



# Students of Liberty





### **Editor's Note**

This is an extension of remarks presented on April 4, 1950 before the students taking the course in "Comparative Economic Systems" at the University of Pittsburgh. Leonard Read is a member of The Foundation staff.

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## Students of Liberty

“I want less talk and more action.”

That sentiment of a business leader typifies the initial reaction of many persons when they suddenly awaken to the increasing dangers which beset their liberty. They demand action. In trying to understand this meaning, it would first seem necessary to examine into this stimulus for action.

To most people, in spite of this “let’s do something” attitude, the problem is all rather nebulous. Things are not quite right, it is readily agreed. There are strikes with their paralyzing effects; idle workers standing in front of work to be done; a growing national debt which, despite political assurances to the contrary, forebodes an evil day, perhaps not too far ahead; numerous individuals who, by the mere exercise of their capricious wills, can throw millions of American families into chaos; prices going higher; government getting bigger, and demands for vast extensions of the same as a cure for the ills it creates; a growing number of people in the world believing themselves the proper objects of our charity; class hatreds developing along occupational and other lines;

bombs from A to H accompanying cries for a security that the mad mess denies; wars in the offing. No, things aren't quite right. And the record, over a period of years, seems to indicate a whole string of costly, dismal failures in our attempts to set them right.

Clarity is hoped for. Most of us do not like to act in areas where we are confused. To do so might cause more harm than good. The question is: Is there some common fault which serves as the root of all these ills, a fault that can be defined and for which treatment can be prescribed? This tract is one man's answer — in the affirmative!

### **Man Is Interdependent**

The population in America would soon be at zero if every individual elected to live as a hermit. Perhaps as much as 99% of our present population would perish in even a primitive, foraging society. For instance, there were only several hundred thousand Indians here before us; their number was limited not by their inability to breed, but by the inability of a foraging society to feed. There are now 150,000,000 Americans with a higher standard of living than any people have ever known. Why? Because our economy is more efficient than hermitary or foraging. The further advanced the economy, the more people it will support at a high level of living. This is by way of saying that the size of the population and the standard of living it enjoys is ultimately determined by the perfection of specialization, division of labor, and exchange.



*For man is interdependent!* And his existence on this earth beyond a primitive state requires a recognition of this fact and a knowledge of how to deal with it skillfully.

It is true that this fact of interdependence is widely recognized. *But how to deal with it skillfully is where divergence of opinion in social affairs originates.* This divergence takes the shape of two diametrically opposed recommendations. One commends life in accordance with the principle of violence. The other commends life in accordance with the principle of love. It is important, at the outset, to call these two opposed principles for social conduct by their correct names.

### **The Principle of Violence**

As will be developed later, the principle of violence finds widespread application all over the world, in America as elsewhere. But to illustrate what is meant by violence, I shall choose a modern instance, one among hundreds of familiar instances, one that most people, not having reflected on the matter, fail to evaluate in terms of violence.

The familiar instance is public housing. A citizen is compelled to give of the fruits of his labor to meet the housing “needs” of others. Freedom of choice as to what he does with his own capital and income (property) is denied him. Freedom of choice gives way to the dictation of an authority, a dictate backed by brute force — violence! Actually, in a strict sense, the only choice a citizen has in this instance is between obedience or death. This

may sound extreme, but nonetheless it is true. Suppose, for example, that a person decides to exercise, absolutely, his freedom of choice concerning payment for a government housing project. Suppose that he decides not to pay his share of the cost because he believes that the building of houses is not a proper function of government. Suppose that he deducts this from his tax payments. What would happen?

### **Policemen with Guns**

Since the government's claim becomes the first lien on everything a citizen owns, a judgment for incomplete payment of taxes would finally be rendered against his property — his home, for instance. If the citizen still refused to pay his share of the government housing project — and if he refused to vacate his property that had been attached by government — policemen with guns would eventually appear to enforce the government order. Suppose that he still refused to acquiesce. Suppose that he met the use of physical force by using physical force in return, which would be his only remaining method of exercising freedom of choice and carrying out his initial intention. He would be shot! The justification for shooting him would be “for resisting an officer,” but the issue would remain the same. The citizen would have done nothing more than hold fast to his resolve not to support socialized housing, using the least violent means, step by step, to hold firmly by his convictions.

The reason that most of us do not think of government coercion as meaning obedience under penalty of death is because we almost always pay our part of the cost of government housing, electricity, and other similar projects before the shooting begins. Usually we acquiesce before the ultimate meaning of compulsion is realized. Thus we are unacquainted with its true implications.

### **Early American Experiment**

The principle of violence found acceptance early in American history. The Pilgrim Fathers, after landing at Plymouth Rock, were in dire economic straits. Not unlike their progeny of our own times they thought they could not, during a period of stress and difficulty, rely on the actions of free men in production, distribution, or charity. Their interdependence, very plain and real to these forebears of ours, must, they reasoned, be attended to by some intervening authority. Men acting freely, the identical men who so clearly recognized their interdependence, could not, they thought, be trusted to act in their own interests! The answer: violence!

True, the Pilgrim Fathers did not call what they did by the ugly name of violence. But, as has been demonstrated, this is what the law is. The Pilgrim Fathers applied the law. They attempted to effect communalization by force. Every Pilgrim, regardless of how little or how much he produced, was required to deliver the fruits of his labor to a communal or community storehouse. He was

permitted to withdraw the stores in accordance with “need,” not the individual Pilgrim’s idea of need but the law’s decree of his need. These Pilgrims put into effect, not by charity or the goodness of their hearts, a principle later stated by St. Simon, and still later held up as an ideal by Karl Marx: “. . . from each according to ability; to each according to need.”\* They socialized the fruits of their labor. There was a common ownership of the means of production — communalization by force. They were communists in the term’s purest form. They had chosen to live in accordance with the principle of violence.

### **Communism Rejected**

There was a most persuasive reason why the Pilgrims finally gave up communism. They began to starve. Many died. Violence, as a method to effect social conduct, was forsworn. Each according to merit became the rule — that is, to each the fruits of his labor. And they prospered. These practitioners began the pattern for the American way: individual freedom, and personal responsibility for one’s own actions.

This turned out to be superior to other ways. According to the record, this way was so good that Twentieth Century Americans applied violence (unwisely, I believe) to keep others out of our country, while many foreign

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\*This implied criticism is directed against the application of this principle by the use of force; not against it as an individual’s rule for self-conduct with his own property.

governments resorted to violence to keep their people at home. This American way had several distinctive tendencies, among them:

1. The doctrine of individual immunity against governmental power. This immunity extended to the individual in respect to his property, in respect to his physical person, and in respect to his mind, or thought and expression.

2. A government of laws and not of men.

3. The doctrine of local self-government.

4. The principle that governmental mandate and office are a public trust, to be exercised in strictest independence of all personal interests, prejudices, or passions, for the maintenance of individual liberty and the preservation of the public order, all to be done as related to the welfare of all individuals.

5. Avoidance of entanglements in the politics of European or other countries, and the corollary of this doctrine which advises resistance to the interference of Europe or Asia in the politics of the American continents.\*

## **The Reason for Government**

A point worthy of note is that this American way was not entirely devoid of violence; violence was merely less exercised here than previously in other countries. This meant

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\*The points here set forth have been taken from *Recent Changes In American Constitutional Theory*, by John W. Burgess (New York: Columbia University Press, 1923).

that government was strictly limited; that there was a minimum of organized violence.

But government, as a principle, had seemingly sound theory to support it. The reasoning went something like this: Each individual has an inalienable right to life. An essential concomitant of this right is the right to protect that life. Obviously, maximum liberty could not be assured by letting all citizens carry their own guns. The straightest shooters would soon be in command. What to do? Appoint an agent. Turn all guns, all force to be used for personal protection, over to him. Give him a monopoly of the coercive power, the sole and exclusive right to exercise violence. The agent, thus endowed with power, could then protect all citizens in the pursuit of their home life, their productive life, and their religious life. Each person would be free to do as he pleased up to the point of injury to others. And each would be responsible for his own welfare, with Christian charity to take up the slack. That was the theory.

Many Americans understood this agent, government, to be what it is: legal and organized police force. They had an appreciation of violence. They knew that it could be used to suppress, restrain, restrict, destroy. Restriction and destruction by government, to be useful, must be confined to that which is bad: fraud, private violence, conspiracy, and theft or other predatory practices. But police force — violence by government or otherwise — is, patently, not a direct, creative force. Thus, in the original

plan, all creative functions were to be carried on by such voluntary, cooperative, and competitive elements as the population contained. Government was to be confined to the protection of personal liberty.

## **Officials Are Still Persons**

These Americans who held to this societal arrangement were also keenly aware of the powers vested in their elected agent. After all, this agent was but a person or persons having normal weaknesses, including greed for power over others, plus the dangerous monopoly of the coercive weapons! It was because of a profound realization of this danger that these Americans attempted limitation of their agent.\* The Constitution and the Bill of Rights, with their separation of the executive, judicial, and legislative powers, were among the devices they employed to avert the dangers of unrestricted power that political theory predicted and history confirmed. They had an unprecedented success — for a time.

*It was because this practice of the principle of violence was on a lesser scale than ever before attempted that accounted for the mighty surge that was America's. Here, in this country, was a greater release of free human energy than history reveals in any other instance.*

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\*The best treatise I have ever read on the function of organized force and the principles that should guide its limitation, is Frederic Bastiat's *The Law* (Irvington-on-Hudson, N.Y.: Foundation for Economic Education).

## No Aggression

Personally, I am opposed to the initiation of violence in any form, by anybody, or by any agency, government or otherwise. I cannot make inspired violence square with ethical concepts. Aggressive coercion, whether socialized medicine or initiating war with Russia, is at odds with principles which seem right. How this brute force can be used and be considered moral, except to restrain violence otherwise initiated, is beyond my capacities to reason. Even the American theory of government, which has always appealed to me, raises two questions to which, thus far, I have been unable to find answers:

1. Can violence be instituted, regardless of how official or how limited in intention, without begetting violence outside officialdom and beyond the prescribed limitation?

2. Is not limitation of government, except for relatively short periods, impossible? Will not the predatory instincts of some men, which government is designed to suppress, eventually appear in the agents selected to do the suppressing? These instincts, perhaps, are inseparable companions of power. As a private citizen, the predatory person is only one *among* millions. As an agent of government he becomes one *over* millions. If there be criminals among us, what is to keep them from gaining and using the power of government? Neither theory nor experience have, so far, supplied me with reassuring answers.

Let me repeat: Organized violence, though limited better than ever before, characterized early America. In



addition, a horrible infraction of the American theory appeared in the institution of slavery. But, because these instances of the principle of violence were so minor as compared with the total energy, the people prospered better than had other peoples. Perhaps it was too good to be true.

### **Protection and Dependency**

This haven of free and independent men, as decades passed into history, began to develop protected and dependent men. The exigencies of free immigration, free trade, free competition in services as well as in commodities, and responsibility for individual welfare, came to be thought of as credos for a hardier race of men, only for such men as had made our country what it was.

It isn't easy to identify the growing items of violence which the accepted, limited violence initiated. Who can appraise the significance of immigration laws in a country begun only by immigrants? Who can assess the meaning of the protective tariff imposed by a people who got their start by overthrowing trade tyrannies imposed on them? What will be written in the final judgment book of a nation whose citizens were "educated" by force? whose "prosperity" depended on violence?

The answers to these questions are dependent on each individual's value judgments. For my part, I have no faith, whatever, in any "good" that can come from these measures based on violence.

## A Vital Measure

Certainly an important, if not vital, break away from the original principles of the Constitution and the limitation of violence against liberty and property occurred in 1913 with the adoption of the Sixteenth Amendment, the progressive income tax. Here, again, appeared communism in its purest form, no different in principle from that applied by the Pilgrim Fathers after their arrival. Here was the forced acceptance of “. . . from each according to ability; to each according to need.” Here was the socialization, in part, of the fruits of the labor of all, with nothing — absolutely nothing beyond fickle, political expediency — standing as a limitation against complete socialization. We have money which goes by force into the communal storehouse and which is withdrawn according to “need”; with the Pilgrims it was corn.

This communistic wedge, pounded by violence, opened an ever-widening crack in the wall of limitation on government. Here was formal acknowledgment of government as an agent of plunder. The only remaining limitation on the extent of the plunder against private property is everybody's total property. Beyond that the plunderer cannot plunder.\*

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\*Numerous European countries provide a case in point. Fabianism in Britain, for example, is at a dead end. The plunder at home, for all practical purposes, is over. But the parasitical idea of “. . . from each according to ability; to each according to need” will not down. This is why the eyes of socialists are turned toward America. It is the last remaining pool from which to siphon.

When considering the growth of plunder, dependent as it is on violence, it is well to reflect on a principle and to observe how violence expands and operates in a wealthy country. The principle: Man tends to satisfy his desires along the lines of least possible resistance. There are two ways, economically speaking, to satisfy desires: the economic means, and the political means.

By the economic means is meant the satisfaction of desires with the fruits of one's own labor.

By the political means is meant the satisfaction of desires with the fruits of the labor of others.

### **The Evil of Tariffs**

The tariff was one of the earliest applications of plunder by political means. In principle it admitted of numerous evils of which the progressive income tax is guilty.\* In this respect — that is, as the breeder of other evils which it implicitly endorsed — the tariff stands as the justification for all the communistic ills that we have heaped upon ourselves. But in scope, in relative direct bearing on the total economy, the tariff has played a small, second fiddle to the Sixteenth Amendment and to many of the other devices of plunder. The tariff, itself, has not been an important octopus. Its role has been even worse: It has spawned octopi!

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\*For instance, both limit freedom of choice as to the disposal of one's income. Both apply violence in order that someone else's "good" may be served.

Both the tariff and the progressive income tax are resorts to the political means. Each is a plunderbund. The plunderbund is merely another term for communalization by force, or legal thievery. It is simply the political device by which citizens pool their votes to extort the fruits of the labor of others for the purpose of satisfying the desires of themselves, their group, their community, or their industry. Rent control, parity and support prices to farmers, “free” education, compulsory social “security,” TVA, public housing, wages by fiat, socialized health insurance, subsidies of all sorts, are but a few in the growing list of plunderbunds — life by violence.

### **Violence Has Many Names**

Communalization by violence comes presented to the world in many forms, bearing numerous labels: communism, nazism, fascism, etatism, state-interventionism, fabianism, planned economy, welfare state, socialism, and new, fair, and other kinds of deals.

Regardless of the label, and irrespective of the means to the end, be the means “democratic” as in socialism or revolutionary as in Russian Communism, the end, in each instance, is always the state ownership and control of the means of production. One other characteristic these isms and deals have in common: They are all parasitical as distinguished from productive devices. One never heard of a society or nation of any account getting its start, for example, in socialism. The reason is that in the first instance

there is nothing to loot or to prey upon. Communalization by violence presupposes the existence of a healthy economy precisely as mistletoe presupposes the existence of a live tree.

As a tree can stand a small bunch of mistletoe, so can a healthy economy stand instances of socialism. But as mistletoe could spread and destroy the tree on which it feeds, so can communalization by violence expand and destroy the society from which it derives its parasitical existence.

### **A Measure of Lost Freedom**

Perhaps it is not possible accurately to assess the growth of this political parasitism, but an idea of the trend can be gained by measuring the loss of freedom of choice an American citizen has with his income dollar.\*

Less than a century ago a citizen had between 95% and 98% freedom of choice with each dollar. The total take of government — federal, state, and local — was from 2% to 5% of all earned income.

This take of government has, of late years, been rapidly on the increase. Today it is in excess of one-fourth of all earned income. Many people argue that that is not so bad because, on the average, we citizens still have nearly three-fourths freedom of choice with our dollars. This is a dangerous assumption. Colin Clark, one of the world's

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\*F. A. Harper, *Liberty: A Path To Its Recovery* (Irvington-on-Hudson, N. Y.: Foundation for Economic Education, 1949), Chapter XIII.

most distinguished statisticians, who made a study of the income behavior of nations over long periods, discovered an alarming fact: Whenever the take of government in any country reaches 20 - 25% of earned income, large segments of the population will support a depreciation in the value of the money as a way to “escape” the burden thus imposed.

Lenin was right when he said: “The way to destroy the capitalistic society is to debauch the currency.” This debauchery, this depreciation in the value of money, is but a subtly planned or unconsciously accepted device by which communalization is brought about by force. It is the road to communism through the back door, unapparent to those millions who will not take the time to reflect. Thus, it is a splendid device for those who would communize America.

### **A Sobering Comparison**

Since we began the programs of deficit financing and the monetization of debt, we have more than quadrupled our money supply. Our behavior in this respect is remarkably like that of some of the larger countries of the world, the countries we think of as being in a financial and socialistic mess — such as Russia, Germany, France, and England. As short a time as 21 years ago the take by government of earned income in Russia was 29%, where we stand today. At that time in Germany the figure stood

at only 22% ; in France at 21 % ; and in England at 21 % . I repeat, our federal, state, and local governments are now taking over one-fourth of our earned income. And if we were to suffer the unemployment we experienced in 1939, reducing our level of production and thus our earned income, this figure would automatically jump to more than one-third. No government has ever taken that much of any country's earned income without the rapid disappearance of individual liberty and private ownership of property.

An instance in point is France. She began a program of "social welfare" — one form of society by violence — in 1915.\* These programs, there or here, beyond the temporary expedient of confiscatory taxation, have no manner of "financing" except by inflationary processes — that is, by increasing the quantity of the medium of exchange. This quantity cannot be increased without resulting in a depreciation of the value of the money. In the brief span of 35 years (1915 - 1950) the franc has lost 99¼ % of its purchasing value! Talk about the "security" of such a program! Think only of a young Frenchman in 1915 preparing himself for retirement in 1950, say at 1000 francs per month — a handsome income in the France of 1915. Today the 1000 francs would buy one good meal, but not at the best restaurants.

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\*Some will offer the excuse: "France was at war." But the French people were being coddled by a government which hoped to spare them the burden of war's waste. It couldn't be done; it never can.

If I were to draw a conclusion from these observations, it would be simply this: We in America have debauched our currency to such an extent, and advanced parasitical socialism to such a degree, that we are no longer privileged merely to “drop an anchor,” to add no more to our evil ways, to remain in safety. We are now over the brink! And, unless we engage in the difficult and almost unprecedented political antic of cancelling out a great number of our so-called “social gains,” private property and freedom to compete in enterprise as institutions are doomed to wither away and to disappear here as they are disappearing in other countries of the world.

### **Violence Breeds Violence**

Another conclusion: *The cause of our ills is a reliance on the principle of violence.* Violence breeds violence. The more of it we practice, the more of it will we rationalize as justified — even “needed.” Just as a poke on the jaw provokes a retaliatory poke on the jaw, so does a subsidy to one industry or to one community evoke the sentiment: “We must have a subsidy in order to get our share of what we are paying in.” Subsidies are among the numerous institutions based on violence. If one would appreciate the extent to which the principle of violence is in effect, let him imagine the subsidies and the “social gains” that would be paid for, and the services of the state that could be rendered, if all of these were put on a shelf, as in a grocery store, and bought only as the citizens



of these United States would buy them — voluntarily. With the disappearance of the myth that someone else is footing the bill, which this serve-yourself plan would assure, what a whale of a difference there would be in the scope and cost of government!

### **The Determination of Value**

The above thought will only confirm in the minds of many the necessity for the continued exercise of the principle of violence. This is true because most of these governmental activities can be maintained only under violence. Thus, under freedom of choice, many activities that different individuals think good, necessary, and valuable, would be dropped. But value, it has been conclusively proved, can be determined only by free market processes, not by the enforced will of one, or by any other authoritarian arrangements.\*

As violence begets violence within nations, so does its existence within nations also beget violence between nations. War — violence on a vast scale — can originate only with people who practice violence themselves. What, for instance, is the difference in principle between plundering a portion of Joe Doake's egg money and taking the life of a Japanese, a German, or a Russian? One does violence to that which sustains life. The other does violence to life. One is indirect, the other direct. The difference is in

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\*Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1949).

degree, not in kind. Persons who will advocate the one have no way, logically, of not advocating or condoning the other. People of violence will make wars and destroy themselves. This need not be written in the future tense. People of violence *are* making wars and *are* destroying themselves.

### **Minor Violence Leads to Major Violence**

There is another way to demonstrate the inevitability of seemingly minor violences leading to major violence. Responsibility and authority go hand in hand. If, for example, you accept the financial responsibility for a widowed sister you assume a commensurate authority over her expenditures, or risk bankruptcy. It is no different in society. When we as citizens turn over to the state an item in the responsibility for our welfare, the state assumes a proportionate authority over our lives. Thus, as we turn over to the state item after item of our own welfare responsibilities, we eventually arrive at the all-responsible state. When we reach this point we will have over us, ipso facto, the all-authoritarian state. At the head of this state will be a gangster, a craftsman in violence, by reason of the nature of the job to be done: administering violence. Authoritarian states are, of necessity, headed by tyrants. Tyrants make wars. Logic says that they must. History confirms that they do.

Russia, for instance, has had many noted communists, soft-headed do-gooders, some of them doubtless sincere,

who advocated the all-responsible state. They could not or did not dare to foresee the inevitable consequence of their acts: Stalinism. Present-day literature is filled with their wails: "But I didn't mean this." Little does this wailing avail them. Their bed of thorns has been devised with their own hands. Today they have no choice but to lie on it. Their day of choice has passed. That day was when alternatives could be weighed, and reason and the right to express it still existed.

### **Alternative to Violence**

The alternative to violence is love. Love, as here used, refers to the application of the kindly virtues in human relations such as tolerance, charity, good sportsmanship, the right of another to his views, integrity, the practice of not doing to others what you would not have them do to you, and other attributes which result in mutual trust, voluntary cooperation, and justice. The distinction between violence and love, each in their extreme or pure form, was made in the Sermon on the Mount:

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

It is not necessary to make the case for the principle of love. Most persons will contend that it is the principle we ought to practice but that it is impractical. But try to find the individual who believes it impractical so far as

*he* is concerned. He doesn't exist. Each person thinks only that it is others who are incapable of decency. I do not know who you are who is reading this. And I do not care, for it makes no difference to the answer whether you are man or woman, Jew or Gentile, employer or employee, student or teacher, American or Russian. Simply ask of yourself these questions: "Would I initiate offense on those who would not offend me? Am I unjust, naturally, to the point where violence is required to restrain me? Am I unable and unwilling to deal honestly with those who would deal honestly with me?" Your answer, as mine, to all three questions — whoever you are, wherever you are — thinking solely of yourself and disregarding allegiances and commitments to all groups, organizations, and to all political regimes, is: "No!"

### **Intellectual Caesarism**

What I am asserting is that everyone thinks himself essentially good, and capable of the high performances which interdependence requires in accordance with the principles of love. Why, then, don't we be done with violence? Primarily, the reason is because of an all-too-common inhibiting fallacy, a myth we have conjured up in our minds: "No one else is quite as good and dependable, if left to his own resources, as I am." This is a form of intellectual Caesarism. In effect, the persons who hold this opinion aver that the world would be a better place in which to

live if only others were cast in their image — a rather brazen indictment of God.

Reason will not support the idea of the principle of love as impractical. Experience, although abundantly supporting its practicality, is difficult to discern. We practice the principle of love in most of the aspects of our daily lives without recognizing it as such. If we did not practice this principle in large measure, we would perish.\* But where violence once takes the place of love, most of us seem to consider the matter settled, and conclude that love has forever been ruled out as possible of application. Many examples of this forgetting process could be cited, but perhaps our new “internationalism” will suffice. Here is an instance where our “aid” to foreign countries is in no sense a voluntary act, but an act based on the principle of violence. Consider what would happen were you not to pay the Marshall Plan part of your tax bill! That this is violence, however, is not my point. The point is the extent to which aid on a voluntary basis has been all but forgotten as a possibility. Violence has so far superseded love in actual application that people are referring to this

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\*The statement that we practice the principle of love in large measure, signifying that the principle of violence is practiced only in small measure, and the argument that violence is the source of our ills, may appear as a contradiction. It is not. Imagine 100 people at a church social. Reflect on the total energy expended in walking, talking, gestulating, conducting the meeting, preparing the meal, and so on. Then, consider the effect of an infinitesimal part, maybe only  $\frac{1}{10,000}$ , of this energy turned to violence, say a punch on the nose of a deacon by the parson. Violence, like a deadly poison, has an effect disproportionate to its quantity.

act of violence as charity! It is as if they insisted on doing good even though they had to kill someone in the process!

### **With Eyes to See**

I repeat, it is not necessary to weigh the merits of violence and love. Where violence is taking us is apparent to everyone with eyes to see and with minds to understand. The practice of love is suspected to be the alternative, but there is too little in the way of firm convictions to support the fact that it is the alternative. Even many of the clergy preach violence while Christian banners and symbols decorate their pulpits. No one, however, except an avowed authoritarian, will deny the fact that this would be a better world if a trend away from violence could be begun and a trend toward love initiated.

With such an assumption it is proper to ask ourselves how this can be done. What are the conditions essential for this needed reversal in form?

Love prospers only in liberty. It generates and grows among free men; only with difficulty among men ruled by the principles of violence. As violence begets violence so does one personal act of kindness beget another. This point does not require any more proof than mere reflection on one's experiences with others. It is self-evident.

Liberty, according to these views, is the key to the unravelling of our Gordian knot. The natural aptness of man, acting as a self-controlling, self-responsible person, is good. The restraint of this aptness is evil. It is, then,

in liberty that man's natural aptness evolves toward its potentiality and its goodness.

Now, to return to the beginning of this discussion and to the many persons who demand action when suddenly awakened to the increasing dangers which beset our country. I wish, before setting forth some of my personal thoughts as to how liberty can be advanced, to inquire further into this demand for action, and to use the inquiry as a means of appraising some of the actions which this demand seems to generate. The appraisals are offered in humility and in the spirit of "take a look at them for what they're worth," not with the set notion that my ideas will prove to be ultimately right and those of others assuredly wrong. All earnest seekers of liberty will weigh with care the strengths and weaknesses in all methods proposed for its advancement. Let this be known, too: Those who sponsor the ideas I criticize, outnumber me a thousand to one. However, the issue at stake is as grave as life itself, and this alone would seem to warrant my temerity.

## **Two Types of Action**

As to action, how many types are there? Are there others than physical action and intellectual action? How could one create an absence of restraint — liberty — by using physical action except to use force against those who already engage in immoral restraint? To adopt this tactic, to employ physical force in any form or degree, except in self defense, would be merely to substitute a new form

of compulsion for the existing forms of compulsion, trading violence for violence — revolution! At best, it is the court of last resort and is not, really, what most persons have in mind when they insist they “want action.” Most of them mean only that they want “something done,” and done quickly! They “want to fight peacefully.” The thought never as much as enters their heads to use fists or guns. They reject physical action, in their intentions, by not even contemplating it.\* All that remains, then, is intellectual action.

### **A Mania for Organizing**

How does one fight for liberty intellectually? The best thing to do even in an “intellectual fight” for liberty, think many, is to “organize.” Usually they think in terms of “organizing” someone else to do something instead of organizing their own time and energies. This damaging tactic is indulged in as though “organizing” had the power, somehow, to absolve individuals from doing any more than joining some organization. The fact that organization without persons is an impossible abstraction, is overlooked. This mania for “organizing” is usually little more than an effort, doubtless unwitting, to transfer responsibility from oneself to some other person or persons who are perhaps even less competent.

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\*True, many want a law. But, unfortunately, they do not think of law as based on the principle of violence.



Responsibility and authority always go hand in hand. Thus, if this process of organizing succeeds, authority over one's own actions is lost precisely in the degree that responsibility is shifted to someone else. The citizen who "wants action," and resorts to this type of tactic, ends up further from his goal than ever. In fact, "organizing," more often than not, is merely an attempt to "pass the buck." Yet, oddly enough, the mere act seems to have the strange power of conferring a sense of accomplishment on the ones who "organize."

### **Organization Is Little Understood**

Organization, though much used, seems to be little understood. In the field of extending individual liberty — the only role of organization here discussed — organization has strictly limited, technical possibilities.\* But, unless these limitations are scrupulously observed, organization will inflict on liberty more harm than good; thwart, not abet, the spread of its understanding. Sobering is the thought that if there were no organization there could not possibly be any socialism!

In committee-type organizations, it is customary for persons to speak and act as a collective — as resolutioners in unison — instead of as persons. The best that these syn-

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\*Without voluntary organization in productive enterprise, for example, there could be no attention to our interdependent requirements. Most of us would starve.

thetic arrangements of individuals can produce is the lowest common denominator view of the majority. Such a view is almost certain to be different from, and inferior to, the best thought of the individuals who go to compose the arrangement. And, even the best is none too good when it comes to the difficult problem of how to understand liberty.

### **Organization Can Be Useful**

Organizations can, however, serve a highly useful purpose in developing and spreading an understanding of liberty if organization be confined to its proper sphere. For the purpose of advancing liberty, which depends solely on the advancement of individual understanding, the only usefulness of organization would seem to be to accommodate and to make easier the *joint* contribution to, participation in, and ownership of the physical assets that will aid in the process. These physical assets may include typewriters, buildings, specialized libraries, printing presses, telephones, and the many other helpful tools to individuals who are attempting to extend their understanding of liberty — physical accommodations enabling searchers for truth to exchange and disseminate ideas and knowledge more effectively. Primarily, these physical assets can be used to secure the advantages which derive from specialization and the division of labor. Organization, limited in this manner, is a useful and efficient means for achieving these desirable ends.

## **Organization Can Be Harmful**

Organization, however, like government, if extended beyond its proper sphere, becomes positively harmful to the original purpose. This fact constitutes the need for much careful thought on organizational limitation. Just as government becomes dangerous when its coercive, restrictive, and destructive powers are extended into the creative areas, so do voluntary organizations pervert and destroy the benefits of intellect when the capacity to merge is extended beyond the amalgamation of things — physical assets — to the point of causing individual judgments to conform to that of another person or persons. Truth, as each person sees it, is the best that the mind of man has to offer. Its distortion, inevitable when achieving a collective chorus, does injury to understanding.

## **A Pernicious Idea**

Next on my list of subjects for appraisal is a pervasive and, I believe, a pernicious idea. It is the notion that it is always someone else, rather than one's self, who needs understanding. This ubiquitous idea is heard in several variations: "*We* are only talking to ourselves," "Educate the workers," "Sell the masses," "Reach the man in the street." The "masses," "the man in the street," apparently, are all persons except the one who uses these terms.

Singular, too, is the fact that the persons who harbor and give voice to this notion, tend to be those who are

not advanced in their understanding of liberty and who are inexpert when confronted with the doctrine of coercive collectivism. An instance recently noted, and alarmingly typical, was a meeting of the Board of Directors of one of America's largest business associations where the resolutions, every one of them, were socialistic, dependent for their application on the principle of violence:

1. A new transportation system for their community to be financed by federal, state, and local governments;

2. A federal subsidy to American shipping that it might successfully compete with foreign bottoms in delivering Marshall Plan aid to the beneficiaries of our largesse;

3. A subsidy to the community's most promising industry.

And most of these Board members think of themselves as "already converted"!

This notion that it is always someone else rather than one's self who is in need of improvement is based on several false assumptions. It denies any extension of understanding to the one person on earth on whom one has the greatest influence — himself. It stamps the speaker as thinking of himself as a finished intellectual product, as all-wise. And, finally, it ignores the idea of truth as an object of infinite pursuit.\* This notion asserts a type of egotism in the presence of which learning cannot take place. It is death to the spirit of inquiry.

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\*It is an interesting fact that those who propose statist programs start with the same assumption: The answers are all known!

## **On Selecting a Logical Source**

The advertising page is the way some demands for action find expression. But does this "action" contribute anything at all to the understanding and preservation of liberty?

It is true that people turn to different sources in their attempts to satisfy different desires. Many of them go to the Bible or to church to seek spiritual enlightenment; none go to the hardware store for this purpose. They go to the school to learn about geometry; rarely do they go to their clergyman for this purpose. Many books and magazines provide them with literary entertainment, but they do not rely on these entertainment sources for intellectual leadership. Nor are they accustomed to thinking of the advertising page as a source of intellectual sustenance! They turn to advertisements, and with good reason, to see what the seller has to sell, what he has to say about his product, and to find out how much it costs.

Before advertising can serve as an effective device for extending understanding of liberty, it will have to have a vastly different preparation, a different motive for preparation, for the most part a different talent in its preparation, and establish a totally new reputation over a period of many years. My misgivings on this point will become more apparent with the presentation, later on, of the extremely limited possibilities I am able to visualize for the advancement of liberty.

This, at least, should be borne in mind: Any attempt on behalf of liberty, unless eventually showing some ac-

accomplishment, tends toward the wasting of resources, both material and personal, and results in an unwarranted discouragement, hopelessness, and inaction.\* It is of the utmost importance that we consider what *not* to do as well as what *to* do.

### **Danger of False Optimism**

Of extreme indirect damage to liberty are the constant, unwarranted, optimistic statements about the future of business made by many businessmen. Whether these are made out of sheer lack of understanding of the underlying facts, or because of fear of market collapse if the unvarnished truth were told, makes little difference. Most lay people, today, do not look to business leadership for many answers to their numerous questions. But to one question they do seek the businessman's answer, and they rely on it. The question is: "How's business?"

If this answer comes back, "Never brighter" and they believe it — as most of them do — how can they possibly give credence to the warnings against "social gains" and the rob-Peter-to-pay-Paul state? Is it any wonder that these warnings are not heeded? People are getting their materialistic "benefits." Businessmen say the materialistic fu-

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\*I have observed many men of energy and resourcefulness, having a well-earned reputation for integrity and intelligence, who, after "giving their all" to some activity aimed to save "free enterprise," an activity predestined to failure, call it quits, "throw in the sponge," retire to the woods, so to speak. These are losses of no small import. There may be no remedy for what has happened, but there can be prevention of what may happen.

ture is good. Why not, then, believe we can have our cake and eat it too?

### **False Supporters of Liberty**

Then there are those who advocate subsidies for themselves and sponsor “free enterprise” programs for others to follow. Such people do injury to liberty by giving the appearance of being on its side:

The thorns which I have reap'd are of the tree I planted: they have torn me and I bleed. I should have known what fruit would spring from such a seed.

Precept and example, be they good or bad, are among the important seeds one plants. Then when words and admonitions are offered in a contrary vein they are obvious lies intended to deceive. But they do not deceive; they merely present the tragicomic spectacle of a man, supposedly endowed with rational processes, looking one way and going the other. “Dissimulation is the coward’s virtue.”

### **A Positive Harm**

There are numerous individuals relatively advanced in their understanding of liberty who insist on meeting in forums and radio debates irresponsible people who advocate the idea of violence. Experience alone ought to demonstrate that this sort of verbal fracas generates more heat

than light. It is a form of entertainment, no doubt. But it does a positive harm.

It was Aristotle who said: "There are a million ways to be wrong and only one way to be right." Any irresponsible person can say: "The moon is made of green cheese." The scholar cannot prove what the moon is made of in the few minutes allotted to him, and if he resorts to the tricks that will win the plaudits of an entertainment-bent audience, he will destroy the most precious thing he possesses: his reputation for being a thoughtful, scholarly person. Liberty will have lost one of the few who can aid others in its explanation.

This same scholar, before the invention of radio, observing a small crowd gaping at some soapbox orator, would not have set himself up on another soapbox to engage in debate. He would have gone his way. Radio has changed the magnitude of the situation, but not the elements which go to compose it: the exhibitionist, the scholar, the gaping audience.

One recent rebuttal to this argument was: "If we don't debate these fellows we will give the appearance that our side has no spokesmen." If we do debate these fellows "our side" will have fewer spokesmen. It is absurd to let the coercionists select the libertarian's means of conveying his thought. Imagine the poet Goethe in a pub, getting himself into a fight with one of the barflies. How would the onlookers judge him? Would they consider his intellectual attainments in such a circumstance? No! They would rate him with the opponent he had elected to en-



gage in contest. They would form their opinions of him only as a brawler. And, further, by such action, the libertarian unwittingly but implicitly acknowledges that violence and love, restraint and liberty, are on an equal footing and should be so debated.

### **Fear Is Not Understanding**

“The cause of liberty is hopeless,” say some, “unless we reach people’s pocketbooks. Anything short of an appeal to their selfish interests is a waste of time. Show them that their jobs, their homes, their businesses, the education of their children, are at stake. There is no other manner of engaging their efforts for liberty.”

While these warnings, in my opinion, are justified, I rate an appeal to them very low as a means of generating interest and stimulating a spirit of inquiry. Fear in the heart does not initiate understanding in the mind. Fear tends to panic; if strong enough, to paralyze.

While it is true that all of us are ultimately motivated by self-interest, it is not true that self-interest is always appraised in the narrow terms of immediate, seemingly temporary gain. Such interpretation is unenlightened interpretation. The idea that people who cannot “see beyond the end of their noses” can be leaders in libertarian thought is expecting too much. These people have no role in this intellectual contest except as followers. This is not said disparagingly, because most of us are followers in most aspects of life; we are leaders only rarely.

Aptitudes vary. Only a few are educable in art. The same can be said for music, agronomy, cooking, medicine, the several crafts. It can also be said for social science and political philosophy. No one person knows in whom these aptitudes exist. Most individuals are even unaware of their own educability as relating to untried, unexplored fields.

It is educability, an aptitude for understanding liberty, that enables one to explain it and thus to have a value in this contest with violence. This is the trait in ourselves to be stimulated and encouraged. It is useless to expect that our fears will motivate us to a better understanding.\* In short, the persons who count in this affair are those who are moved by a force of a higher order, those who take their positions in accordance with a sense of right and wrong, and those who give profound attention to determining right from wrong. Such persons conceive their self-interest to be best served by this higher determination.

## **Self-Improvement**

All right, then. If the aforementioned methods and ideas for the advancement of liberty are held to be ineffective, what ought to be the direction of our efforts?

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\*On pages 19 to 22 I stated some conclusions about the plight we are in. I have made identical statements before many and various audiences, here and abroad. And as frightening as these statements are in their implications, I have never observed a single instance where they served to generate a new interest in liberty. Any new interest has always had a moral or ethical motivation.

This is a proper question. My answer — self-improvement — is the essence of simplicity. The reasons which lie behind the answer, however, are complex. But without the complex reasons, the simple answer is useless. The inclinations to escape personal responsibility, and the conjured-up beliefs that somehow intellectual miracles can be wrought by us on someone else, are too persuasive for easy rejection. Unless we fully understand that these inclinations and beliefs are wholly without merit we will continue to indulge them. I wish to make the argument, as best I can, for self-improvement as the only practical course that there is to a greater liberty.

The problem of liberty, its understanding and how understanding is and is not spread, would be of no interest to a person living on a desert island. It is a problem of individuals who live in a society. It is the problem of how to preserve independence in a highly specialized society in which interdependence plays a major role. In short, understanding liberty is knowing how to live in a condition where voluntary efforts will be at the maximum, and the use of force against persons at the minimum.

### **Liberty Is the Absence of Coercion**

Let it be said that this is a subject not easily mastered. Liberty — the absence of coercion or violence — is not readily comprehended. Relatively few among those who have lived on this earth have been able to visualize any order in society, or any progress by those who compose it,

except as the will of some has been imposed on the actions of others.\* History, for the most part, is a record of violence. Present-day talk and writing — history in the making — for the most part is an argument for the rearrangement of the rules of violence. An appreciation that progress is possible only when human energy is freed of restraint, has been gained by but few men. Is there one book or one article written by anyone at any time that can be designated as the final word on liberty? I doubt it. Perhaps the best that can be said is that the finest minds of all time have been in pursuit of its understanding and that now and then a tiny ray of new light has been thrown on what theretofore was darkness and lack of understanding. These few most advanced searchers have been among those who say: “The more exploration I do, the more I find there is to learn.”

### **An Infinite Pursuit**

The reason for this difficulty in understanding liberty is that liberty, like truth, is an object of infinite pursuit,

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\*“Law and order.” We have grown up with this idea. We accept “order” as unquestionably good. We accept “law” as the unquestionably good way to achieve this “good.” But some discrimination is required. Law can restrain private violence; this is good. Law can also restrain private creativeness; this is not good. Restraint, the characteristic of law, cannot aid private creativeness except as it restrains private violence. Order in creativeness is a matter between our individual selves and our Maker; it is not the concern of would-be makers. Order in creativeness is a problem that falls beyond the proper scope of man-made law.

a quest without end, ever. Liberty does not lend itself to objective definition except to say that liberty is the absence of its opposites — restraint or coercion. These, to some degree, can be observed and talked about descriptively.

But there is difficulty even in defining restraint or coercion. They take many forms and cannot be defined to any person in any of their forms which he does not already recognize. The Negro slave, for instance, if asked to list the restraints exercised over him would have had little to offer.\* He could not clearly define and describe a status unknown to him. A relatively free American, after having experienced a fair measure of liberty, and then suddenly put in the same bondage as the Negro slave, would have been better able to differentiate between his new slave status and the freedom he had earlier known. But many present-day Americans, when asked the question “What liberties have you lost?” are stumped for an answer. A creeping slavery progressively removes the contrasting experience that would give the basis for a full answer. They cannot, any more than the slave, discriminate between what is and what might have been in the area of the personally unknown. No better testimony of this point is required than the common reaction when anyone raises any question about the long-established public education system. It has become so much a part of the mores, so

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\*Perhaps a better example would be present-day Russians. They have so far lost sight of individual liberty that 99.98% of registered voters, according to their claims, cast their ballots for Stalin and his group. And they regard this as freedom!

sanctified by years of acceptance and tradition, that any alternative to “education” under the principles of violence is quite beyond comprehension.

### **The Death of Creative Thought**

Once the reliance on self is removed, once the responsibility for a portion of our being has been assumed by another — be that other a person, a set of persons, or the police force — we cease to think about or apply our ingenuity to the activities thus transferred. When the agency to which the transfer is made is the state, an agency of coercion, is it any wonder that creative thought diminishes to near non-existence? Creative thought is abandoned by man as a free and thus a creative agent, and assumed by man as an agent of coercion. Coercion, by its nature, is incapable of creativeness. One minus one plus zero equals zero! Understanding liberty requires that we think in these lost areas, in areas where there is no longer incentive for thinking except for the seemingly unrewarding and abstract objective of replacing violence with voluntary action.

### **Violence Retards Progress**

As an example of this point, a publisher, libertarian both in his professions and accomplishments, wrote that he found himself in the embarrassing position of having to support a bond issue for an extension of the municipal

sewerage system: "After all, my town has to have sewers." Sewage disposal, not too dissimilar to that found in the Paris of Victor Hugo, is, by reason of its socialization, the victim of non-thinking. Who wants to get creative about anything as mundane as sewage? Certainly *that* is a function of government! It has been. And, we have what we have.

But imagine that this dirty job had no manner of handling except by voluntary action. Urbanization would be impossible without some form of disposal. Coping with the problem would be among the necessities of the first order. And cope with it we would. It is inconceivable that men who can find ways to release the power of the atom\* could not find ways to dispose of sewage. All that is needed is to see that *the responsibility for such a task remains with persons as creative, not coercive, agents*. Without the possibilities of socialization we might, by this time, be vaporizing the stuff, or doing something even more "fantastic."

## **New Name for Lost Liberties**

The understanding of liberty requires these intellectual ventures into the areas of the unknown or, more likely,

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\*It is a common belief that government has been responsible for developing the use of atomic energy. But all of the theory was worked out by free, as distinguished from directed men. The principle of violence was applied to secure the funds to put the theories into an immature practice. Violent means achieved violent ends. Had the theories awaited the demand of a free market before being put into practice, atomic energy would eventually have been a boon, not a bomb, to mankind.

into the areas that have become unknown. Have you not noticed the vigor we employ when a present liberty is threatened and then, when it is lost, how soon we refer to it as a “social gain”? How can one who has been thus trapped, or who himself has lapsed into thinking of a new restraint as a “social gain,” possibly identify the liberties we have lost? He has lost his own knowledge and his own understanding to the same extent that he has altered his terms.

*The individual who does not thoroughly understand, and is not able competently to explain, the fact of our interdependence and how it can be satisfied solely with voluntary effort, also cannot correctly say that he has mastered the subject of liberty.* If this be right, then nearly every person I have ever talked with, read about, or heard of is a neophyte in his understanding of this subject.

### **A Student of Liberty**

In brief, not a single person among us is justified in regarding himself other than as a student of liberty. It is wrong and destructive of our high purpose to assume the teacher attitude by self-appointment.

These self-appointments as teachers — activities seen all about us — are based on two false assumptions and are the cause of much mischief. The assumptions are (1) that a man becomes a teacher by self-designation and (2) that everything would be all right, or at least much better,



if only everyone else could be brought up to the “teacher’s” intellectual level.

## **Destruction and Creation**

Perhaps the reason that so many of us feel we can, at will, influence others in improving their understanding is due in a large measure to the success of influence programs in unrelated areas. For example, the force of government influences most of us to pay our tax bill. The fear of violence influences many not to walk through a picket line. Half-truths, lies, and insinuations have influence in defamation and character assassination. Barbarous slogans like “Kill all the Jews” — appeals to baser instincts — have influenced millions to follow a demented leader. These are influence programs for the purpose of destruction. Any fool can destroy in a few moments a building which was finally achieved after centuries of creative learning. The techniques to be employed in destructiveness and in creativeness are as different as these two forces themselves. Destructiveness is as simple as standing at the top of an elevator shaft and letting yourself go. Creativeness is as laborious and as difficult as the slow rise of civilization itself; it is, in fact, the same thing.

## **Who Has Influence?**

The way to find the answer to the question “How is understanding extended?” is simply to ask: “To whom do

I turn when seeking improvement in any activity — my profession, golfing, swimming, cooking, singing, or whatever? Do I turn to those whom I regard as knowing less than I on the subject? Or do I turn to those whom I regard as more expert than I?” The invariable answer is: “To the more expert.” And other persons do, in this respect, just as you or I.

Let it be said another way: A person does not influence others in expanding their understanding merely because he wishes to influence them. We have only to reflect on the daily experiences with those intimate to us to discover our own limitations in this respect. And what a lesser chance we have of influencing those beyond our immediate circle of activity, those who never heard of us!

### **Who Is a Teacher?**

A person does not become a teacher either by self-designation or by designation of a third party — government or other. *A teacher is designated solely and exclusively by the student.* Many persons believe themselves to be teachers because they hold certain titles, or because they expostulate before audiences, or because what they write appears in some entertainment or news journal with large circulation. And they are especially certain that they are teaching if they hold attention and receive applause; they may be confusing histrionic qualities with education.

No person can force a change in the beliefs of another, even the belief that another has in his own omniscience.

The best that can be done — in fact, all that can be done — is to submit new evidence, new data, new reasoning, and hope that one's reputation for integrity and intelligence is such that the evidence will be considered. It is the student, the one with the receiving set, who does the "tuning in," not the broadcaster. Thus, influence on others in the area of extending understanding is extremely limited. I need no more proof of these limited possibilities than to examine the manner in which others influence me.

### **In Search of Understanding**

The road to influence as it relates to the creative task of advancing an understanding of liberty is self-improvement. It rests on one's role as a student. As one advances in his own understanding and succeeds in out-distancing others, those out-distanced — at least those with a spirit of inquiry, the only ones who really matter, the teachable — will come in search of the understanding they do not yet possess. To the extent that one's understanding is thus sought, and only to this extent, can one be considered a teacher; only to this extent can one be said to be a person of influence in this area.

### **The Student Attitude**

Parenthetically, in selecting teachers of liberty for ourselves, a good way to examine their qualifications is to determine if their ideas for positive, creative action require

violence (the force of the state, for example) to carry them out. If so, write them off. They are of another ilk. Those who advise the use of force in the creative areas are not even aware of liberty. They are, if terms have any meaning at all, authoritarians.

If it be true that one does not become a teacher of liberty until he has advanced himself as a student; if it be true that the principle of love prospers in a condition of liberty; if it be true that the principle of violence thrives in the absence of the principle of love; if it be true that the principle of violence is destructive of ourselves, of civilization, and of mankind; then it would seem to follow that the student attitude should head our agenda of required activities.

The student attitude is more than a matter of mere assertion. It is more than finding out what is known. *It requires the rare quality of finding out that which is not known.* The reporting of what is found out to those who are anxious to know is important but, still, even this is incidental to the search.

### **Moral and Intellectual Attitudes**

There is one other difficulty. As one does not become eligible as a "graduate" student until certain scholastic conditions are met, so it is that one cannot advance as a student of liberty, or qualify himself as a searcher for truth, until certain moral and intellectual attitudes, antecedent to receptiveness, are adopted. One not truthful and not humble and not teachable can no more grasp the

evasive qualities and meanings of liberty than can an idiot comprehend the science of nuclear fission. As Goethe stated it: “. . . only to the apt, the pure, and the true, does she [Nature] resign herself, and reveal her secrets.”

The prime antecedent to receptiveness — intellectual integrity — again, requires more than mere assertion. As it is the most important virtue, so is it the most difficult of acquirement. Perhaps no man achieves it fully. And it is almost certain that no one comprehends its meaning or grasps its merit or sees its relationship to the releasing of one’s potential until after a dogged determination to practice it in every phase of life.

### **Intellectual Integrity**

Intellectual integrity, as I see it, means the accurate reflection, in word and in deed, of what a person’s best judgment dictates as right. No one can rise above his best judgment. Only the quality of judgment can be improved. There is no way to determine what is right except as one’s highest judgment dictates. Even if the say-so of some other authority be accepted, it is still a person’s judgment which selects the authority. It is always a case of self-determination. To act honestly, to mean what we say and to say what we mean, is to present ourselves at our best. Beyond this it is impossible to go. The advancement of one as a student of liberty requires this high conduct. One frustrated with dissimulation, occupied with half-truths and lies, more concerned with appearances in

the eyes of others than with investigation and contemplation, is in no condition to receive much more than is reported in the daily press. Aptness cannot exist prior to integrity. In short, integrity calls for the rejection of actions inspired by mere fashion, popularity, expediency. It calls for the adoption of actions in strict accordance with one's own concept of rightness, not on the supposed but unassessable concept of others.

### **A New Insight**

One of my associates called attention to the fact that the student argument set forth in this piece was somewhat at odds with the teacher approach which some of us originally had in mind for The Foundation for Economic Education. My associate has a good point. We have modified our approach and we will continue to do so whenever any new insight into the problem of liberty recommends a change. Today, each staff member, regardless of length of experience or degree of scholarship, aspires to the student attitude. True, we report what we find out, the ideas we gain — but we report them only to those who express the desire for such information. To the extent that others acquire ideas, reasons, facts from what we report, to that extent only are any of us teachers. They make that designation, we do not.

This much is true: Each person who comes to grips with any specific subject, be it the understanding of liberty or any other, becomes both a student and teacher. And

a person's competency as a teacher grows only as the result of his continuing advancement as a student. This advancing proficiency and integrity is what others, as students, will more and more seek. And the extent of this seeking by others determines the extent that one is allowed to serve as a teacher. This is determined by the student, not by the would-be teacher or by the "Minister of Education." For example, these speculations on the problem of understanding liberty are being formulated and written as a student. These thoughts, such as they are, have resulted exclusively from a personal search for understanding. Others may wish to consider them as an aid to their own thinking, but even if I wanted to, I could not force any person to accept any part of what is here set forth. That is as it should be.

### **Pre-Conditions to Understanding**

Numerous persons have strong feelings against the principle of violence and in favor of the principle of love, but rate their own competency as a student of liberty rather low and believe that this student approach, if adopted, would exclude them from any useful activity. This is a conclusion to be guarded against.

Most of the people who have become leaders in any field have been those who have developed their proficiency with great difficulty. Rarely is any unusual accomplishment the result of a natural, unworked-for gift. The advanced students of liberty, who are so greatly needed at

this juncture in history, will spring from among those who properly rate their competency low but who are determined to raise it. These strong feelings, coupled with this attitude of humility, are among the most important pre-conditions to understanding. These are priceless virtues.

Lacking these pre-conditions, and in the absence of the understanding they presage, there cannot be that requisite sense of discrimination essential to distinguishing between freedom and restraint, between the principle of love and the principle of violence, between educational methods which will work and those which will fail. Lacking this understanding a person has no way of even knowing where to turn for guidance.\* He is lost in this field and might better seek refuge in silence and inaction, that not-to-be-envied sanctuary where one's destiny is in the hands of others.

### **Search Here**

In searching for students of liberty, the search must be within ourselves. In the world of persons it is only within

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\*Evidence of this bewilderment is the oft-heard statement: "But I haven't time to read a fraction of the stuff that comes across my desk." Of course not. No discriminating person reads everything, any more than one eats a dinner at every restaurant. This same person would make no such remark concerning a subject with which he had familiarity. Imagine a successful manufacturer saying, with a note of despair: "But I can't possibly use all the inventions submitted to me." Only the uninitiated would say a thing like that.



each of us that the unexplored areas exist. The best explorer of one's self is one's self. It is not possible to impart to others that which we do not possess. The most we can do is to make known a willingness to share what we have discovered by our own thinking, or what we find edifying from recorded thinking. Whether or not what we offer is, in fact, shared, is beyond our power, and we should realize this.

It is conceded that the student attitude, this search within ourselves, may at times appear unrewarding. But, if the understanding of liberty is to be advanced, the attempt must be persisted in, regardless of its seeming extravagance in time and effort. A statement ascribed to Christ is heartening if one will think of Him in the symbolic terms of ultimate truth and infinite goodness, and of our own weaknesses and inabilities as weeds and brambles, and of our own rare virtues and abilities as fertile ground:

Presently the Master appeared on the steps of the Synagogue and began to speak. It was immediately obvious that he had been aware of the rudeness of the crowd — and deplored it. He had been appointed, he said, to offer a way of salvation to the world; and that meant everybody. In a task so great as this, no prudent thought could be taken about the cost of it or the waste of it. His mission, he said, was to sow the seed of good will among men in the hope of an eventual harvest of peace. Much of this seed would be squandered. Some of it would fall among weeds and brambles where it would have no chance at all to grow, but the sower could not pause or look back to lament this extravagance. Some of the seed would fall upon stony ground where there was very little soil to nourish it and the tender plants would soon wither and die; but

the sower must not be dismayed. Some of the life-giving grain would grow! Some of it would find friendly lodging in fertile ground!\*

## On Saving the World

Another seemingly unrewarding, and to some a disappointing aspect of the student approach is that it reduces the chance of “saving the world” to the saving of only one person — one’s self. But it has its compensation: A person with this philosophy receives satisfaction from any increases in his own perception and, consequently, is not dismayed with the “faults” of others. Actually, there is no other way to “save the world.”

Why, may we ask, is self-improvement resisted by so many? Does the reward seem too little? Is it because self-improvement seems too much like helping one’s self rather than others? If these are the reasons, then each of us needs better to understand individualism, the dignity of his own person, the singularity of his existence, the meaning of rising to one’s potential, the satisfaction that can be derived from faithfulness to one’s conscience, judgment and personality — all as the first steps necessary to helping others.

Why should the integer *one* be ignored? In the universe of persons that’s all the world is made up of — just *ones*. The masses? Just *ones*. Labor? Just *ones*. Business? Just *ones*. I am *one*. You are *one*.

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\*Lloyd C. Douglas, *The Big Fisherman* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1948).

On which *one* can a person best exert influence? If he cannot accomplish any advancement in understanding liberty himself, what vagary of the imagination is it that suggests that some other *one* will look to him for explanation, enlightenment? Again, it should be clearly understood that the student selects the teacher.

The advancement of liberty will arise only from its intellectual refinement on the part of individual persons, and on nothing else. As this gets under way, individuals will emerge who will be so advanced in their understanding of liberty and so able to explain it expertly that the present trend toward total violence will be reversed. Others possessing a spirit of inquiry — students — will select them as their teachers and, in turn, these students will be selected as teachers by still others.

### **The Wave Theory**

One might call this the “wave theory” or the “intellectual reproduction theory” of education. The process can be likened to the ever-widening, repetitive waves which result from a stone tossed in water. It operates as does the principle of geometric progression. Its effectiveness, however, is premised on and presupposes the existence of intelligent, ardent, and honest students of liberty, and on the observance of sound educational methods. We must also observe caution against demands for speed during an “emergency,” lest processes be adopted that would destroy the power of progression and set up counter

waves — the progressive promotion of concepts the direct opposite of those originally intended.

If one will examine the significant, progressive movements of history, it will be found that they had their origin in a lonely perfectionism — that is, in the student approach. To illustrate: Christ understood the distinction between the law of violence and the law of love. He stated the law of love in its purity. It was He who lived a life worthy of emulation; it was He who employed the best of teaching tools, demonstration. Thus it was He who had the greatest influence: (1) He thoroughly understood the principle of love, and could competently explain it to those who selected Him as their Teacher, and (2) He lived without compromise or hypocrisy according to His principle.

Move on seventeen centuries to another student. Adam Smith understood the division-of-labor and specialization theories so thoroughly that he was able excellently to explain them in a book, *The Wealth of Nations*, which had, next to the Bible, perhaps the greatest single influence on western civilization.

### **Recommendations of Reason**

Action? Intuition seems to commend that I try to tell others what to do and how to think. Reason supplies a contrary answer. It suggests that pursuit of my own personal understanding is the only practical action for me to take. Neither personal nor institutionalized evils exist

among men who comprehend them to be evils. If I advance in my understanding of the true and the false, the understanding that I acquire will be sought. Reason recommends that I get the horse before the cart; that first I must learn; that influencing others will take care of itself. Reason says that influence in the creative areas can have no being prior to learning; that learning has no end.

Some agree with this line of reasoning and the conclusions herein set forth. They will assert them to be self-evident, but will argue that this suggested student approach — this process of self-improvement — is too slow to meet the challenge of these times. I am in no position to deny this. But, in my opinion, there can be no short cut. The only way to the Infinite, to Ultimate Truth — that is, to understanding — is through one's own person. When we gain an appreciation of this principle, we will be on our way to as little violence and to as much liberty as can be in store for us.

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