more into the hands of Caesar—the documents on which the way of living was inscribed possessed no remedial powers. Impotent as yesterday’s newspaper!

Were we to write a new Constitution today, it would resemble the original in only one respect. It would be but a recording of the current way of living and thinking. And were we afterward to upgrade our way of living and thinking, the new Constitution would have no power whatsoever to restore our present waywardness.

⁹ In a letter from Whiting Williams.

¹⁰ For more on competition, see the chapter, “In Harmony with Creation,” in my *Accent on the Right* (Irvington-on-Hudson, N.Y.: The Foundation for Economic Education, Inc., 1968), pp. 72–84.

See, also, “Is Economic Freedom Possible?” by Dr. Benjamin A. Rogge, *The Freeman*, April, 1963, and “Competition, Monopoly and the Role of Government,” by Dr. Sylvester Petro, *The Freeman*, December, 1959.

So, let us cease trying to remedy the ills of society by a resort to organizational gadgetry: amending the Constitution or inventing new laws to echo prevailing sentiments. Rather, let us look to our sentiments, to our way of living, to our thinking—including a hard look at the responsibility-authority principle. Conceivably, we'll find a close correlation between the goodness of our thinking and the goodness of our society!

The Myth of the See-It-All

He who is not aware of his ignorance will be only misled by his knowledge.

—Richard Whatley

Referring to numerous problems that beset us, I remarked to the audience, “We need seers but no one has to be a see-it-all.” This brought a chuckle from them and a question to my mind: Had I perhaps stumbled upon a breakthrough term? Repeatedly, in attempts to restore faith in the free market, I have failed to communicate what the obstacle to this faith is; I might as well have spoken in Aramaic.

We are desperately in need of terms which accurately convey our meaning and, hopefully, “see-it-all” might be one.

No human being ever has been or will be, even remotely, a see-it-all. Yet, our thinking is beclouded, frustrated, and often blocked entirely by the unconscious assumption that we are—or ought to be—see-it-alls. We get into our heads that the microscopic bit each of us sees is all there is to see. There may be no greater deterrent to evolving humanity, certainly to the ascendancy of freedom, than this mischievous see-it-all assessment of self. How priceless an explanation that would beat down this notion!

But it is next to impossible for anyone to appreciate fully just how little he apprehends of the world around him. The five senses reveal so very much, it seems, how possibly could there be more?

But reflect on the persons who see a thousand times as much as the ordinary man—those blest with extrasensory perception, those who, like Galileo, can see the truth that the solar system does not revolve around the earth. How possibly could there be more to see than they see?

Yet, a Galileo, Newton, Edison, or an Aristotle, Milton, Shakespeare has only an infinitesimal peek at the world around him. These “giants” might be expected more readily to realize how little they see than the ones who see less. But, too often,

they compare themselves with those they judge to be inferior, rather than with the infinity that is barely opening up to them. We must conclude that an expanded perception is not necessarily a remedy for this malady.

I believe that a cure is available, as open to those of us who see less as to those few who see so much more. It depends upon how we look at things, upon exercise and practice in judging how little we see:

Browse around a million-volume library. What is seen are a million book covers, but scarcely an inkling of the enormous knowledge and wisdom therein.

Peer through a powerful microscope at a single blood cell, one of trillions in your body. Its shape and color are seen, but nothing of the essential chores it performs. Nor does the microscope reveal to the eye the trillions of atoms in the cell or their fantastic energy.

Peer through a telescope at a galaxy millions of light years away. Again, you see shape and color but nothing of the mysterious radiations emitted.

Flick on your reading lamp. Now, define electricity!

Make an assessment of your best friend. What goes on within? You can arrive at only superficial conclusions, most of which will be inaccurate.

Make an assessment of your own mind, psyche, soul. Even here, in the one person you could and should know best, you see little more than you see into the phenomenon of life itself!

I have used only five suggested exercises. This way of looking at the world within and without has countless applications. Indeed, I am aware of nothing within my purview—or yours—to which it cannot and should not be applied.

Again, let me emphasize the need to realize how little we see: it is to insure against the easy and more or less natural inclination to think we see it all. For the see-it-all is one who cannot imagine any future happenings except those he can foresee. How can there be any progress except it be set in motion by those stimuli, forces, and events that fall within his purview? Yet, without his knowing it, his purview is infinitesimal. Here, in the see-it-all, we have a powerful obstacle to both faith and progress; implicit in the see-it-all's attitude is the message that the Hand of Creation is paralyzed. All of history, if read aright, attests to the contrary; history attests that every step ahead has been as if fortuitous. No one foresaw the first great civilization in Sumer, or the glory that came to Athens, or to America. Most things

that have taken place in the past, no person foresaw. Most things that will take place in the future are things none of us can foresee.

As Far as He Could See

Let's apply this theory to our workaday world. Recently, I heard a learned economist brilliantly analyze our country's politico-economic distortions. Indeed, he dug so deeply into our troubles that neither he nor his listeners could possibly see a way out: "We are sunk; there is no hope!"

His conclusion was as persuasive as it was pessimistic. Why? For one reason and one only: If this skilled, well-trained, and thoughtful economist cannot see a way out, there is no way out! He assumes, without quite realizing it, that he sees all. Otherwise, he would, at the very least, have conceded the possibility that certain events might transpire which his foresight could not possibly reveal to him.

Looking at ourselves realistically, aren't most of us in the same boat? Ask anyone you meet—businessman or whoever—if mail delivery should be left to the free market. Unless he is one of the few who has gained an awareness of the free market's miraculous workings, his answer will be negative. Here is how the typical mind works on activities that have been excluded from the free market—where no market demonstration is available:

Now, just exactly how would I go about delivering mail day-in and day-out to a hundred million addresses? H'm! I don't know. After all, I am not an incompetent person. If I can't see how to do this, how can any other? No, this complex problem cannot be mastered by the likes of me acting independently, competitively, cooperatively, privately, freely. This is a chore that belongs to government, the agency that can implement its planning by force.

The above "reasoning" will lead to the same conclusion regarding any other activity which has been substantially pre-empted by government: education, water supply, garbage disposal, or whatever.

In Britain, for instance, where telephones, railroads, power and light, steel mills, coal mining, and mail delivery have been nationalized, hardly anyone can see how any of these might thrive by free market operation. Only disaster can be envisioned!

In Russia, where all creative activities—even farming and the theater—have been brought under compulsive procedures, free market possibilities are rarely considered.

I am suggesting the destructiveness of the see-it-all attitude. It leads people down a one-way road to the total state. Bringing more and more activities under state operation progressively blinds people to what freedom has to offer. As the state pursues its monopolization, the free market as a possibility correspondingly diminishes in men's minds. Finally, utter darkness!

If this were not true, mail delivery in the U.S.A. would be entrusted to the free market.

If this were not true, there would be a denationalization of British industry.

If this were not true, competitive private enterprise would emerge in Russia.

Stretching the Horizon

As for these activities taken over by government, the curtains have already been drawn. The question is, How can the curtains be raised so that free market possibilities can be seen?

The first rational step is a realization on your part and mine that we see no more than an infinitesimal part of the world around us and that our hand in what goes on creatively is on this same minor scale. As a means of awakening, we need only ask ourselves: What has been your or my part in the auto or jet we ride? Or the part an employee of a pencil factory has in a pencil? Neither he nor any man on earth knows how to make one.¹ It is no exaggeration to claim that what goes on around each of us is a trillion times greater than any one of us sees. No one is remotely a see-it-all.

Until we face this humbling fact, we will be blind to a phenomenon of the free market so difficult to grasp that it's nearly a secret: Creative Wisdom. And, as a consequence of this blindness we have no more faith in the efficacy of free market mail delivery, for instance, than Russians have in the possibility of free market

¹ See the chapter, "Only God Can Make a Tree—or a Pencil," in *Anything That's Peaceful* (Irvington-on-Hudson, N.Y.: The Foundation for Economic Education, Inc., 1964).

farming or industry or trade of any kind. In other words, in a world of see-it-alls, what possibility could there be for change and progress?

Let me do this point over: Compared to the all, I see next to nothing; likewise everyone else. Now, were everyone a see-it-all, it follows that faith in what can happen is limited to next to nothing. When neither I nor anyone else can see how the free market would deliver mail—no one can—free market mail delivery will never be given a chance, not in a society of see-it-alls. An awareness of Creative Wisdom is an absolute requisite.

Consider the history of Creative Wisdom.

We observe bits of freedom cropping up during the past seven thousand years: Sumer, Athens, Carthage, Rome, Venice, Kiev, Amsterdam, England, America. Considering how little we ascribe to freedom in our own “enlightened” time, it is fair to assume that these flare-ups of freedom came about more as reactions to desperate situations in which people found themselves than as rational designs.²

Vainly do we look for any forecast by our forefathers as to what freedom would accomplish—any theory about how or why it would work its wonders! The motivation was other than foresight. Our ancestors were sick of Old World authoritarianism; theirs was a revolt against see-it-alls in power.

Freedom in America had its roots in an overriding conviction founded on an observation of the Old World. The observation: the more the government controls human action, the more tyrannical it is. The conviction: that government is best which governs least. The action: our forefathers delegated to government fewer powers than had ever been done before. The result: freedom!

Our ancestors wanted freedom for freedoms sake. That was enough for them. Each could be his own man. Hang the economic consequences! They were no more aware of the creative outburst that would follow freedom than are most people today—even after the fact!

² “Modern man prides himself that he has built [his] civilization as if in doing so he had carried out a plan which he had before formed in his mind. The fact is, of course, that if at any point of the past man had mapped out his future on the basis of the then-existing knowledge we would . . . still have brutally to fight each other for our very lives.” Remarks by F. A. Hayek in *What’s Past Is Prologue* (Irvington-on-Hudson, N.Y.: The Foundation for Economic Education, Inc., 1968).

It appears likely that each flare-up of freedom throughout history—as in America—has been a reaction against governmental tyranny and not the result of any rational design. As each authoritarian arrangement has come to its inevitable dead end—with no bureaucrat knowing what next to do—the victimized people have acted more or less in desperation: “*We might as well try freedom.*” Freedom has been “a court of last resort,” not a rational prognosis of better things to come.

We should take note of three facts:

First, where freedom has been tried, that is, where free markets, private ownership, willing exchange, and limited government have been practiced, civilizations have flowered: Sumer, Athens, America, and others.

Second, all but our own have eventually leveled off, stalled, and fallen—the British Empire, for instance—before our very eyes.

Third, the declines and falls have been associated with a return of governmental intervention with its contraction of freedom.

While neither I nor anyone else can foresee events that will transpire, it seems to me that America also is in danger of a decline and fall. I only raise the question: Is there anything to save us from the same fate that has befallen others? I think there may be something—something missing in each of the other trials.

Missing then—perhaps still missing—is an awareness of Creative Wisdom as the distinguishing feature or hallmark of freedom. Since we are not see-it-alls, we can hardly hope to understand the phenomenon of freedom and its evolutionary by-product, Creative Wisdom; but awareness is within our reach and may be necessary to our survival.

The American miracle flowered from a degree of freedom unknown at any previous time. Looking backward, the same can be said for the British and Roman Empires, of Athens, Sumer, and the others. Bear in mind that the flowering was an offspring of freedom; then note that as freedom was replaced by government control of life these civilizations underwent a decline and fall. Thus, if I read history aright, we must conclude that freedom is the exclusive condition in which creative human energy forms and flourishes; otherwise, it lies stifled and inactive. Creative Wisdom is the term I give to the phenomenon that flowers only when and where freedom prevails.

Creative Wisdom is an essential to social, moral, and spiritual progress as to material advancement. But the latter may be easier to demonstrate.

Take, for example, this morning's toast. Reflect on what happened ere it reached the breakfast table: the mining of the ore and making of the tools that prepared the soil, sowed the seed, harvested and threshed the crop, ground it into flour! The bags? How are they made? Then the transporting vehicles; the bakery and its equipment; the toaster and the electricity.

Not only do I not know how to make electricity—I don't even know what it is—but there is hardly a step in the whole complex process that falls within my ken. My understanding of the production of such a simple thing as a piece of toast is next to nothing, and so is yours, whoever you are. Yet, millions enjoyed toast for breakfast this morning. How come?

Each human being has within him a mite of *potential* creativity, that is, you or I may, now and then, have an idea, experience insight or intuition, invent or discover something. How little this is, even when we live up to our potential, can be appreciated by reflecting upon our minor role in producing the piece of toast. The part played by any one person is infinitesimal! But this much can be said: each tiny know-how, when and if developed, is different from all others. Variation!

Creative Wisdom

Creative Wisdom is that enormous, over-all wisdom that accounts for the piece of toast, the auto or jet, or whatever—a wisdom that does not exist, even remotely, in any discrete individual. Creative Wisdom begins as an attracting force that draws out and develops such widely varying creative potentialities as are possessed by each of us. Motivation! And then the phenomenal miracle: the coalescence of these trillions of tiny varying know-hows into a workable whole that accounts for the piece of toast or whatever.

We are at a loss to explain precisely how this works, just as we are at a loss to explain the configuration or coalescence of tiny molecules into a tree in one instance or a blade of grass or a flower. We can only note that Creative Wisdom is a product of freedom and not authoritarianism.

But we can gain some insight into this phenomenon by noting that the free market—freedom—has three distinctive features:

1. Private ownership. There is freedom only when one has a right to the fruits of his own labor.
2. Free pricing, that is, exchange on mutually agreeable terms.
3. Nonintervention in the affairs of men other than to defend life and livelihood—to keep the peace.

In my view, private ownership—the right to one's own—serves as the motivation for bringing out the creative best in the individual.³

And the force that ingathers or coalesces these varying “creative bests” into a workable whole is free pricing, that is, free exchange or, as Bastiat phrased it, freedom in transactions. Price beckons the activity of each toward specific endeavors, those goods and services which, in people's judgment, satisfy their desires and necessities. It is price that beckons creative effort into those activities which lead eventually to what you want for breakfast: a piece of toast.

Were it not for private ownership and the guide of price, that is, were authoritarianism in the drivers seat, you would get not what you choose for breakfast but what the authoritarian allots to you.

No Superman Needed

Doubtless, one explanation as to why Creative Wisdom flourishes in a free society is that no see-it-all is required. One need not itemize and investigate all the wants of the world's population—an impossible undertaking—in order to be productively useful to himself and others. Being able to read a price is instruction enough. The free market thus accommodates itself to our limited view of the world around us; it is in tune with reality.

A century ago government had a monopoly of first-class mail delivery and still does. At that time the human voice could be delivered whatever distance two shouters could effectively communicate. Today, government delivers the mail substantially as it did then. The human voice? It is now delivered around this earth in less time than a postman takes to move one step toward a mailbox.

³ There is, of course, other than material motivation—psychic profit, for instance. See Chapter X, “What Shall It Profit a Man?” in *Deeper Than You Think* (Irvington-on-Hudson, N.Y.: The Foundation for Economic Education, Inc., 1967).

Suppose you had been asked in 1869, “Which venture would you consider easier, delivering mail or the human voice?” To this seemingly idiotic question, you would have responded, “Mail!”

The explanation? Creative Wisdom has been largely excluded from the socialistic activity, whereas it has miraculously flourished in privately owned activities, that is, where the free market has more or less prevailed.

Of course I don’t know how the free market would deliver mail day-in and day-out to a hundred million addresses! Or attend to education! Nor does any other living person! But I don’t have to see how it would be done to know for certain that it would be done better and at lower cost. Conceded, I cannot explain how Creative Wisdom works. But I can be nonetheless certain of its workability, so staggering is the evidence on every hand.

When one frees himself from the see-it-all myth, he will then have faith that many wonderful things can and will transpire, things he cannot foresee. Just so long as they are founded on right principle: freedom to act creatively as one chooses!

12

The Law Without

Edmund Burke provides the setting for this chapter and the one following:

Men are qualified for civil liberty in exact proportion to their disposition to put moral chains upon their own appetites; in proportion as their love of justice is above their rapacity; in proportion as their soundness and sobriety of understanding is above their vanity and presumption; in proportion as they are more disposed to listen to the counsels of the wise and good, in preference to the flattery of knaves. Society cannot exist unless a controlling power upon will and appetite be placed somewhere and *the less of it there is within, the more there must be without*. It is ordained in the eternal constitution of things, that men of intemperate minds cannot be free. Their passions forge their fetters.¹

Their passions forge their fetters! The fetters, of course, come in the form of the law without—external government. If their passions be not too great; if they love justice; if they be distinguished by their soundness and sobriety of understanding; if they listen to the counsels of the wise and good; if men possess such qualities of character, then the external government—the law without—will be but helpful, simple, and necessary thou-shalt-nots. But if rapacity rages and appetites are uncontrolled; if vanity be their mark; if they heed the flattery of knaves; if these passions be rampant, the external government will indeed forge their fetters. And the compulsions from without will range from out-and-out anarchy to more or less formal, legalized oppression under a dictatorship. It is important, therefore, that we carefully consider what can and cannot be accomplished by external government, the law without.

Increasingly concerned over riots, brutal assassinations, and other depredations—anarchy in its incipency—the American public anxiously seeks a remedy for these conspicuous evils. Order in society we must and will have; and

¹ A letter from Mr. Burke to a Member of the National Assembly in Answer to Some Objections to His Book on French Affairs, 1791.

history reveals that men will pay a high price—fettters notwithstanding—to ward off uncertainty and chaos.

No doubt about it, there is a popular clamor for law and order. And whenever there is a popular clamor, politicians rush forth with their standard solution: Pass a law! Gun control affords a current case in point. As if the remedy for murder rests on the registration of firearms or a law against their possession! It seems doubtful that any of these proposed laws could be effectively administered. But even if firearms were abolished altogether, to what extent would killings be lessened? Not one whit! A killer has a thousand and one other means at his disposal. Deprive him of one and he will resort to another.

There is already a law against murder, whether by firearms, knives, poisons, strangulation, clubs, or whatever. Severe penalties are prescribed and well known, despite which people still commit murder. This should remind us that the law without has but a limited competence when it comes to controlling—let alone improving—behavior.

The Lesson of Prohibition

There is still a lesson to be learned in this regard from the ill-fated Eighteenth Amendment, that “noble experiment” to right what many people conceived to be another wrong: the drinking of alcohol. So, let us recall what the consequences were. First, drinking increased. Second, the stuff imbibed ranged all the way from lemon, vanilla, and Jamaica extracts, to bay rum, rubbing alcohol, and bathtub gin. I once saw an addict of these lethal liquids gulp down two 3-ounce bottles of spirits of camphor—84 per cent alcohol.

And among the catastrophic results was the shifting of the liquor business from law-abiding, honest producers to law breakers and criminals. Racketeers took over, and the law against murder did not deter them from dealing with aspiring competitors; they shot them down! It was worth one’s life to peddle beer in competition with Al Capone.

But by far the worst consequence of this attempt to legislate morality was the attendant disrespect for all external law. Citizens by the millions—the respectable and law-abiding element until then—ignored this governmental thou-shalt-not. Indeed, countless law-enforcement officers became parties to the law breaking—and were well paid for their pains.²

If the law without is to be respected, it must be circumspect—its purpose generally understood and accepted. Whenever statutory law becomes capricious or whenever it goes beyond a people’s sense of reasonableness and justice, it will be ignored. Remember the widespread disregard of price control and rationing under OPA? These unreasonable, unjust, and unenforceable edicts impaired the free market; many “black markets” arose to serve consumers. These unwise edicts made law-breakers out of good citizens.

When people get in the habit of breaking statutory law because the laws are unwise and unjust, that habit carries over into breaking laws that are wise and just. When the high priest is disrespected for some of his ways, he will not be respected for any of his ways; he is suspect in everything. Have a second look at this thought; it may explain, more than is generally supposed, the breakdown of law and order.

It is, thus, of utmost importance that we reflect upon both the potentialities and the limitations of law—the legal framework. To avoid a complete breakdown of law and order—with dictatorship as the inevitable after-math—we must learn to know what the law cannot do as well as what it can do.

We should recognize one impossibility at the outset: the force implicit in government cannot mend moral deficiencies. A society of thieves cannot be made honest by passing an Integrity Act! Consider the futility of a law against covetousness, or against suicide, or sex, or drinking, or dissimulation. But, possibly, we can better understand what the law without cannot do by reflection upon what does lie within its range.

The First Assumption

If any society is a going concern, it is because the vast majority of people wish to do what’s right, reasonable, and just. Otherwise, there is no occasion to discuss these questions, no reason to think about the constitution of liberty, no logic in accepting other than dictatorship. A reasonably righteous people has to be the first assumption.

² Oklahoma remained a “dry” state long after the repeal of Prohibition. I recall attending a convention there. Liquor for the occasion was imported from a neighboring state—and under police escort!

However, reality cannot be side-stepped: there is in the best of societies a tiny minority whose word is no good, who will lie, cheat, trespass, steal, kill. In short, these few will completely disregard the rights of others; they will try to feather their own nests by whatever low and degraded method comes to mind. Such people lack a moral nature; they have no sense of justice.³

Consider the vast majority who at least wish to do what's right, reasonable, and just. Keep in mind that each is unique; no two think or evaluate alike and, thus, no two have precisely the same concepts of righteousness, reasonableness, and justice. Their ideas differ as to what's mine and what's thine. Nor are they agreed on how fast one should drive on this or that street, or on countless other matters important to harmonious living.

People who wish to treat others right need to know what rules to follow and are anxious to have them formulated for all to see and observe. If the rules—the laws—be fair, they will respect them; it is in their interest to do so, for this is their way to escape anarchy with its disorder and chaos.

Limitations of the Law

What, really, is the scope of external law? What are its limitations and potentialities?

The law can codify the thou-shalt-nots and prescribe the penalties for infractions. But the law of itself is incapable of being a guarantee against infractions. Observance of the law rests on how people react to it. The law is effective in the case of those individuals who *desire* to respect it and of those who *fear* not to. This is its potentiality. And it is ineffective when the desire dies out and the fear of penalties becomes weaker than the temptation to engage in illegal activities. This is its limitation.

³ This division of the good majority and the bad minority is used somewhat symbolically; it is never this clean cut. There is, admittedly, some badness in the best of us, and, we must concede, some possible goodness among the most depraved. As Simone Weil wrote: "From earliest childhood to the grave there is something in the depths of every human heart, which in spite of all the experience, of crimes that have been committed, endured, observed—invincibly expects people to do good and not evil. More than any other thing, this is the sacred element in every human being."

These forces or drives—desire as well as fear—are, in turn, importantly governed by the law's respectability, that is, by people's evaluation of its reasonableness and justice. But respectability is a subjective judgment; it cannot be objectively defined; its definition varies as greatly as do individuals in their moral scruples and intellectual discernment. I am only trying to emphasize the point that law and order in a society rest, in the final analysis, on what kind of people we are; there is no organizational gadgetry that can overcome this fact; it is a reality from which there is no escape.⁴ And here, in broad generality, lie the limitations and potentialities of law.

If the rules be reasonable and just! Consider a simple analogy—a scale model of the way we act—to deduce what is and is not fair: competitive football, for instance. Note that the rules are exclusively taboos, thou-shalt-nots, things not to do. Penalties for infractions are prescribed, well known to all participants, and imposed by the officials. Even over these, there are minor differences, but none that isn't easily and agreeably resolved. Respect for the rules is near unanimous. Here we have the law in its negative and proper role.

Confining the rules to things not to do opens the infinite realm of things to do. It is only in this sense that law—the rules—is positive: by restricting the bad, the good is made possible.

The Realm of the Creative

Admittedly, the realm of what to do requires instruction. But this depends upon the coaches (entrepreneurial leaders) as well as the initiative, split-second thinking, and the creativity and ingenuity of the participants. The realm of what to do belongs to the creative, not the restrictive—to the free and voluntary, not to the inhibitive and dictatorial. What a fiasco football would be were the rule book to prescribe the plays!

Football players will never unanimously agree that all the thou-shalt-nots in the rule book are perfect. They can no more agree on perfection than all of us can agree on what is respectable—reasonable and just—in societal law. But the

⁴ Indeed, the law, if reasonable and just, will not, in any significant way, impose prohibitions that a reasonably righteous people would not self-impose.

pigskin competitors would be up in arms, as we say, if the rules prescribed the plays. Instantly and instinctively, they would lose respect for any such rules.

In principle, at least, respectable law for society does not differ from respectable rules in football, nor does that which is disrespectable! Yet, in society, most people countenance the unjust along with the just, the unreasonable with the reasonable. They let politicians with their pass-a-law remedies prescribe the plays of life: how long they may work, what wages they shall receive, what and with whom they shall exchange, what shall be done with the fruits of their labor, on and on—a long and tiresome list. And at what cost? *A growing disrespect for all law!*

We should never expect the tiny minority of the population who are thieves, killers, cheaters, rioters to be held at bay as long as the vast majority who at least wish to do right are parties to disrespectable law. The majority will then no longer observe such law and by their nonobservance set the stage for the outlaws. When a model of rectitude does not exist, evil proliferates and takes over. It cannot be otherwise.

Therefore, let those of us who are bent on law and order look first to our own scruples; next, to what the law without can do for us; and, last and most importantly, what it can *never* do for us!

13

The Law Within

It should be plain that progress toward an ideal society depends primarily on the kind of people we are: the greatest chef in the world can't make a good omelet from bad eggs.

It goes without saying that an ideal society is beyond anyone's comprehension. But for our purpose here, let us define an ideal society as one where creative expression suffers no external inhibitions or prohibitions or restraints; where there is no interference with anyone's life, except against destructive actions; where no person is granted a legal privilege that cannot in wisdom and justice be granted to all—no special privileges whatever. In an ideal society every person is free to go as far as his talents, abilities, virtues, and energy can take him.

Creative expression can flower and life find its fulfillment only when destructive actions are not overpowering. Bringing destructive actions under some measure of control is, therefore, always the first order of business for improving the social environment. Is it not self-evident that all would perish if all were killers—or thieves, or parasites, or liars, or dictators?

There are but two forms of human restraint against the destructive: (1) external government—the law without; and (2) self-control—the law within. Restraints are either imposed on me by others or imposed on me by myself.

This raises several questions. How shall we account for the fact that so much attention is centered on the law without and so little on the law within? Why all the emphasis on statutory law with its limited potential for the betterment of mankind and so little emphasis on the boundless possibilities of moral upgrading? Why so many eloquent spokesmen for political reform while moral philosophers are but voices crying in the wilderness? Do we find external law that much more attractive than self-restraint? Does the one method attract better and brighter men than the other? Or is it just that we'd rather plan to rectify the visible faults of others than try to see and remedy our own errors? So it is that something-for-nothing schemes—promises of a good society which require no new talents and virtues on one's own part—have a generally seductive appeal; their propaganda gains enormous attention and support.

There is, however, a deeper reason why the law within is neglected in favor of the law without.

A Study in Depth

The external law is precisely what the term implies, that is, it is visibly on the surface, lending itself to outline, description, wording, phrasing. There is a concreteness about external disciplinary forces; they are something you can “get your teeth into.” They are communicable!

The law within, on the other hand, is always below the surface; it is, and must remain, a study in depth; it partakes of the Infinite. The ordinary channels of communication are not well suited, for this is the kind of thing more caught than taught.

If you are able to plumb deeper levels of your psyche—your nature and your being—than I, communicating your perceptions to me may be out of the question. “A man only understands that of which he has already the beginnings in himself.”¹ Rather than concreteness, there is a nebulosity about internal disciplinary forces.

Reflect, again, on the law without. If confined to its principled scope, it has only a few negative possibilities. It can codify and attempt enforcement only of those thou-shalt-nots which bear disastrously on the lives of others: murder, theft, fraudulent representations, and the like.

But in the case of any civilized person, the law within forbids all actions destructive of others and, even more importantly, all actions destructive of self. The law without is simply the brute force to control others while the law within calls for the intelligence, understanding, integrity, and strength of character for self-control.

The law within, if rational, forbids not only ordinary thievery but it also forbids feathering one’s own nest at the expense of others—even when the looting is done for one by government.

It is against the inner law

- to take the life of another;
- to be inattentive to mental and physical health;
- to perish in an act of aggression;

¹ An entry of December 17, 1854, in *Journal Intime* of Henri Frederic Amiel.

- to bear false witness;
- to covet the possessions of another;
- to control the lives of others, or even to wish one could;
- to resign the responsibility for self to a governor, an employer, or any other person, or to fail to resist if others try to assume one's personal responsibility;
- to affirm any position contrary to the dictate of conscience;
- to fail to nourish, refine, think through, and bring to the fullest possible development every idea or insight gained;
- to neglect to complete a transaction: if a door is opened, close it; if something is dropped, pick it up; if a promise is made, keep it; if money is borrowed, pay it back; if a contract is made, honor it;
- to withhold from those who seek it such light as one may possess;
- to accept any compulsive or authoritarian arrangement as the final solution to any human endeavor; that is, the inner law requires that one forever explore the ways of freedom.

The above are only samplings of the law within, but isn't it obvious, as Burke points out, that "the less of it there is within, the more there must be without"?

No two individuals, of course, have identical laws. Some of these inner laws barely scratch the surface while many are assuredly so deep others cannot perceive them. For the most part, the inner laws, particularly the deeper ones, are self-discoveries. But the deeper the better, which is to say, the greater the disciplines of self, the less likelihood of infringing the rights of others.

Enter Into Life

The law within, be it noted, often goes far beyond taboos, the negative thou-shalt-nots. There are also inner laws that are positive—actions to take, things to do. For instance, one shall respect others as he would like to be respected. There are inner laws which demand that one's work, whatever the calling, or whatever the pay, be of the excellence that arouses personal pride. Look upon obstacles as opportunities to overcome, as a means to becoming. Put all chores, duties, refinement of ideas, and so on into the past tense as soon as possible to clear the way for new achievements. Get into life! There is no end of these.

It is well to note that the law without, aside from voluntary obedience, is enforced by guns, prisons, fines, or the threat of these. The law within, on the other hand, rests solely on strength of character which, in turn, derives from the will

rationality to determine one's own actions. The law without is only man protection, a defensive device, while the law within is man creation; it is a positive force in man's emergence, evolution, growth, hatching.

Self-discipline—obedience to moral law—lessens the need for exterior disciplines. A person without inner direction is asking to be controlled; and a people wholly lacking in rules of self-control must slump into dictatorship.

The moral law is valid and independent of shifting opinions; it may even contradict my whims; and yet, as Sorley observes, "it is something which satisfies my purposes and completes my nature." Persons in whom the moral law lives are self-controlling, and freedom is their way of life—the Kingdom in its earthly version.

14

Education, the Libertarian Way

There was a time when this chapter might have been entitled, “Education, the Liberal Way.” But that was when liberal still pertained to liberation of the individual from the tyranny of government or any other human master—before the term was usurped by those who stand for a liberality with other people’s property and rights. The meaning of the word, liberal, has been reversed; it once was an honest label for believers in individual liberty; it now is being worn by believers in coercive collectivism. Thus, the term is useless for my purpose.

Nor does the newer term, libertarian—adopted by some of us in place of the lost word—provide sure-fire communication of meaning. Already, many persons of authoritarian persuasion are claiming it, and for precisely the same reason that they expropriated liberal: it is a *good* term; it gives a favorable mask to the bearer.

This is why we must forever define our terms or risk misunderstanding. However, this burden is not all to the bad; it has its blessings: repeated definition is an absolute “must” to convey to others what one means. Further, constant definition is necessary to make clear to me what I mean.

“Education, the Libertarian Way,” can make no sense until libertarianism is defined.

A Nonprescriptive Way of Life

Libertarianism is a philosophy, a way of life. But it differs from most philosophies in that it does not prescribe how any individual should live his life. It allows freedom for each to do as he pleases—live in accord with his own uniqueness as he sees it—so long as the rights of others are not infringed. In short, this philosophy commends no controls external to the individual beyond those which a government limited to keeping the peace and invoking a common justice might impose.¹ Each individual acts on his own authority and responsibility. Those incapable of self-

¹ Defraying the costs of a principled agency of society, limited to keeping the peace and to invoking a common justice, is not an infringement of individual rights but, instead, a

support, instead of becoming wards of the state, may rely upon the charitable instincts and practices of a free people—a quality that thrives only when a people are free. This is all there is to my definition; it is brief because it is not prescriptive. It has nothing in it at all that calls on me or the government to run your life. This is why the neoliberals refer to it derisively as “simplistic.”

Viewed long range, this nonprescriptive way of life is brand new, too recent to have gained a substantial following or even much of an apprehension of its miraculous workings.² Libertarianism—then bearing the name of liberalism—had its first significant flowering in England during the century between the Napoleonic Wars and World War I. But, its most widespread acceptance and practice has been in these United States. This country, with less organized force standing against the individual than ever before in history, witnessed the greatest release of creative energy known to mankind. Genius developed in the most unsuspected persons; millions of people began to realize their potentialities.

Libertarianism has been more nearly approached here than elsewhere in the production and exchange of goods and services, private ownership, personal rights, religious liberty, and government limited to peace and justice; but the educational emphasis—paradoxically—has been in the opposite direction from the very start. The reasoning, beginning in Thomas Jefferson's day, has been something like this: Ours is to be a people's government. For such a venture to succeed there must be an educated electorate. People simply cannot be trusted to attend to this basic requirement on their own initiative. Solution: compulsory school attendance!

This denial of parental responsibility and freedom of choice as to school attendance placed the responsibility for an educated electorate squarely on the shoulders of government. This, in turn, necessitated another compulsion: the forcible collection of the wherewithal to defray the school bill. The adage that he who pays the fiddler calls the tune, applied in this case and led to the third compulsion: government-dictated curricula.

citizen obligation. See my *Government: An Ideal Concept* (Irvington-on-Hudson, N.Y.: The Foundation for Economic Education, Inc., 1954).

² Such misunderstandings are largely rooted in incorrect correlations. Societal shifts and trends vary greatly in their slow movements—decades to centuries. Today, for instance, we witness economic gain and socialistic growth going on simultaneously. Unless careful, we are likely to credit socialism with the prosperity, whereas the credit belongs to a near-libertarian way of life, the main thrust of which passed by before most of us were born!

Three compulsions, all rejecting self-discipline, and each a thorough contradiction of libertarian principles, were invoked. We have, as a consequence of introducing and practicing these compulsions, inverted the educational process; and the more we pursue this course, the more pronounced will be the educational chaos. At least, this is my thesis.

Two points are conceded: (1) a good society can never prevail among the unintelligent and unfit, and (2) education is the essential corrective, *provided we know what the educational process is and what it is not*.

The word education, associated as it is with compulsory methods, may tend to confuse this analysis. So, let's find another word. What is the quality we really seek among the electorate? Is it not *enlightenment*? If it is enlightenment we seek as our goal, we must also find the means appropriate for its attainment.

Different Approaches

At issue are two opposed methodologies. The currently popular one, associated with the three compulsions, is founded on the notion that education can be imposed, as some animals are force-fed; that intellectual upgrading comes from an outside thrust—a push.

The libertarian method, on the other hand, has its roots in the concept that intellectual upgrading is a taking from or ingathering process, and that the taker or ingatherer is a unique individual.

The two methods differ as much as “forcing in” and “seeking out”; they raise the question, Are we seeking imitations or originals? In any event, by using the word, enlightenment, rather than education, we can see the futility of forcing in and the validity of seeking out.

Enlightenment does not have one means of achievement for children and another for adults; it has no changing scheme for each advancing year. The process is the same for teen-agers as for octogenarians. So, a good way to grasp how enlightenment comes to the younger generation is to see how it comes to grown-ups. To further sharpen the focus, let us begin with you and me—two adults—and this matter of enlightenment. More on the youngsters later.

Take, for example, the ideas in this article. Who is in control as to whether or not they enlighten you? The answer is not disputable: You are! Your acceptance or

rejection is not under my control. All I can do about your enlightenment is to turn on my own light, such as it is. You may not even look at these ideas. Or, if you do look, you may find them unacceptable. So far as you are concerned, my ideas and I are at your mercy; you alone sit in judgment as to what enters your mind, be it nonsense or wisdom. Your doors of perception are controlled by only one person: you! This can be generalized: it applies not only to you and me but to most persons on this earth.

Experience clearly reveals that an idea cannot be forced into anyone's consciousness. Yet, in a near overpowering urge to upgrade others according to our lights, many of us resort to propagandizing or reform; we waste our energies on futile forcing-in tactics. The very fervency of our desire to recast others in our image leads to methods that preclude success; we blind ourselves to the reality of enlightenment and how it works.

Enlightenment is not induced but, rather, is educed! Consider light. Obviously, it cannot see; it can only be seen. A pilot can see a beacon light if he looks; the light does not search him out. Millions of people have seen the countless wisdoms in the Bible, for instance, but these wisdoms are no more aware of their beholders' existence than is the paper on which they are written.

You can, if you wish, see the ideas in this chapter—but only if you wish. You alone determine access to your unique mind and how it works; ideas, as such, possess no key to your consciousness. These ideas can no more be thrust into your intellect than into the marble brow of a statue.

Educe, draw forth, extract! Potentially, anyone can follow this one-way road to enlightenment. The process, however, presupposes that there be something to draw forth as well as something to attract. The latter—an attractive light—is our only means of helping in the enlightenment of another: have an idea worthy of that other's attention.

When we concern ourselves with the plight of humanity, particularly with the shortcomings of others that bear unfavorably on our own opportunities to live and advance, it behooves us to find out what we can and cannot do about enlightening them. It is agreed, I hope, that we are powerless to reform them, to make them over in our images. Once we recognize this limitation, we can, if we so will it, begin to realize our potentialities.

And what, pray tell, is the single tactic within our power? We can increase our own light which, if bright enough, will, on occasion, attract another to it. For it is

light that brings forth the eye, that whets the spirit of inquiry, that stimulates the desire to know, that draws forth, arouses latent capacity. This is as much as we can do to enlighten another; but the result is still of his choice rather than ours, and fortunately so. For were this not the case, think of all the reformers at whose mercy you and I would be!

Enlightenment and education—not the making of imitations—are achieved in precisely the same manner; these are two words for the educative process. And to grasp how enlightenment is achieved is to see how education would be approached the libertarian way. Not a single compulsion! Trust others to turn toward the light!

The objections are a thousand and one, but have a common core: this libertarian way affronts the mores; it is out of step with prevailing sentiments. It has not been tried; we can't imagine how it could possibly work.³ This reason can be stated another way: *Hardly anyone believes that people can be trusted to turn toward the light on their own initiative; instead, they must be turned!*

How are we to explain this lack of trust? Frankly, it originates with the current compulsions. Nothing interferes more with our freely turning toward the light we choose than to be coercively turned toward someone else's choice of lights. Suppose, for instance, that you were compelled to read this. You would never again freely turn toward my ideas. The compulsion directing American "education" today accounts for the dearth of voluntary turning and leaves the false impression that freely turning toward the light has no vitality and, thus, could not be relied upon. But, is it not true that you, whoever you are, trust yourself in this respect? Then, why not trust others?

Assuming no compulsions, every person above the moronic level would freely seek those lights befitting his unique requirements. One couldn't live unless he did so; and the will to survive is strong within all of us.⁴

³ See Chapter VI.

⁴ Essential to enlightenment are "the three R's"—reading, writing, arithmetic. At least these basic tools of education, argue most people, must come under compulsion. But Johnny will voluntarily turn to these elementary disciplines as readily as to talking. The motivation in each of these cases is not only survival but an aspiration to rise above a nobody.

Originals, Not Imitations

Given the libertarian way in education, anyone who would not seek light for his own advantage is not educable. The problem in these rare cases is not one of education but of charity.

An educated electorate—the American ambition, indeed, necessity—calls for originals, not imitations. Were all citizens a faithful imitation of me, or you, all would perish as would a single person were he on this earth alone. You and I depend for our lives upon countless human originals, each unique.

As to the creation of originals, I'm assuming my experiences may be somewhat comparable to your own.

Recently, I was reading an article on geology. The author explained that his understanding of continental drifts had been enhanced by nine disciplines other than his own. I must confess that I had never heard of a single one of them before—paleoecology and orogeny, for instance. I expect there may be literally millions of lights that have never come within my view. Possibly, however, the light shed by that geologist, at which I freely chose to glance, may whet my appetite for more geological light.

Yes, I may look further in that direction, but only in a cursory fashion. My driving desire is for more light in political economy, moral and ethical principles, justice, and human freedom. The point is this: I do not want my eye coercively focused upon lights of another's selection, be that other a modern Napoleon, an educational committee, a geologist, an orologist, or any other genius. An imitation is the very best that can result from such compulsory tactics. But when I fix my eye on lights that attract me—my choices will assuredly be different from yours—an original is in the making. And it is in my interest that you and others also be originals, not imitations.

It is axiomatic that an imitation cannot excel what it imitates. It is thus a foregone conclusion that an electorate cannot gain in enlightenment by the imitative process. Merely bear in mind that it is beyond the power of compulsion—in education or whatever—to produce better than imitations. I insist that the originals emerging from American education are in spite, not because, of the compulsions.

Now, to the youngsters. Of all the traits that distinguish the newborn child from most adults, none stands out more conspicuously than wonderment. Each new perception is greeted with wide-eyed and joyous amazement. This seeking-out impulse is the genesis of enlightenment. Without wonderment there can be no educating; this is self-evident. Enlightenment can no more be forced upon youngsters than upon you or me.

The wonderment with which each individual is initially endowed turns into harder and harder questions and can and sometimes does survive to the end of a long life. This trait can survive provided it is not snuffed out by (1) the absence of any light in the environment, (2) the coercive turning of the individual away from his unique requirements, (3) the indifference, intolerance, discouragement, crossness, exhibited by arbitrary and indolent parents and teachers, particularly in the child's tender years, and (4) an arrogant, know-it-all attitude characteristic of advanced age and narrow or closed minds.

Without wonderment, then, enlightenment or education is out of the question. But given the normal child's inquiring mind, the role of parents, teachers, and the rest of us is exemplary conduct and having light that can be drawn on.

The most important point to keep in mind is that enlightened individuals are not to be turned out like nuts and bolts. Nor would we be trying to mass produce in that fashion were it not for the three compulsions. Mass production is only feasible when the objective is replicas, imitations, carbon copies, duplicates. There is no way to mass produce originals. If we would improve the human strain, it behooves us to encourage originality, to adopt the libertarian way of education.

A final question is posed: What chance has education the libertarian way of ever becoming the vogue? It has precisely the same chance as has an understanding that compulsions are antagonistic to the educative process and that free choice is in harmony with enlightenment. Doesn't look so far-fetched after all, does it!

Influence, the Libertarian Way

As suggested in the previous chapter, libertarianism is a nonprescriptive philosophy—it is the ideology of freedom.

If freedom—individual liberty, the free market, and related institutions—is a way of life that works, the first demonstration of its workability should be in its own propagation. For, if libertarian methods cannot successfully extend an understanding and belief in freedom, then it is not a viable philosophy.

My thesis is that no one can take an effective stand for liberty and its propagation whose stance is not libertarian. In a word, any methods other than libertarian will work against liberty, not for it. The method must fit the objective for, as Emerson points out, the end pre-exists in the means.

Many of those who avow their devotion to liberty follow practices that would deny my position on methodology. While they will not resort to the pure authoritarian method of “believe our way, or else,” they indulge in argument and persuasion; name-calling is often used; they attempt the intrusive method of high-pressure selling. Believe-as-I-do, while not backed by force, is, nonetheless, a nonlibertarian attitude. This method is prescriptive and a prescriptive means cannot bring about the libertarian objective—freedom to act creatively as each may choose.

At the outset, let us acknowledge that few people even so much as take a look at freedom ideas and, of those who do, most are impervious to them.

Our Narrow Range of Interests

Impervious to freedom ideas! But what’s so strange about that? There are scientists, for example, who have an obsessive interest in algae and oceanic scum, in bumblebees, in continental drifts, in human uniqueness, in polar bear meanderings, in organic farming, and so on. They are deeply devoted to these subjects; I am not. But, some may counter, these are rare specializations, having little bearing on people’s lives; whereas, freedom, whether one appreciates the fact or not, is important to everyone. Well, the threat of cancer should be of interest to everyone, yet note how few are devoted to its cure.

Why are so few devoted to the cure of cancer? Not because of its insignificance! I have just read an article reporting that certain leukemic cells die in the absence of an amino acid known as L-Asparagine.¹ This is a first-rate discovery. However, such ventures in biochemistry are well over my head. Interested? Yes, in an off-hand sort of way. But deeply devoted? Not even close! These investigations seem not to lure me; I am impervious to them.

And so it is with my specialization, the philosophy of freedom. Only now and then is there an individual who becomes a real student of the subject, that is, who acquires a deep and abiding interest in freedom's significance to himself and others. Further, until a person becomes such a student, he is just as impervious to freedom—has no more insights into it—than I have into leukemia and amino acids or a thousand and one other specializations.

Based on what appears to be a national and worldwide trend toward all-out statism, we must suspect that the few of us who are devotees of freedom aren't equal to the challenge; the currents of contrary thought are too powerful for us. Thus, we must hope that some others will join us, not because ours is a numbers problem—it is not!—but because among the newcomers there may be some who will far excel the present devotees in depth of understanding and clarity of exposition.

In view of the need for better men than we, the first question that comes to mind is, How do we go about influencing them? Particularly, what should be our approach to persons who are our intellectual superiors! Selling our ideas to such individuals, or to anyone, for that matter, is no more possible than minnows capturing whales. Are we, then, left helpless? Is there nothing we can do? To the contrary, there is a way if we can master it.

A Psychiatrist; Opens the Door

The distinguished Swiss psychiatrist, Dr. Carl Gustav Jung, gives us the key:

What does lie within our reach . . . is the change in individuals who have, or create, an opportunity to influence others of like mind in their circle of acquaintance. I do not mean by persuading or preaching—I am thinking, rather, of the well-known fact that anyone who has insight into his own action, and has thus found access

¹ See "L-Asparagine and Leukemia," *Scientific American*, August, 1968.

to the unconscious, involuntarily exercises an influence on his environment. The deepening and broadening of his consciousness produce the kind of effect which the primitives call “mana.” It is an unintentional influence on the unconscious of others, a sort of unconscious prestige, and its effect lasts only so long as it is not disturbed by conscious intention.²

Dr. Jung gives us the key but it is not as simple as a metal key. His is a mental key, and will unlock nothing for us unless we understand his words and what he intends to convey by them. So, let us reflect upon the ideas behind the words:

What does lie within our reach—There is a power that lies within your reach and mine, one he is about to reveal.

. . . the change in individuals who have, or create—We may already possess this power; but, if not, it is possible to create it and, thus, bring about a change in ourselves. He refers to my changing me, not you.

. . . an opportunity to influence others—Obviously, he has some secondary effect in mind, as a consequence of the change in self.

. . . of like mind—The secondary effect will be most fruitful on those who have a passing and favorable interest in the enlightenment in question, in our instance: freedom.

. . . circle of acquaintance—Each of us has his own orbit—no two alike—beyond which this power cannot extend.

I do not mean by persuading and preaching—Away with argument, exhortation, polemics, ideological pushing, attempts at intrusion, forcing in. These devices are the opposite of what Jung has in mind.

. . . the well-known fact—Doubtless, the fact that follows was well known to Jung and some other pros, certainly to a few of the ancients and, as he suggests, it is sensed now and then by primitives. Today, however, it is nearly a secret.

. . . insight into his own actions—Know thyself!

. . . access to the unconscious—Insight into one’s own actions, when deep enough, plumbs what Jung calls the unconscious, the undiscovered self. Here lies

² See *The Undiscovered Self* by Dr. Carl G. Jung (New York: New American Library, a Mentor Book, 1958), p. 121.

the source of ideas, intuition, creativity—the aforementioned power that lies within our reach.

. . . involuntarily exercises an influence on his environment—This power radiates from the excellent individual without any awareness on his part that he is radiating. We—the ones who constitute the environment—occasionally experience being drawn to such persons; we ascribe a magnetic quality to them.

The deepening and broadening of . . . consciousness—The power to which Jung alludes stems from our own thoughtful concentration and understanding, awareness, perception.

. . . produce the kind of effect the primitives call “mana”—“Mana” is a Polynesian term and was regarded as a spiritual power manifesting itself in certain individuals. Is not insight into one’s own actions a spiritual power?

It is an unintentional influence on the unconscious of others—Yes, it is an *unconscious prestige*. The moment one becomes conscious of this power, it ceases; it is turned off. Observe those who are probing ever deeper. The more they discover the phenomena of self, the more are they aware of how little they know; thus, they are not conscious of possessing any superior knowledge. But let them cease their probing, spend their effort instead proclaiming their superiority, and we are no longer drawn to them. A surge of self-esteem short-circuits this system of power.

. . . its effect lasts only so long as it is not disturbed by conscious intention—To appreciate the truth of this, we need only take note of who it is we turn to for light. Instinctively, we turn away from those who are bent on reforming us or making us over in their images. Whether we look to our contemporaries or to those who have gone before, we seek out those who pursue truth for truth’s sake and who, obviously, have no thought of its effect on you or me or any other particular individual. Their intentions are honorable and the effect is enlightenment, until and unless they are disturbed by consciously trying to intrude their ideas into the consciousness of others; in that event, off goes the power!

The Individual Sells Himself

We may deduce from Dr. Jung’s analysis that you or I cannot sell anyone on freedom. *The individual sells himself!* His doing so, however, presupposes that an unconscious magnetism exists, that an unintentional lure is within his reach.

Both fact and theory seem to suggest that Dr. Jung is correct in his analysis. As to fact, civilizations on the rise have always been studded with stars. This would stand out in crystal clarity were we able to “replay” the original Constitutional Convention for comparison with a current political convention.

As to theory, it stands to reason that the generative process in society can be nothing more than the generative process going on in individuals. Improvement is impossible except at these discrete points.

Intentionally working on others takes the effort away from self. It has no effect on others, unless adversely; and the unevolving self is always the devolving self. The net result is social decadence—and has to be.

The corrective for this popular pastime is to rid ourselves of the notion that Joe Doakes must stand helpless unless he be made the object of our attention. Joe will do all right—and the same can be said for you and me if well just mind our own business, the biggest and most important project any human being can ever undertake!

16

The Biggest Project on Earth

What is the biggest project any individual can undertake? My answer is: Mind your own business!

Our object here is to find words for common sense. And this admonition fails to communicate what I mean because it has acquired a negative connotation. It suggests what *not* to do, without spelling out what *to* do. It is taken more as a rebuke than a recommended course of action. And for good reason!

When we say to another, “Mind your own business,” we often mean no more than “Keep your nose out of my business.” We have no thought of what the offending person should do instead, nor do we care. “Get lost!” or “Leave me alone!” would suffice as well. That “Mind your own business” is taken as a rebuke can be explained by the fact that millions insist upon minding the business of others.

Yet, mind your own business, if viewed in a positive sense, can be counsel of the highest order. It points the way to life’s most fruitful exploration, puts one in pursuit of the Infinite. The following story may help to illustrate:

The other morning, as my six-year-old daughter was watching me shave, she suddenly asked, “Daddy, where does God really live?”

“In a well,” I answered absent-mindedly.

“Oh, daddy!” Debbie voiced her disgust at such a silly answer.

At breakfast my wife asked, “What’s this you’ve been telling Debbie about God living in a well?”

“In a well?” I frowned. Now, why had I told her that! Then, all at once, a scene came to my mind that had been hidden in my memory for thirty years. It had taken place in the small town of Kielce, in Southeastern Poland, where I was born.

A band of passing gypsies had stopped at the well in our courtyard. I must have been about five years old at the time. One gypsy in particular, a giant of a man, fascinated me. He had pulled a bucketful of water from the well and was standing there, feet apart, drinking . . . his muscular hands held the large wooden pail to his

lips as if it weighed no more than a tea cup. When he had finished . . . he leaned over and looked deep into the well. Curious, I tried to pull myself up the well's stone rim to see what he was peering at. He smiled and scooped me up in his arms. "Do you know who lives down there?" he asked.

I shook my head.

"God lives down there," he said. "Look!" And he held me over the edge of the well. There, in the still, mirror-like water, I saw my own reflection.

"But that's me!"

"Ah," he said, gently setting me down, "now you know where God lives."¹

A Limitless Quest

Whether or not one agrees with the gypsy's theological method, it seems certain that God can never mean more to a person than he perceives God to be. In a word, there is a precise correlation between perceptivity and God. And it follows from this that the exploration of self—the expanding of perception or consciousness—is as limitless as are explorations into the meaning of God or Creation. Indeed, are not the two the same quest? If one answers affirmatively, as I do, then I suggest that this inner probing is man's highest business and that minding it is the biggest project on earth.

Once it is acknowledged that the exploration of self is of infinite dimensions—an unending performance—it must be clear that there can be no prescription or map for the journey. To explore is to probe the unknown, and who can say what this is! "The unknown is infinite as the infinite is unknown." The point to be emphasized here is that I haven't the vaguest idea what my inner probings will reveal to me; assuredly, I cannot know what yours will reveal to you.

Reflect on these observations:

1. Regardless of who the person is or how deeply he has probed into his own being, he knows little more about his complex self than he does about Creation.

¹ Taken from *Theosophy in New Zealand*, January–April, 1966.

2. No two individuals are alike; each is unique. The complexity of one person bears but slight resemblance to the complexity of any other person.²
3. When it comes to probing the depths of my being, I alone possess the key. This can be generalized: it applies to you and to all other individuals as much as it does to me.

With an eye on the above points, minding one's own business makes sense; minding other people's business makes nonsense. And grasping the folly of the latter lends credence to the wisdom of the former.

If I Were in Charge . . .

To help with this argument, grant that I am as wise as an occupant of the White House. Under these circumstances, assess my competency to control *your* creative actions: what you shall invent, discover; what you shall read, think about and study; where you shall work and how many hours per week; what wage you shall receive for your labor or price for your product; what and with whom you shall exchange, and so on. The absurdity of this, when viewed in a you-and-me situation is obvious. Now, for me to mind the business of two is twice as absurd. And what if I attempt to control the people of a nation or of the whole world? The absurdity is millions of times compounded!

It is now relevant to ask, Why do so many think themselves competent to control millions of people when it is evident that no one of us has yet mastered the art of self-control? Why do "educated" people by the thousands run for public office on untenable platforms which deal with people as objects to be manipulated?

There seems to be a simple answer to this hallucination. Whenever one tries to impose his will on a single person there is an instant playback. In Napoleon's case—a typical example—he found it impossible to control his wife and his own sizable family. Action and reaction at that proximity are sharp and definite; the reaction is as forceful as the dictatorial action itself. The offender—Napoleon or whoever—is as much instructed by the error of minding his wife's business as if he had erred in minding his own business. When we are directly smitten for our

² Roger J. Williams, *You Are Extraordinary* (New York: Random House, 1967).

iniquities, we tend not to repeat them. Paying the penalty for error is a necessary instruction, for it points the way to what's right.

But when one attempts to control the lives of many people, identification is diffused. So far as the offender is concerned, his victims are more or less unknown to him; instead of a you-and-me relationship, the victims are impersonal to the point of nonentities. Nor are the victims quite sure of the identity of the offender. The dictator continues to act dictatorially because there is no correcting reaction; it ceases. Were I personally to preclude your working for less than \$1.60 per hour, your reaction would be immediate, intimate, and probably violent. But when the government does the same thing the reaction is imperceptible; there isn't anything specific to scratch against.

The hallucination thus prevails among public "servants"; they who mind other people's business large scale are not smitten for their iniquities. If I could forcibly impose a minimum wage on millions of people, it would be the people, not I, who would pay the penalty for my error. I would seem to get off "Scot free" and, thus, be unaware of my mistakes, my ignorance unchecked; I would see no wrong in minding other people's business—in remaining dictatorial.

The alternative to master-minding other people's business is to conscientiously mind one's own. Minding other people's business tends to destroy the master as well as the slave. The greatest service we can render to others is to leave them alone while attending our own business—a project worthy of our very best efforts.

The Consistent Life

Believe one way and act another! See clearly what's right and then do what's wrong! This is the dilemma that confronts any morally sensitive person who probes deeply enough into the libertarian philosophy to fully embrace it. Is living a life of contradictions necessary? Isn't the consistent life possible? These are the hard questions raised in many honest minds.

A typical case in point: A friend bought a small farm with his meager savings but found, to his dismay, that he had either to accept some of the governmental aids to agriculture or lose his property. "These handouts fly in the face of my principles," he wrote. "They are wrong. I wish to keep my little farm; that is right. What, pray tell, should I do?"

A careless answer to this difficult question is far worse than no answer at all. For me to advise my friend not to take the handouts because they also offend my principles would be the rankest kind of inconsistency. For do I not use the socialized mail? And ride subsidized airlines? And look at Telstar TV? I can't even count the ways my daily living does offense to what I believe to be right. Like the distraught farmer, I wish to be consistent. What are the chances?

At the outset, let us concede that no individual has ever attained absolute consistency. The pursuit of Truth is an infinite quest; man in his imperfection can, at best, do no more than move in the direction of consistency. To err is human; it is in our nature, regardless of how nearly perfection is approximated. But, if a person would move toward consistency in his behavior, it behooves him to at least recognize an inconsistency when he faces it, or is forced to accept or live with it. This is the purpose of our search here.

A fairly obvious fact sets the stage for this analysis: We are committed to living in the world as it is, or not living at all. Were you or I to divorce ourselves from—having nothing whatsoever to do with—every last activity tainted with socialism, we could not exist. We have the choice of living and trading in the market as it is or resorting to hara-kiri!

How High the Price?

The questions these alternatives pose are: Should we elect to live amidst so many wrong practices, or should we give up the ghost? Can it be that consistency comes at this high price?

The answer to this particular libertarian dilemma comes clear to anyone who arranges his values properly: Live life! To take life, even one's own, is contrary to the Higher Law. So, living life in a world of wrongdoing—there isn't any other kind of world—while doing offense to consistency, is preferable to its alternative. The world around us—good, bad, or indifferent—is, to use the philosopher's phrase, "the ultimate given." To have the world as we would prefer it, instead of the world as it is, is scarcely within the range of our choices; so we are doomed to a measure of inconsistency simply by electing to live in this world of ours.

There is a second area in which consistency is no more than remotely possible. If man is to participate in the Divine Task, he must place his ideals as high as possible. Such ideals are always out of reach for the simple reason that man is imperfect. No one of us can ever sensibly proclaim, "Behold in me the ideal!" Falling short of our own ideals is not only a mark of imperfection but also of inconsistency.

There is another problem area: faulty judgments. These account for many inconsistencies. Example: a millionaire senior citizen of the libertarian persuasion accepts Medicare. This is an inconsistency, even on his own terms, for he opposed the legislation and devoutly believes this socialistic measure to be wrong. Compare this inconsistency with using the socialized mail, riding the subsidized airlines, or taking a handout as a means of survival. Inconsistencies, we may infer, are in graduated forms; I find Medicare, for instance, less tolerable than using the socialized mails and, thus, can forswear its acceptance with less difficulty.

Weighing the Alternatives

But, of course, each of us must make his own judgments. These are made by weighing alternatives. However, alternatives cannot be accurately weighed unless they are clearly perceived. The millionaire who accepts Medicare sees only the plus side: a very small premium payment that could cover a very large hospital bill.

The millionaire probably overlooks the minus side; it is harder to see; nonetheless, it should be taken into account: The extent to which any individual

turns the responsibility for his life—prosperity, welfare, security—over to another, or the extent to which government takes it away from him, to that extent is the very essence of his being removed. Self-responsibility is one of life's most precious qualities; it is the motivating force essential to personal development. The transfer of self-responsibility, whether surrendered voluntarily or under coercion, is, next to loss of life itself, the greatest loss one can suffer.

The senior citizen—rich or poor—who puts a correct value on self-responsibility, sees clearly that he runs great risks when he accepts Medicare or other handouts. For government pap, like sedation, is a killer. Physical or psychic health is always threatened, never improved, by either sedation or pap; these palliatives are no more than pain killers—and at a very high price!

Taking a Stand

I now come to that area of activity which holds out the best promise for moving toward a more consistent life. Granting our inconsistencies and contradictions, some of which we know not how to escape, what is that realm in which our own improvement can be most fruitfully sought? Where does one begin?

Proclaimed positions! The numerous stands one takes! This is where we should initially come to grips with consistency and contradictions. Here is the important question: Do I stand consistently, or do my several positions contradict each other? For instance, one breaks with consistency in its genetic stage—where infractions are most easily avoided—when he proclaims for “free enterprise,” on the one hand, and takes a stand for TVA on the other; or asserts a belief in open competition and free entry and, when the shoe pinches, calls for protectionism. The inconsistency of any individual has its beginnings when he “talks out of both sides of his mouth,” as the saying goes.

But narrowing the question of consistency to the easiest realm of all—proclaimed positions, what one openly stands for—is no small matter. It opens onto a wide, wide world of difficult intellectual endeavor. And no one, even in this narrowed realm, will ever make the grade—perfectly!

Importance of the Premise

We must not, however, underrate the importance of proclaimed positions; these are the ultimate determinants of the social structure. Let us suppose, for example, that you and I and others—enough of a leadership to gain a substantial following—were to drop all oral and written support for Medicare, that is, assume that perceptible support dwindles. Medicare would die on the vine! Libertarians, therefore, should, above all else, strive for consistency in their proclaimed positions. Several thoughts on such an undertaking may be in order.

In the first place, there is little chance of consistency—except by pure accident—unless one reasons logically and deductively from a basic premise, that is, from a fundamental point of reference. Short of this, a person's positions will be at sixes and sevens, governed by pressures, by the winds of fickle opinion, by conflicting interests.

Parenthetically, there isn't any virtue in consistency, *per se*. If one's basic premise be shallow or wrong, such as fame or fortune or power over others, one can, by accurate reasoning therefrom, be consistently shallow or consistently wrong. To be consistently right—the virtuous aim—requires a right premise.¹

Precautions to Be Observed

One oriented in the libertarian direction, in searching for a right premise, could conceivably ask himself: What is man's highest earthly purpose? Should he conclude that it is individual growth, development, emergence in awareness, perception, consciousness, then there is his premise, his basic point of reference. Once settled upon, he takes all positions consistent therewith. If a particular behavior—individual or societal—does offense to his premise, he stands openly against it. If, on the other hand, the behavior complements or lends strength to his concept of life's highest purpose, he takes an open stand in its favor.

Each person must, of course, select his own premise. Two cautions appear to be in order. If it does not require individual liberty, it assuredly is not a right one. And

¹ For a profound analysis of the premise and its relation to reason, see Immanuel Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1959).

See also my "Importance of the Premise," *The Freeman*, January, 1962.

if it cannot be openly and proudly proclaimed before God and man alike, it is in need of improvement.

Should a person reason accurately and regularly from a right premise, he would, perforce, be consistently right in his proclaimed positions. In any event, to the extent he succeeds, to that extent will he find himself never lending encouragement to any wrongdoing and, thus, withdrawing the only kind of support on which wrongdoing thrives.

Once the individual has become as consistent in proclaimed positions and principles as his abilities permit, his faulty judgments will tend to be displaced by well-rounded and sound judgments. But, most important of all, he will discover how to live in the world as it is with fewer and fewer contradictions. The senior citizen will get along without Medicare and the farmer without handouts. Their values, altered and upgraded by more consistent positions, attend to this.

The genesis of the consistent life is in the realm of individual beliefs and testimony. The uplifting or degrading of society and the rise or fall of civilization is all determined by how well we stake out and adhere to our positions.

18

In Quest of Perfection

Reflect on the following proposition: *Man, who is now and forever imperfect, will find perfection among his imperfect fellows.* At first blush, this gives the appearance of being a contradiction in terms, but I have recently discovered—and shall try to demonstrate—that it is not!

The now-and-forever imperfection of man seems obvious enough as we take stock of the humanity around us. Indeed, unless we are on guard, the imperfection of others may be the most impressive fact that ever enters our consciousness! Surely, we are seldom aware of similar shortcomings when we stand in front of the mirror! We ourselves, it seems, are the exceptions. And perhaps a very few other persons. For, now and then, there have been men whose images, as they come down to us, are all plus and no minus, all virtue and no vice—rare examples of untarnished perfection. An understanding of these exceptions is essential to a grasp of my point.

I shall contend that these exceptional cases are but myths which originate in man's quest for perfection. Until two recent experiences, I was unaware of either the myth or its possible explanation—which leads to an exciting truth about human relationships.

The first experience was a formal eulogy of mine to a departed friend. Interestingly enough, I didn't realize what was happening to me in this performance until I later observed what was happening to eight individuals when addressing glowing encomiums—informal eulogies—to me.¹

Building a Myth

As I thought about those encomiums heaped upon me, I discovered how myths are built around certain men: Let enough good be said about any person—with no acknowledgment of any imperfections—and, after he departs this life, others will speak of him in hushed and reverent terms. His faults will have dimmed to nothing

¹ *What's Past Is Prologue* (a symposium) (Irvington-on-Hudson, N.Y.: The Foundation for Economic Education, Inc., 1968). Copy on request.

and there he will stand on a pedestal, a model after which others may strive to cast their lives.

The danger in eulogies, if the recipient is still around to listen to them, is that he will believe what he hears.

If he does, woe unto him. Even so, his loss may seem a small price to pay for what others will have gained, and this is what I wish to demonstrate.

Observe what happens when one eulogizes another. The eulogizer dwells upon what he considers virtuous or meritorious in the other, thereby *portraying his own ideals*. Note that he avoids mention of any fault whatsoever. Also note that he praises only those few features he believes praiseworthy. This is precisely what I did when eulogizing my departed friend, though I didn't recognize it until I observed these men delivering their encomiums to me. The eulogizer, I repeat, uses tiny virtues he sees in the object of his praise to depict his own ideals.

Hopefully, the one eulogized will still see himself as he really is; but whether he does or not, there is something strikingly wholesome in this process and we should know what it is.

From the Best in Everyman

The seedbed of idealism, the force that produces excellence, is the portrayal of observed virtues. It is in the fleshing out of abstract ideals that the highest art consists. This is why Ortega considered it so important that we admire perfection in others.

While admiration isn't possible without instances of perfection, we see in the admiration and its portrayal the Hand of Creation at work. As to perfection, none of us can be Christ; but we can adore him. This leads to my belief that the exemplary role of Christ is to stimulate adoration, which is to say, that the great value of one's mastery of various truths and virtues lies in the emulative artistry they induce.

Leonardo's "Mona Lisa" assuredly has made a far greater contribution to an appreciation of the good and the beautiful than has the lady he looked upon. His portrayal, not the merit she possessed, dominates this relationship. As with Leonardo, so with a eulogizer: the portrayal has him "looking at the stars." Yet, the one eulogized is, at best, an imperfect individual with a noticeable merit or two;

like all of us, he or she has trouble overcoming vices and errors with virtues and truth.

This is not to discount the tiny truths any one of us unearths; if free to flow, they can move the world. But, by reason of the few I can uncover for myself, I will do best by looking for perfections in others, thinking about them, formulating them, trying to live by them. Here is how Goethe phrased the idea:

The greatest genius will never be worth much if he pretends to draw exclusively from his own resources. What is genius but the faculty of seizing and turning to account [formulating, living by] everything that strikes us [everything that we admire]. . . .

Let's summarize this thesis: Perfection is never found in you or me or in any other person except in stingy bits.

Man is now and forever imperfect. Thus, as Goethe suggests, we should never attempt to draw exclusively on our own resources. We need only remember that all the perfection there is in the world exists in billions of tiny bits apportioned ever so sparingly among millions upon millions of imperfect individuals. Yes, of course we should look for perfection in ourselves but never to the exclusion of searching where it exists in abundance, namely, in a multitude of others. And, whenever we come upon a perfection, we are well advised to portray and eulogize that feature of the person who holds it, for it is the portrayal that is creative and that provides our own thrust toward excellence.

These reflections may have more to commend them than first meets the eye. Open admiration—praise, encomium, or eulogy—of what is good in others, regardless of the faults they may exhibit, brings out the best that's in them:

I have believed the best of every man,
And find that to believe it is enough
To make a bad man show him at his best,
Or even a good man swing his lantern higher.²

Further, it elicits from them a friendship and affection universally desired but seldom achieved. What a boon this attitude is in human relationships! And how

² William Butler Yeats

important is this truly liberal or tolerant stance to those of us bent on advancing liberty among men! For experience teaches that counsel is rarely sought from those who see no perfection except in themselves, and it matters not how brilliant they may be. They simply aren't liked! As a rule, when one doesn't like another, that other is not admitted to one's inner sanctuary, the mind.

I repeat, all the good there is in the world exists in billions of tiny bits. It's all there. Lacking are its seekers, its portrayers, and, in a very real sense, its creative artists.

This correction, however, is easy enough to make once we realize that the eulogizer is more significant in the growth of excellence than the one eulogized. The latter has his faults but the former in his portrayal of observed perfections advances unadulterated excellence, free of the flaws.

For the most part, the virtues we master are those we see in others; and the vital process is the everlasting search for them.

I See a Light

How bright the world must look to those of authoritarian persuasion! Power structures everywhere: communism, socialism, the welfare state, the planned economy. Call these authoritarian movements what you will, they lead to all-out statism, the goal of millions. And, interestingly enough, other power structures spawned by the growing statism promise to hasten this modern imperialism: strikes, for instance, that can crush the economy at any point, angry mobs that destroy private property and individual rights at will. Bright, indeed, must seem the prospects for those who would play the role of “the man on horseback.”

The devotees of individual liberty, on the other hand, unless aware of what clues to look for, see hardly any light at all through the darkness that prevails.

There is—it seems to me—a ray of light which, if followed, offers a possible course. However, the path is one we have rarely, if ever, consciously trod. True, this way has been used, else there never would have been human progress. But it was not rationally chosen; we more or less stumbled upon it. Let us now try to map and follow that path toward freedom.

The problem is how to rid ourselves of these various power structures. Let us begin by submitting one of them to close analysis. Find the right method for ridding society of just one brand of unprincipled power and we may have the method to overcome them all—communism or whatever. We might begin with the strike, an annoying example with which we are all familiar.

The strike is a flagrant exercise of unprincipled power. I say unprincipled because there is no moral right to strike.¹ Workers, be they captains of industry or wage earners, have no more right to use coercive force to get their way than have chambers of commerce or ladies’ aid societies!

¹ See Appendix: “There Is No Moral Right To Strike.”

Force or Threat of Force

Look at this power. Fresh in mind as this is written is the idling for two and one-half months of 50,000 New York City teachers and 1,000,000 students. That government education, founded as it is on coercion—compulsory attendance, government dictated curricula, and the forcible collection of the wherewithal to pay the school bill—had something to do with the confusion is beside the point. The issue here is the strike—a dictatorial device—as a means of forcibly imposing the will of some on others.

Following the teachers' strike, Consolidated Edison, the nation's largest public utility, was struck. Had the principle of the strike been fully executed, that is, had no one been permitted to fill the vacated jobs, the population here would have been brought to a state of starvation, so dependent have we become on electricity, gas, and central heating. Fortunately, the Company's supervisory personnel tried, as best they could, to "man the pumps."

What's happening to New York City is illustrative of what's being inflicted on citizens across the nation. How, for instance, can we ever forget the grounding of five major airlines by a stewardesses' strike, supported by the pilots. This crippling action, however, was minor compared to ever so many other exercises of raw force or the threat thereof. One is prompted to ask, has there ever been an instance in any nation, at any time in history, in which so much governing power has been held in private hands, that is, outside of the formal governmental establishment?

Legislation Not the Answer

We must recognize at the outset that this exercise of coercive power cannot be corrected by legislation. Why? Because those who have been licensed to use such power have a lot of leverage over legislation. We can hardly expect them to urge the cancellation of their special privilege. True, when this situation is corrected—and it will be!—legislation will be written and the legislators will take the credit; but such statutes will simply record a new, predominant understanding.

Let's put this problem of correction another way: no form of confrontation—name-calling, resentment, denunciatory writing or speaking, or whatever—will do any good; indeed, confrontations will only increase the opposition, harden the practitioners of coercive power in their acts of injustice.

As confrontations increase, so will the opposition—the tension of the opposites according to the law of polarity.

The correction that lies ahead must and will take the form of defections from within these coercive movements. When? That's the question. We can help speed the process by better understanding the composition of these movements and our own role as outsiders.

Let's take the 50,000 teachers who were out on strike. This affair, as any of the other coercive movements, consists of three distinct parts.

The core of the action is made up of those who have lost their way—detached from moral values and the victims of intellectual error. A majority of the 50,000 teachers would probably fall into this category. We must refer to the ideas they follow as erroneous unless it be conceded that some persons have a moral right to impose their will, their wishes, their designs on others by force. This is an utterly untenable and indefensible position.

The spearhead of the action is a spokesman. It is incorrect to think of him as a leader. Rather, he puts himself in the vanguard of the host that has lost its way. He is always energetic, articulate, daring. He himself is also a follower—out front!

The balance in the striking action—perhaps as many as 10,000—are those who are “swept along by the tide.” They do not believe in coercive action; they have not lost their sense of direction. But this is a case of “going along” or losing the only employment for which they have been trained. Obey the spokesman, or not eat! These are the ones who will defect if given half a chance. They need help, and so would you or I were we in their shoes. Help from outsiders who are not being buffeted about by the striking action; help from those who can calmly view the issues in a detached and objective manner! In the frenzy of a life or death struggle, how many of us are prepared to think about the economic and moral issues involved?

Set a Right Example

How are we as outsiders to help those now trapped by these coercive schemes; the ones who would defect if they had the moral and intellectual ammunition; the ones who would, if they could, break up these power structures from within? *Make your place in the coming aristocracy!* That's my answer.

Let me begin with Whitey.² He was not among those who would defect if they could. Instead, Whitey was a strike organizer; he belonged to the spokesman category, a follower up front. To put it mildly, Whitey was angrily committed to his course of coercive action. He wasn't looking for help—far from it—and was far less likely to defect than those who wish to do so. However, he not only defected but became a wonderful, effective worker for freedom. The reasons, I believe, were as follows:

1. We employed a method the very opposite of confrontation, namely, turning the other cheek. Remorse rather than resentment was evoked.³
2. Whitey had an inquiring as well as an open mind, once the opening was found. Further, he had the capacity to apprehend moral values.
3. FEE had on hand explanatory literature relevant to his intellectual errors; we were able to supply him with the case for freedom. Many years of work, study, writing had gone into its preparation.

The first question that comes to mind: If FEE can cause one in Whitey's position to see the light, why cannot FEE cause other millions of coercionists to see the light? If one, why not everyone?

The story of Whitey is only to illustrate what is within the realm of possibility for the thousands who will be numbered in the coming aristocracy; it is not to suggest but, rather, to deny that FEE can repeat this performance at will. Whitey distinguished himself from nearly everyone else in the coercive movements: he had been, unknown to me, on FEE's mailing list for several years. He was in FEE's orbit; only a very few of the other millions are. Let me now explain what I mean by orbit.

Others Draw the Line

An orbit is composed of those individuals, known or unknown, now or hereafter, who seek or pay some attention to one's counsel, thoughts, ideas in a specific field. Each of us has several orbits. For instance, most of those in my golfing or curling or cooking orbits—indeed, most of my acquaintances—are not in my libertarian

² See Appendix: "The Story of Whitey."

³ For a commentary on turning the other cheek, see "Epilogue" in my *Deeper Than You Think* (Irvington-on-Hudson, N.Y.: The Foundation for Economic Education, Inc., 1967).

orbit. I have no musical or medical orbits at all, the beginning of an endless list of nonorbits.

The extent of one's orbit is not self- but other-determined. Others, not I, decide whether they are in my libertarian orbit. I have nothing whatsoever to do about the matter except to strive for and attain some measure of excellence. And even this is no sure-fire recipe for orbit expansion. Conceivably, you could be the greatest brain surgeon who ever lived, but suppose no one else thought you were. No orbit! Many great ideas and inventions have been conceived in the minds of men before their time has come. Orbits are formed exclusively by subjective judgments.

The above explains the vital necessity of the coming aristocracy, comprising individuals in all walks of life, each developing a libertarian orbit of his own. We at FEE can serve only those within our orbit; others may serve in their own orbits. This is why our society must be heavily dotted with libertarian lights, that is, with effective wellsprings. Merely reflect on those of your acquaintance who might seek your counsel but who neither know nor want to know of FEE.

Examples of Growth

I shall conclude this thesis by citing two recent examples of a developing aristocracy and the results thereof—encouragements which, added to many past experiences, account for the title of this chapter, "I see a light."

During a Seminar discussion in Kansas, a teacher friend of long standing, proudly reported how excitedly interested her students were in free market, private ownership, limited government ideas and ideals. This report being at odds with my observation of today's college students, I thoughtlessly glossed over the claim, evoking from her a look of disappointment. That crestfallen look annoyed my conscience for several hours. Then the light! And, later, an apology: "I now understand what is happening. It is your excellence as a teacher of these libertarian ideas that accounts for your students' unusual interest in them." An aristocrat at work! Note the results!

As if my new-found enlightenment needed further affirmation, there came to my desk two days later a letter from Tennessee. It was from a man whose articles have appeared in *The Freeman* on several occasions. He is among the best libertarian thinkers and writers of my acquaintance. In September, 1968, he began his teaching career in a small Christian college. The significant paragraph:

“It has been a thrilling experience to observe the reaction of students to a straightforward presentation of the freedom philosophy. Some have stayed after class to talk and to say that this is the first time in their life that anyone has helped them relate the concept of freedom to their Christian ideals and to real-life problems. In short, they are hungry for the ideas you folks so earnestly believe in.”

The picture is clear. All about us are millions of citizens in a state of utter confusion: strikers, rioters, racists, distraught students arguing and fighting over which of this or that form of authoritarianism shall prevail. Why? Because they are unaware of any alternative to coercion of some type. Why this pitiful lack of awareness? All because of a shortage of aristocrats.

But take heart; the aristocrats are coming, teachers who know the freedom philosophy so well that freedom as a way of life is an exciting prospect. As men are drawn to freedom, coercive schemes are left unattended, unsupported, ignored. This is not a matter of fighting the darkness but, rather, of generating light.

Merely bear in mind that to be a teacher does not require identity with formal, educational institutions. History seems to reveal that the greatest sources of light have been free-lance teachers—institutions unto themselves—exemplars of excellence, portrayers of the aristocratic spirit.

The love of excellence “in self, in others, in all things in earth or sea or sky” can be the mark of “a day laborer, an artisan, a shopkeeper, a professional man, a writer, a statesman.” And it will be the mark for countless individuals who arrive at the simple realization that this is the way to the joyous life, indeed, to life itself. Here we have the composition of the coming aristocracy. That’s the light I see!

Appendix A

There Is No Moral Right to Strike

Rarely challenged is the right to strike. While nearly everyone in the population, including the strikers themselves, will acknowledge the inconvenience and dangers of strikes, few will question the right-to-strike concept. They will, instead, place the blame on the abuses of this assumed right—for instance, on the bungling or ignorance or evil of the men who exercise control of strikes.

The present laws of the United States recognize the right to strike; it is legal to strike. However, as in the case of many other legal actions, it is impossible to find moral sanction for strikes in any creditable ethical or moral code.

This is not to question the moral right of a worker to quit a job or the right of any number of workers to quit in unison. Quitting is not striking, unless force or the threat of force is used to keep others from filling the jobs vacated. The essence of the strike, then, is the resort to coercion to force unwilling exchange or to inhibit willing exchange. No person, nor any combination of persons, has a moral right to force themselves—at their price—on any employer, or to forcibly preclude his hiring others.

Reference need not be confined to moral and ethical codes to support the conclusion that there is no moral right to strike. Nearly anyone's sense of justice will render the same verdict if an employer-employee relationship, devoid of emotional background, be examined:

- *An individual with an ailment employs a physician to heal him. The physician has a job on agreeable terms. Our sense of justice suggests that either the patient or the physician is morally warranted in quitting this employer-employee relationship at will, provided that there be no violation of contract. Now, assume that the physician (the employee) goes on strike. His ultimatum: "You pay me twice the fee I am now getting or I quit! Moreover, I shall use force to prevent any other physician from attending to your ailment. Meet my demands or do without medical care from now on."*

Who will claim that the physician is within his moral rights when taking an action such as this? The above, be it noted, is not a mere analogy but a homology,

an accurate matching in structure of the common or garden variety of legalized, popularly approved strike.

To say that one believes in the right to strike is comparable to saying that one endorses monopoly power to exclude business competitors; it is saying, in effect, that government-like control is preferable to voluntary exchange between buyers and sellers, each of whom is free to accept or reject the other's best offer. In other words, to sanction a right to strike is to declare that might makes right—which is to reject the only foundation upon which civilization can stand.

Lying deep at the root of the strike is the persistent notion that an employee has a right to continue an engagement once he has begun it, as if the engagement were his own piece of property. The notion is readily exposed as false when examined in the patient-physician relationship. A job is but an exchange affair, having existence only during the life of the exchange. It ceases to exist the moment either party quits or the contract ends. The right to a job that has been quit is no more valid than the right to a job that has never been held.

The inconvenience to individuals and the dangers to the economy, inherent in strikes, should not be blamed on the bungling or ignorance or evil of the men who manipulate them. Rather, the censure should be directed at the false idea that there is a moral right to strike.

Appendix B

The Story of Whitey¹

Now, by another true story, let me demonstrate how these ideas work in day-to-day practice. This experience had its beginning about eight years ago. I had written an article showing that there isn't any moral right to strike. Later, I received a letter on the stationery of the Sailors Union of the Pacific, Portland, Oregon. The writer was identified on the letterhead as William Benz, Organizer. His message was three pages of pure vitriol. "You dirty so-and so," except he couldn't spell so-and-so. There's an "a" in it! But I'll say one thing about that letter: it had a lot of spirit.

Instead of throwing the letter in the wastebasket, I invited my associate, the Reverend Edmund Opitz, to read it and added, "Ed, I shall be away for three days. If you don't mind, please write this character a response for my signature, and give him our treatment."

Let me reveal what our treatment is. It's that of turning the other cheek; it is to take no cognizance whatsoever of the man's meanness, his vitriol. It is, rather, to write him as high-grade a letter as you would write the Lord. Ed Opitz is pretty good at that! On returning, I signed his masterpiece and sent it on. Shortly thereafter, I received a reply from Mr. Benz, the most abject apology I have ever read. This man was crushed to think he had written his kind of a letter to the kind of a person Opitz had made me out to be.

I wrote a thank-you note and added: "I'm sending you a couple of books under separate cover." One was my little book of Argentine lectures, *Why Not Try Freedom?* The other was Doc Harper's perfectly remarkable book, *Why Wages Rise*, which was relevant to the man's original yap. When he had read these, he wrote, "Mr. Read, this is the finest stuff I have ever read in my life; please send me more." This was getting to be fun, so I sent him five more volumes. One of my associates said that if you want to get some free books, write Read a nasty letter. After reading these five volumes, my new friend wrote, "Mr. Read, I hereby appoint you my director of reading. You are authorized to purchase any book that in your judgment

¹ A transcription from extemporaneous remarks I made at a Commemorative Dinner to FEE, October 4, 1968.

will help me in my thinking and send me the bill.” Why, even you folks won’t do that! This man turned his education over to me. Incidentally, by this time, he had quit the labor union.

As this kind of correspondence continued, a remarkable friendship developed. Many months later, when I had occasion to visit Portland, I suggested to Mr. Benz that I would like to meet him personally and that he should breakfast with me Monday morning. He was at the appointed place bright and early, a fellow about 47 years of age, a man of enormous energy, obviously.

At breakfast he confessed to me that all of his life had been lived in hate and also that he hadn’t quite finished the second grade. This man was so fascinating to me that I stayed at the breakfast table with him until noon. I had a luncheon speech to make; he went along bringing another labor official. When it was over, he asked, “Mr. Read, may I drive you to the airport?” Never having destroyed a generous impulse, my answer was affirmative.

On the way to the airport I thought I would have some fun. “Whitey, [his nickname] do you remember that first letter you wrote me?” Ill bet that was the first time in his life he ever blushed.

He replied, “Yes, I remember.”

“Whitey, suppose I had replied in kind? Would you and I be riding together now?”

With that his old anger returned: “I’ll say we wouldn’t.”

So I said, “Whitey, I’m going to tell you what I did to you that you may do the same to others.” With that, I held my plane ticket against the windshield and asked, “What holds it there, Whitey?”

And he said, “It’s the tension of your finger.”

“You’re right! In science that’s called the law of polarity, or the tension of the opposites. Whitey, I want you to observe what happens when I remove the tension.” Of course, the ticket fell to the floor. I then said, “All I did in your case was to remove the tension. I left you nothing whatsoever to scratch against.” And I cited the old Arab proverb, “He who strikes the second blow starts the fight.” I pointed out that he had struck the first blow, that I had not struck the second, that we were friends. Whitey got the message.

This friendship went on for quite some time. Then, suddenly, no more letters from Whitey. Finally, a letter which said, “I never thought it would happen to me,

Leonard. I bought a new car and, on the highway, had a head-on. I've been in this hospital for three months; the doctors are trying to splice me together again. But, Leonard, you should see what I've been doing to these doctors on behalf of our philosophy."