"Politicians"

A word whose connotations in the England of Elizabeth I and James I were, if possible, more pejorative than they are today was "politician". This was partly the consequence of Machiavelli's The Prince, which, to the popular imagination, described the politician as an unscrupulous schemer operating on the assumption that the end justifies the means. Another aspect of the objection to "policy" was the "Calvinist" suspicion of anything smacking of the notion of free will. "Policy"--the reasoned and willed pursuit of an objective--was often regarded as "Popish": thus, Francis Rous, in his Testis Veritatis (1626), identified policy with Arminianism and "Popery", and John Hull, in The Unmasking of the Politique Atheist (1602), says of those who turn "religion into pollicie": "The Atheist denies Gods providence: and the Papist denies him to have a stroke in all our actions".

Such writers were responding to a real philosophical problem, namely, if God predestines both events and a person's moral state, what room is left for the exercise of will, for "policy"? I do not plan to attempt to answer this question, but to suggest some of its implications--the first of which is the curious irony that politicians should be condemned not so much for what they do, but for claiming that they have the power freely to do anything.

Not all Elizabethans held this view of the matter, of course. Shakespeare, for example, realized that the postulating of a doctrine of necessity or determinism could be an instrument of policy. Thus, Edmund, in King Lear, cynically and for the confounding of his credulous half-brother, Edgar, bemoans the baneful effects of planetary influence. The sudden suspicion of Edgar which he has cleverly instilled in their father Edmund attributes to "these late eclipses". We know, of course, that he in fact believes that "I would have been that I am had the maidenliest star in the firmament twinkled on my bastardizing"--but his pious deference to "necessity", if nothing else, puts Edgar off guard.

I am, of course, one to reflect on the position of contemporary politicians, who, in their election promises, appear to be fervent free-willers, and, in their alibi-hunting, downright determinists. In the latter pose they represent an inversion of the politicians exorciated by Rous and Hull: the earlier specimens were characterized by their adherence to the doctrine of free will, the later, by their claiming to be victims of forces beyond human control ("the international economic climate", "the trend of world events").

More sinister than these, who are no doubt often merely hapless and confused, are the Edmunds--those who deliberately create the circumstances they deplore, and claim that these are the result of "the logic of history". "The class war is inevitable," argue politicians who are doing all they can to perpetuate economic tensions; "the government must be given additional powers," say those who have deprived persons of the means to cope with their own problems.

Such claims raise a fundamental dubiety: if they are correct, then the world is essentially chaotic and our parlous situation is therefore irremediable; if not, the evil is the result of policy--"some perversion of the human mind and heart"--and it lies within the wills of persons to reverse it.
Our Policy

SEED aspires to fulfill a unique role transcending the functions of other magazines and journals. Our purpose is neither to propagate in the sense of promoting some fixed point of view or body of thought nor merely to comment on current events. Our partnership does not extend beyond two considerations. Firstly, we believe that reality does exist: it is not a matter of opinion and will assert its authority over all opinions that contradict it. All sanctions reside in reality; opinion has none. Secondly, we believe in the desirability of extending human freedom. Genuine freedom is contingent upon our comprehension of reality, since to the extent that we discard reality, they court personal and social disaster.

In other words, far from conforming to the modern view that value judgments are to be avoided, SEED will intentionally consist of a succession of value judgments, which will constitute the principal critical function of its success. Man cannot approach truth without rigorous formation of value judgments and perfecting of definitions. Discovery and refinement of the correct principles for human action and association will be the focus of our attention within the field of reality. If we carry our investigation of the nature of reality far enough, we shall illuminate the way to the formulation of sound policy.

We have no delusions about the facility of the course on which we are embarking. It is possibly the most difficult course open to us. However, its value should be proportional to the efforts it requires. If the distractions to intelligence and will which characterize contemporary society are, as we believe them to be, fundamentally unsatisfying, we are confident that some sections of truth will involve themselves in the experiment that SEED represents. Such persons are the only ones capable of responding to such an experiment.

We approach our undertaking in the spirit of making an offering that will call forth latent creative capacities. If the ideas that SEED disseminates have validity and settle in good soil, they will grow. Moreover, their growth will be progressive and cumulative. SEED will serve as a medium permitting the cross-fertilization of adventurous intellects, thereby diminishing the effects of the entropic phenomenon that paralyzes development by compelling men to struggle to find truths that they have lost sight of and had to rediscover repeatedly during the past.

If our project is conducted correctly, it will at least generate a new conceptual vigour among a segment of the community—and perhaps even result in the formation of new men.

(A vs. B) vs. C

I must say that our relations with the international banking world are excellent. And bankers, to the extent they are allowed within the exchange control restrictions which have been imposed, operate completely internationally.

International bankers come and go to Salisbury all the time.

—Dr. D.C. Krogh, Governor Reserve Bank of Rhodesia Focus on Rhodesia, April 1976

This comment by Dr. Krogh suggests the unique position occupied by international finance in world affairs. Its representatives move with ease across political and even military frontiers. Personally, the financier regards most boundaries as artificial; yet his propaganda apparatus (including the major communications media, which depend periodically on bank loans for their economic survival) is always hard at work conjuring up villains and heroes in the field of international relations.

The seeming contradiction between idea and action can be explained by analysis distinguishing strategy from tactics. International finance is a sort of planning department for a world economy; from this perspective its basic objective is the "rationalization" and enlargement of administrative jurisdictions. However, the psychology of the people affected by these plans (outside the scope of communist conditioning, at least) constitutes an uncertain factor in their unfolding. A scenario of "adversary" international politics is thus staged to distract people's attention from the real authors of the policies dominating their lives.

While populations are being appealed to by their political leaders to work harder and sacrifice in order to survive balance of payments crises, international financial houses are abstractly studying the angles of the situation that offer opportunities for harvesting profits from the distress. While soldiers are killing each other in combat, the financial backers of their respective causes are exchanging pleasantries at cocktail parties.

C.H. Douglas once stated that the further back we carry our analysis of international conflicts—of both the economic and military varieties—the more we are forced to the conclusion that they resemble prize fights, parties A and B being encouraged to batter each other into insensibility for the benefit of C, the promoter. C is the financier, whose operations have made mere survival the only actuating principle of much of mankind.
The Libertarian Alternative?

A reasonable demand to make of any body of opinion that habitually criticizes existing institutions is that it outline what it conceives to be a more desirable, or at least a more practicable, state of affairs. Such a body of opinion is "libertarianism", which claims to offer an alternative to the current drift towards what it calls "statism" or "monopoly". Because its avowed aims—securing the rights of individual persons—seem creditable to us, we feel that its claims merit some scrutiny. The following essay is an attempt to evaluate some aspects of "libertarianism".

Anyone professing the importance of freedom and the necessity for value judgements is likely, sooner or later, to encounter "libertarianism"—a school of thought maintaining, according to Tibor R. Machan, editor of The Libertarian Alternative, that "legal institutions and agents" should "make no compromise in disfavor of human liberty and rights" and that "man's need to make true moral and political judgements is inescapable". The representative attitudes of libertarians on a number of subjects are expressed in the essays comprising this volume, whose purpose is explained in the dustcover blurb: "Thirty respected exponents of libertarian doctrine argue from their individual perspectives for the restructuring of collectivist institutional, cultural and intellectual elements to achieve the libertarian alternative of a free society, based on individual rights and functioning through a free economy".

The book is divided into seven sections, whose titles ("Justice, Liberty and the Individual", "State and Societies", "Contemporary Statism: Libertarian Critiques", "Free Societies and Foreign Affairs", "Economics and the Free Market", "The Free Society", and "Prospects and Obstacles to Freedom") indicate different foci, although such categorizing is to some extent arbitrary. The essays cover topics from the philosophical bases of libertarianism to rather specific practical applications of the philosophy in such areas as drug research, education, and public health.

Philosophically, one finds much to agree with in The Libertarian Alternative. In the first place, although in its rejection of "statism" and "collectivism", libertarianism perhaps invites the charge of being "conservative" or "right wing", it is more consistent than conservatism often is: as Machan observes, "conservatives, on the whole, are more interested in establishing morality via order, i.e., force, than in offering the proper conditions, namely liberty, within which moral excellence can and is most likely to emerge" (357).

That is, libertarians are not, apparently, merely another party seeking to impose their own order (as an alternative to the existing imposed order) on everyone else. Thus, one of the essayists can assert regarding military draftees: "They are fighting, we are told, for their freedoms and our freedoms. And now see what happens and what is said if you refuse to report for induction". Because they are questioning not merely who controls centralized political power, but the centralization of power itself, the libertarians' claim to offer a genuine alternative deserves thoughtful attention.

Definitions

A detailed examination of all the essays in The Libertarian Alternative is beyond the scope of this discussion; however, several of them are of particular interest. The piece that opens the book, John Hospers' "What Libertarianism Is", defines libertarianism as "the doctrine that every person is the owner of his own life, and that no one is the owner of anyone else's life; and that consequently every human being has the right to act in accordance with his own choices, unless those actions infringe on the equal liberty of other human beings to act in accordance with their choices" (3). The definition seems a reasonable one; indeed, it is not new, for it is essentially a restatement of John Stuart Mill's "The only freedom which deserves the name, 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". One element in Hospers' statement that is not explicit in Mill's is the notion of "ownership": this indicates the emphasis which libertarians place on the economic basis of political freedom, a question which I shall examine in some depth later on. Corollaries of his definition, Hospers explains, are that libertarianism opposes any form of "forced servitude", that it denies anyone's right to dispose of another's life (which, of course, includes...
his "property")—even through the government, and that "No human being should be a nonvoluntary mortgage on the life of another" (5). Hespers' argument revolves around two crucial concepts: "the rights of man" and "force". These two are mutually exclusive: "force", in Hespers' view, is "behavior that requires the unwilling involvement of other persons" (11); thus, it is a violation of the individual's "right to act in accordance with his own choices".

Government

From this, Hespers goes on to consider the role of government, which, he says, "has always been the chief enemy of the right to property" (7)—one of the basic human rights. The role of government should be, he maintains, "the protection of human rights" (13). Again, this position is clear; again, it is scarcely new, reminding us of Mill's "the sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their number, is self-protection". The principle is again evident in Hespers' tri-partite classification of laws: (1) laws protecting individuals against themselves... (2) laws protecting individuals against aggressions by other individuals... (3) laws requiring people to help one another...": Hespers argues that only those laws in category (2) should operate. The notion that the function of law is to protect or guarantee the rights of the "free and responsible" person is an old one, as Richard O'Sullivan has argued—and I agree. However, legislation in the area of category (3) has generally been in response to conditions which the libertarian analysis does not deal with adequately (as we shall see); rejecting these laws as unacceptable merely on the basis of the libertarian conception of "ownership" is perhaps an insufficiently radical approach. However, this relates again to economics—as Hespers says, "Many questions, particularly about economic matters, will be generated by the libertarian account of human rights and the role of government" (19)—and we are, for the moment, postponing this aspect of the subject.

Two Theories of Freedom

Another challenging discussion may be found in John O. Nelson's "The Two Opposed Theories of Freedom of Our Philosophical Inheritance", which distinguishes between the "English conception of freedom" and "the Continental theory". Once again, a similar distinction is to be discovered in Mill's "On Liberty": he argues that Continental European liberalism was traditionally willing to admit and accept that the power of rulers "was but the nation's own power, concentrated, and in a form convenient for exercise" whereas in England, "there is considerable jealousy of direct interference, by the legislative or the executive power, with private conduct" (13, 19). Nelson argues that the English theory finds its classic expression in Hobbes' definition of liberty as "the absence of external impediments; which impediments may oft take away part of a man's power to do what he would, but cannot hinder him from using the power left to him according to how his judgement and reason shall dictate to him". The Continental theory, on the other hand, derives from Rousseau's "the mere impulse of appetite is slavery, while obedience to the law which we prescribe to ourselves is liberty". This statement is ambiguous, implying as it does that a person can in fact lose his freedom by submitting to "appetite" rather than exercising reason; however, a person must be free to choose which he will do.

Nelson interprets the difference between Hobbes' view and that of Rousseau in these terms: "In [Rousseau's] conception freedom is opposed to appetite or desire and is assimilated to law. Thus it represents an almost opposite conception of freedom from the English which bases freedom in desire and, at the very least, separates it from law" (41). He goes on to argue that the Continental conception tends to involve "collective freedom"—partly by maintaining that law is a collective concept. Whether or not his contention that it is not sensible to speak of an individual prescribing laws for himself is just, his comments on the consequences of the idea of freedom as collective are, I think, valid—and are related to the notion of "majority democracy", or what Mill calls "the tyranny of the majority".

"Collective Freedom"

Thus, quite accurately, Nelson raises the possibility that, while the American Revolution of 1776 was a "war of liberation", "rightly or wrongly it could be argued...that the American colonists were individually less free after they gained their freedom as a people than they were before" (42). His point is an important

(continued p. 7)
Shaky Pillars

A great deal—perhaps a preponderance—of the noise enveloping contemporary political and economic questions arises from the now-respectable custom of defending one's own corner, no matter what. The occasions on which members of some group endorse a policy on some basis other than what they themselves will get out of it are rare, and seemingly becoming rarer. Indeed, trying to act in respect of authority transcending immediate self-interest is likely to earn one a reputation as a "scab", "class traitor", or "unreliable person".

This reflexive paré prof has made modern controversy insufferably repetitive and uninteresting. On any issue, each partisan simply feeds a few data into his formula and comes up with a patented and predictable response. What makes intellectual activity exciting—the testing and continual refinement of ideas—plays no part in this dialectical drudgery. This explains the instant sonorous effect of statements made by governments, unions, trade associations, etc. We know in advance what they will say. If we paid attention in the past, those days are no more: the hope of hearing a new proposal or a fresh concept has withered under the weight of a thousand disappointments.

A list of "Ten Pillars of Economic Wisdom," published in the Doktar company newspaper The News (November 76), is a case in point lending itself particularly well to criticism because it does contain some sound principles in embryonic form. However, instead of bringing them to birth, at the critical stage it is overthrown by the sterile producer-lobby bias and miscarries.

A few examples will show how the distortion is applied.

Pillar No. 1 states: "Nothing in our material world can come from nowhere or go nowhere; nor can it be free; everything in our economic life has a source, a destination and a cost that must be paid." This statement disposes of a large and unsettled question—i.e., the creation of the universe—in a dubiously dogmatic manner. However, without insisting further on this fault, we shall merely point out that, in the absence of definitions of "free" and "cost", the sentence defies understanding.

The implication seems to be that the "costs" are penalties borne by men. Any other interpretation seems nonsensical. If a man sows one grain of wheat and harvests twenty, the result may be said to have "cost" the soil certain minerals, to have "cost" the clouds some of their vapour, to have "cost" the sun a bit of its energy. But, in so far as men is concerned, all these things are free—including the disposition of the seed to multiply itself. Only a sour, jealous temperament could see the situation otherwise.

What this insistence on the importance and inevitability of cost constitutes, of course, is the foundation of an artificial theory of economic justice—namely, that men must experience a measurable amount of discomfort in order to enjoy a measured amount of reward. Despite the fact that this theory breaks down completely when tested against real economic processes, it permeates our entire economic life. Its effect is to keep men in a position of subordination to the idols of work and productivity. As we shall see shortly, the Doktar people are worshippers at this shrine.

An especially clear instance of slanted criticism occurs in Pillar No. 3: "The only valuable money that government has to spend is that money taxed or borrowed out of the people's earnings. When government decides to spend more than it has thus received, that extra unearned money is created out of thin air, through the banks, and when spent, takes on value only by reducing the value of all money, savings, and insurance." It is interesting to see here the rare (but true) affirmation that money lent by the banks is "created out of thin air." However, this applies to money loaned to industry, as well as government; and if a company borrows a large sum for, say, a plant expansion, and pays the sum out as wages during construction, the same inflationary pressure results. More money in the hands of consumers; no more consumer goods on the market: the effect is a tendency toward demand-pull inflation. Only an act of willful blindness could prevent the authors from seeing this fact.

Not surprisingly, the theme of continually increasing production is introduced in Pillar No. 7. "The greatest good for the greatest number means, in its material sense, the greatest goods for the greatest number, which in turn means the greatest productivity per worker." This assertion rests on the assumption that production guarantees distribution—which is far from being the case.
Indeed, the real sequence of events in our economy is liable to be as follows: the more output per worker, the greater the unsold surpluses, the lower the retail prices, the quicker the collapse of the company, the less the material security of the employee. If the manufacturers' lobby has a dominant fixation, it is on the principle that increased production is the remedy for all that ails the economy; but super-production is a self-defeating policy when the public lacks the means to purchase all that is being produced.

The Ninth Pillar reverts to the concept of rewards and punishments suggested by the first, stating that: "Tools are the only one of [the] three factors of production—the others being natural resources and human energy—that man can increase without limit, and tools come into being in a free society only when there is a reward for the temporary self-denial that people must practise in order to channel part of their earnings away from purchases that produce immediate comfort and pleasure, and into new tools of production. Proper payment for tools is essential to their creation."

Certainly, no sane man will deny that the need to invest to enhance the means of production is a genuine need; but, by the same token, to elevate this proposition to the position of being the most important thing one has to say about the modern productive apparatus indicates a completely unbalanced view. It is rather like summing up fifty years of successful marriage by saying that the husband took some time to become accustomed to his wife's cooking. The statement may be true, but other facets of the relationship are more worthy of attention. Similarly, the most impressive aspect of production with advanced tools and technology is not how costly the tools are, but how rapidly they can churn out everything necessary to satisfy the economic requirements of the members of the community. It is merely perverse to insist on considering tools as a burden instead of an opportunity; yet this is the standpoint invariably adopted by the defender of the theory of rewards and punishments. Abundant production with little human effort upsets his equations for "justice."

The strange thing about the axiom that economic deprivation is the essential precursor of economic benefit is that, logically, it is not the justification for continually renewed hardship that its advocates try to make it. If, from going without, plenty comes, the sacrifices and investment of previous generations ought to have made life easier for us. If a century ago some lively intellect devoted twenty years to perfecting a machine, this does not mean that each of us has to spend twenty years perfecting a machine. If anything, it ought to afford us respite from thinking about machines. Nor did the benefits of that inventor's work depart from the world with his death. In all likelihood, they are still flowing to us.

In other words, even the doctrine of rewards and punishments does not necessarily lash us to an ever-revolving wheel of suffering. The price of our comfort and leisure has already, in its major proportion, been paid. By adopting this long-term perspective on the implications of investment, we can see that its chief interest lies in the marvellous potential it gives us to draw dividends from the inspiration and effort of our predecessors.

The foregoing illustrates how an apparently objective exposition of the bedrock of economics can be made to subserve the goals of a philosophy. The philosophy, in this instance, involves subordinating the individual to a system. The writer hopes that no reader will make the mistake of assuming that spokesmen for business are the only promoters of this end, which is sought with equal determination and fact-distortion by "representatives of labour and government. There is need for a good deal of ideological house-cleaning in all camps if we are to arrive at a social philosophy of integration and reconciliation, in which every man will have his place, and the places will be large enough to accommodate fully developed men.

R.E.K.

There are really only three alternative policies in respect to a world economic organisation:

The first is that it is the end in itself for which man exists.

The second is that...it is the most powerful means of constraining the individual to do things he does not want to do, e.g., it is a system of Government....

And the third is that the economic activity is simply a functional activity of men and women in the world; that the end of man, while unknown, is something towards which man and women in the world; that the economic activity is simply a functional activity of men and women in the world; that the end of man, while unknown, is something towards which most rapid progress is made by the free expansion of individuality, and that, therefore, economic organisation is most efficient when it most easily and rapidly supplies economic wants without encroaching on other functional activities.

C. H. Douglas, Social Credit Principles, 1924
"Alternative", continued from p. 4)

one: where "freedom" is defined as "obedience to a law which we ourselves prescribe", and where law is regarded not as the guarantee of the rights of the individual but as the will of the majority, then the freedom of the individual (as opposed to that of the collectivity) may be compromised by collective liberation. We have many examples of this sort of thing in contemporary politics: while Uganda was under colonial rule, for example, perhaps the rights of persons were more secure than they are now in the independent country under Idi Amin. The question arises also with respect to Quebec, where separatists argue for the power of the people to determine their own (collective) destiny: it is quite conceivable that an independent Quebec (one with a socialist or centralist government such as that advocated by Rene Levesque) would be a country in which personal freedom was more restricted than it is in the province of Quebec at the moment. I do not want to pass judgment here on any particular case; but I do want to emphasize the crucial significance of Nelson's distinction between collective freedom (if that is not a contradiction in terms) and individual freedom. For many people today, the notion that "democracy is the right to do what everybody—or most other people—want you to do" enshrines a sacred truth.

Although Nelson perceives an apparent antagonism between "freedom" and "law", he does attempt to reconcile the contradiction in the latter part of his essay—partly by reference to John Locke's "the end of law is not to abolish or restrain but to preserve and enlarge freedom; for in all the states of created beings capable of laws, there is no law, there is no freedom". Nelson comes to postulate—like Horsens—a kind of law which is compatible with individual freedom, namely, law that "establishes, defines, and ensures a system of privately owned spaces or land" (52). Still, he does not minimize the danger and the difficulty posed by the idea that the "distributive" concept of freedom should be established through the collective technique of legislation. Once again, it should be noticed, his argument comes down to the question of "ownership".

Philosophical Freedom

One other aspect of the question of "freedom" (in broad terms) as it is treated by libertarians should (continued p. 6)
be mentioned, at least briefly: free will. Bruce Goldberg's critique of Skinnerian psychology, "Skinner's Behaviorist Utopia", provides an argument—although largely in negative terms—in favor of philosophical freedom as the basis of political freedom. His article is valuable mainly in that it exposes a number of fallacies or contradictions in the position of "planners", or those who, in the name of altruism, claim the power to program human behaviour. These fallacies, according to Goldberg, fall into two categories: (1) "that it is possible selectively to condition emotions and behavior"—with the corollary that all the complex variations of behaviours can be programmed, and (2) "that all behavior is unfree", or causally-determined. In regard to (2), Goldberg maintains that every event which influences behaviour need not be a specific cause of that behaviour. Perhaps the libertarian objection to determinist notions is more succinctly stated by Machan in his "The Schools Ain't What They Used to Be and Never Was":

Arguments against free will abound, of course, and one would do them injustice to treat them as briefly as this discussion permits. My grounds for believing that they all fail is that without the element of human freedom in at least one area of human activity, namely in the assessment of the truth or falsity of judgment, there would be no way in which to assess the truth or falsity of the view that "free will does not exist." If we are entirely determined, then, of course, so are our judgments of whether something is or is not the case (247).

This is just to indicate that here, again, libertarians are apparently consistent in their approach: they seek the basis of their advocacy of political freedom in the conviction that human beings are actually capable of making choices. Where the "energy" for this free will comes from is another matter—perhaps related to the libertarians' insistence that, while "freedom" is essential, nothing (in the economic sense) is "free".

It is difficult, in a short review, to do justice to the arguments of the writers represented in The Libertarian Alternative; many of them are worked out in considerable detail. However, I hope that my distillation of the philosophical attitudes of the libertarians is a fair indication of their position. Perhaps a more concrete indication of the libertarian approach is to be discerned in their application of their philosophy to specific problems. In this regard, I direct the reader to the articles in part three, "Contemporary Statism: Libertarian Critiques", where, for example, compulsory, public-funded education is discussed by Machan. However, rather than looking at these matters here, I should like to turn to the problematical area of libertarian economics.

(To be continued)

D.R.K.

2. Ibid., 20.
3. Ibid., 20.
4. See my article "The Sphere of Authority", Seed, 1:8 (September, 1974).
5. From Leviathan; quoted by Nelson, 40.
7. From The Second Treatise of Civil Government; quoted by Nelson, 49.

"The West has helped the Soviet Union practise a new economic policy abroad, unaccompanied by reform at home. It has given the USSR credits to enable its leaders to get out of the dead-end their stupid system has pushed them into, and in the process killed off liberal trends inside the country."

Vladimir Bukovsky, in La Monde