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RECENT THOUGHTS

Being a Supplement to The 1965 Edition
of
AMERICAN IDEALS -- THEIR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL BASIS
By
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This work was begun in 1954 with my having in mind a far narrower subject and a wholly different title: INTERPRETIVE OUTLINE OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF HENRY GEORGE, a philosophy central to my own ever since my late teens. I thought----as indeed I still do----that "land reform" and tax reform as urged by Mr. George was essential to any just and peaceful society, and as greatly needed in America as in countries we look down on as backward and poor. By the early 1950's I realized that the professed ideals of our country----long neglected and, since the 1930's, steadily being replaced by socialistic tendencies of thought and action----urgently needed to be understood and appreciated anew. And especially, more indispensable than ever did I see Mr. George's economic reform to be, for the maintenance of liberty, equality, and personal responsibility----attributes of an order of life we have enjoyed thinking we enjoyed, in greater measure than seen in other countries, essentially since 1623.

By 1956 I had accomplished the manuscript of the OUTLINE, hoping for publication by a Foundation singularly well adapted to my subject. Fortunately, as in a few weeks I realized it to be, my work was rejected.

However, very shortly there came to act upon me one of the most important principles in the growth of personal philosophic comprehension of life: ANY GREAT ITEM OF TRUTH (such as the Georgist doctrine), WHEN FINALLY WELL UNDERSTOOD AND SATISFACTORILY PUT INTO WORDS, SOON THEREAFTER BEGINS TO BE SEEN AS MERELY A PART OF SOME LARGER GENERALIZATION WHICH, ON CONTINUED STUDY, IS ITSELF IN TURN SEEN AS MERELY A PART OF A YET GREATER AND MORE COMPREHENSIVE BODY OF TRUTH. This unfolding of greater and greater vistas of life could be endless, no doubt, and very baffling to anyone feeling an inner compulsion to write something of lasting value in the service of bewildered humanity! It certainly struck me so. But I guess we have to learn that part of the hard work of writing anything true and worthwhile is the patience it takes to allow time for ideas to become clearly seen, to settle into true perspective.

Under my continuing compulsion, and with the feeling that I owed life a great deal, I undertook to broaden the scope of subject matter so as to begin with concerns uppermost in the minds of thinking people----the declining adherence to the public and private strengths and attitudes we think of as having given America its earlier bright promise, and the several strange and troublesome paradoxes in our national life. Finally I adopted the title and outline of this book. It has been privately issued in editions of 1963, '4, and '5, with two or more printings of each. In all, about 600 copies have been given to friends and others, and about the same number sold to schools, individuals, and libraries.

As we know, much has happened here and throughout the world since 1965, and many new developments or insights would now be appropriately incorporated in such a work as this. But time will not allow me to thus make the revisions that would be necessary for that. So I ask my readers of this third printing of my third edition to trust that I can see, as

they also must, the numerous ways the work might well have been changed or amended in view of events of the past few years in this fast-changing world. But above all, I hope they will recognize the continuing validity of whatever I have attained of adherence to basic principles which never change ----those of economics, justice, love, and human nature, the elements of NATURAL LAW. Desirable as extensive revisions of my work might be, I shall have to content myself with a number of supplementary observations related to the changing world and to my continuing study and new contacts.

NOTE: Page numbers referred to are in the book,
American Ideals.

I

Observing the extensive effects of American foreign policy, economic and military power, commercialism, and alleged "national interests" on ourselves, our economy, and the rest of the world, I wish to retract one statement, found on page 35: "Our country is the nearest thing there is to a leader of the free world...." Whether in any respect it is such, my feeling now is that I would much prefer not to have made any such unseemly, invidious, and questionable remark.

Learning more about foreign lands, which we can easily do, and about their various strengths and weakness as these compare to our own, we see that all countries are mixtures of good and evil. Our own has been a creditable leader in some ways, and a haven of refuge from tyranny and want in the eyes of millions who have hopefully "voted with their feet", but who, in many cases, were victimized by some of our evil phases of "laissez faire",

when they got here. Much of the aid in all forms that many of our good-hearted citizens and our government have extended to the needy in foreign lands was given in the spirit of honest generosity and compassion, while on the other hand, much that was officially given was actually from motives of commercial aggrandizement and profit or of overt national policy with the realization that if we do not help some certain groups "the communists will".

We in this country need to be more broad-minded and alert than has been our habit in the past, to seek and accept talent wherever found, recognizing that leadership, on spiritual, civic, scientific, or intellectual fronts, will never be found concentrated here or in any one place but scattered widely throughout the world. The following are just a few illustrations: Albert Schweitzer, FRANCE; Thomas Jefferson, AMERICA; Toyohiko Kagawa, JAPAN; Jesus Christ, ISRAEL; U Thant, BURMA; Leo Tolstoy, RUSSIA; Martin Luther, GERMANY; Alexander Dubcek, CZECHOSLOVAKIA; Elisabeth Fry, ENGLAND; Mahatma Ghandi, INDIA; John Locke, ENGLAND; Henry George, AMERICA; Carlos Romulo, THE PHILIPPINES. Surely I need go no further; having supplied a concept, I leave it to the cosmopolitanism of my readers to continue the list with their own favorites. (Maybe an international and historical list of bad leaders would be of interest!) But for the sake of fairness, truth, and ultimate expediency, let us end this with the words of ROBERT BURNS, the Scottish poet: "There is so much good in the worst of us and so much bad in the best of us that it hardly behooves any of us to criticize the rest of us".

II

Since 1965 I have become better acquainted with Humphrey Neill of Saxton's River, Vt., author of THE ART OF CONTRARY THINKING and founder of THE SOCIETY OF THE CONTRARIANS. The preoccupation

common to members of that SOCIETY is the stock market. However, one of the principles of their "thinking", which is valuable in all thinking, especially in regard to public affairs, is the studious avoidance of the contagion of "Mass Thinking". The Contrarians, of course, with their special purpose, seek to relate their actions to those of the market, using popular opinion in the field as one of the indices by which to judge how to do this. Public consideration and government action regarding public questions are hopelessly awash with all manner of ideas extraneous to what is actually for the best ultimate interest of all people as a whole----cheap sophistry, self-interest, rationalization, and "mass thinking".

The true student of social and economic questions must also avoid the contagion of all such becloudings of basic facts and principles. Of course an opinion long and widely held is not necessarily wrong and so to be rejected. But even having these qualifications, no central or influential idea, nor any basic assumption should be exempt from timely re-examination. Such an idea may be universally and everlastingly valid, a true Law of Nature; it may have been valid once but under conditions no longer existing; or it may have been merely a popular delusion, never valid even at first.

As Dr. Glenn Frank, President of Wisconsin University, said at my graduation: "Have an open mind, but don't let it be a wind-swept area".

Only those who think for themselves can be truly free. Among those who never will be----whose "wind-swept" minds are as but chips on the stream----are the "in" crowd, who go "where the action is", and get "Dodge Fever"; what pass for the choices, values, and opinions of such non-thinkers are nothing but the reflections of what they think others think.

Practicing some of the implications of Mr. Neill's philosophy, I began the habit of deliberately questioning many popular beliefs and concepts which have had or may in the future have much influence, impartially endeavoring to discern whether they have been held because they are true and valid or merely because of the thinking and eloquence of a few who have won the unthinking support of many others. Here are a few examples of ideas that may be true, half true, or completely false:

- A. At confrontations, a good offense is the best defense.
- B. Big schools prepare children for life better than small schools can.
- C. The Civil War had to be fought, for without it the country would have disintegrated and slavery would have continued forever.
- D. Legislated Minimum Wages put a floor under the economic status and welfare of the working man.
- E. War creates employment and prosperity.
- F. Growth of population is economically beneficial.
- G. The harder some people work, the less employment there will be for others.
- H. Tariffs protect the working man.
- I. Federal Aid to education is valid.
- J. World Peace Through World Law.
- K. All other states have a surveyors' registration law, therefore New Hampshire should.
- L. What is good for business is good for you.
- M. The church should be involved in all human issues.
- N. Peace is maintained by a balance of power.
- O. "Planned obsolescence" increases prosperity.

I recommend the habit of this manner of honest inquiry, not only because it can become a fascinating study, but also because the salvation of mankind ultimately depends on separating the true from the false and basing our institutions on the former, no matter how long the latter has prevailed.

Under Mr. Neill's influence, I have also come to practice an increased suspicion of the real nature of all ideological mass movements, such as strikes, race riots, student riots, and all other "mass" pressure actions, complaints, threats, denunciations, and demonstrations, and of their popularly presumed monolithicity. The surface aspect of these ructions simply does not, I am sure, even approximate the true inner feelings of most individual members of tumultuous gatherings, if they could only first sit down, two or three in a quiet spot, "reason together", honestly and with good will, seeking what is to the best ultimate interest of all concerned. The real nature of many noisy demonstrations and confrontations so common today is that of rootless demagogues exploiting the "half-truths" inherent in their thoughtless followers' real or imagined complaints; and at times, it is true, they are contending with "powers that be" who have not heretofore listened to more reasonable approaches. Neither sides' tactics are wisely calculated to "Win Friends and Influence People" in the best sense. (My page 105 covers some points relevant to all this. However, I certainly must retract one statement given there: "...there may be in our country no incipient revolutions....")

To sum up: one schooled in "contrary thinking", in its favorable sense, will not, like the "crowd", be fooled by the surface aspect of situations but will look beneath to learn their true nature and meaning.

Since 1965, I have studied ECONOMICS IN ONE LESSON, by Henry Hazlitt----a most valuable book, briefly, simply, and clearly written, for any who wish to understand the economics of public affairs. Since it deals with errors dominating most government policies, and does so from the standpoint of the principles of Natural Law, it is not likely to become obsolete in your lifetime or mine!

The "lesson"----elaborated upon in the first 6 pages and applied in the remaining 211 to such ideas as Minimum Wages, Public Works, Protective Tariffs, etc.----he states in one sentence:

"The art of economics consists in looking not merely at the immediate but at the longer effects of any act or policy; it consists in tracing the consequences of that policy not merely for one group but for all groups".

Throughout my many years of trying to help people see the truths of Natural Law in the field of economics and justice, I have always detected, and been puzzled by, a certain indefinable reluctance on the part of rich or poor alike, to accept the implications of certain truths having to do with the distribution of wealth and privilege. This has always seemed in strange contrast with peoples' ready acceptance of all the implications of truths in the field of the so-called "exact" sciences.

In the latter field there can surely be no question about Man's mental abilities to grasp and accept facts; this is being written only a few weeks after 3 Americans returned safely and exactly on schedule after encircling the Moon 10 times! Why cannot Man master the far simpler but infinitely more vital problems of getting on peaceably together down here on what was called----in a radio message from one of the astronauts during a moment

of renewed appreciation of it while far from home and loved ones and just after gazing at the Moon's "forbidding aspect"---"The Good Earth"?

Well, I think Mr. Hazlitt has supplied the first step toward answering that question. In his very first paragraph he says, in substance, that economics----meaning, I am sure, its study and acceptance----is bedeviled by one factor not significantly troublesome in the exact sciences: "the special pleading of selfish interests". I had long sensed something of this sort. In fact, my section on why the Georgist philosophy is not taught in colleges, on page 97, is exactly consistent with Mr. Hazlitt's statement. Still I feel a debt to him for his more concise yet general way of conveying the idea, and with it in mind, I shall henceforth be better prepared for this sort of intellectual block to the progress of students and readers.

Were you to wonder about the next step in the answer, that is, why there is this "special pleading" or, how we could overcome it, I think first we would have to convince a man that, if all special privileges were ruled out and all men assured their natural rights, he need have no fears for the success of his life's work under such a dispensation of justice, liberty, and opportunity, and that he would share all material and spiritual benefits of a society that was healthier, happier, more friendly and stable, and less divided, hateful, dangerous and potentially revolutionary.

And how could we persuade this man to want, for himself, only what he could honestly earn while being assured only justice, liberty, and all other natural rights, and how could we persuade him to want all other men to be equally assured?

For that, I think we would have to draw on some of the teachings and attitudes of Christ----especially: "Love thy neighbor as thyself", return good for evil, and let bygones be bygones. I am

convinced that ultimately none of us will ever completely enjoy peace or security of body, mind, or soul until we learn to live by these admonitions and to accept and practice all their implications. Till then, we shall live, if at all, in varying measure, by THE LAW OF THE JUNGLE.

IV

1968----INTERNATIONAL YEAR FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

In 1948, a Universal Declaration of Human Rights was accepted by the General Assembly of the United Nations. It was hoped that in the ensuing 20 years substantial progress would be made in the various countries toward the affective adoption of this Declaration, just as the U.S. "bill of rights" was established by constitutional law here. The progress actually made has fallen far short of the hopes of the majority of people, although many of the Declaration's principles have been written into the constitutions of some of the new countries, have been incorporated into numerous treaties, and have been referred to in some court cases.

1968 was thus a 20th Anniversary of the Declaration. The following is an outline of the substance, considerably abbreviated and simplified, of its 30 Articles:

All are born free and equal in rights, regardless of race, color, or creed, and with reason and conscience such as to act in a spirit of brotherhood toward others.

All have a right to life, liberty, and security of person as against all forms of inhuman or arbitrary treatment.

All shall be free to move or reside where desired, to leave or return to one's country, or to seek asylum in another.

Men and women have a right to marry and found families. The family, the unit of society, is entitled to the protection of society or the State.

All have a right to own property, alone or with others.

All have the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, and to the open expression of ideas and to peaceable assembly. No one may be compelled to belong to any association.

All have the right to take part in government, either directly or through chosen representatives.

All have an equal right to all public services. The will of the people shall be the basis of government, as expressed by secret ballot and equal suffrage.

All have the right to social security and to the cultural rights needed for personal dignity and development.

All have the right to work and to the free choice of employment; to just conditions of work; to protection against unemployment, and to equal pay for equal work.

All have the right to remuneration ensuring to self and family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection.

All have the right to join trade unions for the protection of interests.

All have the right to rest and leisure, including limitation of hours; to periodic holidays with pay; to a standard of living adequate for health and well-being of self and family, including food, clothing, housing, medical care, and necessary social services; and to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age, or other lack of livelihood beyond one's control.

All have a right to an education----one directed to the full development of the human personality, conducive to understanding, tolerance, and friendship toward all others, which shall further the activities of the United

Nations for the maintenance of peace. Parents shall have a prior choice as to the sort of education for their children.

All have a right to take part in the life of the community, enjoying its advancements and benefits.

All have duties toward the community-----to respect the limitations determined by law for the respect for the rights of others and for the requirements of morality and order.

The full text of the Declaration represents much earnest work by many people trying to visualize and then codify the rights to which every person in the world is entitled. We should be glad that some people are thus looking ahead, searching for ways toward peace and recognizing that much of its foundation is the assurance of the rights, hence the peaceable behavior, of the individual units of society.

However, although the "rights" here listed are things we can in general agree everyone would want, and although they are evidently formulated by benevolent people, yet, from the standpoint of political economy (see page 116), and with the exception of "equality before the law", they are not essentially basic in nature. Pervading the list as a whole, there is, as I see it, a sense of its being a schedule of obligations owed by government or society to the individual----something like "Divine Grace" in a fundamentalist theology. It seems to suggest giving people the objects of human endeavor rather than assuring to them a few basic rights by which they could win those objects by their own efforts.

The material on human rights given in the official Declaration I have included so as to show the trends in today's thinking on how to attain justice and peace, hoping, a page or so later on,

to reveal its essence in better perspective by submitting a contrasting outline of my own.

Being the author of a book on the subject, I am mainly interested in the needed social and economic basis of the professed "IDEALS" of America, the country that has thought of itself as setting, for the rest of the world, a proper example of a just order of society----traditionally professing to assure its citizens not "cradle-to-grave" parental care but liberty and broad opportunity to exert themselves, to work for the elements of the good life, and, with a truer sense of pride and dignity, to stand on their own feet.

More thought must be given to the truly basic rights by the exercise of which people could have choice and success in themselves working and rising to the attainment of the objectives we all want. Furthermore, those who contemplate a just society must learn to see all relations between peoples as two-way propositions, remembering that the citizen, while accepting the rights owed him by society, in equal measure owes society certain obligations. The reason that this is at present forgotten is that we are living in an age when the "pendulum" of popular, so-called "liberal" thought has swung to an extreme of sympathy for the poor, the ignorant, the shiftless, the unhappy, the elderly, the drug-addicted, and the criminal. Actually, far more appreciation, liberty, and encouragement by society should be extended to those with energy, honesty, initiative, and willingness to work, to think, and to strive to support and improve their own lives, homes, and surroundings----that is, those who "pull their own weight" and do the necessary work of creating decent families and communities, and of supporting the economy from which the support of all people---good, bad, and indifferent---is ultimately drawn.

It should be clear that if the basic rights by which people could be free and self-supporting were

extended and perfected, and if there could be far less public largesse and institutionalized "welfare", "aid", "compensation", and subsidization of all sorts now given to those dependents of society who have fallen by the wayside or to those often wealthy parasites on society who profit by monopoly and bad institutions, there could then be a great shift in the balance of the economy and society. Many who have heretofore been a burden or a menace to society would change and become productive citizens with secure lives of meaning and satisfaction, being valued in their own communities, and respected, loved, and emulated by the young.

The following is my own formulation of rights and obligations.

BASIC RIGHTS OF THE INDIVIDUAL

1. To hold land privately for production and residence.
2. To possess the full product of his labor and capital (as evidenced by income, capital investments, private property, products for use or for sale) unimpaired by taxation or other forms of depredation.
3. To be left alone, in any degree desired, unmolested privately or officially (except for special causes----crime, communicable disease, etc.).
4. To participate in all civic, social, industrial, or community activities in which his honesty, energy, intelligence, and thoughtfulness for others naturally make him welcome and fitted to serve.
5. To share the values of his country's land and great natural resources by enjoying all civic services supported by the public collection of their full economic rental value. (See page 87, SHARING....)
6. To travel or migrate, come and go, live and work, all peaceably, anywhere in the world that he would naturally be welcome.

7. To be treated by the law with equality and justice.

BASIC OBLIGATIONS OF THE INDIVIDUAL

1. To pay to the public, in lieu of all taxation, the full annual economic rental value of all land held privately, whether used or not and whether yielding an income or not. (See page 85, JUSTICE....)

2. To behave in every respect with a degree of neighborliness and consideration for others such as to make himself welcome in as neat, clean, orderly, culturally and socially advanced community as he desires to reside or work in, doing his share to maintain or improve its standards, rules, and orderliness.

3. To refrain from interfering with the affairs of others, by minding his own business, by practicing "The Golden Rule", keeping out of controversies----private, industrial, domestic, or foreign---where he is not legitimately concerned, and where he has no responsibility nor any legal or formal connection or capacity.

4. To bear the consequences of his own acts, choices, and mistakes, or ways of living or doing business, not imposing these on his community or society.

5. To do his full share in upholding and advancing the standards of his community, keeping the peace, aiding the unfortunate, creating a decent atmosphere for all ages, rendering gratuitous services for which his special talents and training may fit him, helping to meet all common problems and emergencies----doing all these things as the simple duties of any citizen and for the privilege of being in the community of his choice.

BASIC FUNCTIONS OF GOVERNMENT

1. Collection of the rent of lands held privately. (See page 81.)

2. Maintenance of law and order and protection of all public and private rights.

3. Rendering of whatever services ultimately prove best handled as public services financed by taxation.

No matter how much time was given me, I would see no reason for describing these "basics" much more specifically. But be not fooled by their apparent simplicity or brevity; reflectively considered, they cover far more than meets the eye.

For instance, "helping to meet all common problems" would naturally include such a duty as restraint in siring children, in view of the growing population problem, and also clearly implies the moral obligation to prepare----by love, devotion, and intelligent training----one's own children so that they may live creditable lives of personal satisfaction and public usefulness----not becoming burdens or dangers to society. And another example: "To refrain from interfering with the affairs of others" would restrain one from mixing into and intensifying, say, "labor relations", industrial strife, and so on, by what are so euphemistically called "sympathetic" strikes or picketing, where one has no direct connection and is not proposing to personally bear any of the costs or other consequences of the outcome of matters at issue. The same rule would also bar elected representatives of the people of one country from undertaking to "police" other countries in which they naturally had no mandate from their peoples. We speak of the inordinate complexity of international affairs; but it is bad or misguided men who have largely made them so. I recently read of the prince of Cambodia, presumably the ruler of his country; he hardly dares make a single move in the domestic or foreign field without first weighing the effects on the aggressive and touchy rulers of numerous and powerful other countries----ours included----who could and would wreck his regime should they be displeased with his ordinances.

This would be a much improved world if every-

one, in high places or low, while extending friendly cooperation to all others were otherwise to stay conscientiously within their rightful spheres of duty----that is, in plain English, if they would MIND THEIR OWN BUSINESS.

V

CONCLUSION

America, though affluent in the aggregate as never before, seems beset by so many and varied, old, and unsolved problems, hardships, and ugly social situations that it almost defies all efforts to find any common denominator of them, any common cause or correction. Limited as we are by popular concepts, about all we can hope for is the tentative, precarious alleviation of some ills as separate entities, if we can have any hope!

In the foreign field, our most intense problem is our war in Vietnam. It accounts for much of our disunity at home and the scorn accorded us abroad; its cost is a serious drain on our economy, but idealistically worse than that, its negation of democracy and freedom at home while allegedly being waged to preserve those qualities in a small and alien country where it cannot possibly be established from without is the most divisive paradox we have experienced since the Civil War. We might well ponder the words of Woodrow Wilson in 1889, on democracy: "It comes like manhood, as the fruit of youth; immature peoples cannot have it, and the maturity to which it is vouchsafed is the maturity of freedom and self-control, and no other".

In the domestic field, our most intense problem is in race relations; our treatment of the colored people has been, for a hundred years, the most shameful negation possible of all our equalitarian and Christian pretensions. In the riotous and sinister behavior of some of them, can we say they are irrational? Probably so, but we might see a parallel to them in the actions of a computer as

expressed in the hilarious words of one operator announcing the habits of his machine: "Hey! You want to know something? You give it a foolish question and you get a foolish answer". This problem, however, can be seen as being, in part, merely a particularly unjust phase of our growing rift and alienation between rich and poor, educated and ignorant, regardless of race.

The over-intensification of industrialism and urbanization of all society seems more and more like a trap from which few can find any escape. Most people see no outlet into any alternative realm of independence and less concentrated living, which, if they could find it, would give them a choice of freer, wider living and working, or bargaining power enabling them to meet prospective landlords or employers on an equal footing.

To me, this seems to bring us, full circle, back to Mr. George, the philosopher first mentioned, who showed how freedom and justice could be attained by all men only through the possession of the full product of their labor and capital and the public assurance of access to natural opportunity by all on equal terms----this being indeed the needed basis of the professed IDEALS OF AMERICA.