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FALL 2021 First Year Seminar: Progress? FYSE-101-03 (Professor Nishiten Shah)

*1-page paper number 1*

**Prompt: “Exchange can make an entire society not just richer but nicer”. Use an example to illustrate why Pinker thinks this is true.**

*Response:*

Dear Friend,

Steven Pinker claims that wealth leads to specialization, specialization leads to exchange, and exchange makes people behave nicer. He uses an example from Adam Smith to make his point. Smith says that a pin-maker working in isolation can make at most one pin a day, while if the work is divided into small chunks such that one man draws out the wire, another straightens it, third cuts it, fourth points it, fifth grinds it at the top for receiving the head, then 5000 pins can be made in a day per person. This is the case of an exchange of labor and skill which is achieved when a person specializes in some task. Moreover, if someone is specialising in making pins then he will need to perform an exchange for food. Hence, this shows that a system of specialization can lead to exchange.

The economist Ludwig Von Mises’s claims, “If the tailor goes to war against the baker, he must henceforth bake his own bread”, we can see the dependency of the tailor on the baker. Similarly, we can see how complex markets will rely on exchanges and maintaining good relationships between the complex chain of consumers and retailers. Thus, everyone will be willing to be “nicer” in the sense that they are endorsing the idea of (*doux commerce*) gentle trade, as did many enlightenment thinkers including Montesquieu, Kant, Voltaire, Diderot, and the Abbé de Saint-Pierre. This suggests that exchange sometimes makes people behave “nicer”. But, here by the word “nicer” Pinker does not mean “to be kind” but rather he means that people tend to be selfish by acting selflessly.

Best,

Dhyey Mavani