

On difficulty, and other essays

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ECONOMICS AND POLITICS

281

peace, and established order; these constitute a status which is to industry the atmosphere of life. Franchises and privileges have not grown less important but more important. Our way of developing and using them is by joint-stock companies, which lessen the individual risk and increase the impersonality. Our laws and institutions assume with great naïveté that the legislators are to be disinterested persons, no one of whom will ever make the reflection which I quoted from the New Haven councilman. They are assumed to act without interest or passion in the name of pure justice, and the disbursement of franchises and privileges is supposed to be for the public interest only. It is, however, true of every constitutional state, at the beginning of the twentieth century, that there are two ways of getting a share in the product of industry -- to help to make it, and to help to regulate the making of it, get at it through economies or through politics. Every great state has, within a generation, had a great scandal from the action of its political organs on its industry; and democratic republics offer special opportunities for the legislature to levy tolls on industry. If we confine our attention to our own country we know that every legislature which meets contains a set of men who are in politics for what they can make out of it. But every industry must be carried on under the conditions which are created for it by the laws of the state; and if it is a large industry, or a new one, it will need legislation for itself -- it will need compulsory powers, franchises, etc. Here is where the dreadful set of men may impose upon the situation. In England the method of granting compulsory powers is very careful of all vested interests; the consequence is that the expense of getting powers is so great as to be prohibitory on all small enterprises. This is a standing difficulty on that

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Less visible but equally significant is the death within our language, within our ready apprehension of the language, of that central historicity, density of cross-reference, felt syntactic and semantic elaboration which were, to be sure, related to atticism and latinity, but which also had their own prodigal life. Ovid's or Horace's tags on the immortality of the major text, tags themselves reproductive of high commonplaces in Homer and Pindar, became the talismanic cliché of Christian-classical education and self-fulfillment. The sociology, the psychology or, at a fundamental remove, neuro-physiology, the social-psychology—the awkwardness, the overlap in our rubrics being themselves symptomatic—of reading, of our relations to texts, remain rudimentary.

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