



THE DEVIL AND THE REFORMERS

JACK SCHWARTZMAN

“The devil loves nothing better than the intolerance of reformers.”

James Russell Lowell

“The intrusion of family-ethics into the ethics of the State, instead of being regarded as socially injurious, is more and more demanded as the only sufficient means to social benefit.”

Herbert Spencer

In the last few weeks, in the United States, police have arrested sellers of marijuana, wood alcohol, “pornographic” films, and sex books.

In the last few weeks, prominent persons have urged stringent restrictions of gambling (following disclosures of staggering losses); sales of tobacco products (following their link with cancer); and purchases of dangerous weapons (following the assassination of President Kennedy).

In the last few weeks, different organizations have objected to, rioted against, or stopped various speeches and would-be speeches of a pro-Castro orator, a “rightist” ex-General, a self-styled Nazi *fuhrer*, an avowed Communist sympathizer, and a Black Muslim advocate.

What do these apparently unrelated news items have to do with each other?

THE IMMORALITY OF ENFORCED MORALITY

They all tell the same story: encroachment upon the individual freedom and morals, health, and safety of the public.

But what are morals, health, and safety except personal concepts? Only the individual can ever determine their meaning. No “absolute” power can do so.

Does it mean, therefore, that there are no absolutes in the universe?

Far from it! The cosmos *is* regulated by inexorable natural laws. Adherence to them would - of necessity - cause each person to act in harmony with absolute morality and hygiene.

Only the individual, however, may catch such ethical values - by casting the line of his own free will into the sea of absolute standards. No organization may usurp this function.

“The larger an organization,” wrote Jung, “the more is its immorality and blind stupidity inevitable. By automatically stressing the collective qualities in its individual representatives, society will necessarily set a premium on everything that is average ... Individuality will be driven to the wall. This process ... rules everything in which the State has a hand. Without freedom there can be no morality.”

Restraint of trade and speech, therefore, is immoral.

FREEDOM MEANS FREEDOM

Does it mean, then, that sales of guns, knives, liquor, tobacco, drugs, and pornography should *not* be restrained? That Communist, Nazi, atheistic, and other controversial and poisonous ideas should have free circulation? That - horror of horrors! - a man may shout “Fire!” in a crowded theatre?

This is precisely what it means.

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FOR LIFE, LIBERTY AND PROPERTY

It means that “freedom” encompasses all the commerces and utterances of man - even opinions demanding violence.

It means that any one who wishes to sell or buy any foolish - or even dangerous - commodity may do so.

It means that it is not sellers or advertisers (be they even greedy hucksters or much-maligned “Madison Avenue boys”) who initiate demand. They merely fulfil it.

It means that all things in this world “sell” or “advertise” themselves with the individual glow of their own phosphorescence. The desire for these things, however, begins with the consumer. The seller only satisfies the desire.

Try to compel the seller *not* to sell what is required. Try to compel the purchaser *not* to buy what he wishes. You will *not* stop the transaction. You will merely drive it underground.

“Trade,” said Henry George, “is not an invasion. It does not involve aggression on one side and resistance on the other, but mutual consent and gratification. ... It is as natural for men to trade as it is as natural for men to trade as if is for blood to circulate. ... Without trade man would be a savage.”

Since people are weak, however, should they not be “protected”?

If people are “weak”, then the “lawmakers”, being people, must be equally “weak”. Why, then, accept their version of what is right? Better by far to perish by one’s own choices than to be enslaved by the arbitrary “laws” of self-imposed saviors! Man-made laws, noted Thoreau, “never made men a whit more just.”

But would not one become morally or physically ill by using narcotics - or by drinking - or by smoking?

Only through such bitter experiences will a person learn the apparently harsh - yet just - law of cause and effect: “as ye sow, so shall ye reap!”

DIFFERING VIEWS ON HARM

But are not certain things undeniably harmful? Should not humans be compelled to stay away from evil - for their own good?

Even if it were possible, practical, intelligent, and beneficial to force people not to hurt themselves, who would determine what is harmful or dangerous? Our “leaders” have failed to agree. For instance ...

We are told that drugs are considered harmful and habit-forming. Yet a British medical journal recently advocated legalizing the sale of marijuana, claiming that it was not addictive. In many parts of the Orient, drugs are considered beneficial.

We are given to understand that tobacco is dangerous, and a Long Island bank is now boasting of having eliminated smoking among its employees. Yet, for centuries, tobacco has been regarded as an aid to meditation. “Tobacco,” mused Burton in *Anatomy of Melancholy*, “divine, rare, superexcellent tobacco ... a sovereign remedy to all diseases ...”

We are assured that once the populace is aware of the hazards of smoking, the latter will be drastically curtailed. Yet, in Britain, where a report of such dangers had been previously made public, no appreciable change in smoking purchases has taken place. As said Hekkinger once: “Tobacco is a dirty weed: *I* like it!”

We are reminded of the strong case against alcohol made out by the champions of Prohibition. Yet history shows how ineffective and pathetic their efforts were. Uncle Nikita’s violent outbursts against liquor consumption only accentuates the suspicion that intoxication is on the increase in the Soviet Paradise. “I wonder often,” often-wondered Omar Khayyam, “what the vintners buy, one-half so precious as the stuff they sell.” And Louis Pasteur (saintly hero of “pasteurized” milk) once made a startling declaration: “Wine is the most healthful and most hygienic beverages.”

We are informed that book dealers were rightfully arrested for selling “smutty” sex books. Yet Thomas Jefferson (as if commenting on these arrests) once stated: “I am mortified to be told that, in the United States of America, the sale of a book can become a subject of inquiry, and a criminal inquiry too!”

We are warned that sex is disgusting and degrading, and that a nation which dissolutely wallows in the mud of sensualism will fade from power. Yet some psychologists aver, to the contrary, that sex gratification is necessary in order to rid oneself of “inhibitions”.

We are bombarded (since the late President’s murder) by some politicians’ ceaseless demands for a curb on the sale of weapons. One question, therefore, is pertinent. Which is worse: to have individual bandits roam the land, or to disarm citizens in the face of the growing might of the predatory State? The United States Constitution wisely provides: “The right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed.” Let not panic cause caution to be flung to the winds, and the unscrupulous Thief be invited to guard the family silver!

FREEDOM RESTATED

Lest this uncompromising stand on behalf of individual liberty be lost in the shuffle of words and commas, it is here stated emphatically:

This is *not* an advocacy of a community of drunks, hucksters, assassins, Communists, Nazis, procurers, and prostitutes! (Charming group!)

This *is* an advocacy of the doctrine that each person has the unqualified right to go to hell - if he so desires!

But should not human beings be propelled along the path of righteousness?

No State laws or regulations have yet succeeded in bringing about “good”. Only *teaching* can ever accomplish what “do-gooders” have unsuccessfully attempted for millenia. Only from the clash of ideas and cross-ideas will the spark of truth ignite.

“The only freedom which deserves the name,” said John Stuart Mill, “is that of pursuing our own good in our own way, so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of theirs, or impede their efforts to obtain it.”

Let the following statement of Tolstoy be dedicated to those who, spurred on by the latest assassination, would “do something” to prohibit sales of dangerous weapons. Let those who fear freedom long ponder this famous quotation:

“Neither fortresses nor cannon nor guns by themselves can make war, nor can the prisons lock their gates, nor the gallows hang ... All these operations are performed by men. And when men understand that they need not make them, then these things will cease to be.”