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## TWO ASPECTS OF FREEDOM

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### (a) THE NON-ECONOMIC NATURE OF FREEDOM

“ISN'T it a fine excuse for the Devil,” asked the Renaissance scientist and magician Paracelsus, “to shield himself behind astrology and to blame the stars for what he has done?”

This question can be paraphrased in twentieth-century terms. Isn't it a fine thing for your personal conscience to shield itself behind economic determinism and to blame impersonal capitalism for what it has done? War, imperialism, fascism—these are an ethical default older and deeper than capitalism; don't try to shift this personal responsibility to any impersonal statist or economic force.

We know, if anything we know too well, Anatole France's sarcasm about the “equality” which imprisons the rich man as well as the poor man for stealing bread. Obviously no free society can remain free, or is free for all its citizens, unless it eliminates an unbearable poverty that makes a sham of civil liberties and invites dictatorship.

True enough. However, American capitalism, continuously raising the mass standard of living year after year, needs no lecture on *this* from Marxists eager to prove our genuine liberties ungentle.

On the contrary, the fault of the American capitalist outlook is that it shares with Marxism—more than most European socialists do—an almost corybantic devotion to economic production figures. Thereby both are inclined to overlook those

psychological, moral and traditionalist shields of freedom against tyranny with which this article is concerned.

The motive for tyranny is not economics but will to power. Behind power, such motives as vanity, inferiority complex, sadism, fear, frustration, and just plain cussedness must also be considered. Economic gain is sought as a means toward power: not power as a means toward economic gain. This distinction must be remembered when confronted by a capitalist tyranny and by injustices committed by capitalists. The economic structure of capitalism is being used as a means toward power and tyranny but is not the cause of it. In the same way, socialism, feudalism, and other -isms can be used as a means toward tyranny without being the cause of it.

Lenin (via Hobson) "explained" imperialism, war, and fascism as the inevitable results of capitalist economics. *Imperialism, A Study*, published 1902 by the British economist John A. Hobson, founded the modern devil-theory of capitalist imperialism, culminating in Lenin's *Imperialism: the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, 1917. The Hobson-Lenin half-truths have been so widely and glibly parroted that Babbitt Junior repeats them as a conditioned reflex at any mention of the British empire or "western imperialism", without reflecting as to the source and soundness of these clichés.

Today all the ills of Asia are blamed on the past sins of capitalist imperialists. Their imprisonment of a Gandhi and a Nehru excited western liberals to more indignation than all the mutual butchery of half a million Hindus and Moslems in a "free" India. When Imperialism actually did lead to those pre-1914 "war crises", such as the German-French rivalry over Morocco, it was the bankers and capitalists who hesitated and preferred peaceful trade; it was the militarists and political leaders who preferred to risk war.

That much-denounced "exploitation" of colonies usually paid mere chickenfeed in profits. Hardly a major motive for those much-denounced bankers. In the case of pre-1914 Germany and Italy, colonial imperialism was economically a dead loss. It served only psychologically: a boost to the national inferiority-complexes of the two late-comers in the race. Capitalism is not the cause of imperialism, war, and fascism; though it may be a cause. Brave men lived before Agamemnon; sin and human nature lived already before capitalism. Imperialism, war, and fascism are a case of power-motive using economics

as a pretext not of economic-motive using political power as a pretext.

Bertrand Russell's materialistic, nineteenth-century "modernism", which flogs the dead horses of Victorianism and Puritanism while the living dangers escape, usually symbolizes everything I disagree with.<sup>1</sup> But on this issue of over-estimating economic motive, he says exactly what needs to be said:

The fight for freedom is not to be won by any mere change in our economic system. It is to be won only by a constant resistance to the tyranny of officials . . . To suppose that irresponsible power, just because it is called Socialist or Communist, will be freed miraculously from the bad qualities of all arbitrary power in the past, is mere childish nursery psychology; the wicked prince is ousted by the good prince, and all is well. If a prince is to be trusted, it must be not because he is 'good,' but because it is against his interest to be 'bad'. To insure that this shall be the case is to make power innocuous, but it cannot be rendered innocuous by transforming men whom we believe to be 'good' into irresponsible despots . . . It is sheer nonsense to pretend that the rulers of a great empire such as Soviet Russia, when they have become accustomed to power, retain the proletarian psychology, and feel that their class-interest is the same as that of the ordinary working man.<sup>2</sup>

Will economic change—specifically the abolition of capitalism—"solve" the psychological causes of tyranny, fascism, imperialism, and war? Old-fashioned socialists believe so. So do those liberals who still parrot a fashionable Marxist jargon without themselves being Marxists. To fight tyranny by abolishing capitalism and abolishing the profit motive may increase, not decrease that power-motive which does more than mere money to cause tyranny. An official statism of socialists is no less tyrannic—though in certain contexts no more tyrannic—than the unofficial statism of a monopoly capitalist. The question then is: how much can voters organize to hit back against the former, and how much can consumers and trade unions organize to hit back against the latter?

The answers to these questions vary in different societies and epochs. The success of parliamentary democratic restraints

1. For example, Mr. Russell writes in *New Hopes For a Changing World*, N. Y., 1952: "Propagandists have acquired a habit of talking about 'western values,' and it must be confessed that a great deal of what they say is rubbish. I am inclined to think that the most important of western values is the habit of a low birth-rate." If this is meant merely as a sarcastic *bon mot*, the matter need not be pursued further. If meant as serious philosophy, at a moment when western values are so lethally menaced, then would Mr. Russell explain whatever happened to values in the corrupt, materialism-corroded Third Republic of France? With its low birth-rate, it should be, for him, tops in values.

2. *The Wit and Wisdom of Bertrand Russell*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1951, pp. 68, 94, 122.

on tyranny, whether monarchist, capitalist, or socialist tyranny, depends on the past traditional framework of that society. It depends not only on the economic realities of the society but on the political methods of change. So every discussion of economic freedom ends up in politics. In turn, every discussion of political freedom, ends up in the non-political or more-than-political problem of values, the problem of the section that follows.

## (b) THE ETHICAL NATURE OF FREEDOM

### I

To sum up the preceding section on "The Non-Economic Nature of Freedom": freedom rests not solely on the material basis of merely economic prosperity and merely political constitutions. Freedom, including the most material economic and political freedom, rests ultimately on ethical values. A seeming paradox yet factually correct: you can only achieve the goals of materialism by an idealistic interpretation of life. You can only achieve economic gains by a credo that subordinates economic gains to individual freedom. If you base society solely on the idea of economic gains, scrapping freedom and justice for the sake of the total tyranny needed to organize total planning, then you lose not only the freedom but also the economic gains.

In place of the economic capitalist philosophy of Adam Smith and its parallel, the economic socialist philosophy of Marx, the world through trial and error will come to see *the economic necessity of an anti-economic philosophy*, the material necessity of anti-materialism. Pragmatism is unpragmatic; it won't work.

Totalitarianism is not the opposite of naturalistic relatives, as many liberals believe, but partly its consequence. Totalitarianism is not rule by law but dictatorship by Fuehrer-whim, that most relative of all concepts. Being relativists themselves, many liberals call Hitler an "absolutist" in values because they do not care to admit he was produced by the same amoral scientific relativism that (on a far nobler plane) produced them. Let us hear Hitler's own words, on the question of whether he regarded laws as relative or absolute. During the mass killings of June, 1934, the Bavarian Minister of Justice became squeamish

about so many shootings without trial. He protested to Hitler (feebly no doubt) this violation of all established general laws of humanity. Hitler replied:

Now everything depends on my authority. The laws are valid only because they bear my name! . . . You and your legality. Don't forget that every revolution demands its sacrifices! Why, if one had to ask you lawyers beforehand for permission, then there would never have been a revolution in all the thousands of years of history. Revolutions are the great forward thrusts which create upheaval and force things forward. Many must break and bleed in the process! From the viewpoint of law every revolution is illegal, and you lawyers are only annoyed because you must learn new law when the old is overthrown!<sup>3</sup>

Whereas the traditional moralist stresses conscience, the arch-relativist Hitler denounced conscience as strongly as he denounced all universals of either human or divine law. Hermann Rauschning, the former Nazi President of Danzig, has recorded the following typical remarks of Hitler:

We must regain our clear conscience as to ruthlessness . . . The word 'crime' comes from a world of the past. Conscience is a Jewish invention. It is a blemish like circumcision. Brutality is respected . . . The people . . . want someone to frighten them and make them shudderingly submissive . . . They need something that will give them a thrill of horror.

In 1904 Mussolini took the courses of Vilfredo Pareto at the University of Lausanne. Four years later, the future fascist, then still a Marxist, referred to Pareto's theory of morally-relative power-politics by *élites* as "probably the most extraordinary conception of modern times." This does not mean that Pareto intended the immoral consequences to which his theories were warped by his student. The distinction between intentions and outcomes is obvious. In any case, Mussolini saw fit to appoint his Lausanne professor of 1904 to the Senate of fascist Italy in 1923.

Lenin was just as outspokenly relativist and anti-legalist as Hitler and Mussolini. In *Left-Wing Communism, An Infantile Disorder*,<sup>4</sup> Lenin wrote:

It is necessary to agree to any and every sacrifice . . . To resort to all sorts of devices, maneuvers and illegal methods, to evasion and subterfuge . . . In short, any means whatever, to seize power; no restraint by any universals of ethics.

3 G. M. Gilbert, *The Psychology of Dictatorship*, N. Y., 1950; page 76.

4. International Publishers. 1934: p. 38.

would be to ignore the most important facts in human history. To think of them in the judicial manner prescribed by political science is to think of them as the Nazis did.<sup>6</sup>

## II

In America the conservative function must begin outside politics and economics. What America needs is a humanistic conservatism, not a conserving of special or adventitious economic interests. By beginning with the humanities—with literature, philosophy, the permanent classical expressions of the human spirit—the purpose of such conservatism is educational and moral. This is never always and never wholly conditioned by the alleged determinism of your economic income or your political party, though conditioned sometimes and somewhat.

Furthermore, the function of the intellectual in general, as guardian of values, is moral and educational, not—except in consequence—political. This function is well described in a new book by Eliseo Vivas, *The Moral Life and the Ethical Life*.<sup>7</sup>

Let me reiterate that, as against belief in the primacy of the political, the truly humanist teacher—and properly viewed the teacher must share with the statesman, the priest, and the poet the ultimate responsibility for the success or failure of his people and culture—must conceive the fundamental problem today, yesterday, and always to be the need to stave off the snarling beasts of barbarism that are always and everywhere on the alert to get out of their inward cages into which culture drives them. The teacher's job must be to guide man to grow to his full stature as human. This he does not by enlisting him in a party but by making him the possessor of the sustaining intellectual and moral structures of civilization.

It is heartening to see a somewhat similar conclusion reached by someone far to the "left" of Vivas in his attitude toward all established churches. The great Italian liberal and hero of the anti-Mussolini movement, Gaetano Salvemini, after years of stormiest political strife, reached a conclusion likewise subordinating politics to morals. "Our civilization will break down if the school fails to teach the incoming generation that there are some things that are not done."

The directly opposite educational view, which subordinates morality to politics and to alleged social progress, was best

6. Gertrude Himmelfarb, "Political Thinking: Ancients vs. Moderns," *Commentary* magazine, July, 1951: p. 81.

7. University of Chicago Press, 1950: page 132. The subsequent quotations from this book are from pages 133, 121, 122, 123.

expressed by Lenin: "In our opinion morality is entirely subordinate to the interests of class war. Everything is moral which is necessary for the annihilation of the old exploiting social order . . ." The fascist has the same anything-goes morality, substituting "national war" for "class war" in the Lenin quotation.

By putting his main attention to moral education rather than to the political-economic arena, the humanistic conservative seems an escapist "from reality" to many apostles of social progress. They smile half scornfully, half indulgently at his "escape" into books and the humanities. They believe he wastes his time on trivia, pedantic or arty. One of these trivia happens to be "the fate of civilization and of man," as Vivas reminds us:

. . . the most important question that the teacher must ask himself is whether men can be taught that they cannot be eulogistically called "men" if they free themselves from the tyranny of the ideal. If we teachers and clerks cannot make this clear to them, the fate of civilization and of man himself has passed into poor hands. The barbarians, from whom the eighteenth century thought itself forever safe, are not merely living beside us in the colonial areas or in the slums of our large cities or even next door to us but are teeming within each and every one of us. Inside us lie untamed our own brutality and the natural tendency inherent in each animal to define value in terms of his own interests, which is to say, to view the world in terms of his passions and lusts. When this tendency becomes a philosophy, it turns into the worst barbarism imaginable, a much more subtle and insidious one than that which once threatened so-called "civilized" Europe from beyond its marches.

To the general laws of ethics, civilization subordinates the ego of any individual and the ego of Lenin's "class" or of the fascist's "nation". This view is permanently innate in the experience of man. But it must be newly learnt by every generation. Our generation learned it from the class wars of modern communism and the national wars of nazism. Thucydides learned the same lesson from the radical class wars of Corinth and Coreyra and the reactionary "patriotic" wars of Athens and Sparta. His comment five centuries before Christ:

Men too often, in their revenge, set the example of doing away with those general laws to which all alike can look for salvation in adversity.

Defending against an excessive modern relativism these "general laws to which all alike can look," Vivas writes:

2. According to the religious view this inner check comes from God. God, in turn, is defined by several conflictingly different definitions. These range from anthropological concreteness to mathematical abstraction. Every one of these definitions is partly inadequate, and necessarily so, because formulated by mere humans, wading beyond their depth. If we could adequately define God, we would be gods ourselves, instead of mortals aspiring toward God.

Though both are equally within the fold of western civilization, these two schools disagree as to the natural or supernatural origin of this ethical inner check. I am not minimizing nor evading the obvious importance of this disagreement. But at this moment of history, confronted by the anti-ethics of class egotism and national egotism, I prefer to see the upholders of universal ethics stressing the code they both agree on, instead of stressing their disagreement about the unknowable "natural" or "supernatural" origins of that code.<sup>8</sup>

Many readers will have followed, in *Partisan Review* and elsewhere, the bitter disagreement between two of America's ablest and most indispensable intellectual leaders of anti-communism: Sidney Hook and Eliseo Vivas. Yet both of them, both the religious and the secular philosopher, agree in practice on common values which are basic to all civilization and which would be utterly destroyed by Soviet Russia (or other forms of totalitarian fascism). Against this menace, therefore, both schools of philosophy must—for the present at least—close their ranks. Both secular and religious thinkers must at least agree that the ethical inner check, no matter what its disputed origin, is the best bulwark against the communazis and will finally outlive them.

The most effective, most automatic way to enforce the ethical check is to formalize and institutionalize it, even at the painful but unavoidable price of sacrificing a certain amount of inspiration to institution. Some of the spirit must always be sacrificed to some of the letter of the law. The price must be paid, for society's sake. Whether grudgingly or with eager faith, you can never get around paying it—unless you take the anarchist position that civilization does not depend on organized society but can survive with no more framework than the natural goodness of man.

8. By itself, the fact that the author is undecided between these two alternatives is not of the slightest interest to anybody else. But it is no merely private matter—it is an objective generalization—that today most of those who reject relativism and who return to values, are likewise undecided between these alternatives. Does not such a situation call for less hostility between related groups of value-affirmers?

Because every human being is a caveman by nature, capable of every insanity and atrocity, you must prefer art and artifice, classicism and formalized social convention, to the cults of natural goodness, progressive education, and instinctive self-expression. For the same reason you must prefer the "conservatism" symbolized by the pruned and patterned gardens of Versailles to the "anarchism" symbolized by the romantic barbarous jungle. But if you can disprove this view of social stability, then you are entitled to be a philosophical anarchist. An idealistic pacifist anarchism (Thoreau, Kropotkin, Gandhi, George Orwell), rather than liberalism or socialism, is the most logical and most attractive alternative to conservatism, in case the latter's pessimistic premises about human nature were proved wrong.

To make people live the ethical check instead of only theorizing it, the best sanction is the community's experience of having lived it for centuries, the feeling of it "always" being so and being there: just as "so" and just as "there" as the sky and earth that form the roof and stage of the innately ethical drama of man. I would call this the ethical, non-economic dream-nexus of man, as opposed to the cash-nexus of the capitalist or socialist materialist. Whether your source for your ethical code is natural or supernatural or that blurred borderline to which both science and religion tend at their purest, only this conservative experience of communal tradition will turn it from abstraction into a way of life.

Progressive democrats favor universal suffrage horizontally in time. Conservative democrats favor it also vertically. Traditionalism has been defined as extending the vote to our ancestors.

Herbert Butterfield in *History and Human Relations* called the Marxist radicals "the symptoms of an age condemned, partly no doubt by its own errors, to a terrible preoccupation with the material side of life" and "the voice of the disinherited not yet schooled in the values of an ancient civilisation, which they see chiefly as an object of attack." Possibly the first function of ethics in the anti-leftist and non-intellectual world of business, is the struggle for greater social justice. But the first function of ethics in the uprooted, left-dominated world of western intellectuals, who over-simplifyingly imagine themselves disinherited and alienated, is to school them "in the values of an ancient civilization." These values are sometimes deserved-

bored to death under any other teacher. In Logan's classroom they learned something more important than grammar, and a respect for language. They learned, without realizing it until much later, a respect for life.

Unlike most modern educators, Jotham Logan did not look on life as a problem to be analyzed, but as an experience to be enjoyed. His enthusiastic love of life emanated from him in concentric rings. The first ring embraced his classroom, the second his former pupils, the third the culture of Greece and Rome. The fourth ring enclosed his city, which he thought of as an ancient Greek thought of his. The fifth was the province of Nova Scotia and then sixth was the British Commonwealth, with England as its heart. With a symbolism unconscious on his part, his study revealed all of his loves. His shelves were filled with Latin and Greek classics. On his walls were pictures of an old Academy football team, of his graduating class at Dalhousie, of former pupils, of Joseph Howe, of Dr. John Stewart, of Halifax in the old days, of King Edward VII holding the reins of the horse which had won him the Derby. Through the concentric circles his loyalties played like flames. His teaching ranged through them all and totally ignored whatever lay outside them. His very limitations gave him coherence. He had few doubts. Doubt may be a fine quality in a scientist, but in a love it is a miserable one.

There were many occasions in Logan's life when all six rings of his loyalties merged and became one. There are several that could be mentioned here, but one will suffice to illustrate the extreme simplicity of his nature and the effortless, almost thoughtless, way in which he was at one with himself and his own conception of the world. That occasion was the night of August 3, 1914.

Owing to the difference between Greenwich Mean Time and Atlantic Standard Time, Nova Scotia considered herself at war four hours before Big Ben struck midnight in London and the day became August 4. On that evening after supper Logan was in his study on Barrington Street. With him was a former pupil he was tutoring for a supplementary examination at Dalhousie. While the last hour of peace ran out, Logan and his pupil worked quietly together on a passage in Thucydides.

It was only in later years that Logan realized the awful appropriateness of reading Thucydides at that particular moment. The war that was about to begin did to our civilization what the Peloponnesian War did to that of ancient Greece

Its assault on the roots of our culture completed the work already done by the Industrial Revolution. But on that warm August evening in Halifax all the catastrophies we have since witnessed were concealed. Logan and his pupil continued to work until the bells struck eight o'clock. Then Logan rose and went to the window. Newsboys began crying their extras in the streets and he knew the war had begun. He closed his copy of Thucydides and placed it on a shelf where it was to remain unopened for five years. That night he reported for duty at Wellington Barracks. Eight months later, on the day after the *Lusitania* was sunk, he sailed with his battalion from Halifax. In spite of his age—he was already over fifty—he served with the rank of captain in the Twenty-fifth. Many of his former pupils were in the battalion with him. Many of them he saw die, and he himself was wounded. When the war ended, he came home with the rank of major, returned to the books which had been gathering dust and to his classroom on the top floor of the south-east corner of the old Academy.

When I first met Logan, I was a very small boy in my first year in the Academy. Logan was then in his mid-fifties, and I remember my father saying how astonishing it was that a man of his age should have survived trench warfare without having had his physique ruined. But Logan had a terrific constitution. On afternoons when the rugger team practiced on the Wanderers's Grounds he was always there, running up and down the field with a whistle in his mouth. His domed head was bald and the hair on his temples was gray. When he sat at his desk and passed his hand over his scalp it used to whiten, then the blood would rush into it again, and I used to wonder if Cicero had looked as he did now. He suffered from various aches and pains brought on by the dampness and strain of the trenches, but he was always at his desk. On the mornings when his lumbago was bad it was a good thing to know your work, but otherwise his temperament was unruffled. He made us work hard. He never insulted his great subject by trying to pretend that it was easy.

It was his enthusiasm, of course, that made him the teacher he was. His enthusiasm and his passionate loyalty. He thought the Romans were nicer men than they were and that the Greeks were a lot more stable than their history shows them to have been. He breathed into them a great deal of himself, and they were enormously improved as a result. He gave us Greeks and Romans leavened by his own brand of chivalry, democracy

and gentility. If he had not respected them as highly as he did, he could not have made us respect the languages he wrote; and, in the long run, respect ourselves, too. To me, at least, he made learning an adventure. He made me, past all hope of reform, incapable of regarding any man's work as separate from the character of the man who performs it.

Jotham Logan, as everyone in Halifax knows, went by the nick-name of "Lucky", and whenever he heard it quoted he used to whisper to himself *deo volente*. *Felix*, his Romans would have called him, and *Felix* he certainly was. During a long life he mingled with happy naturalness with every kind and class of person from British Guards' officers to stevedores from the Halifax waterfront. In summers he worked on a Colchester County farm and read Vergil and Homer in the evenings. No one did a pupil have to be brilliant to win his affection. One of the worst pupils he ever had he regarded with a particular relish, and was delighted to learn later that the boy had done well in the bootlegging trade. (Since when has it been a sin for Nova Scotians to drink smuggled rum?) Conservative as all men who feel at peace with others, Logan contrived to love a world which had turned its back on most of the things he especially valued. He loved the past without degenerating into *laudator temporis acti*. When he spoke of the past, he made it a part of whatever present he inhabited.

A utilitarian would call Logan's life a failure because the cause for which he fought—the classics—has been a lost cause. No judgment could more thoroughly condemn utilitarianism. Logan became a living part of thousands of human beings. I don't expect to be around thirty years from now but if I am, I shall still be thinking of Logan in the present tense. So will hundreds of others who knew him, and that is the best immortality any man can hope for.