

The Lanterns

Liberty's Beacons on Freedom's Path

Aaron Harvey

For here we are not afraid to follow truth
wherever it may lead ...

-Th. Jefferson

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Introduction

There are two paths. A path toward liberty, another toward servitude. As it is that of least effort, the more worn path of servitude has traditionally been taken by mankind. Conversely, the path toward liberty is one only recently discovered; a path not altogether obvious, but one illuminated by civilization and requiring a great deal of courage and ability to tread.

While the path toward liberty is responsible for the free and prosperous civilization of the West, it is not a path guaranteed to be passable without scouts to tread ahead, sentinels ever watchful on the flanks, and beacons of experience planted firmly along its proven way.

For with every step there are ideological highwaymen and marauders claiming an easier path, one destined for an emerald city just around the next bend for only the immediate price of subservience to their whims and tribute through their tolls.

Perhaps no recent example illustrates the whimsical, nay quasi-schizophrenic, nature of such ideological highwaymen than that of Peter Orszag. Like the wind blows, Mr. Orszag one day casts blame¹ upon the democratic processes of our Republic for what ails us, while soon thereafter reversing direction and asserting that the antidote to our ailments is *forced* participation² in those very same processes. Liberty be damned, apparently we need only trust in Mr. Orszag's ever-shifting whims.

Truth be told, Mr. Orszag is just another one of many totalitarians in our midst; petty tyrants whose authoritarian impulses manifest in one way today and in another tomorrow as inane attempts to puncture the shields of mankind's moral standards, lessons of experience, and reason.

As there is under the sun, today's attempts to divert our course from liberty's path are nothing new. In fact, today's rejection of civilized institutions and democratic processes, by the likes of Mr. Orszag, is rooted in the same primitive impulses that drove the continental revolts of Thomas Muntzer, the Bolsheviks, and the German national socialists.

¹ Orszag, Peter. "Too Much of a Good Thing; Why we need less democracy." *The New Republic*. 14 September 2011.

² Orszag, Peter. "Make Voting Mandatory." *Bloomberg*. 19 June 2012.

While the movements of Muntzer, the Bolsheviks, the German national socialists, and today's progressives may at first appear to have nothing in common, their wars against Western civilization use three similar attack vectors: attacks upon private property, attacks upon religion (mainly, but not exclusively Christianity), and attacks upon the family. Crystallizing these vectors illuminates the main avenues of assault used in the war against the West while providing us with angles through which to parry and counter.

When combined with the 18 "System X" tendencies elucidated by Stuart Chase in *The Road We Are Traveling*, the three attack vectors identified above constitute the playbook of self-proclaimed progressives; individuals who tend to worship at Darwin's altar while dogmatically asserting that evolution is now ready to be cast aside in favor of central planning that will chart an easier path for mankind. Central planning which, as Mr. Orszag pleads, must be undertaken without the debate, respect, liberty, and mutual consideration that characterize the democratic processes and spontaneous order of a constitutional republic.

To stay steadfast upon liberty's course with such banditos lurking in plain view, there are two types of knowledge each of us must learn and use: that of the basic proven principles of civilized political economy and that of the current events which serve to affirm those proven principles.

This work targets the first type, fundamental proven principles, in a manner intended to communicate the key points concisely while clearing up common misconceptions. Think of it as an additional arrow in liberty's quiver; an arrow to supplement the God, gold, and guns which are the tried and true antidotes for those attempting to force us from liberty's path.

While restating the obvious has been done before, the fog conjured up by today's mass media makes our task of doing so a tad more complex. Therefore, the following chapters lay out a concise set of beacons, across five piers of civilization, for charting liberty's course through the ever-shifting fog of mass media illusions. With these beacons at hand, the reader will be well equipped to keep liberty's key principles in mind while rejecting those counter-liberty sophisms unleashed by the mass media to exploit the sympathies of the gullible and the ignorant.

Anticipated Use

I harbor no illusions that anyone except the hardiest of souls will relax by the fire, reader in hand, and peruse this work from cover to cover like a studious young Jefferson laboring over Cicero in the flickering shadows of Shadwell's candlelight.

Rather, this is intended to be a key points introduction to five key bases of Western civilization, a persistent reference embedded in one's favored electronic device, available on-demand when interest is stirred in staying true to liberty's course.

The essential points contained herein might be useful for those times when one needs to casually integrate a few key ideas into a conversation or when one needs to clear up any of the common misconceptions that have infected our culture through the pandemic of mass media fantasies and fictions.

In other words, a set of beacons firmly staked to enlighten the path from whence we came; philosophical guideposts to ensure that those treading beside us and following in our footsteps do not fall prey to the ideological highwaymen attempting to divert us from liberty's path.

As a persistent reference, it can be learned at one's own pace without any immediate need to read the 24 key references that influenced it. For those wishing to find each point's broader context, sources and page numbers are included. Those wishing to dig even deeper will find a list of the key references in the "Influences, Further Reading" section.

It is my sincere hope that these simple truths, first elucidated by the intellectual giants that paved the way for our civilization, will find their way into the hearts and minds of each of us dedicated to preserving the ideas and institutions we have been so fortunate to inherit.

Chapter III. The Absence of Coercion

Liberty is generally established with difficulty in the midst of storms; it is perfected by civil discord; and its benefits cannot be appreciated until it is already old.

-Alexis de Tocqueville

Common Confusion

While to some the word liberty means that we are free to do as we please with ourselves and the products of our labor, to others it implies the power to coerce in the name of fairness and plunder in the name of equality. ¹⁹⁷

Sinister Alteration

While liberty in the true sense means minimized coercion, the self-proclaimed progressive definition has been altered to imply that centralized government must be free to coerce in the name of society. ¹⁹⁸

Minimized Coercion

To those of the liberty school, the liberty of a free country implies a state of affairs where centralized power, control, and coercion are minimized.¹⁹⁹

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Even if coercion cannot be abolished completely, liberty's principles can serve as a set of beacons capable of guiding us toward minimized coercion and thus maximum liberty.²⁰⁰

Liberty's Bulwark

Although coercion of some form or another will always be present, we can minimize it by adhering to the moral standards and rule-of-law principles that form liberty's bulwark against foreign and domestic attacks.²⁰¹

A Common Mistake

While liberty is often confused with democratic processes, the right to vote does not imply that centralized control has been minimized or that those who are ineligible to vote are victims of coercion.²⁰²

Choosing Serfdom?

Certainly, the simple freedom to vote one's self into servitude, thus giving up liberty, is not liberty at all. ²⁰³

A One Way Street

The history of the 20th century is rife with examples of people voting themselves into servitude and thus giving up liberty through democratic processes.²⁰⁴

From Democracy to Dictatorship

Germany's rapid descent from democracy to centralized national socialist dictatorship provides stark evidence of the risks to liberty posed by nefarious quacks and demagogues.

By No Means

Although democratic processes are usually found in states that enjoy morality, liberty, and prosperity, by no means are morality, liberty, and prosperity always present in states claiming democracy. ²⁰⁵

Fleeting Whims

Liberty would be a meaningless term if it were defined by the whims and ever-changing will of fleeting majorities and their elected agents.²⁰⁶

What Liberty is Not

Although the invisible changes in public opinion are made visible through democratic processes, it is impossible to define meaningful words based upon ever-changing opinions.²⁰⁷

Sovereignty

When we apply the term liberty to nations, we are referring to a people's desire to determine their own way without the shackles of foreign control. ²⁰⁸

Emotional Shackles

Confusion regarding the term liberty may also arise from the observation that people can be “slaves to their emotions” and thus unable to make smart decisions.²⁰⁹

Not Unfreedom

Although being a slave to one's emotions may prevent good decision making, it is not unfreedom in the sense that coercion by other people infringes upon one's liberty.²¹⁰

Choosing Wisely

Whether or not someone imposes their will upon someone else is an issue much different from whether or not we can choose wisely among the options before us. ²¹¹

Anti-Social Coercion

Since liberty refers to relations among people, coercion is present where some threaten others or where some attempt to impose their will upon others by restricting choices and actions.²¹²

Dangerous Confusion

The notion that liberty implies “freedom from obstacles” and the “freedom to do what one wants” is perhaps the most dangerous confusion regarding the meaning of the word. ²¹³

The Power to Plunder

It has become quite common to confuse the true meaning of liberty, as minimized coercion, with the pernicious progressive definition of liberty as the power to do what one wants. ²¹⁴

Ominous Developments

Only recently has the totalitarian notion of “freedom from obstacles” become confused with the idea of “minimized coercion” that defines liberty.²¹⁵

A Key Element

A key element of totalitarianism is the notion that liberty implies the freedom for central planners to exercise any power they desire in the name of society, fairness, and equality. ²¹⁶

Consolidate and Coerce

In fact, the notion that liberty means “freedom from obstacles” is often cited by central planners consolidating the power to coerce others into chasing utopian illusions.²¹⁷

Confuse and Destroy

Once freedom is confused with power, the ways in which the word “liberty” can be twisted toward centralizing the power that destroys true liberty are virtually unlimited. ²¹⁸

No Limits

If we accept that liberty is the power of a centralized government to do what it wants, then agents of the state are bound by no limits when attacking true liberty with coercion and central planning.²¹⁹

Twisted Attempts

Attempts to twist liberty's definition from "the absence of coercion" into "removing the barriers to our desires" are dangerous because they are the basis for replacing true liberty with centralized government power. ²²⁰

The Freedom to Coerce

Even though liberty unleashes our civilization's prosperity, it is relentlessly attacked by those attempting to redefine it from “the absence of coercion” to “the power to coerce”.²²¹

False Definitions

To freedom's detriment, the false definition of liberty, as the power of centralized government to do specific things, has become widely accepted within self-proclaimed progressive circles.²²²

Dangerous Dogma

Even though liberty is proven to unleash spontaneous innovation and technological advance, those who preach from collectivism's altar dogmatically claim that progress must be centrally planned and directed. ²²³

When Words Lose Their Meaning ...

Where the confusion between liberty and power leads to associating liberty with wealth, even more demands for “liberty” can be conjured up to attack freedom. ²²⁴

... People Will Lose Their Liberty

After confusing liberty with wealth, collectivists can appeal to liberty to attack freedom and appeal to plunder in the name of illusions such as “social justice” and “fair share”.²²⁵

Common Illusions

Some of the most common illusions conjured up to justify plunder's misconceived philanthropy include vague subjective proclamations of fairness, “justice for society”, and “saving the earth”.²²⁶

Nefarious Challenges

Since liberty is an abstract concept that can be difficult to understand, those with nefarious intentions tend to attack it by working to displace liberty with free government “services” and other spoils of plunder.²²⁷

Freedom Isn't Easy

Considering the responsibility, discipline, and persistent effort required to succeed in a free country, it is little wonder that many find it tempting to forgo liberty's burden for the relative ease of plunder. ²²⁸

Through the Fog of Illusions

Even if some people fail to see liberty's benefits and others actively attack it in the name of illusions such as “man-made global warming” and “social justice”, liberty remains desirable. ²²⁹

Free to Fail

Since liberty enables the freedom to fail, the freedom to starve, and the freedom to self-destruct, it is quite common that the results of our own use of liberty leave us unsatisfied. ²³⁰

No Guarantees

Even if liberty leads to more overall prosperity, technological advance, and individual opportunities than are otherwise possible, liberty cannot guarantee happiness, success, or satisfaction for any of us. ²³¹

Positive Negatives

Although some complain about liberty's negative sense of being defined by the absence of coercion, we should realize that many good things are defined by the absence of particular evils.²³²

Justice, Peace, and Liberty

Just as justice exists in the absence of injustice and peace exists in the absence of war, liberty exists in the absence of coercion. ²³³

Visible Effects

Since liberty is defined as the absence of coercion, its effects are only visible through the goods, services, and other manifestations of the individual potential unleashed by it. ²³⁴

Liberties

Where most choices, decisions, and activities are restricted, the term “liberties” is used to describe that which may still be done freely. ²³⁵

Absence of Liberty

While liberty is compatible with restrictions upon certain actions, liberty is not present where authorization is required more than not.

A Desirable Negative

If we examine the contrast between liberty and servitude, for example, we discover that the negative sense of liberty in no way reduces its desirability.²³⁷

Absence of Evils

Although some complain that liberty is a negative, related desirable conditions, such as justice, peace, and tranquility, are also conditions defined by the absence of particular evils.²³⁸

Coercion

In addition to threats of punishment, coercion refers to the control of options, decisions, and actions so that one has little choice but to act according to the will of others.²³⁹

Today's Coercion

Although we usually think of coercion as threats of force, coercion is far more common today in the form of pervasive government dictates that restrict choices and degrade individuals. ²⁴⁰

Under Others' Control

Coercion is immoral because its controls and restrictions force those being coerced to become mere tools and agents of those doing the coercing.²⁴¹

Coercion Today

Today's coercion is most often found as a labyrinth of complicated restrictions and regulations that restrain action to the point that any remaining freedom is essentially useless.²⁴²

Our Sphere

If our decision making is to be free of external interference, boundaries must be set to establish limits inside which the people and dictates of the state cannot meddle. ²⁴³

A Private Boundary

Liberty implies a private boundary inside which conditions cannot be controlled by other people and where choices cannot be restricted to those determined by others. ²⁴⁴

Innovate and Produce

Not only do the principles of liberty apply to each of us, they also apply to voluntary associations of people, such as employers, who innovate and produce most effectively where external control is minimized. ²⁴⁵

The Coercion Monopoly

Since force is the only way to prevent coercion, free countries award the coercion monopoly to the government and then work to restrain government's power using the rule of law. ²⁴⁶

Rule of Law

The term “rule of law” is used to describe rules, such as those defined in the United States’ Constitution, designed to preserve liberty by placing limits upon centralized government’s power to coerce and control. ²⁴⁷

Types and Amounts

Since coercion may be necessary in certain instances, the rule of law is also used to define the types and amounts of coercion that can be legally used by agents and administrators of the state.²⁴⁸

Predictable Actions

With moral standards as the basis for general rules of law, government's coercive actions become more predictable and people are able to make rational decisions based upon them. ²⁴⁹

Long Term Prosperity

With limits upon coercion and control set by the rule of law, the long term private sector investments upon which prosperity rests become more attractive to those with the energy to pursue them.²⁵⁰

Praise or Blame

Those who pursue the opportunities afforded by liberty should realize that they will reap the praise or blame and are morally responsible for the consequences of their efforts. ²⁵¹

Responsibility's Regard

Arguably, the regard for responsibility that thrives where people embrace liberty has fallen low enough to undermine the very freedom upon which our prosperity and civilization rest.²⁵²

From Aversion to Hostility

While aversion to responsibility naturally results from being frightened by it, morality, liberty, and prosperity face grave danger where the angst engendered by responsibility changes into full-fledged hostility toward liberty. ²⁵³

Negative Consequences

Since negative consequences may arise when we accept responsibility, our natural tendency to avoid them is most easily achieved by not accepting the responsibility that leads to them in the first place. ²⁵⁴

Natural Reactions

Additional fears of liberty and responsibility arise as natural reactions to the persistent effort and continuous self-discipline required to succeed in a free country.²⁵⁵

Misunderstanding

In some ways, disrespect for liberty and individual responsibility results from misunderstanding the lessons of science.²⁵⁶

Vague Notions

Although integral calculus and chemistry's atomic theory are similar to the individualist conception of civilization, only vague notions, such as determinism, are offered in support of the collectivist conception.²⁵⁷

Determined Actions

Since science tends to trace today's events to yesterday, it can easily lead to the false notion that our motivations and actions result from prior events and are therefore not our own responsibility. ²⁵⁸

Rigid Laws

Determinism's notions were believed to show that rigid scientific laws controlled the mind, thus casting aside the recognition of our unique personalities and individual tastes upon which the case for liberty is built. ²⁵⁹

Preserving Liberty

If we are to preserve liberty from the shackles of pseudo-science and centralized control, we must understand and abide by moral standards that transcend the rule of law. ²⁶⁰

Responsibility

Since morality underpins liberty, we should remember that taking advantage of liberty's opportunities obligates us to deal with resulting consequences.²⁶¹

Intolerant of Evil

Although we may respect the values of those we disagree with, we have no moral obligation to tolerate those who attempt to undermine liberty with collectivist superstitions and plunder. ²⁶²

Rooting Out Plunder

Since immorality and irresponsibility are incompatible with liberty, prosperity, and civilization we must see through the ever-shifting mirage of collectivist illusions and we must root out plunder at every turn. ²⁶³

Inseparable

Although inseparable from liberty, the self-reliance and responsibility required to prosper in a free country can be sources of stress and discontent. ²⁶⁴

Origins of Plunder

Since the persistent effort of applying our knowledge and labor tends to be stressful and difficult, the scourge of plunder naturally arises where it proves easier than the burden of liberty.²⁶⁵

Finding Our Niche

Since modern civilization's complexity makes it more difficult to find the best niche for our unique skills and talents, stress and discontent tend to arise more easily as civilization grows more complicated and fast-paced. ²⁶⁶

Finding Talents, Finding Uses

With life becoming more and more specialized, avoiding stress and discontent depends more and more upon identifying and engaging in the types of efforts most suited to our skills and personalities. ²⁶⁷

Most Suitable

While finding the most suitable way to apply our skills and abilities is perhaps the toughest task in a free country, it is a responsibility inseparable from liberty. ²⁶⁸

Our Station

If we are dependent upon someone else to assign our station in life, we have already abdicated the liberty that would have enabled us to find our own way in the first place. ²⁶⁹

Objective Utility

Furthermore, if we are to be free, our monetary rewards must result from the usefulness of our efforts rather than subjective judgments from others regarding our merits.²⁷⁰

Utility's Value

Although collectivist hacks tend to claim that value depends upon the amount of labor used to produce something, the value of goods, services, knowledge, resources, and labor depends only upon their usefulness.²⁷¹

Our Greatest Contribution

Although making the most of one's abilities may sometimes be inexplicably frowned upon, it is the single greatest contribution one can make in a free country.²⁷²

From the Parts Arise the Whole

Even if human nature can sometimes be self-defeating, we should recognize that civilization results from our individual contributions and that making the most of our unique talents is the greatest contribution each of us can make to our fellows.²⁷³

Improving Ourselves

When we develop or discover new skills that improve our own lot, we gain the ability to make a better contribution to our friends and fellows.²⁷⁴

Courage and Industry

Since liberty begets courage and industry, people in free states have the opportunity to make the most of their talents and be better off than those living under the shackles of collectivism. ²⁷⁵

Failing to Prepare

If our education system simply instructs technicians to serve others, it is failing to prepare people for success within the competitive free markets that are the hallmarks of liberty. ²⁷⁶

Create and Communicate

To thrive in today's competitive global economy, each of us should recognize that our persuasive communication skills are just as important as the other things we do. ²⁷⁷

Making Talents Known

No matter how talented we may be, the worth of our skills in a free country depends upon our ability to make our talents known to those who can best use them.²⁷⁸

Our Own Goals

If we are to choose our own goals, rather than having them dictated to us, we must be rewarded for applying our talents wisely and not for simply having merit as judged by others. ²⁷⁹

To Be Free

If we are to be free within a large, distributed, impersonal civilization, then the objective utility of our efforts must determine our monetary compensation and rewards. ²⁸⁰

Subjective Servitude

If certain attributes somehow entitle a person to a position or wage, then liberty does not exist because someone else has been empowered to position them via subjective judgment.²⁸¹

Free to Create

Although liberty exists where we are we free to create, compete, and produce without coercion, liberty cannot exist where certain people are elevated above others because they are judged superior by authority.²⁸²

Got Me Under Pressure

Since a free country provides only the opportunities, risks, and uncertainties associated with developing one's talents, it naturally puts people under pressure that is often disliked.²⁸³

Plunder's Lighter Load

The discontent that results from the unceasing effort required to succeed in a free country often causes those with few morals to cast off the heavy burden of persistence in favor of plunder's lighter load.

Pressures We All Face

Of course, the pressures we all face could not be magically eliminated with a collectivist system in which authority's orders replace liberty's responsibility and choices. ²⁸⁵

Equality Before the Law

Since equality before the law is the only kind of equality compatible with liberty, it is the only type of equality that free countries should pursue.²⁸⁶

Deceitful Claims

Despite deceitful collectivist claims that fairness requires some to be plundered so that others may enjoy equality, the only equality that truly eliminates injustice, and is therefore just, is equality before the law.²⁸⁷

What Liberty Reveals

If liberty did not reveal that certain decisions and actions lead to better results than others, then much of the argument for it would disappear.²⁸⁸

The Myth of Uniformity

If each of us were alike, our decisions, tastes, and actions would all be the same, there would be no reason for expressions such as “living my own life”, and there would be little case for liberty. ²⁸⁹

Principle Foundation

Since we are each unique, liberty's principles also serve as a foundation for the rules of law intended to prevent unequal treatment and plunder by agents of the state in the name of fairness, equality, or other illusions.²⁹⁰

Moral Standards

Moral standards, such as respect for individuals and private property, are the basis for those rules of law intended to restrain centralized government, maximize freedom, and unleash prosperity.

Infinite Variation

Biology's infinite variation bestows the distinct traits within us that lead to our unique personality, specific tastes, and individual worth.

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The Most Individuality

As we move up the biological scale, individual differences between creatures of the same species become more and more apparent until the most individuality is exhibited by humans, at the top of the scale. ²⁹³

Thousands of Genes

Since each infant has thousands of genes and will experience innumerable environmental variations as it develops, it is impossible to foresee anyone's complete future potential. ²⁹⁴

From Anywhere

As Americans such as Abraham Lincoln and Mark Twain demonstrated, greatness may arise from anywhere because there is no genetic benefit from affluent circumstances. ²⁹⁵

Odd Notions

Although the notion of human uniformity proffered by those who oppose liberty may appear to align with democratic processes, it actually erodes the recognition of individual value upon which much of the case for liberty rests.²⁹⁶

Equal Votes

Although each of us may cast equal votes during the democratic processes that usually accompany liberty, by no means do votes of the same value imply the uniformity of those who cast them. ²⁹⁷

Striking Differences

Similarly, if the differences between us were not so striking, the idea of individual worth would not be as important and neither would the idea of individual liberty.²⁹⁸

Equally Free and Independent

The Virginia Bill of Rights' text that "all men are by nature equally free and independent", has been largely replaced with a simplified expression of "free and equal" that conveys the idea of equal treatment before the law for each unique individual. ²⁹⁹

Equal Treatment

Equality does not imply that some should be plundered so that others may enjoy “social justice”, but that equal treatment before the law is required if each of us is to be free to chart our own course.³⁰⁰

Blind Justice

Liberty's idea of equality before the law is in eternal and irreconcilable conflict with the notions of subjective wealth redistribution and centralized control inherent to collectivism. ³⁰¹

Plunder's Injustice

Since the law is intended to organize justice by eliminating injustice, the law cannot be wielded to sanction the injustice of plunder without destroying what it was originally intended to preserve. ³⁰²

A Conundrum

Since each of us is different, the only way to equalize us would be to treat each of us unequally.³⁰³

Unequal Treatment

Those who claim that a select few should have the power to take from those with ability, to hand to those with need, seemingly fail to realize that unequal treatment must be imposed if their notions of artificial equality are to be realized. ³⁰⁴

Conjured Slogans

Those of the liberty school realize that demands for equality are little more than slogans conjured up by those intent upon exploiting emotions to empower themselves in equality's name.³⁰⁵

Vague, Subjective Terms

Terms like equality and fairness are vague subjective terms most often used by those who wish to exploit emotions and empower themselves at the expense of morality, liberty, prosperity, and truth.

Fabian Destruction

Those Fabian socialists who advocate incremental wealth redistribution under the veil of “social justice” are as much a threat to liberty as their revolutionary Marxist forefathers. ³⁰⁷

Contrary to Liberty

Although today's welfare-state socialism uses less force than revolutionary Marxism, the 18 collectivist tendencies noted by Stuart Chase are as contrary to liberty as any species of the Marxist genus. ³⁰⁸

Central Planning

As F.A. Hayek pointed out: Even though Marxism is revolutionary and Fabianism gradualist, the centrally planned and directed system that each envisions is basically the same.³⁰⁹

A Matter of Time

In other words, the difference between revolutionary Marxism and the bureaucratic socialism of the Fabian welfare-state is not a difference of intent but rather the amount of time between conception and realization. ³¹⁰

Plunder's Injustice

Standing for justice, by standing against the injustice of plunder, in no way implies that one regards advancement of the less fortunate as an unworthy cause. ³¹¹

Chasing Illusions

If we are to preserve morality, liberty, and free enterprise, we should realize that sympathy for altruism does not compel us to accept collectivist demands that we chase their illusions.³¹²

Exploiting Emotions

Since collectivist illusions are generally conjured up to exploit our emotions and attempt to justify plunder's injustice, we have no reason to accept them as moral, legitimate, or just. ³¹³

Vital Elements

While we recognize that uncertainty and discontent are natural byproducts of liberty, we should also recognize that stress, conflict, competition, and discontent are vital elements of civilization's advance.³¹⁴

Enhancing Our Ability

Since improving our own skills enhances our ability to contribute to our friends and fellows, we should strive to improve them and to ensure that others are not coercively deprived of similar opportunities.³¹⁵

The Parts Make the Whole

With the whole of civilization resulting from the individual decisions, actions, and interactions of each of us, making the most of our own unique abilities helps maximize civilization's potential.

Worse Off?

Although some question the benefits of passing property along to the next generation, no argument can be made that the citizens of a free country are worse off because of inheritance.³¹⁷

Confiscating Liberty

Furthermore, since higher death taxes were among the 18 collectivist tendencies imported into the United States from fascist Europe before World War II, we should realize that they are opposed to liberty and prosperity.

A Better Way

Since parents have various ways to advance their children's interests, we should recognize that inheritance is a superior moral choice compared to other options, such as nepotism. ³¹⁸

By Other Means

Since parents' natural instincts are geared to take care of their children, it seems clear that they will find ways other than inheritance to advance their children's interest when confronted with the raised fist of aggressive death taxes.³¹⁹

Anti-Social Demands

While many collectivist demands arise from nothing but the anti-social passion of envy, gratifying envy by cloaking it under the veil of “social justice” has become a grave threat to liberty. ³²⁰

From Collectivism's Altar

Even if illusions of fairness and “social justice” have been conjured up to justify envy by those who preach from collectivism's altar, envy remains one of the most socially destructive human emotions.³²¹

Reducing Liberty

If one claims that government should reduce discontent due to envy, one will also claim that the state must reduce the liberty which leads to unequal incomes and associated envy. ³²²

Liberty's Razing

Since its acceptance implies liberty's razing, one of the notions most dangerous to liberty is the notion that the organized forces of centralized government have an obligation to eliminate discontent.

Anti-Social Passion

Since the most anti-social passion of envy will always be with us, a free country that wishes to preserve liberty must be careful not to condone it by redefining envy's demands as demands for equality and fairness. ³²⁴

Another Demand

While many collectivist demands arise from envy, collectivists also demand that subjective merit replace the objective usefulness by which free markets determine value. ³²⁵

Subjective Merit

Those who preach from collectivism's altar commonly offer subjective merit as an alternative to the objective utility that determines the value of one's knowledge and skills in a free country.

The Value of Utility

However, if liberty is to be preserved, we must be compensated for the utility of our contributions rather than the subjective merit of our actions as determined by others. ³²⁷

Take Two

Although subjective merit judgments may at first sound appealing, a second look reveals that subjecting one's self to merit judgments means that one must submit to being controlled by those judging the merit. ³²⁸

Subjective Evaluation

While the usefulness of goods, services, and natural resources tends to be self-evident, the merit of one's efforts can only be determined through subjective evaluation by others. ³²⁹

Subjugation by Merit

The usefulness that determines the value of our knowledge, skills, and talents in a free country is incompatible with the notions of subjective merit judgment used to assign one's position under collectivist systems.³³⁰

Judging Efforts

Since determining merit requires that certain people judge the efforts of others, the usefulness of the actual results delivered by the person being judged has little bearing on the merit of his actions.³³¹

Others' Opinions

Where our rewards depend upon others' opinions of our merit, there is little reason to do anything other than attempt to satisfy the wants and whims of those judging our efforts. ³³²

Accidental Success

While certain successes, such as penicillin's discovery, may be accidental and thus have little merit, many useless failures have been undertaken with great merit. ³³³

Utility Trumps Merit

Although many failed projects, such as the Cape to Cairo railroad in Africa, were the most meritorious of efforts, many more of the useful things we have, such as penicillin and Coca Cola, were accidental discoveries devoid of meritorious effort. ³³⁴

Merit Impossible

It is impossible to judge another person's merit correctly unless we fully understand, among other things, their knowledge, talents, intellect, and ability to persist on tough tasks. ³³⁵

Useless

Not only is merit a meaningless measure of value, but it is virtually impossible to judge merit with any reliable degree of accuracy. ³³⁶

Merit Impossible II

If we are free to respond to the fleeting circumstances we are constantly faced with, it will be impossible for another person to judge the merits of our choices and efforts correctly.³³⁷

Merit vs. Results

In fields where there is great uncertainty and variability regarding possible outcomes, the differences between rewards for subjective merit and useful results become clear. ³³⁸

Sowing Our Seeds

If we enjoy the liberty to sow our resources in risky fields, such as research and development, then the only rewards we can morally reap are those proportional to the usefulness of our endeavor's end results.³³⁹

Taking Chances

Many things we rely on today, such as antibiotics and software, were developed by people who could only take the chance that others might find their products useful. ³⁴⁰

Making Decisions

Since we have many goals to consider pursuing, the basis for deciding which efforts are worth the risk must be estimates of useful value rather than useless merit. ³⁴¹

Missing Value

Since subjective merit's objective commercial value does not exist, there is no reason to attempt to use merit as a basis for making economic decisions in a free country. ³⁴²

In Dependence

If we cannot estimate the value of the efforts we're considering, we have little choice but to depend upon someone else to plan and direct our activities. ³⁴³

Judged and Coerced

If we must make decisions by considering how another person might judge the merit of our efforts, we are prevented from making the choices most valuable to us and are thus coerced by those judging our merit. ³⁴⁴

Wrong Directions

Since civilization advances most quickly when optimal results are delivered with least pain and sacrifice, and therefore least merit, merit is a useless guide by which to plan one's actions. ³⁴⁵

Wrong Way

Because more merit results from more effort, pain, and sacrifice, a person whose merit is being judged has no reason to make things better, do things faster, or be more efficient. ³⁴⁶

Merit Impossible III

While our limited intellect quickly comprehends utility, the complexities of judging someone's merit make it impossible to be judged correctly. ³⁴⁷

The Rewards Message

A free country's rewards serve to communicate how much certain achievements are worth, regardless of the amount of effort expended in their pursuit. ³⁴⁸

Recognizing Value

In a free country, we are able to see which types of activities are most rewarding and we have the liberty to obtain the knowledge, skills, and abilities that enable us to pursue them. ³⁴⁹

Reasons to Improve

Since similar prizes are rewarded for similar achievements in a free country, the tendencies to increase efficiency, to do better, and to achieve more with less, are significant positive byproducts of liberty and free markets. ³⁵⁰

Competitive Essence

Just as competition is the essence of natural selection, the competition found within free markets brings out the best in people while motivating them to create new things, make better things, and be more efficient. ³⁵¹

Chores Performed

A society of merit is a society of chores performed rather than success achieved; a society subject to little but the whims of those who decide which tasks have merit and which do not. ³⁵²

Devoid of Liberty

A nation of merit is devoid of liberty because it is controlled by those choice architects who decide which tasks have merit, which chores should be performed, and who has the power to plunder whom.³⁵³

Rare Instances

Except in rare instances, such as military bravery in defense of liberty, merit is incompatible with liberty because merit requires that each of us be subjectively judged by those who hold coercive power over us. ³⁵⁴

Free and Useful

Where liberty thrives, our livelihood depends upon the usefulness of our unique talents, skills, and capabilities rather than the merits of our efforts as judged by those who rule over us. ³⁵⁵

Justice?

More dangerous to liberty than the notion of merit-based rewards is the notion of “distributive justice”; a notion that requires each of us be subjected to centralized control. ³⁵⁶

The Absence of Injustice

While the goal of the rule of law is to organize justice, it is important to remember that justice is defined by the absence of injustice, including plunder.³⁵⁷

Meaningless Questions

Since our individual pursuits are guided by our own opinions of conditions and circumstances, and the results of our efforts cannot be predicted, questions regarding the justice of resulting incomes are meaningless.³⁵⁸

Our Own Decisions

If we are free to make our own decisions based upon the knowledge we have and the circumstances we face, then there is no legitimate reason for anyone to question the justice of the rewards we reap. ³⁵⁹

The Natural Pecking Order

Since equal justice implies that laws apply equally to all, and the range of skills and talents varies between each of us, the same rules will naturally lead to a wide range of unequal results. ³⁶⁰

Happeneth to Us All

Since each of us has unique knowledge, skills, and talents and each of us faces unique circumstances in which to apply our abilities, the happenings of time and chance will naturally be different for each of us. ³⁶¹