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ARCHITECTS OF LEVIATHAN

by Edmund A. Opitz

The Rev. Edmund A. Opitz of The Foundation for Economic Education delivered this paper before Hillsdale College students and faculty during Political Morality: From Socrates to Nixon, the first seminar of the Center for Constructive Alternatives in the 1973-74 academic year.

The Norman Conquest was actually a conquest. The group of men assembled around Harold at Hastings in 1066 was not a delegation from the local booster club to welcome William and his associates; it was an army. Nor were the Norman knights on a scenic tour of the Channel; they were an invading force armed and prepared for battle. The two groups of armored men fought one day in October, and the Normans won the victory. William followed up his initial success with other victories and established himself as sovereign over this island territory. The conqueror of England now owned the place and rewarded his one hundred and seventy Norman followers by giving them portions of English earth. The division of the spoils went something like this: William permitted the Church to retain its acreage, amounting to about one-quarter of England; he allotted 20% to himself, thus accounting for 45% of England's land mass. One-half of the remainder was given to ten Norman nobles, which left about 27% to be divided up among one hundred and sixty knights. The Normans were the new rulers of England, and they also owned the country. The Normans were the governors of England, having captured public office in a literal and not a metaphorical sense. They were not voted into office; they seized power. The Normans conquered the English and the government of England came into their possession.

Every nation has come into existence in a similar fashion; in the aftermath of war. Nations are not brought by the stork; nor do nations come into being as a result of any sort of social contract. The myth of an original compact should not be confused with history. Human society is *sui generis*, but the nation in which we live — and other nations likewise — achieved sovereignty over the land mass we call our own by killing off or driving away the territory's previous inhabitants. Similar procedures were practiced

by earlier generations, and so on back to the dawn of time. Such is the moral setting in which nations are born, and so must be the manner of their survival — they must be prepared for armed defense. No political theory which overlooks this is worth much.

Real people live in nations. Humanity, on the other hand, exists only in the imagination. Now, you can do things with humanity that you cannot possibly do with people. The imagination can reduce real people to abstract units of mankind; it can scramble and rearrange these units according to a preconceived Plan; and presto chango, the vision of a perfected humanity living in a plastic utopia! If the real world disavows this chimera, so much the worse for the real world. The real world is full of wicked men and evil institutions, and as soon as the Planners have killed them off the new humanity will enter its Shangri-La!

Beware the armed visionary! His efforts during the past two centuries to bring about the impossible by means of the intolerable have nearly done us in! In sober truth, a perfect resolution of human difficulties is not for this world. The human condition permits only amelioration of our lot, not its perfection. And when amelioration has done its best the human burden will still be on our shoulders for each of us to bear as best he can.

My intention is not to underscore the dark, seamy, underside of the human record; history's tragic side is there for all to see, once ideological blinders are removed. My purpose is to pay tribute to the human capacity to endure, to bounce back, to achieve, to create. Out of the disorder of the Norman Conquest there emerged eventually the order of English society — with its Common Law, its intricate system of feudal fights and duties, its idea of "the immemorial rights of Englishmen," the formation of Parliament, and so on. And this is not all. These people produced

im•pri•mis (im-prí mīs) adv. In the first place. Middle English, from Latin *in primis*, among the first (things). . .

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monumental works of art, a noble literature, a body of philosophy. They were notable in religion and in education. And they produced a well-knit society whose texture was tough enough to endure for centuries.

The process was not without "blood, sweat, and tears," but when it was accomplished the government of England reflected the character and temperament of the people of England.

Man is indeed a political animal in this respect, that he fashions governments in his own image. This is true even in a conquest situation; it is obvious in a democratic system. It is self-evident that the politicians elected to public office are men who embody the consensus. The successful candidates are those who most persuasively promise what voters believe government should deliver; politicians operate on that slippery spectrum bounded, on the one hand, by what voters expect and demand of government, and by what they will put up with from government, on the other. A nation tends to get the government it deserves, in the sense that pressure groups will eventually organize to make wrongful demands upon government, unless the nation's "aristocracy of virtue and talent" — men with the ability to teach what expectations and demands are legitimate — are needed. When educators, philosophers, and men of letters fail to properly nourish the intellect, the conscience and the imagination of a significant segment of a society, they betray a sacred trust as teachers of mankind, and in the wake of their defection a secular religiousness becomes the popular faith. Leviathan is the god of this faith. Men serve Leviathan in the confident expectation that he will provide his votaries with ease, comfort, security, and prosperity. The modern world does indeed provide more of these things for more people than earlier periods, but it also exacts a toll in the form of perpetual warfare, social unrest, hardening of the arteries, softening of the brain, and a troubled spirit.

When we attempt to assess the modern malaise we are tempted to say: "An enemy hath done this thing." But the truth of the matter is that we have done it to ourselves — the actively guilty, the passively guilty, the ignorant, the stupid, and all the innocent bystanders — we are all in this thing together. Every society has its characteristic pecking order, and ours is no exception. Certain men, certain ideas, certain life styles are at the top of the pecking order; the masses admire and seek to emulate these men, ideas and life styles. If these ideas and styles are not life enhancing, there is frustration and thwarting at the deep levels of human nature and a whole society is sidetracked. The Remnant who keep the faith are superfluous; society has no use for their services. Such a society will necessarily get Leviathan — a government which matches its warped and ill-favored nature. Edmund Burke puts the matter plainly in a letter to a constituent in Bristol:

Believe me, it is a great truth, that there never was, for any long time, a corrupt representative of a virtuous people; or a mean, sluggish, careless people that ever had a good government of any form. If it be true in any degree, that the

governors form the people, I am certain it is as true that the people in their turn impart their characters to their rulers. Such as you are, sooner or later, must parliament be.

Civilizations rise and fall. Why this occurs is the subject of learned speculation and debate. There is little unanimity among scholars, who disagree among themselves even as to the yardsticks by which decline and progress might be measured. But even though the overall movement of a civilization as a whole cannot be detected by those within it, there are two trends in the modern world in all progressive countries, where the facts are clear; the first has to do with politics, the second with economics. The thrust of eighteenth century Whiggery and of Classical Liberalism was to pry various sectors of life out from under the yoke of the State, to free them from political controls. The aim was to shrink government to a limited, constabulary function. The twentieth century has reversed this trend, with a vengeance. The theory of the free society has come under increasing attack, and totalitarian governments have emerged in nation after nation.



As Classical Liberalism expanded the voluntary sector of society the economic controls of the Mercantilist era were removed from business, industry, and agriculture. Adam Smith demonstrated that — within the framework of the Rule of Law, which Liberalism supplied — the economic order was subtly regulated by the buying habits of consumers; and the free economy began to emerge within western nations. Freedom in economic transactions was never fully achieved in any nation, but we made greater progress in that direction in the United States than elsewhere, and we paid lip service to the ideal of the

market economy. But ideals change. Freedom did not bring about utopia and in the aftermath of this disappointment, a new scheme captured the imagination of the intellectuals – national planning for the achievement of national purposes and goals. The New Deal marked a major change in the popular attitude toward the free economy; efforts to frame the rules necessary for attaining competition in the marketplace gave way to the urge to put the marketplace under bureaucratic regulation. The free economy is now being phased out, step by step.

I am a believer in the free society and in the free economy. The free society is to my taste because I like its variety, the diversity it encourages, the spontaneity it permits. And I like the free economy because it is more productive than any alternative; people eat better, have more things, are more secure in their possessions. Freedom works, and therefore I resist the collectivizing trends of the twentieth century which would transform people into creatures of the State. But my belief in freedom is grounded, ultimately, on my reading of the nature of the human person. Man, I believe, is a created being; there is a sacred essence in him. Man is on this planet in consequence of a mighty plan – of whose outlines we may gain faint intimations – and his life is used to further a vast purpose – of which we are given an occasional clue. If man is indeed a created being, and the members of a society act upon their belief that such is their nature, they will begin to frame political theories consonant with their convictions. They will erect political structures designed to safeguard the sacred essence in each person; the law will attempt to maximize each person's opportunity to realize his earthly goals. Believing that God wills men to be free, such a society will regard any trespass on the true liberty of even the lowliest individual to be a thwarting of some intent of the Creator. The deep conviction that each human being is a person and not a thing will generate ideas of equal, inherent rights; and this central dogma will exert pressure on personal attitude and conduct, on government and law, on every level of the free society, to bring all into harmony with the key belief that man is a created being.

But suppose man is not a created being. Suppose the human being is not a person, but a thing. If the universe is simply brute fact, mindless and meaningless; reducible in the final analysis to mass and motion – then man is a thing just like any other item in the catalogue of the planet's inhabitants. Suppose we assume – as do many of our contemporaries – that man is the chance product of the random movement of material particles. Man's haphazard appearance on a fifth rate planet is, then, a fluke; he just happened to occur, as the accidental by-product of physical and chemical forces. He's merely a part of nature, like every other species on the planet. Except that the human species is more foolish than the rest, and has a great gift for make-believe which renders its continued existence problematic!

When we confront a strange object we try to size it up, so we'll know better how to deal with it. If it's a person we get onto a person-to-person basis;

but if it's a thing we treat it like a thing. We make a crucial decision here, and the way we decide depends upon our basic philosophy, our understanding of the fundamental nature of the universe. If we have embraced some variety of Materialism as our philosophy then we must eventually come to the logical conclusion that human beings are things, and once we conclude this we'll begin to treat people as things. People then come to be regarded as units of the State, as objects to be manipulated, as pawns in a political game to be used and used up in some national plan, as guinea pigs for experiments in genetic engineering, as robots programmed for utopia. Shades of 1984!

I am prepared to argue that we get the free society only after the consensus has firm convictions about the sacredness of persons, and that we get the free economy only after we have the free society. Now, when we reflect on the nature of persons we involve ourselves in some pretty deep philosophical and theological questions, and some of our contemporaries are impatient with such speculations. They believe that the intellectual opponents of the free market can be devastated by straightforward economic arguments, and once we have the free market everybody will be doing his own thing and we'll get the free society as a matter of course. Things are not this simple; if they were, freedom in human affairs would be the rule; voluntary transactions and unhampered exchange would then mark the economic life of all nations. The reverse is true: freedom has always been in jeopardy, and the liberties which expanded during the Classical Liberal Era are now contracting everywhere.

There is a deep-rooted urge in each person to be unhampered in the pursuit of his own life goals, but this individual instinct for freedom has only rarely in history been institutionalized as the free society. Likewise, each person has a deeply rooted desire to conserve his energy and improve his material well-being; trade and barter are as old as mankind. But despite the economizing urge the free economy seldom appears on this planet. The free society and the free economy did emerge in the eighteenth century and freedom expanded during the nineteenth. An excellent literature came into being to expound and defend political and economic freedom, despite which freedom retreated during the twentieth century because there was a leak at the philosophical level, where we deal with the nature of personhood and the meaning of life.

The economizing spirit is concerned to save energy and resources; it strives ceaselessly to diminish inputs and maximize outputs. Which is to say that economics is the drive to get more for less. Now, unless this more-for-less impulse is counterbalanced by non-economic forces it develops into a something-for-nothing mentality. And when the something-for-nothing mentality takes over the free economy dies of auto-intoxication.

The advice to "do your own thing" has been repeated so often as to be an incantation, and if freedom could be had by casting a spell then the

free society would be a shoo-in. But the free society cannot be sustained by magic, and lacking a personhood, the advice to "do your own thing" is an invitation to disaster. The weak doing their thing are at the mercy of the strong doing theirs, and the unscrupulous have the upper hand over the rest . . . I belong to a bicycle club and have two friends with whom I ride. Joe is a weightlifter, a powerful man, and a "square." Fred is a middle aged retiree with strong affinities for the youthful life styles of today. We three were in a resort town for a bike rally, and in addition to cyclists there were many young people whose sartorial and tonsorial disarray proclaimed their devotion to individual liberty. The three of us stopped for refreshments at a soft drink stand and watched the passers-by. A pair of especially unkempt and unwashed young men strolled by, and Joe — the muscular "square" muttered, half under his breath, "I'd like to wring their necks!" Fred, a gentle and sympathetic soul, said, "But, Joe, they're only doing their thing." To which my obvious retort was, "Yes, Fred, but Joe's *thing* is wringing hippies' necks!"



Classical Liberalism was built around the idea of the Rule of Law, equal justice for all, and thus it erected certain guidelines and standards, whose observation maximized each man's liberty in society. And it framed these rules because each person is a sacrosanct individual, free in virtue of his very nature.

When convictions about the sacredness and mystery of personhood are energized, then men will seek to erect institutional safeguards around each individual, and we move toward the free society. But if the prevailing philosophy has a faulty doctrine of personhood, then people lose that sense of their true humanness which would lead them to strive for an ordered liberty, and we lapse into the closed society. Modern thought, the ideology which has prevailed during the past two centuries, has many facets and some undeniable strengths.

But it has one glaring defect; it has no adequate doctrine of personhood. This ideology is reductionist in tendency, whenever it contemplates the Self. It reduces men to animals and animals to machines. It defines thought as subvocal activity, dismisses reason as rationalization; explains mind as a mere reflex of activity among the braincells; and invokes the conditioned reflex to account for every variety of behavior.

I am painting with a broad brush in order to highlight a drift or tendency in modern thought, "a mean, sluggish, careless" streak in the realm of ideas. When a thinker uses a finely tuned instrument — his mind — to reach the conclusion that thought cannot be trusted, we have evidence of corruption in philosophy. Let me illustrate.

There are philosophers of considerable and deserved reputation who have dreamed up world views in which human beings figure as creatures of a lesser stature than persons. Be it noted, however, that the philosopher guilty of devaluating personhood generously exempts himself from the strictures he applies to others! Given his blind spot, he concludes that it is only other people, the mass of mankind, who fall within the scheme of manipulable objects; the philosopher who regards us as unpersons finds another category for himself. He's the philosopher king! Bertrand Russell, in a celebrated essay entitled "A Free Man's Worship," declares that "Man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms." In short, we are merely the result of a chance arrangement of particles. Now, it is obvious that Lord Russell regarded this idea worth putting onto paper and publishing, which would not be the case unless, in the first place, he regarded this idea as being more truthful than alternative views. But how can the designations true or false be applied to an "accidental collocation of atoms?" By the internal showing of Russell's statement, his own beliefs are below the idea level; they are subreason. And in the second place, the publishing of these words bespeaks a wish on the author's part to persuade other people of the validity of his position. But why bother to offer enlightenment to creatures whose beliefs are nothing but the chance result of blind forces?

Bertrand Russell was immensely gifted as a philosopher and mathematician, but his philosophy is

deficient in its attempts to account for self-hood; it has no adequate place for persons. And if Russell is deficient here, how much more deficient are the lesser men who instruct us in the meaning of life! The widespread irrationalism of the present day represents the dead end of a philosophy which developed a world view wherein was no proper niche for the creator of that world view – the philosopher himself. It takes a brilliant and ingenious mind to arrive at such a paradoxical conclusion which so blatantly denies the obvious. Any fool knows that white is white and black, black; so does the wise man. But in between the fool and the wise man are those who are able to argue with perverse brilliance that white is a kind of black. C. A. Campbell, emeritus professor of philosophy at Glasgow University, makes a sound observation: “As history amply testifies, it is from powerful, original and ingenious thinkers that the queerest aberrations of philosophic theory often emanate. Indeed it may be said to *require* a thinker exceptionally endowed in these respects if the more paradoxical type of theory is to be expounded in a way which will make it seem tenable even to its author – let alone to the general philosophic public.”

To be a man is to search for meaning. Philosophy begins in wonder, and we can't help wondering what life is all about, and how human life fits into the total scheme of things. We try to decipher the mysteries of the universe, hoping to obtain a few clues to help us play our roles in life with zest and joy. We wonder if human values and ideals find reinforcement in the nature of things, and if the values that concern us most deeply – love and honor, truth, beauty and goodness – are realities. Or are they merely illusions we cling to for comfort in an otherwise cheerless existence? We consult the philosophers, and all too many of them are mired in the cults of unreason, meaninglessness, and absurdity. Man is a cosmic accident, they assure us; the universe is a moral and aesthetic blank, completely alien to us. We cannot trust our own thought processes, they say, as they simultaneously downgrade mind and insist that we accept their theories! Well, they can't have it both ways! Of course, if matter is the ultimate reality, mind is discredited. But if this discredited instrument is all we have to rely on, how can we put any confidence in its findings? If untrustworthy reason tells us that we cannot trust reason, then we have no logical ground for accepting the conclusion that reason is untrustworthy! Well, I don't trust the reasoning of people who champion the irrational, and I do know that our reasoning powers may be – like anything else – misused. But when human thought is guided by the rules of logic, undertaken in good faith, and tested by experience and tradition, it is an instrument capable of expanding the domain of truth. Reason is not infallible, but it is infinitely more to be trusted than nonreason!

Deep down within us we know with solid assurance that we really do belong on this planet; that we are

the key component of the total richness. We know this, but we need reminding – as in these words from the American poet, the late Robinson Jeffers:

. . . man dis severed from the earth and stars
and his history . . . for contemplation or in
fact . . . Often appears atrociously ugly. In-
tegrity is wholeness, the greatest beauty is
Organic wholeness, the wholeness of life and
things, the
divine beauty of the universe. Love that,
not man
Apart from that, or else you will share man's
pitiful confusions,
Or drown in despair when his days darken.¹

I find the same sentiments in prose, from the pen of a gifted and unorthodox thinker, Anthony M. Ludovici:

The profound and cultivated man of wanton spirits, whose sense of self is the outcome of healthy impulses springing from the abundant energy and serenity of his being, not only affirms his own self and the universe with every breath he takes, but, by the intimate knowledge he acquires of life through the intensity of his own vitality, he feels deeply at one with everything else that lives. The intensity of his feeling of life helps him to perceive, behind the external differences of living phenomena, that quality and power which unites him to them. The luxuriant profligacy of nature finds a reflection in his soul, but it also finds an answering note in his feelings. Profound enough not to be deceived by surfaces, he feels the dark mystery behind himself and the rest of life, and, what is more important, guesses at the truth that he himself cannot, any more than the daisy or the antelope, stand alone, or dispense with the power which is enveloped in that dark mystery.²

These are the authentic accents of a religious world view, and a citizenry in whom this vision lives will invest each person with a sacredness, a protected private domain, a body of rights and immunities. The law, then, is established to secure these prerogatives of the person, and government is limited to those functions which maximize liberty and justice for all. This is Jefferson's "Equal and exact justice to all men, of whatever state or persuasion." This is the free society, and it is not an autonomous social order, suspended in midair; it is based necessarily on a religious foundation.

Even less autonomous is the free market. Freedom of action in the economic sphere does not beget itself, but a society which maximizes liberty for all persons equally has freedom in economic transactions as well. The free economy, in other words, is simply the label attached to human behavior in the market place when our options are open, as they should be.

"The heavens themselves, the planets and this centre observe degree, priority and place." Shakes-

peare was right; there is an overarching Order and Pattern built into the nature of things. Everything has its rightful place in that Order, and each thing after its own kind manifests its nature. But man does not simply manifest his nature. Man is open-ended; he is not locked into a behavior pattern; he can choose. He does not automatically manifest his nature; rather, he must learn to express his nature by conforming himself and all his works to the universal Pattern.

Plato, in the *Laws*, refers to an ancient saying that God, who holds in his hands beginning, end, and middle of all that is, moves through the cycle of nature, straight to His end. And Plato adds:

Justice always follows Him and punishes those who fall short of the divine law. To that Law, he who would be happy holds fast and follows it in all humility and order; but he who is lifted up with pride or money or honour or beauty, who has a soul hot with folly and youth and insolence, and thinks that he has no need of a guide or ruler, but is able of himself to be the guide of others, he, I say, is deserted of God; and being thus deserted he takes to himself others who are like him, and jumps about, throwing all things into confusion, and many think he is

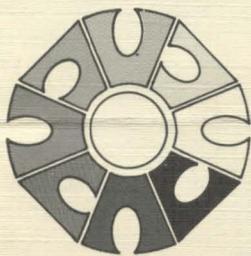
a great man. But in a short time he pays the penalty of justice and is utterly destroyed and his family and state with him.³

We are the architects of our own Leviathan. Whenever a people goes slack, whenever the mean, sluggish, and careless are moved up to the top of the pecking order, then we get an unlovely society to match our own ill nature. But this need not be. The way we express our nature is not fixed in one mode only; we are free to change the pattern of our lives. There is a right way, a way that is good for man, a way that meets the needs and demands of human nature and the human condition, a way that fulfills the law of our being. Walking in that way, men and women find their proper happiness in a free and prosperous commonwealth.

¹ From "The Answer" *The Selected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers*, p. 594, Random House, N.Y.

² *Man: An Indictment*, Anthony M. Ludovici, p. 204, Dutton, N.Y.

³ *Laws*, IV, 716.



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Imprimis has received many compliments about its drawings. Pictured at the left in a self-caricature is the young man responsible. Tom Curtis is editorial cartoonist for the *Milwaukee Sentinel*, and his work is syndicated by the Register and Tribune Syndicate. He is a 1960 graduate of Harvard University, with an A.B. in architecture. While at Harvard, Curtis was cartoonist for the *Harvard Lampoon*. He says his political philosophy could best be described as "libertarian conservative," to use John Chamberlain's words. I place great faith in the freedom of the individual as a key to happiness and productivity. I also feel that little real freedom can exist where there is no law and order."



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