

Trust No One—Including *The X-Files*?

by Raymond J. Keating

I have two favorite moments from *The X-Files*.

In one of the television episodes (“Arcadia,” which aired in 1999), FBI agents Fox Mulder (David Duchovny) and Dana Scully (Gillian Anderson) go undercover in a planned residential community. Posing as the Petries—that’s right, same names as Rob and Laura from the old *Dick Van Dyke Show*—they are investigating the mysterious disappearances of several couples.

The community has strict regulations, and those who challenge the rules meet their doom at the hands of a thought-created monster conjured up by the strict homeowners’ president. Mulder fleshes out the creature by threatening to put up a portable basketball hoop and by knocking his mailbox out of alignment.

Rather than an attack on private communities, as might be expected from Hollywood, this comes across much more as a wonderful indictment of busybodies in local government and civic groups who try to impose their own views and tastes on their neighbors.

My other favorite moment took place in the 1998 film *The X-Files: Fight the Future*. This movie was fully immersed in “X-Files” lore, featuring a web of alien invasion and complex conspiracy. At one point, a shad-

owy figure tells Mulder that at the heart of the conspiracy is the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Mulder is warned, “FEMA, the secret government.”

With *The X-Files*’ nine-year pursuit of UFOs, conspiracies, and the paranormal now over (though additional films are distinct possibilities), it’s time to ask if this is a TV show that libertarians (or conservatives) could embrace.

The X-Files certainly had many moments—like those previously mentioned—that generate agreement or chuckles from libertarians. However, a compatible, broad philosophy is not to be found there.

Oh sure, there were various government schemes and conspiracies that regularly popped up, and the show’s message of “trust no one” very much applies to government. This held obvious appeal for freedom-loving folks.

However, at its core, *The X-Files* should have appealed most to two other camps. The first, most assuredly, are those who believe that the government carries out massive conspiracies of a wide-ranging nature. In contrast, most libertarians understand that not only is government too inept to successfully pull off vast conspiracies, but also that people have incentives—including monetary rewards—to reveal the truth about such skullduggery. In *X-Files* lingo, one might say that the truth is out there—for a price. It is similar to so-called price fixing or collusion in the market, in that someone always has an

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incentive to break with the conspirators to gain market share, revenues, and profits.

The second group that should have embraced *The X-Files* is liberals (in the modern-day, big-government sense). They regularly acknowledge that corruption and even inefficiencies exist in government. However, they believe that if the right people—particularly, smart people—are in office, government will work just fine.

At its core, one would have to say that *The X-Files* was guilty of the same conceit. After all, Mulder and Scully themselves are smart government agents hard at work trying, in part, to fix government gone awry. They are goo-goos—good-government reformers—for the UFO set.

To the contrary, libertarians generally

understand that corruption and waste in government exist because of perverse incentives intrinsic to government. That's why they recognize that the best—indeed, the only—way to clean up government is to limit its size.

While fun to watch, Scully and Mulder over the years have not been working to cut government spending. Instead, whenever the FBI closed down the *X-Files* office, the two were always looking to get their program reinstated.

Hmmm, a taxpayer-funded government program in the basement of the FBI building pursuing tales of UFOs and the paranormal. In the real world, that would be a boondoggle worthy of investigation by libertarians. □

A Brief Introduction to Business Concepts:

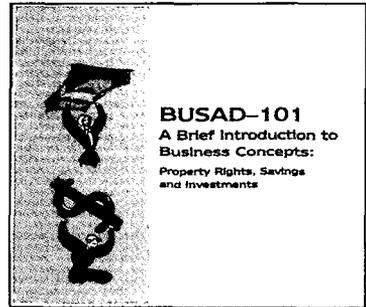
Property Rights, Savings and Investments

by: Cecil Bohanon, Ball State University

\$19.00 * [164 pp (pb)] * ISBN 189343577

A free-market introduction to the world of business for the high school senior or college undergraduate that introduces the student to the basic concepts of property rights, values and basic economic institutions. Adopting a historical approach, the author discusses the rise of free trade through the lens of Adam Smith and the rise of specialization of labor.

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FEE TODAY

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FEE Fest 2002: Special Report

The reports are coming in fast and furious about the first FEE Fest:

“What a super, fantastic, great convention FEE put on—a very energizing three days. I loved it!”

“The best convention I’ve ever attended. Bravo!”

“I can’t wait for next year’s FEE Fest—I’ll be sure to bring my family and friends.”

“I have done nothing but talk about the convention for the past four days.”

We couldn’t have been more pleased with the way our first annual national convention turned out, from the huge turnout for our pre-conference FEE course in free markets to the closing ceremonies on Sunday. With only four months to plan our first FEE convention, we were able to register nearly 900 attendees, nearly doubling our original target. The biggest complaint? Too much to see, too little time!

Nathaniel Branden, a keynote speaker at the Saturday night banquet, described the atmosphere well when he said, “I feel an electricity here that I haven’t sensed at libertarian meetings for a long time.” And he was right. Many commented on the sense of

Read Ben Stein’s poem, written especially for the FEE Fest, on the next page.

reunion they felt as they met with old friends, listened to speakers whose writings they have read for years, and basked in the enjoyment of being among like-minded people who love liberty and intellectual pursuit. It was electrifying and re-invigorating. And over far too soon.

Standing “O” for Ben Stein

Ben Stein, character actor, game show host, former Nixon speechwriter, and economist, charmed the audience with a poem he wrote for FEE on his way to Las Vegas (next page). Stein opened with a few jokes, then discussed the problem of “Why Bashing Big Business Is Big Business in Hollywood.” He pointed out the irony of this very wealthy industry being so critical of business people, and suggested that envy on the part of Hollywood writers is the main source of this negativity. Stein was asked what advice he might give to a 20-year-old Ben Stein. His response was moving: “Thank your parents more,” he stated. “I don’t think I ever appreciated my parents enough, or told them enough.”

IT'S ALL ABOUT FREEDOM AND CHOICE

A Poem by Ben Stein

Special for the FEE National Convention, May 3, 2002, Las Vegas, Nevada

Here we are in this desert oasis,
Far from Washington, most scary of places.
Here we are in a town where joy is boss,
Where people party and play, smile with wins,
cry with loss (but not for long).

But here's the thing about Vegas that makes my heart sing:
It's about money and chorus girls and having a fling.
It's not about prisons or gulags or firing squads.
It's not about forcing people to be little socialist gods.
You might lose your paycheck or fall drunk on the floor,
But you'll never have the KGB or the Gestapo knocking
on your 4 a.m. door.

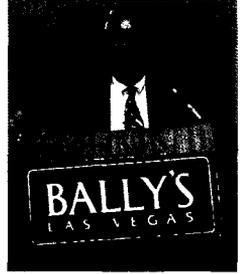
No one will take you to the Lubyanka to be shot in the head,
Or tear you away from your children and your family bed
Because you made a joke about Stalin or Marx,
Or breathed a lie to Beria in the 4 a.m. dark.

In a place of pure freedom, early and late,
We're in a market of sorts, but a market for fun,
Where buyers and sellers of risk meet in the sun.
And as with all markets, it's about freedom and choice,
Not about compulsion or violence or the *Sieg Heil* voice.

It's about the best of human spirit and heart,
The strongest, safest most noble part,
The wish to take chances, to roll the dice:
Willing buyers and sellers, fighting not over lives but over price.

This is how it should be in all good markets on earth and in heaven too,
Free marketers' paradise for me and for you.
And think of how that psycho Marx would spin in his grave,
If ever he saw this motto in America saved,

"Here in Vegas we shoot craps, not 'bourgeois spies,'
And we choose freedom as the highest value of all,
And leave socialism and state planning to its deathly pall,
Far from the vibrant glowing colors of freedom in this desert shrine,
To all that's true and free, and by that divine."



Following Ben Stein's presentation, the Institute for Humane Studies, Young America's Foundation, Intercollegiate Studies Institute, and FEE cosponsored a student party, with FEE Trustee Tom Palmer as the featured speaker. About 70 students attended the event. We hope to have many more

social events like this at our next convention, for students and adults alike.

FEE Fest on C-SPAN 2 Book TV

Famed Las Vegas magicians Penn and Teller arrived to hear Harry Browne's presentation, "How I Found Freedom



Karen Krupinsky, director of member relations at FEE, and Dinesh D'Souza in the midst of the busy exhibit hall

in an Unfree World.” C-SPAN Book TV videotaped Harry’s presentation, as well as those presented by authors Michael A. Ledeen, “The Brilliance of Alexis de Tocqueville and America’s Fatal Weakness”; Mark Skousen, “The Big Three in Economics—Smith, Marx, and Keynes”; Dinesh D’Souza, “What’s So Great About America?”; Charles Murray, “The Growing Controversy of the Bell Curve”; and Tom DiLorenzo, “The Real Lincoln.” These presentations will be broadcast on C-SPAN 2 Book TV several times over the next few weeks. For scheduled broadcasts, check www.FEEnews.org and www.booktv.org.

Over 100 Speakers and Sponsors

The FEE Fest was packed with workshops, panels, and debates on philosophy, history, economics, finance, education, art, and public policy. We were there to learn, as Leonard Read would say. Highlights included a standing-room-only crowd for a terrorism panel on Friday, the Latin American panel on Saturday, an educational panel on Sunday, and a challenging debate on the “Selfishness and the Best Moral Case for Capitalism” between Dinesh D’Souza and David Kelley, with George Gilder moderating.

Gerald O’Driscoll, Jr., discussed in detail the “World Map of Economic Freedom” published annually by the Heritage Foundation and the *Wall Street*

Journal. We published the 2001 map in the May issue of *FEE Today*, calling it “The Map that Predicted the Terrorist Attacks.” We reprinted 2,000 copies of the special 4-page *FEE Today*, which disappeared rapidly at the convention. (With your help, we plan to mail out hundreds of thousands of copies of this special *FEE Today*. Please use the enclosed envelope to support this good cause—or call Karen Krupinsky at 800-960-4FEE, Ext. 214.)

The Exhibit Hall was a busy place for socializing and networking, with over 60 think tanks, colleges, and other organizations, as well as the Laissez Faire Bookstore.

Join the 1776 Club

One feature that everyone seemed to enjoy was the 1776 Club, a new FEE program devoted to helping deserving students study free-market economics as we “proclaim liberty throughout all the land” (the words found on the Liberty Bell). Attendees were invited to join the club with a donation of 76 cents, \$1.76, \$17.76, or any increment of that famous number. After dropping a donation into the box, the new club member was then invited to ring the FEE Liberty Bell and win a prize. Those who donate \$1776 become Founding Members of the 1776 Club, and are invited to ring the bell 21 times (the sum of $1 + 7 + 7 + 6$). Our goal was to *Let Freedom Ring* throughout the conference. Film producer Conrad Denke became the first Founding Member of the 1776 Club, a number dear to his heart (his personal phone number and his cell phone both end in 1776). Bert Dohmen followed close behind with not only 21 chimes, but also a salute to freedom with each ring of the bell. Want to become a Founding Member of the 1776 Club? Send your check for \$1776 to FEE today!

A Night to Remember

When we opened the doors to the Venetian ballroom for the Saturday night banquet, we knew it was going to be an unforgettable evening. The room was gorgeous, the staff accommodating, and the food delicious. Since this was also a celebration of Laissez Faire Books' 30th anniversary, cofounder Sharon Presley presented a history of Laissez Faire Books and a toast to Andrea Millen Rich, who headed LFB until her retirement this year. Ken Schoolland, professor of economics at the Hawaii Pacific University, received the first annual Leonard E. Read Book Award for Excellence in Economic Education for his delightful satire, *The Adventures of Jonathan Gullible* (available for \$15.95 from Laissez Faire Books, 800-326-0996).

Modern dancer Valerie Durham choreographed two dances for the Saturday night banquet, "Enter the Austrians" and "All Men Are Free," an interpretation of the breaking down of the Berlin Wall set to Beethoven's *Ode to Joy*. Both were spectacular, with the powerful second piece bringing the audience to its feet.

Audio Tapes/Videos Now Available

If you missed the FEE Fest, I have good news. Audio and videotapes are available for almost all the sessions at the FEE National Convention. Audio tapes cost only \$5 per session, and videotapes are available for only \$15. Go to www.FEEnationalconvention.org for the complete list of tape recordings available and how to order.

Plan Now to Attend FEE Fest 2003

We are already making plans for FEE Fest 2003, scheduled tentatively at the Paris Resort in Las Vegas, May 15–18, following the Las Vegas Money Show. If you register now, you qualify for our "early bird" special price of only \$195 per person—\$55 off the regular price of \$250. You can use the enclosed envelope to sign up, or register online at www.FEEnationalconvention.org. Also, if you are interested in speaking or being a sponsor/exhibitor, please contact Tami Holland, 1-888-565-8779.

Special Thanks to the FEE Staff—and a Welcome to Our New Chairman

Before closing, I want to especially thank Tami Holland; my wife, Jo Ann; and all our wonderful FEE staff for putting in many long hours to make the first FEE Fest a big success. If you have a chance, let them know how much you appreciate their extraordinary efforts.

I would also like to thank Don L. Taylor for his unwavering support as chairman of the board here at FEE. He is a true freedom fighter and we will miss him, as he retires. We welcome Ed Barr of Toronto, Canada, as our newly elected chairman. His enthusiasm for liberty and FEE is catching.

Yours faithfully in liberty, AEIOU,



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IDEAS ON LIBERTY

JUNE 2002

Government Needs to Lose Weight



How ironic that just as an already bloated government is taking on major new powers, it is exhorting *us* to lose weight. That's exactly what former Surgeon General David Satcher did before leaving office. In his "Call To Action To Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity," Dr. Satcher wrote that "Our ultimate goal is to set priorities and establish strategies and actions to reduce overweight and obesity."

This requires more than a chuckle, a shrug, and a "there they go again," for it's indicative of a seriously flawed view of government's relationship to what used to be private matters. The line between public and private health has long been smudged and is on its way to being erased altogether. Not to be an alarmist, but advocates of individual liberty should be alarmed.

It's not as though people haven't heard that being fat might be unhealthy. Books, websites, talk shows, and commercials every day bombard us with that message and the various ways to shed pounds. Have you seen Jared at your local Subway sandwich shop yet? Have you heard of Slimfast? Few have gone broke promoting a fad diet. If anything, people worry too much about their weight.

That great debunker of junk science, Steven Malloy, writes that the government's statistics on overweight and obesity are based on "suspect research," such as unveri-

fied telephone surveys and "an arbitrary definition of 'overweight' based on 'body mass index.'" Malloy adds that the government's estimate of 300,000 deaths a year is "unadulterated junk science." The *New England Journal of Medicine* also finds the data unreliable, Malloy says. He further criticizes Satcher's report because it ignores important differences between being overweight and being obese. Obesity is unhealthy, Malloy says, "But the evidence supposedly linking mild-to-moderate overweight with increased health problems is murky, based only on flaky statistics." Malloy even debunks the alleged relationship between childhood and adult weight problems: the evidence is lacking.

But forget all that. Even if all the medical alarmism were justified, why is it any of the government's business? Conceded, that question sounds outlandish these days, accustomed as we are to believing that *everything* is the government's business. But once we remind ourselves that, as George Washington is reputed to have said, "Government is not reason; it is not eloquence. It is force," we should be wary of its portly scheme to slim us down. That scheme consists of a long "menu" of "activities and interventions in five key settings: families and communities, schools, health care, media and communications, and worksites." In other words, we are to have more intrusion from Washington, D.C., in everything from our family and community lives to our jobs in order to get us to lose weight. Where in the Constitution is the central government

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