



“Man is born for cooperation, not for competition”

OR

“The idols of the market place must yield to those of humanity.”

THE FLAW in this cliché is the implication of incompatibility between competition and cooperation, between the procedures of voluntary exchange and the objectives of human beings.

What socialists call “the idols of the market place” include competitive bargaining and free trade as well as the private ownership and control of property. These are the means by which *each* individual may pursue *his* choices and objectives to the limit of *his own* ability—within the limits of due respect for the lives, the property, and the related unalienable rights of his fellowmen.

Though the free market affords the maximum opportunity for each and every unit of humanity to approach the fulfillment of his potentialities, this is not what the socialists have in mind. The socialistic concept of ideal humanity involves giving to each person according to his needs, regardless of his efforts to earn what he wants. According to this view, the whole of man consists of his capacity to consume, which sheds light on the contention that “man is born for cooperation, not for competition.” In other words, man is born for comfort and ease, not work and struggle!

The “cooperation” of socialism refers to the sharing of whatever is available to consume, regardless of how it came to be produced or saved, or who might claim ownership. Man, as consumer, is to help himself to anything he needs—but at the other fellow’s expense. The double trouble with this concept of “cooperation” is its inherent immorality and the fact that it doesn’t work. The theory doesn’t work out in practice because most human beings won’t work—or save—if they’re systematically robbed by loafers, or taught to be loafers themselves. And, whereas voluntary charity may be considered one of the highest forms of moral human action, it seems clear that reversing the process to

let the receiver of alms grasp what he wants from whom he pleases is quite as immoral as any other form of theft.

Because consuming may follow but cannot precede production, it is important that economic policy give consideration to producers and encourage them. Private property—the right to the fruits of one’s own skill and labor, earned by serving rather than exploiting others—affords such encouragement. The owner of property is free to trade with others, if they are willing. He may not force anyone to buy his goods or services, but must vie for the buyer’s favor—cater to the consumer—in open competition with all other producers within his market area.

Stiff competition? Yes, indeed. But also cooperation of the highest order, for it involves absolute respect for the lives, the property, the freedom—the gamut of human rights—of every peaceful person in the world. No one is empowered by free market procedures to enslave any other person, or to compel him to buy or sell anything.

To cooperate effectively, individuals must be free to choose with whom to cooperate and for what purposes. And competition provides the opportunity for such choice. If there is but one maker of bread, there can be no choice. So, competition is the necessary prelude to cooperation.

What social arrangement could possibly be more humanitarian than to let each individual rise to the full limit of his creative potentialities? The competitive free market does this and thus maximizes the opportunities for the more capable among men to behave charitably toward their less fortunate brethren. It is not a question of cooperation *or* competition. Cooperation *and* competition in the market place afford the best hope for each individual and for humanity in general.

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