



## Do You Want to Live Forever?

A MARINE OFFICER, leading his men into battle, exhorted them with this line: "Come on, you ..... ! Do you want to live forever?" This is a good question in this era of over-preoccupation with the notion of security. It is doubly apposite when one considers that the world's nations boil with unrest, while the hydrogen bomb hangs over our heads. Musing over such matters makes one realize just how far American politicians and intellectuals have gotten out of touch with reality. Assuming that we do, or should, seek physical immortality, they have undertaken to protect us against all daily hazards of mortality. Even as living vegetables, they pump life into us through Medicare, to the bitterest end. While we are spry, they spare no pains (nor our scarce resources)

to snug us in with seat belts and protect us from all dangers, either from the environment or consumables. Their latest concerns have reached down to the safety of tricycles and infant's cribs.

What are the realities of these matters? People may surrender to seat belts or air bags in their cars; but, when they reach Sun Valley or spot an unclimbable mountain, they will ski the most deadly slope or try to scale up the sheerest cliff. Infants will choke themselves in the safest crib, with a pillow or a tantrum, and a fail-safe trike will easily carry a nonswimmer into the family pool. There is no way to keep the individual from surrendering his relief check to the nearest poker game. Realizing that each heartbeat is a gamble with nature, man is a gambling animal. "Nothing risked; nothing gained," is his primordial motto.

Going beyond such trivial risk-

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ings of life and health, men will positively seek danger, either for a cause or for thrill alone. Twitted by Oliver Goldsmith for his casual view of martyrdom, Samuel Johnson said: "Sir, as to voluntary suicide, as you call it, there are twenty thousand men in an army who will go without scruple to be shot at, and mount a breach for five-pence a day." Although the price has been driven up since Johnson's day, even in this nation there is no lack of willing mercenaries — nor of youthful militants willing to risk their lives in protests against war, of all things. Our athletics and daredevil events often rival the Aztecs in human sacrifice. Although crowds are no longer entertained with public hangings, larger crowds, including the huge television audience, watch mangled drivers burn to death in flaming race cars.

Put in this perspective, the preoccupation of our political and intellectual leaders with environmental, personal, and social security does seem a little odd. If a neighbor should only dare advise you to do what governments order, you would shun him at the least — or, more probably, sock him in the jaw as a busybody; but, somehow, the art of propaganda has twisted our thinking around so that we tolerate, and even abet, this nonsense of government.

### **Good Intentions—Bad Results**

Actually, it is our philanthropic virtue which makes this folly possible. Most of us do not think of ourselves as requiring all this control. It is to help the other people who are careless, impecunious, or helpless. My father, a staunch conservative, voted for the 18th Amendment (Prohibition) because, as a grocer, he saw workers drinking up their paychecks and leaving wives without grocery money.

At the time, we do not think of the long term effect, on ourselves and others, of these piecemeal "reforms." Such wisdom is the business of statesmen and, of these, we are always in short supply. Nevertheless, we cannot excuse ourselves. Common sense and any knowledge of history should tell us that government is the least effective agent of philanthropy we could choose. Funding the Salvation Army with 5 per cent of our income would outdo 20 per cent turned over to politicians. But, of course, we have bought the impractical philanthropy of Rousseau. Ameliorating misery is not enough. "If the people won't be good, we will make them be good." Such preventive discipline has never worked and never will. People insist on learning, so far as they do learn, from their own mistakes. One cannot keep one's own

children safe. Much less can government save anyone from his own folly.

The welfare-environmental, world-saving state did not arrive in a day, or in four decades. It is the fruit of over a century of logical positivism and Marxist dialectic. Such modes of thought, if such they may be called, have gradually permeated a ruling number of our university staffs, our public schools, and the general intellectual milieu. Hence, they have spread through our media in an era of their burgeoning ubiquity. Through such propagation, we have developed the current breed of political "liberal," concerning whom the late Albert Jay Nock said he "would not trust one alone in a room with a red hot stove — unless it was valueless." (And, by all historical standards, Nock, himself, was a liberal.)

### ***Look to the Individual***

To put the current liberal mentality in its proper place, one must compare it to the successful intellectual tradition of the Western world. The progress of Western science and philosophy stems from the recognition that, in reality, "nothing exists apart from particulars." We learn the mystery of things by studying individual specimens, not by speculating in generalities. As Aristotle put it

"The physician does not cure mankind. He cures Socrates, or Callias, or some other individual who happens to be a man." Even cursory observation shows us that the current breed of liberal is engaged in "curing mankind." Certainly, he is not in any way, but accidentally, concerned with individuals. Groups he understands, and statistics from random samples; but individuals are the often troublesome accidents which interfere with his glittering generalities. If biologists, botanists, physicists, or any kind of real scientists operated with his logic, we wouldn't have any workable science, or the kind of productive society which can afford to support liberals in unproductive idle speculation. (Incidentally, the Cal-Tech men who charted the spaceship trajectories to the moon give fundamental credit to Galileo—fifteenth century man of the honest tradition.)

William James suggested that: "It is the primitive tendency of the human mind to affirm the reality of anything conceived." Once one's ideas become more "real" than the objects around him, he is out of touch with reality. With some notable exceptions, this is the condition among the liberals and academic "social scientists." It puts them in direct line with the medieval metaphysicians who speculated on how many angels

could dance on the point of a pin. However, medievalists honored something more exalted than human stupidity.

### **Wishful Thinking**

Liberals, of course, have an advantage over those among us with primitive minds. Wishful thinking has always been preferred to harsh realism among a large proportion of any populace. Universal suffrage places a heavy handicap on sanity in government, as demonstrated by every successful mass movement in history. Liberal control of compulsory public training (euphemistically called education) has come close to ensuring a frame of mind, among the populace, suitable to their forms of argumentation. Such forms dress tenuous, or even false, generalizations with the dignity of facts. We have come a long way from the thinking of Oliver Wendell Holmes' *Autocrat of the Breakfast Table*: "Facts are the brute beasts of the intellectual world. I tolerate no facts at this table." In the liberal mentality, the most miserable "fact," such as poverty or pollution, outweighs the most glorious truth, such as the survivability and progress of free men — even under the most arduous of circumstances.

In their book, *The Disaster Lobby*, Melvin J. Grayson and Thomas R. Shepard, Jr., have thoroughly

documented how far we have strayed from common sense and logic in handling our political economy. Only Lewis Carroll or Jonathan Swift could do justice to the present American scene. All of our priorities seem to be arranged as if the cart should be before the horse. Ecology holds pre-eminence over food, lodging, or energy. Birds, bison, or fish take precedence over people. Race and sex are more important than individual excellence, or personal liberty. Watergate obscures inflation and the fumbling of all departments of government—Federal, state, and local.

### **Consumerism**

Worst of all, the consumer, once deemed to be king in our economy, is now considered such an idiot that he must be protected, night and day, by the likes of Ralph Nader and a host of legislators and bureaucrats against the dire outcomes of his stupidity. At the same time, the public "education" which, presumably, nourished this stupidity, is endowed with increasing billions of public funds, while private education languishes.

In the midst of this shambles it created, the smugness of the liberal establishment is amazing. At a time when most of us are beset by doubts and misgivings, and are likely to be apologetic even when

proven right, many newspaper editors and columnists, along with most network commentators and the liberal intelligentsia seem to rest assured in their rectitude. "The best of all possible worlds" in which they appear to live is immune to outside criticism. Without blushing, they can filch public documents or deal in innuendo destroying public figures and appear to feel no qualms, even when caught up. Their formulae, which separate the good guys from the bad, appear to be unassailable. Liberals are good; all others are bad. It's as simple as that.

Although there are strong signs of public disenchantment with this fanatic smugness, surprisingly the liberals manage to hold onto their controls, outside of modest losses here and there. Their security lies in the persistence of fanaticism and the long-term conversion of the American people to their brand, coupled to the power of a bureaucracy dedicated thereto and backed by police force. Only an angry and aroused electorate can succeed in bringing this reign to an end, just as an angry and aroused public made the bureaucracy possible. Unlike the steady fire of fanaticism, the boiling points of individuals are immensely variable, and indifference is all too common. However, smugness is an ugly human characteristic. No-

body really likes a know-it-all. So, the liberal establishment has an Achilles' heel.

#### ***A Word for the Defense***

The current "energy crisis" offers a great opportunity for libertarians and market economists to be heard. Only when people are hurt are most of them willing to listen. The harder the crunch, the more likely is a response. Today, even our liberal legislators seem wordless at the possibility of an easing of environmental control. It is unanswerable that their obstruction of off-shore drilling, atomic power plants, strip mining, private forestry, the Alaska pipeline, and refinery building has placed us in an unenviable economic position. Their emasculation of National Defense has maimed our bargaining power in a totalitarian world. Likewise, their headlong, progressive mandates of questionable gadgets to clean up automotive exhausts have multiplied fuel use and resultant shortage. If it comes to unemployed people huddling in cold houses, bereft of free use of their automobiles, the environmentalists are apt to lose their audience. People would prefer clean air and water, and a pristine landscape; but they would trade off quite a bit of pollution for the right to use those facilities.

Once the audience is ready, "selling" the free market should not be difficult. It is not as if there were an alien idea to explain. (Indeed, the welfare state is the real alien idea!) An open market has always existed in human experience, even in times and places where it has operated as a "black market." *Laissez faire*, indeed, is the plainly observable law of nature, predating human law. And man is a competitive creature, with a strong sense of territory (property), similar to all others in the animal kingdom. Only his strong moral proclivities can explain his willingness to submit to the will of legislators, short of being forced, and there can never be enough police in the world for complete subjugation. Lawmakers in a society which considers itself a democracy thus play a game of brinkmanship when they legislate morals and push eminent domain toward the extinction of individual liberty. One step too far (which may have been taken) and the free marketeers will have won the audience.

One of the many pleasant outcomes of such a change will be a new genuine openness. Unlike radical liberals, libertarians nurse no urge to shut up the opposition. It is not in our credo to suppress ideas. We would suppress only violence, force, or fraud. That is,

we would limit government's acts of suppression to these fields and would, within these limits, allow people to live their own lives; which, allowing for a good deal of official harassment and impediment, is what they already must do. It will be surprising how peaceful things will become on the home front under such conditions. Our relations with other nations are likewise sure to improve. The man who is free and happy at home is unlikely to stir up trouble elsewhere.

#### **Voluntarism Is Best**

The free market offers genuine majority rule. Every majority is made up of individuals. If each individual, within the limits of legitimate law, is free to make his own choices in life, this will be the optimum condition of majority rule. It is a fraudulent majority rule where a minority made up of legislators and bureaucrats, or even a majority of voters (themselves a minority of the whole), can regulate the personal lives and choices of every individual in the society. The "true believers" in the welfare state have managed to bring us to this pass. We do not suggest that they give up their predilections; only that they give up coercion and put their ideas back in the open market.

Ecologists, conservationists, and

humanitarians should have enough faith in the generosity of the American individual to place their cases before the court of individual choice. There is nothing in the record of private philanthropy in this nation to indicate that deaf ears await any legitimate claim. As a matter of fact we have a strong record of voluntary response, even to ridiculous appeals, as indicated by the flourishing of private associations favoring almost anything under the sun. But it is an insult to the individual citizen and the spirit of our laws that any such association should be afforded the coercive powers of government in achieving its ends. The Sierra Club, labor unions, Nader's Raiders, the National Education Association, or any other form of pressure group whatever should face the same form of individual veto that every producer in the nation faces. Any other course puts the cart before the horse. The reformer should convince the consumer — not rule the producer.

Of course the true believers are too obsessed with their particular manias to recognize alternative claims. Focused on the ideals of primordially pure air, crystalline rivers, lakes and oceans, untouched natural parks, flourishing endangered species, and boundless health, they have lost sight of the

daily necessities of daily living and the basic truth of all economists: Human wants are unlimited; resources are always in short supply; hence all economic decisions must be compromises with necessity. In the pure majority of the market, such compromises are an amalgam of individual choices. Whatever the political system or laws, the individual must decide what he shall have and what he must do without. This is as true on Park Avenue as it is in the darkest depths of Africa, or in a Soviet state. To the extent that any government circumscribes the individual citizen's field of free choice and association, it has limited his power of survival, let alone his chances of success. Why an ecologist, who can benignly watch a lion pull down an eland or hartebeest, does not appear to understand the foregoing is a trifle hard to explain. It's a tough world, rather unforgiving, and the true believers, in order to return it to Eden, seem determined to bring it down upon us. They have so twisted up our priorities that not even General Motors has any clear idea how to plan. In such an arena, what are the prospects for the individual?

### ***The Ingenious Individual***

Contrary to the doomsayers, left to his own devices, the individual

has always shown remarkable powers of survival, even in the most unlikely environments. One by one, he has created all the engines of economic ease which we possess, while reform governments have done nothing but milk the cows of his creation. Determined to mandate an abstract "social justice," true believers have ignored the relativism that even the American sharecropper was rich by comparison with the vast majority of the world's inhabitants. Encouraging self-pity (to which we are all prone) in the less fortunate, they have dampened the spirit of such barefoot farm boys whose determination once made them captains of industry. (They now major in "social service" and end up in pro football!) If their ideas are not unseated from places of power, it is difficult to see how the reformers can avoid "killing the goose that laid the golden egg": American Capitalism. Everything we have is owed to the exercise of free individual initiative. Its sole necessary and proper discipline, short of violence, force, or fraud, comes from the free choices of individuals as consumers. Government has more than enough to do with the exercise of legitimate police powers, justice and defense. As it is, it is clearly doing nothing well, as Peter Drucker has said, with the pos-

sible exceptions of ventures in space, foreign wars and diplomacy. These are, basically, Executive activities, of a department which the liberals in Congress are set on weakening.

Posing the question, "Do you want to live forever," implies no denial of immortality of the soul. As in the case of the Marine leader first quoted here, this is a question concerning this worldly existence. Patrick Henry's cry, "Give me liberty, or give me death!" was more than political oratory. It strikes a chord in nearly all of us, if not all, from panhandler to merchant prince. There is the point beyond which we will not be pushed. Life is sweet only when it is creative; and we will always risk its loss on the altar of achievement, whether it be mounting a barricade, climbing a mountain, rocketing to the moon, or in some more mundane occupation. Life is what we ultimately spend: each person's total gift to the universe of reality and the essential coin of philanthropy. A man's closest desire is that his passing through is not meaningless, for he knows that he is mortal. Compared to this small glory in each of us, how paltry seem the concerns of the welfare state. Let us live by our choices and die as free men!



# STRIVE FOR THE SIMPLE LIFE

LEONARD E. READ

I love a life whose plot is simple.  
—Thoreau

I, TOO, LOVE A LIFE whose plot is simple. However, my idea as to what's simple differs from that of the great naturalist and essayist, Henry David Thoreau. Doubtless, he had in mind the quietude of Walden Pond and its seclusion from society. And this is what nearly everyone regards as the simple life.

My great-grandfather, born during the founding of America, was the first settler in Shiawassee County, Michigan. There was no "society" to interfere with his comings and goings — the nearest village being miles away — and except for the prying eyes of foraging Indians he and his family hacked it out alone. According to the popular definition, his life was indeed simple, far more so than Thoreau's.

What, really, *is* the simple life? Unless we settle that question, we will be plagued by a troublesome, socialistic cliché: "The more com-

plex the society, the more government control we need." The result, eventually, will be out-and-out dictatorship as intricacies in society are used as an excuse for total government. Is it not true that most people in today's world think of my great-grandfather's life as simple and of mine as complex? Actually, it is the other way around. You and I really live the simple life, and this is the point I wish to clarify.

If, as I believe, man's purpose is to grow, evolve, emerge along the lines of his uniqueness, it follows that he must emerge from that poverty which attends those who are forced to become a Jack-of-all-trades. My great-grandfather's unique talent might have been musical composition, or he might have become a distinguished naturalist and essayist, as did Thoreau — for all I know, or for all *he* knew! He, so preoccupied in doing nearly everything for himself, never had a chance to discover his