

CAN ONE BE FREE IN AN UNFREE WORLD?

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Freedom may be defined as the absolute ability to make choices about one's own life without the fear of physical intervention by others. Logically, this means one cannot physically intervene in anyone else's life, since this would nullify the basis of one's own freedom. This is the foundation for Libertarian-Objectivist morality, and without the general acceptance of this moral premise there can exist no real freedom for any individual on this planet. Any claim to the contrary constitutes an illusion or a fraud. The near-total reign, for thousands of years, of Faith and Force as the primary intellectual and political doctrines constitutes the dark age of human despair out of which members of the Creator Class are struggling.

This is an unfree world, and there is no way of ultimately escaping the consequences while remaining on this planet under present conditions. It is impossible for a morally responsible individual to enjoy freedom anywhere on this planet. All land is controlled by political entities which in varying degrees fail to recognize the absolute right of the individual to live his or her own life free from force. These same political powers are rapidly extending dominion over the oceans and polar ice caps. The reduction of human rights in all spheres of activity shows every sign of intensifying. The idea of running away to another country where tax laws are less confiscatory, or of investing or storing assets in "safe" countries such as Switzerland, has no real future. Although countries such as Costa Rica offer temporary havens for retiring upper-income persons, there is no guarantee that such countries will not become the targets for terrorist attacks. In fact, this is becoming more likely. Portugal and Greece have in the past been quiet havens for many individuals seeking safe and peaceful retirement. Communist terrorism and the "nationalization" of all foreign-owned wealth, results of their history of repressive statist policies, are an increasingly grave threat in both countries. In very real terms there is no place to escape, even temporarily. The world is round and the further you run the closer you get to your original problem.

Even the hedonistic comfort of enjoying a temporary refuge from collectivist and statist expropriation is marred by the mounting apprehension of its eventual spread and of being annihilated by its side-effects--that is, the holocaust of thermonuclear war. Unless one accepts the status of a hounded animal and one is willing to lend at least tacit support to the claims of moral guilt against life and property upheld by the altruist-collectivist looters, then the moral individual has no effective choice but to join his fellows in common defense against these gangsters.

The world is on the verge of an economic collapse. It will affect every nation and every individual on the planet. Although it is true that one can take measures to avoid the direct losses due to inflation and devaluation, in the long run one cannot help but experience a reduction, if not in one's standard of living, at least in opportunities.

It is impossible to insulate oneself against the consequences of worldwide economic collapse. Assuming that one has had the foresight to wisely invest in gold and to have built a fine cabin in the hills, well stocked with food and creature comforts, this does not alter the painful fact that one has been forced to run away and hide in isolation.

Any number of events can take place to end even this assumedly safe retreat from the world. The government, in its insane desire to placate starving and unemployed masses, might for instance enact a law prohibiting hoarding of foodstuffs beyond a three-day supply under penalty of confiscation and severe fine. The prohibition on holding good bullion in this country sets a perfect precedent for an "Emergency Anti-Hoarding Act". Under this law the local sheriff or forest ranger and his gang, knowing of your cabin, would hold you as a vicious "social parasite" and confiscate your food stocks. This would be your fate in a country such as the U.S. or Canada where some kind of law might still exist. South of the border your gring skin would be the legal equivalent of a fox pelt.

For those who think that this is an exaggeration, please observe that billions of dollars in assets have been and are being expropriated from large and powerful multinational corporations by numerous governments. Lone individuals have far fewer avenues of recourse than has ITT. Even in countries with previously impeccable reputations for respecting individual financial privacy, such as Switzerland, permission is being granted for inspection of numbered accounts.

Assuming that one has the financial acumen and personal agility to protect oneself from bureaucratic looters and remain solvent in the face of world depression--indeed this would be a triumph of intelligence laudable in itself, but would it logically suffice in the case of the individual with a well-developed sense of self-identity and moral integrity? No, it could not suffice.

An ethical-moral code is a system of values by which a conscious individual lives. The cause-and-effect nature of reality requires that a moral-ethical code be consistent with the real world, if it is to be a useful tool for maintaining existence. However, human existence is not limited to range-of-the-moment survival as is the case with wild beasts; it involves a reflective awareness of self-identity. The characteristic of self-identity is what differentiates conscious humans from mechanistically responsive animals. In abstract terms, self-identity is the capacity in an entity to value itself above all else, since logically its capacity to value ends with itself. However, self-identity revolves about the capability of being able to manifest and maintain abstract values in the concrete. This is logically necessitated by the essential metaphysical requirement of all living things to transform matter and energy to maintain existence. The human capacity to live by transforming its concrete environment is based on its ability to abstractly conceptualize the ends to be accomplished as well as the means for doing so. A moral-ethical system is the means--the plan--not only for maintaining existence, but for raising one's self-identity and its emotional corollary, self-esteem. A moral-ethical system is the means whereby the individual achieves the happiness which is the sole reward and meaning of life.

Happiness ultimately comes from being able to align one's emotions with a consciously held set of logically coherent values. Contrary to popular belief, emotions are not mysteriously generated by an autonomous "subconscious" source, but are the product of experientially learned values which are stored in memory to form preprogrammed (that is, "spontaneous") responses to stimuli. Emotion constitutes a necessary early identification system to things which when negative to life or happiness elicit fear or anger, and evoke love in the case of extreme good. But this early identification system can be utilized neither as a cognitive tool nor as a surrogate for conscious validation that one has earned the feeling of self-esteem and, in essence, of happiness.

Happiness is more complex than merely experiencing a good feeling, or even a sustained sense of good feeling. An individual must know that his or her present sense of euphoria is valid in relation to real conditions. Self-identity, and ultimately self-esteem, are dependent on maintaining and applying abstract conceptual judgement in performing reality checks. Happiness is fundamentally dependent on the self-demonstrated capacity to know that feelings of self esteem are valid, in line with the context of real conditions.

An individual who cannot know or who rejects conceptual validation cannot experience happiness. This is due to the very nature of the human emotions, which will still function to produce doubt and anxiety when conscious reflection is rejected. In fact, this is the structural reason that a typical individual feels guilt or shame when feeling good or experiencing pleasure. He has no systematic code of values which is in line with his own real nature and that of the world. Lacking this, he has valid doubts as to whether or not he has earned the right to be happy. True happiness cannot be experienced unless one is sure that his enjoyment is in line with his future existence and self-identity. The widespread alienation people feel towards themselves is generally attributed to the supposed dichotomy between the conscious and subconscious, or to a struggle among id, ego, and superego. But this is not true; it comes from the nightmare anxiety produced when one does not admit the truth to oneself.

The whole theory of the "subconscious" as an autonomous entity, something beyond the control or direct influence of the conscious mind, has resulted (in terms of the history of theoretical psychology) from the elevation of a widespread psychopathic state to the status of a theoretical norm. This is one of the reasons that thought and emotion are believed to be inherently opposed and in conflict. The notion that happiness can and must take place apart from the conscious intellect results directly from the fact that we live in a world largely populated by insane persons, and one which is both generative of and receptive to theoretical rationalizations of not only the existence but the necessity of insanity.

Happiness is not only more than merely sustaining a good feeling or a feeling of self-esteem; it also requires more than the assurance of sustaining short-term corporeal existence. Humans have the capacity to deal with problems ramifying far into the future. An ethical-moral code is in essence a set of basic criteria for interpreting phenomena and projecting these into the future. Self-identity depends, not only on one's capacity for implementing abstract values in the realization of concrete results, but also on being assured of one's capacity to sustain and improve the process into the future. The coherence of one's abstract values with his emotive response and their consistency with real conditions, and the knowledge that this can be sustained into the future, permits the awareness that one has ethical-moral integrity and a right to happiness.

This awareness is what makes life worth living. It requires the most selfish exploitation of one's capacities. It means that an individual will not compromise in achieving the most outstanding level of life for himself. Personal honor is that which the individual proclaims to himself as the standard of achievement and goal of his life, from which he will not shrink. This sense of honor can never sacrifice integrity to expedience. A moral individual, in recognizing his self-identity and its center of ethical-moral duties to himself, will not permit the substitution of complex evasions born of cowardice or insanity. Self-identity is supreme over even existence; in other words, the end never can justify the means. If the way by which one lives is demonstrably invalid, then the only choice one has is to change or to cease existence as a human being.

In practice, moral action is action taken in what is understood to be one's highest self-interest. But this self-interest must be guided by logical premises if it is to be efficacious; these logical premises in turn have to be firmly anchored in the objective nature of the world.

Ethical-moral values are not to be the products of whim or social convention; they are to be derived from the objective conditions of the real world. Ayn Rand has reaffirmed the Aristotelian premise that "existence exists". There is only one reality and it exists in only one way, whether or not one chooses to identify the proper nature of this existence. This is the basis for any objectivist ethic, and the only basis which is logically consistent with a libertarian morality. Those who choose to defy reality and act contrary to knowable cause-and-effect relationships must be adjudged insane or unethical. In terms of objectivist ethics and psycho-epistemology, if one combines the conclusions of Nathaniel Branden with those of Ayn Rand, ethical-moral integrity and sanity are merely the two sides of the same psychological coin. The choice to defy cause-and-effect reality is both insane and evil.

Harry Browne argues that to try to change the thinking of others is an indirect approach to solving problems. The direct and more efficient approach, he contends, is to choose a course of action which does not depend on others. It is interesting that Mr. Browne, who eschews the use of any absolute standard of value, clearly identifies philosophizing and political action as poor sources of value. He implies a standard but never identifies his basic premises, because to do so would mean a logically coherent system of values going to the roots of existence--i.e., a moral code.

Basically Mr. Browne tells you to do your own thing. He tells you what to avoid in order to be free (such as self-identity and ethical-moral values) but he doesn't explain for what one should be free. In fact, instead of offering the means of self-protection and freedom from coercion, he actually disarms the potential libertarian of his greatest weapon, moral rectitude based on reason.

Libertarian-objectivists must know--or be reminded--that historically the failure of laissez-faire capitalism has stemmed not from the fact that its success was not objectively demonstrable (as most surely it was during the 19th century) but rather from a massive default on the part of libertarian-capitalist philosophy from its duty to coherently oppose the blatant frauds perpetrated by the advocates of the mystics, the altruists, and the collective-statists. To argue that there are no absolute premises from which one's self-identity follows is to throw the freedom-seeking individual to the wolves of altruist-collectivism and mysticism. Amoralism implies antivalue, and antivalue to an epistemological entity such as man constitutes insanity.

In the realm of practice this means that a rational and moral individual cannot choose to run away from existing world conditions. There is no physical escape short of space colonization, which is not available at present. If an individual chooses to completely disown political action as has Harry Browne or to postpone political action as has Ayn Rand, I can only question his sanity in the light of existing conditions. Present trends show dramatically that the forces leading to collectivist totalitarianism are mounting. Historically we are living freedom's last chance--and it looks as if this is freedom's last gasp.

It is in the rational self-interest of any individual who asserts the absolute right to live his or her own life to cooperate in building a world-wide movement, based on free association, against altruism, collectivism, and mysticism. This requires an investment of time and energy. It is possible not only to turn the tide but to reverse the historical flow to the favor of individual freedom. There is much to gain and ultimately little to lose. The very knowledge that one has done everything possible to defend one's right to life on every front and battlefield of reality would suffice to validate the emotion of happiness. Were this all that I achieved this would be enough.

There are many levels of activity which can contribute to effective opposition to enslavement and assist in the creation of a new system. At the very least, the effort invested in the political realm will function as a rear-guard action to protect our space operations' dirtside bases.