

Introduction to the book:

Frank Chodorov, Fugitive Essays: Selected Writings of Frank Chodorov (1980)

By Charles H. Hamilton

Frank Chodorov was by temperament and experience skeptical of the intentions of politicians and intellectuals. They wanted to change the world. And Chodorov never tired of pointing out the dangers of such obsessions: “When proponents say ‘let’s do something about it,’ they mean ‘let’s get hold of the political machinery so that we can do something to somebody else.’ And that somebody else is invariably you.”¹ Chodorov knew that change depended on individuals taking responsibility for their own actions, not on choreographing the actions of others. For almost thirty years he sought to find and counsel those people devoted to individual freedom and a humane life. He took on “Isaiah’s job.”

This biblical parable is retold by Albert Jay Nock in one of his best essays.² The prophet Isaiah is sent by the Lord to tell the people of a decaying civilization “what is wrong, and why, and what is going to happen unless they have a change of heart and straighten up.” He didn’t expect to rouse the masses to action or to convert the political powers that be; rather, in what was ultimately more important, Isaiah desired to serve the Remnant. The members of this Remnant, as the Lord explains,

are obscure, unorganized, inarticulate, each one rubbing along as best he can. They need to be encouraged and braced up, because when everything has gone completely to the dogs, they are the ones who will come back and build up a new society, and meanwhile your preaching will reassure them and keep them hanging on. Your job is to take care of the Remnant.

When Nock wrote this essay in 1936, he saw the job going begging. A few years later, Chodorov took that job and uniquely served to maintain the tradition of what Murray N. Rothbard has called the “old American Right”: that passionate belief in individual liberty which strongly opposed both the rising statist interventionism at home, and war and imperialism abroad.³ For over twenty years, he wrote hundreds of articles, edited three magazines, and helped to edit a handful of others. With his brand of political journalism, “he deeply influenced the postwar conservative movement,” as William F. Buckley once acknowledged.⁴ And his important contributions still survive on the Right and in the now burgeoning libertarian movement.