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LIBERATED!

HOW LONG have you been interested in this philosophy?" I asked the graduate student in education, who obviously wanted to learn more about the subject of freedom.

Her response struck me as sensational in the clarity of what it revealed: "I have now been *liberated* for six months." This conjures up a picture of a person imprisoned by a host of myths, superstitions, fallacies. Then, in a flash, by some unforeseen encounter, she was freed of them all and launched on a new road to enlightenment. Liberation, as she used the term, suggested a sudden illumination, a breakthrough to a higher level of consciousness: "Whereas I was blind, now I see."

It is interesting to reflect on the preliberation notions. In many cases we find lying at their root the primitive doctrine that man derives his rights to life and liberty from some man-concocted collective—the tribe or the state. This doctrine was frankly expressed in the old divine-right-of-kings thesis, an egotism few present-day statisticians have the nerve to admit.

The logical sequence to such a premise is the conviction that the state is responsible for a people's welfare, security, prosperity. And if the state can grant a man's rights, it can also retract them; that is, it is in control of rights. Freedom of choice as to how one employs himself or what he does with the fruits of his own labor is expanded or contracted according to the caprice of those who have gained command of the political apparatus. Wage and price controls, government education, public housing, federal urban renewal, government power and light, socialized medicine, government mail delivery, social security, federal subsidies to any and all groups who think themselves in distress, protection against competi-

tion, progressive taxation, and a host of other socializations or nationalizations are simply extensions of the premise that man's rights derive from the state.

OUT OF THIS CONFUSION emerges an intensely personal experience—the moment of liberation, the break-through! An idea or fact or observation, germinating in the mind for an indeterminate period, suddenly comes to life, opens a crack, and the light floods in. It's something like a seed embedded in a crevice of solid granite, the forces of its growth slumbering but, when released, stronger than its rock-bound prison. Its destiny undeniable, the seed splits the stone and is freed to friendly and life-giving elements.¹

Once this opening has taken place, old ideas take on a different perspective and new ideas come into one's comprehension. Relegated to the junk heap of myths is the absurd premise that man derives his rights from a political apparatus. To the question, "How could man, who knows next to nothing about himself, create himself or preside over creation?" comes a resounding "Impossible!" Rid of this bedeviling notion, a new premise insinuates itself into consciousness: Men are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, among them the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Or, as Bastiat later put it:

We hold from God the gift which includes all others. This gift is life—physical, intellectual, and moral life.

But life cannot maintain itself alone. The Creator of life has entrusted us with the responsibility of preserving, developing, and perfecting it. In order that we may accomplish this, He has provided us with a collec-

¹ For instance, *Betula Nigra*, sometimes known as "The Rock Splitting Birch."

tion of marvelous faculties. And He has put us in the midst of a variety of natural resources. By the application of our faculties to these natural resources we convert them into products, and use them. This process is necessary in order that life may run its appointed course.

Life, faculties, production—in other words, individuality, liberty, property—this is man. And in spite of the cunning of artful political leaders, these three gifts from God precede all human legislation, and are superior to it.

Life, liberty, and property do not exist because men have made laws. On the contrary, it was the fact that life, liberty, and property existed beforehand that caused men to make laws in the first place.²

ONE LOGICAL DEDUCTION from the premise that man's rights are endowments of the Creator is that each individual is an end in himself, that is, each person owes allegiance, above all else, to his Creator. No other person or set of persons, however organized, has any moral sanction to interfere with this Creator-man relationship; no person is warranted in compelling any human being to serve merely as a means to his own ends. When anyone violates this relationship, he is saying, in effect, "I am your god."

It follows from the above premise that man-made laws can be no more than codified social taboos or a set of prohibitions, for the purpose of preserving inviolate the Creator-man order. All true law finds its origin and its limitation in such rights of protection as inhere in each of us. How can we tell what these rights are? Merely ascertain if universality can be applied to them. Do I, for example, have a right to defend my life, livelihood, liberty against those who would take these from me? Only if the same right may rationally be conceded to everyone else. Can it be? Obviously, yes! Now, then, do I have a right to take the life, livelihood, liberty of another? Only if the right of murder, theft, slavery may rationally be conceded to everyone else. Can it be? Obviously, no!

It follows logically from this premise that government may properly do no more than perform the defensive function. All productive

² Frederic Bastiat, *The Law*, translated by Dean Russell (Irvington-on-Hudson, N. Y.: The Foundation for Economic Education, Inc., 1950), pp. 5-6.

and creative actions are then freed of any man-restraint, flowing solely from the Creator-man order.

When an individual is liberated, he becomes aware of the miracles which come to pass once creative human energy has no organized, man-concocted force standing against it. An unwavering faith in free men expels any lingering, misplaced confidence in little men playing god.

The omnipotent state — authoritarianism — will not be liquidated except by liberated individuals. It is only they who go in search of freedom's answers. Until the time of liberation, they are no more teachable than a parakeet; they can repeat what they read or hear but they cannot *know*. If only liberated individuals can be of any help in reversing the trend away from freedom, it is important to take note of what brings about liberation.

EXPERIENCE REVEALS no master key. Each mind has a unique lock. The keys presently in our possession may or may not fit. Said the student, "I have now been *liberated* for six months." I made inquiry of her mentor, "What did you say to cause the break-through?" In this instance it had to do with self-responsibility, pointing out that the state can no more assume responsibility for one's welfare, security, prosperity than can a committee of baboons. Indeed, the responsibility for self is no more transferable than is breathing. Yet, people can be lulled into this false notion and, as a consequence, forego attention to self-responsibility, becoming purposeless and useless. But unfortunately, this key will not fit the lock to most unopened minds.

One brilliant libertarian thinker confessed that he had been a socialist in high school, that a friend tirelessly labored with him until, finally, he saw the light. "What key did he use to unlock your mind?" I asked.

"George came to my home for dinner. I was showing him our new refrigerator. He asked me how I would allocate refrigerators, were it not for the price system. It was this recognition of the free market's allocation of scarce resources that triggered the change in me."

An outstanding worker for liberty acknowledged that he had finished college as a socialist. What proved to be the key to his mind? It was