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The Counter-Revolution of Science
The Sensory Order

F. A. HAYEK

The Constitution of Liberty

Our inquiry is not after that which is perfect, well knowing that no such thing is found among men; but we seek that human Constitution which is attended with the least, or the most pardonable inconveniences.

ALGERNON SIDNEY

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To the
unknown civilization
that is growing
in America

Preface

The aim of this book is explained in the Introduction, and my chief obligations are acknowledged in the few paragraphs preceding the notes. All that remains for me to do here is to issue a warning and to present an apology.

This book is not concerned mainly with what science teaches us. Though I could not have written it if I had not devoted the greater part of my life to the study of economics and had not more recently endeavored to acquaint myself with the conclusions of several other social sciences, I am not concerned here exclusively with facts, nor do I confine myself to statements of cause and effect. My aim is to picture an ideal, to show how it can be achieved, and to explain what its realization would mean in practice. For this, scientific discussion is a means, not an end. I believe I have made honest use of what I know about the world in which we live. The reader will have to decide whether he wants to accept the values in the service of which I have used that knowledge.

The apology concerns the particular state at which I have decided to submit the results of my efforts to the reader. It is perhaps inevitable that the more ambitious the task, the more inadequate will be the performance. On a subject as comprehensive as that of this book, the task of making it as good as one is capable of is never completed while one's faculties last. No doubt I shall soon find that I ought to have said this or that better and that I have committed errors which I could myself have corrected if I had persisted longer in my efforts. Respect for the reader certainly demands that one present a tolerably finished product. But I doubt whether this means that one ought to wait until one cannot hope to improve it further. At least where the problems are of the kind on which many others are actively working, it would even appear to be an overestimate of one's own importance if one delayed publication until one was certain that one could not improve anything. If a man has, as I hope I have, pushed analysis a step

forward, further efforts by him are likely to be subject to rapidly decreasing returns. Others will probably be better qualified to lay the next row of bricks of the edifice to which I am trying to contribute. I will merely claim that I have worked on the book until I did not know how I could adequately present the chief argument in briefer form.

Perhaps the reader should also know that, though I am writing in the United States and have been a resident of this country for nearly ten years, I cannot claim to write as an American. My mind has been shaped by a youth spent in my native Austria and by two decades of middle life in Great Britain, of which country I have become and remain a citizen. To know this fact about myself may be of some help to the reader, for the book is to a great extent the product of this background.

F. A. HAYEK

CHICAGO
May 8, 1959

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Part III
FREEDOM IN THE WELFARE STATE

Introduction

What was the road by which we reached our position, what the form of government under which our greatness grew, what the national habits out of which it sprang? . . . If we look to the laws, they afford equal justice to all in their private differences; . . . The freedom which we enjoy in our government extends also to our ordinary life. . . . But all this ease in our private relations does not make us lawless as citizens. Against this fear is our chief safeguard, teaching us to obey the magistrates and the laws, particularly such as regard the protection of the injured, whether they are actually on the statute book, or belong to that code which, although unwritten, yet cannot be broken without acknowledged disgrace.

PERICLES

If old truths are to retain their hold on men's minds, they must be restated in the language and concepts of successive generations. What at one time are their most effective expressions gradually become so worn with use that they cease to carry a definite meaning. The underlying ideas may be as valid as ever, but the words, even when they refer to problems that are still with us, no longer convey the same conviction; the arguments do not move in a context familiar to us; and they rarely give us direct answers to the questions we are asking.[1] This may be inevitable because no statement of an ideal that is likely to sway men's minds can be complete: it must be adapted to a given climate of opinion, presuppose much that is accepted by all men of the time, and illustrate general principles in terms of issues with which they are concerned.

It has been a long time since that ideal of freedom which inspired modern Western civilization and whose partial realization made possible the achievements of that civilization was effectively restated.[2] In fact, for almost a century the basic principles on which this civilization was built have been falling into increasing disregard

and oblivion. Men have sought for alternative social orders more often than they have tried to improve their understanding or use of the underlying principles of our civilization.[3] It is only since we were confronted with an altogether different system that we have discovered that we have lost any clear conception of our aims and possess no firm principles which we can hold up against the dogmatic ideology of our antagonists.

In the struggle for the moral support of the people of the world, the lack of firm beliefs puts the West at a great disadvantage. The mood of its intellectual leaders has long been characterized by disillusionment with its principles, disparagement of its achievements, and exclusive concern with the creation of "better worlds." This is not a mood in which we can hope to gain followers. If we are to succeed in the great struggle of ideas that is under way, we must first of all know what we believe. We must also become clear in our own minds as to what it is that we want to preserve if we are to prevent ourselves from drifting. No less is an explicit statement of our ideals necessary in our relations with other peoples. Foreign policy today is largely a question of which political philosophy is to triumph over another; and our very survival may depend on our ability to rally a sufficiently strong part of the world behind a common ideal.

This we shall have to do under very unfavorable conditions. A large part of the people of the world borrowed from Western civilization and adopted Western ideals at a time when the West had become unsure of itself and had largely lost faith in the traditions that have made it what it is. This was a time when the intellectuals of the West had to a great extent abandoned the very belief in freedom which, by enabling the West to make full use of those forces that are responsible for the growth of all civilization, had made its unprecedented quick growth possible. In consequence, those men from the less advanced nations who became purveyors of ideas to their own people learned, during their Western training, not how the West had built up its civilization, but mostly those dreams of alternatives which its very success had engendered.

This development is especially tragic because, though the beliefs on which these disciples of the West are acting may enable their countries to copy more quickly a few of the achievements of the West, they will also prevent them from making their own distinct contribution. Not all that is the result of the historical development of the West can or should be transplanted to other cultural foundations; and whatever kind of civilization will in the end emerge in those parts under Western influence may sooner take appropriate forms if allowed to grow rather than if it is imposed from above. If it is true, as is sometimes objected, that the necessary condition for a free evolution—the spirit of individual initiative—is lacking, then surely without that spirit no viable civilization can grow anywhere. So far as it is really lacking, the first task must be to waken it; and this a regime of freedom will do, but a system of regimentation will not.

So far as the West is concerned, we must hope that here there still exists wide consent on certain fundamental values. But this agreement is no longer explicit; and if these values are to regain power, a comprehensive restatement and revindication are urgently needed. There seems to exist no work that gives a full account of the whole philosophy on which a consistent liberal view can rest—no work to which a person wishing to comprehend its ideals may turn. We have a number of admirable historical accounts of how "The Political Traditions of the West" grew. But though they may tell us that "the object of most Western thinkers has been to establish a society in which every individual, with a minimum dependence on discretionary authority of his rulers, would enjoy the privileges and responsibility of determining his own conduct within a previously defined framework of rights and duties,"[4] I know of none that explains what this means when applied to the concrete problems of our time, or whereupon the ultimate justification of this idea rests.

In recent years valiant efforts have also been made to clear away the confusions which have long prevailed regarding the principles of the economic policy of a free society. I do not wish to underrate the clarification that has been achieved. Yet, though I still regard myself as mainly an economist, I have come to feel more and more that the answers to many of the pressing social questions of our time are to be found ultimately in the recognition of principles that lie outside the scope of technical economics or of any other single discipline. Though it was from an original concern with problems of economic policy that I started, I have been slowly led to the ambitious and perhaps presumptuous task of approaching them through a comprehensive restatement of the basic principles of a philosophy of freedom.

But I tender no apologies for thus venturing far beyond the

range where I can claim to have mastered all the technical detail. If we are to regain a coherent conception of our aims, similar attempts should probably be made more often. One thing, in fact, which the work on this book has taught me is that our freedom is threatened in many fields because of the fact that we are much too ready to leave the decision to the expert or to accept too uncritically his opinion about a problem of which he knows intimately only one little aspect. But, since the matter of the ever recurring conflict between the economist and the other specialists will repeatedly come up in this book, I want to make it quite clear here that the economist can *not* claim special knowledge which qualifies him to co-ordinate the efforts of all the other specialists. What he may claim is that his professional occupation with the prevailing conflicts of aims has made him more aware than others of the fact that no human mind can comprehend all the knowledge which guides the actions of society and of the consequent need for an impersonal mechanism, not dependent on individual human judgments, which will co-ordinate the individual efforts. It is his concern with the impersonal processes of society in which more knowledge is utilized than any one individual or organized group of human beings can possess that puts the economists in constant opposition to the ambitions of other specialists who demand powers of control because they feel that their particular knowledge is not given sufficient consideration.

In one respect this book is, at the same time, more and less ambitious than the reader will expect. It is not chiefly concerned with the problems of any particular country or of a particular moment of time but, at least in its earlier parts, with principles which claim universal validity. The book owes its conception and plan to the recognition that the same intellectual trends, under different names or disguises, have undermined the belief in liberty throughout the world. If we want to counter these trends effectively, we must understand the common elements underlying all their manifestations. We must also remember that the tradition of liberty is not the exclusive creation of any single country and that no nation has sole possession of the secret even today. My main concern is not with the particular institutions or policies of the United States or of Great Britain but with the principles that these countries have developed on foundations provided by the ancient Greeks, the Italians of the early Renaissance, and the Dutch, and to which the French and the Germans have made important con-

tributions. Also, my aim will not be to provide a detailed program of policy but rather to state the criteria by which particular measures must be judged if they are to fit into a regime of freedom. It would be contrary to the whole spirit of this book if I were to consider myself competent to design a comprehensive program of policy. Such a program, after all, must grow out of the application of a common philosophy to the problems of the day.

While it is not possible to describe an ideal adequately without constantly contrasting it with others, my aim is not mainly critical.[5] My intention is to open doors for future development rather than to bar others, or, I should perhaps say, to prevent any such doors being barred, as invariably happens when the state takes sole control of certain developments. My emphasis is on the positive task of improving our institutions; and if I can do no more than indicate desirable directions of development, I have at any rate tried to be less concerned with the brushwood to be cleared away than with the roads which should be opened.

As a statement of general principles, the book must deal mainly with basic issues of political philosophy, but it approaches more tangible problems as it proceeds. Of its three parts, the first endeavors to show why we want liberty and what it does. This involves some examination of the factors which determine the growth of all civilizations. The discussion in this part must be mainly theoretical and philosophical—if the latter is the right word to describe the field where political theory, ethics, and anthropology meet. It is followed by an examination of the institutions that Western man has developed to secure individual liberty. We enter here the field of jurisprudence and shall approach its problems historically. Yet it is neither from the point of view of the lawyer nor from that of the historian that we shall chiefly regard that evolution. Our concern will be with the growth of an ideal, only dimly seen and imperfectly realized at most times, which still needs further clarification if it is to serve as a guide for the solution of the problems of our times.

In the third part of the book those principles will be tested by the application of them to some of today's critical economic and social issues. The topics I have selected are in those areas where a false choice among the possibilities before us is most likely to endanger freedom. Their discussion is meant to illustrate how often the pursuit of the same goals by different methods may either enhance or destroy liberty. They are mostly the kind of topics on

which technical economics alone does not provide us with sufficient guidance to formulate a policy and which can be adequately treated only within a wider framework. But the complex issues which each of them raises can, of course, not be treated exhaustively in this volume. Their discussion serves mainly as an illustration of what is the chief aim of this book, namely, the interweaving of the philosophy, jurisprudence, and economics of freedom which is still needed.

This book is meant to help understanding, not to fire enthusiasm. Though in writing about liberty the temptation to appeal to emotion is often irresistible, I have endeavored to conduct the discussion in as sober a spirit as possible. Though the sentiments which are expressed in such terms as the "dignity of man" and the "beauty of liberty" are noble and praiseworthy, they can have no place in an attempt at rational persuasion. I am aware of the danger of such a cold-blooded and purely intellectual approach to an ideal which has been a sacred emotion to many and which has been stoutly defended by many more to whom it never constituted an intellectual problem. I do not think the cause of liberty will prevail unless our emotions are aroused. But, though the strong instincts on which the struggle for liberty has always nourished itself are an indispensable support, they are neither a safe guide nor a certain protection against error. The same noble sentiments have been mobilized in the service of greatly perverted aims. Still more important, the arguments that have undermined liberty belong mainly to the intellectual sphere, and we must therefore counter them here.

Some readers will perhaps be disturbed by the impression that I do not take the value of individual liberty as an indisputable ethical presupposition and that, in trying to demonstrate its value, I am possibly making the argument in its support a matter of expediency. This would be a misunderstanding. But it is true that if we want to convince those who do not already share our moral suppositions, we must not simply take them for granted. We must show that liberty is not merely one particular value but that it is the source and condition of most moral values.[6] What a free society offers to the individual is much more than what he would be able to do if only he were free. We can therefore not fully appreciate the value of freedom until we know how a society of free men as a whole differs from one in which unfreedom prevails.

I must also warn the reader not to expect the discussion to re-

main always on the plane of high ideals or spiritual values. Liberty in practice depends on very prosaic matters, and those anxious to preserve it must prove their devotion by their attention to the mundane concerns of public life and by the efforts they are prepared to give to the understanding of issues that the idealist is often inclined to treat as common, if not sordid. The intellectual leaders in the movement for liberty have all too often confined their attention to those uses of liberty closest to their hearts, and have made little effort to comprehend the significance of those restrictions of liberty which did not directly affect them.[7]

If the main body of the discussion is to be as matter of fact and unemotional as possible throughout, its starting point will of necessity have to be even more pedestrian. The meaning of some of the indispensable words has become so vague that it is essential that we should at the outset agree on the sense in which we shall use them. The words "freedom" and "liberty" have been the worst sufferers. They have been abused and their meaning distorted until it could be said that "the word liberty means nothing until it is given specific content, and with a little massage it will take any content you like."[8] We shall therefore have to begin by explaining what this liberty is that we are concerned with. The definition will not be precise until we have also examined such other almost equally vague terms as "coercion," "arbitrariness," and "law" which are indispensable in a discussion of liberty. The analysis of these concepts has, however, been postponed to the beginning of Part II, so that the arid effort at clarification of words should not present too great an obstacle before we reach the more substantial issues.

For this attempt at restating a philosophy of men's living together which has slowly developed through more than two thousand years, I have drawn encouragement from the fact that it has often emerged from adversity with renewed strength. During the last few generations it has gone through one of its periods of decline. If to some, especially those in Europe, this book should appear to be a kind of inquest into the rationale of a system that no longer exists, the answer is that if our civilization is not to decline, that system must be revived. Its underlying philosophy became stationary when it was most influential, as it had often progressed when on the defensive. It has certainly made little progress during the last hundred years and is now on the defensive. Yet the very attacks on it have shown us where it is vulnerable in its tra-

ditional form. One need not be wiser than the great thinkers of the past to be in a better position to comprehend the essential conditions of individual liberty. The experience of the last hundred years has taught us much that a Madison or a Mill, a Tocqueville or a Humboldt, could not perceive.

Whether the moment has arrived when this tradition can be revived will depend not only on our success in improving it but also on the temper of our generation. It was rejected at a time when men would recognize no limits to their ambition, because it is a modest and even humble creed, based on a low opinion of men's wisdom and capacities and aware that, within the range for which we can plan, even the best society will not satisfy all our desires. It is as remote from perfectionism as it is from the hurry and impatience of the passionate reformer, whose indignation about particular evils so often blinds him to the harm and injustice that the realization of his plans is likely to produce. Ambition, impatience, and hurry are often admirable in individuals; but they are pernicious if they guide the power of coercion and if improvement depends on those who, when authority is conferred on them, assume that in their authority lies superior wisdom and thus the right to impose their beliefs on others. I hope our generation may have learned that it has been perfectionism of one kind or another that has often destroyed whatever degree of decency societies have achieved.[9] With more limited objectives, more patience, and more humility, we may in fact advance further and faster than we have done while under the guidance of "a proud and most presumptuous confidence in the transcendent wisdom of this age, and its discernment."[10]

PART I

The Value of Freedom

Throughout history orators and poets have extolled liberty, but no one has told us why liberty is so important. Our attitude towards such matters should depend on whether we consider civilization as fixed or as advancing. . . . In an advancing society, any restriction on liberty reduces the number of things tried and so reduces the rate of progress. In such a society freedom of action is granted to the individual, not because it gives him greater satisfaction but because if allowed to go his own way he will on the average serve the rest of us better than under any orders we know how to give.

H. B. PHILLIPS

CHAPTER TWO

The Creative Powers of a Free Civilization

Civilization advances by extending the number of important operations which we can perform without thinking about them. Operations of thought are like cavalry charges in a battle—they are strictly limited in number, they require fresh horses, and must only be made at decisive moments.

A. N. WHITEHEAD

1. The Socratic maxim that the recognition of our ignorance is the beginning of wisdom has profound significance for our understanding of society. The first requisite for this is that we become aware of men's necessary ignorance of much that helps him to achieve his aims. Most of the advantages of social life, especially in its more advanced forms which we call "civilization," rest on the fact that the individual benefits from more knowledge than he is aware of. It might be said that civilization begins when the individual in the pursuit of his ends can make use of more knowledge than he has himself acquired and when he can transcend the boundaries of his ignorance by profiting from knowledge he does not himself possess.

This fundamental fact of man's unavoidable ignorance of much on which the working of civilization rests has received little attention. Philosophers and students of society have generally glossed it over and treated this ignorance as a minor imperfection which could be more or less disregarded. But, though discussions of moral or social problems based on the assumption of perfect knowledge may occasionally be useful as a preliminary exercise

in logic, they are of little use in an attempt to explain the real world. Its problems are dominated by the "practical difficulty" that our knowledge is, in fact, very far from perfect. Perhaps it is only natural that the scientists tend to stress what we do know; but in the social field, where what we do not know is often so much more important, the effect of this tendency may be very misleading. Many of the utopian constructions are worthless because they follow the lead of the theorists in assuming that we have perfect knowledge.

It must be admitted, however, that our ignorance is a peculiarly difficult subject to discuss. It might at first even seem impossible by definition to talk sense about it. We certainly cannot discuss intelligently something about which we know nothing. We must at least be able to state the questions even if we do not know the answers. This requires some genuine knowledge of the kind of world we are discussing. If we are to understand how society works, we must attempt to define the general nature and range of our ignorance concerning it. Though we cannot see in the dark, we must be able to trace the limits of the dark areas.

The misleading effect of the usual approach stands out clearly if we examine the significance of the assertion that man has created his civilization and that he therefore can also change its institutions as he pleases. This assertion would be justified only if man had deliberately created civilization in full understanding of what he was doing or if he at least clearly knew how it was being maintained. In a sense it is true, of course, that man has made his civilization. It is the product of his actions or, rather, of the action of a few hundred generations. This does not mean, however, that civilization is the product of human design, or even that man knows what its functioning or continued existence depends upon.[1]

The whole conception of man already endowed with a mind capable of conceiving civilization setting out to create it is fundamentally false. Man did not simply impose upon the world a pattern created by his mind. His mind is itself a system that constantly changes as a result of his endeavor to adapt himself to his surroundings. It would be an error to believe that, to achieve a higher civilization, we have merely to put into effect the ideas now guiding us. If we are to advance, we must leave room for a continuous revision of our present conceptions and ideals which will be necessitated by further experience. We are as little able to conceive what civilization will be, or can be, five hundred

or even fifty years hence as our medieval forefathers or even our grandparents were able to foresee our manner of life today.[2]

The conception of man deliberately building his civilization stems from an erroneous intellectualism that regards human reason as something standing outside nature and possessed of knowledge and reasoning capacity independent of experience. But the growth of the human mind is part of the growth of civilization; it is the state of civilization at any given moment that determines the scope and the possibilities of human ends and values. The mind can never foresee its own advance. Though we must always strive for the achievement of our present aims, we must also leave room for new experiences and future events to decide which of these aims will be achieved.

It may be an exaggeration to assert, as a modern anthropologist has done, that "it is not man who controls culture but the other way around"; but it is useful to be reminded by him that "it is only our profound and comprehensive ignorance of the nature of culture that makes it possible for us to believe that we direct and control it."[3] He suggests at least an important corrective to the intellectualist conception. His reminder will help us to achieve a truer image of the incessant interaction between our conscious striving for what our intellect pictures as achievable and the operations of the institutions, traditions, and habits which jointly often produce something very different from what we have aimed at.

There are two important respects in which the conscious knowledge which guides the individual's actions constitutes only part of the conditions which enable him to achieve his ends. There is the fact that man's mind is itself a product of the civilization in which he has grown up and that it is unaware of much of the experience which has shaped it—experience that assists it by being embodied in the habits, conventions, language, and moral beliefs which are part of its makeup. Then there is the further consideration that the knowledge which any individual mind consciously manipulates is only a small part of the knowledge which at any one time contributes to the success of his action. When we reflect how much knowledge possessed by other people is an essential condition for the successful pursuit of our individual aims, the magnitude of our ignorance of the circumstances on which the results of our action depend appears simply staggering. Knowledge exists only as the knowledge of individuals. It is not much

better than a metaphor to speak of the knowledge of society as a whole. The sum of the knowledge of all the individuals exists nowhere as an integrated whole. The great problem is how we can all profit from this knowledge, which exists only dispersed as the separate, partial, and sometimes conflicting beliefs of all men.

In other words, it is largely because civilization enables us constantly to profit from knowledge which we individually do not possess and because each individual's use of his particular knowledge may serve to assist others unknown to him in achieving their ends that men as members of civilized society can pursue their individual ends so much more successfully than they could alone. We know little of the particular facts to which the whole of social activity continuously adjusts itself in order to provide what we have learned to expect. We know even less of the forces which bring about this adjustment by appropriately co-ordinating individual activity. And our attitude, when we discover how little we know of what makes up co-operate, is, on the whole, one of resentment rather than of wonder or curiosity. Much of our occasional impetuous desire to smash the whole entangling machinery of civilization is due to this inability of man to understand what he is doing.

2. The identification of the growth of civilization with the growth of knowledge would be very misleading, however, if by "knowledge" we meant only the conscious, explicit knowledge of individuals, the knowledge which enables us to state that this or that is so-and-so.[4] Still less can this knowledge be confined to scientific knowledge. It is important for the understanding of our argument later to remember that, contrary to one fashionable view,[5] scientific knowledge does not exhaust even all the explicit and conscious knowledge of which society makes constant use. The scientific methods of the search for knowledge are not capable of satisfying all society's needs for explicit knowledge. Not all the knowledge of the ever changing particular facts that man continually uses lends itself to organization or systematic exposition; much of it exists only dispersed among countless individuals. The same applies to that important part of expert knowledge which is not substantive knowledge but merely knowledge of where and how to find the needed information.[6] For our present purpose, however, it is not this distinction between dif-

ferent kinds of rational knowledge that is most important, and when we speak of explicit knowledge, we shall group these different kinds together.

The growth of knowledge and the growth of civilization are the same only if we interpret knowledge to include all the human adaptations to environment in which past experience has been incorporated. Not all knowledge in this sense is part of our intellect, nor is our intellect the whole of our knowledge. Our habits and skills, our emotional attitudes, our tools, and our institutions—all are in this sense adaptations to past experience which have grown up by selective elimination of less suitable conduct. They are as much an indispensable foundation of successful action as is our conscious knowledge. Not all these non-rational factors underlying our action are always conducive to success. Some may be retained long after they have outlived their usefulness and even when they have become more an obstacle than a help. Nevertheless, we could not do without them: even the successful employment of our intellect itself rests on their constant use.

Man prides himself on the increase in his knowledge. But, as a result of what he himself has created, the limitations of his conscious knowledge and therefore the range of ignorance significant for his conscious action have constantly increased. Ever since the beginning of modern science, the best minds have recognized that "the range of acknowledged ignorance will grow with the advance of science."[7] Unfortunately, the popular effect of this scientific advance has been a belief, seemingly shared by many scientists, that the range of our ignorance is steadily diminishing and that we can therefore aim at more comprehensive and deliberate control of all human activities. It is for this reason that those intoxicated by the advance of knowledge so often become the enemies of freedom. While the growth of our knowledge of nature constantly discloses new realms of ignorance, the increasing complexity of the civilization which this knowledge enables us to build presents new obstacles to the intellectual comprehension of the world around us. The more men know, the smaller the share of all that knowledge becomes that any one mind can absorb. The more civilized we become, the more relatively ignorant must each individual be of the facts on which the working of his civilization depends. The very division of knowledge increases the necessary ignorance of the individual of most of this knowledge.

3. When we spoke of the transmission and communication of knowledge, we meant to refer to the two aspects of the process of civilization which we have already distinguished: the transmission in time of our accumulated stock of knowledge and the communication among contemporaries of information on which they base their action. They cannot be sharply separated because the tools of communication between contemporaries are part of the cultural heritage which man constantly uses in the pursuit of his ends.

We are most familiar with this process of accumulation and transmission of knowledge in the field of science—so far as it shows both the general laws of nature and the concrete features of the world in which we live. But, although this is the most conspicuous part of our inherited stock of knowledge and the chief part of what we necessarily know, in the ordinary sense of "knowing," it is still only a part; for, besides this, we command many tools—in the widest sense of that word—which the human race has evolved and which enable us to deal with our environment. These are the results of the experience of successive generations which are handed down. And, once a more efficient tool is available, it will be used without our knowing why it is better, or even what the alternatives are.

These "tools" which man has evolved and which constitute such an important part of his adaptation to his environment include much more than material implements. They consist in a large measure of forms of conduct which he habitually follows without knowing why; they consist of what we call "traditions" and "institutions," which he uses because they are available to him as a product of cumulative growth without ever having been designed by any one mind. Man is generally ignorant not only of why he uses implements of one shape rather than of another but also of how much is dependent on his actions taking one form rather than another. He does not usually know to what extent the success of his efforts is determined by his conforming to habits of which he is not even aware. This is probably as true of civilized man as of primitive man. Concurrent with the growth of conscious knowledge there always takes place an equally important accumulation of tools in this wider sense, of tested and generally adopted ways of doing things.

Our concern at the moment is not so much with the knowledge thus handed down to us or with the formation of new tools

that will be used in the future as it is with the manner in which current experience is utilized in assisting those who do not directly gain it. So far as it is possible to do so, we shall leave the progress in time for the next chapter and concentrate here on the manner in which that dispersed knowledge and the different skills, the varied habits and opportunities of the individual members of society, contribute toward bringing about the adjustment of its activities to ever changing circumstances.

Every change in conditions will make necessary some change in the use of resources, in the direction and kind of human activities, in habits and practices. And each change in the actions of those affected in the first instance will require further adjustments that will gradually extend throughout the whole of society. Thus every change in a sense creates a "problem" for society, even though no single individual perceives it as such; and it is gradually "solved" by the establishment of a new over-all adjustment. Those who take part in the process have little idea why they are doing what they do, and we have no way of predicting who will at each step first make the appropriate move, or what particular combinations of knowledge and skill, personal attitudes and circumstances, will suggest to some man the suitable answer, or by what channels his example will be transmitted to others who will follow the lead. It is difficult to conceive all the combinations of knowledge and skills which thus come into action and from which arises the discovery of appropriate practices or devices that, once found, can be accepted generally. But from the countless number of humble steps taken by anonymous persons in the course of doing familiar things in changed circumstances spring the examples that prevail. They are as important as the major intellectual innovations which are explicitly recognized and communicated as such.

Who will prove to possess the right combination of aptitudes and opportunities to find the better way is just as little predictable as by what manner or process different kinds of knowledge and skill will combine to bring about a solution of the problem.[8] The successful combination of knowledge and aptitude is not selected by common deliberation, by people seeking a solution to their problems through a joint effort;[9] it is the product of individuals imitating those who have been more successful and from their being guided by signs or symbols, such as prices offered for their products or expressions of moral or aesthetic esteem

for their having observed standards of conduct– in short, of their using the results of the experiences of others.

What is essential to the functioning of the process is that each individual be able to act on his particular knowledge, always unique, at least so far as it refers to some particular circumstances, and that he be able to use his individual skills and opportunities within the limits known to him and for his own individual purpose.

4. We have now reached the point at which the main contention of this chapter will be readily intelligible. It is that the case for individual freedom rests chiefly on the recognition of the inevitable ignorance of all of us concerning a great many of the factors on which the achievement of our ends and welfare depends.[10]

If there were omniscient men, if we could know not only all that affects the attainment of our present wishes but also our future wants and desires, there would be little case for liberty. And, in turn, liberty of the individual would, of course, make complete foresight impossible. Liberty is essential in order to leave room for the unforeseeable and unpredictable; we want it because we have learned to expect from it the opportunity of realizing many of our aims. It is because every individual knows so little and, in particular, because we rarely know which of us knows best that we trust the independent and competitive efforts of many to induce the emergence of what we shall want when we see it.

Humiliating to human pride as it may be, we must recognize that the advance and even the preservation of civilization are dependent upon a maximum of opportunity for accidents to happen.[11] These accidents occur in the combination of knowledge and attitudes, skills and habits, acquired by individual men and also when qualified men are confronted with the particular circumstances which they are equipped to deal with. Our necessary ignorance of so much means that we have to deal largely with probabilities and chances.

Of course, it is true of social as of individual life that favorable accidents usually do not just happen. We must prepare for them.[12] But they still remain chances and do not become certainties. They involve risks deliberately taken, the possible misfortunte of individuals and groups who are as meritorious as others who

prosper, the possibility of serious failure or relapse even for the majority, and merely a high probability of a net gain on balance. All we can do is to increase the chance that some special constellation of individual endowment and circumstance will result in the shaping of some new tool or the improvement of an old one, and to improve the prospect that such innovations will become rapidly known to those who can take advantage of them.

All political theories assume, of course, that most individuals are very ignorant. Those who plead for liberty differ from the rest in that they include among the ignorant themselves as well as the wisest. Compared with the totality of knowledge which is continually utilized in the evolution of a dynamic civilization, the difference between the knowledge that the wisest and that which the most ignorant individual can deliberately employ is comparatively insignificant.

The classical argument for tolerance formulated by John Milton and John Locke and restated by John Stuart Mill and Walter Bagehot rests, of course, on the recognition of this ignorance of ours. It is a special application of general considerations to which a non-rationalist insight into the working of our mind opens the doors. We shall find throughout this book that, though we are usually not aware of it, all institutions of freedom are adaptations to this fundamental fact of ignorance, adapted to deal with chances and probabilities, not certainty. Certainty we cannot achieve in human affairs, and it is for this reason that, to make the best use of what knowledge we have, we must adhere to rules which experience has shown to serve best on the whole, though we do not know what will be the consequences of obeying them in the particular instance.[13]

5. Man learns by the disappointment of expectations. Needless to say, we ought not to increase the unpredictability of events by foolish human institutions. So far as possible, our aim should be to improve human institutions so as to increase the chances of correct foresight. Above all, however, we should provide the maximum of opportunity for unknown individuals to learn of facts that we ourselves are yet unaware of and to make use of this knowledge in their actions.

It is through the mutually adjusted efforts of many people that more knowledge is utilized than any one individual possesses or than it is possible to synthesize intellectually; and it is through

such utilization of dispersed knowledge that achievements are made possible greater than any single mind can foresee. It is because freedom means the renunciation of direct control of individual efforts that a free society can make use of so much more knowledge than the mind of the wisest ruler could comprehend.

From this foundation of the argument for liberty it follows that we shall not achieve its ends if we confine liberty to the particular instances where we know it will do good. Freedom granted only when it is known beforehand that its effects will be beneficial is not freedom. If we knew how freedom would be used, the case for it would largely disappear. We shall never get the benefits of freedom, never obtain those unforeseeable new developments for which it provides the opportunity, if it is not also granted where the uses made of it by some do not seem desirable. It is therefore no argument against individual freedom that it is frequently abused. Freedom necessarily means that many things will be done which we do not like. Our faith in freedom does not rest on the foreseeable results in particular circumstances but on the belief that it will, on balance, release more forces for the good than for the bad.

It also follows that the importance of our being free to do a particular thing has nothing to do with the question of whether we or the majority are ever likely to make use of that particular possibility. To grant no more freedom than all can exercise would be to misconceive its function completely. The freedom that will be used by only one man in a million may be more important to society and more beneficial to the majority than any freedom that we all use.[14]

It might even be said that the less likely the opportunity to make use of freedom to do a particular thing, the more precious it will be for society as a whole. The less likely the opportunity, the more serious will it be to miss it when it arises, for the experience that it offers will be nearly unique. It is also probably true that the majority are not directly interested in most of the important things that any one person should be free to do. It is because we do not know how individuals will use their freedom that it is so important. If it were otherwise, the results of freedom could also be achieved by the majority's deciding what should be done by the individuals. But majority action is, of necessity, confined to the already tried and ascertained, to issues on which agreement has already been reached in that

process of discussion that must be preceded by different experiences and actions on the part of different individuals.

The benefits I derive from freedom are thus largely the result of the uses of freedom by others, and mostly of those uses of freedom that I could never avail myself of. It is therefore not necessarily freedom that I can exercise myself that is most important for me. It is certainly more important that anything can be tried by somebody than that all can do the same things. It is not because we like to be able to do particular things, not because we regard any particular freedom as essential to our happiness, that we have a claim to freedom. The instinct that makes us revolt against any physical restraint, though a helpful ally, is not always a safe guide for justifying or delimiting freedom. What is important is not what freedom I personally would like to exercise but what freedom some person may need in order to do things beneficial to society. This freedom we can assure to the unknown person only by giving it to all.

The benefits of freedom are therefore not confined to the free—or, at least, a man does not benefit mainly from those aspects of freedom which he himself takes advantage of. There can be no doubt that in history unfree majorities have benefited from the existence of free minorites and that today unfree societies benefit from what they obtain and learn from free societies. Of course the benefits we derive from the freedom of others become greater as the number of those who can exercise freedom increases. The argument for the freedom of some therefore applies to the freedom of all. But it is still better for all that some should be free than none and also that many enjoy full freedom than that all have a restricted freedom. The significant point is that the importance of freedom to do a particular thing has nothing to do with the number of people who want to do it: it might almost be in inverse proportion. One consequence of this is that a society may be hamstrung by controls, although the great majority may not be aware that their freedom has been significantly curtailed. If we proceeded on the assumption that only the exercises of freedom that the majority will practice are important, we would be certain to create a stagnant society with all the characteristic of unfreedom.

6. The undesigned novelties that constantly emerge in the process of adaptation will consist, first, of new arrangements

or patterns in which the efforts of different individuals are coordinated and of new constellations in the use of resources, which will be in their nature as temporary as the particular conditions that have evoked them. There will be, second, modifications of tools and institutions adapted to the new circumstances. Some of these will also be merely temporary adaptations to the conditions of the moment, while others will be improvements that increase the versatility of the existing tools and usages and will therefore be retained. These latter will constitute a better adaptation not merely to the particular circumstances of time and place but to some permanent feature of our environment. In such spontaneous "formations"[15] is embodied a perception of the general laws that govern nature. With this cumulative embodiment of experience in tools and forms of action will emerge a growth of explicit knowledge, of formulated generic rules that can be communicated by language from person to person.

This process by which the new emerges is best understood in the intellectual sphere when the results are new ideas. It is the field in which most of us are aware at least of some of the individual steps of the process, where we necessarily know what is happening and thus generally recognize the necessity of freedom. Most scientists realize that we cannot plan the advance of knowledge, that in the voyage into the unknown—which is what research is—we are in great measure dependent on the vagaries of individual genius and of circumstance, and that scientific advance, like a new idea that will spring up in a single mind, will be the result of a combination of conceptions, habits, and circumstances brought to one person by society, the result as much of lucky accidents as of systematic effort.

Because we are more aware that our advances in the intellectual sphere often spring from the unforeseen and undesigned, we tend to overstress the importance of freedom in this field and to ignore the importance of the freedom of *doing* things. But the freedom of research and belief and the freedom of speech and discussion, the importance of which is widely understood, are significant only in the last stage of the process in which new truths are discovered. To extol the value of intellectual liberty at the expense of the value of the liberty of doing things would be like treating the crowning part of an edifice as the whole. We have new ideas to discuss, different views to adjust, because those ideas and views arise from the efforts of individuals in ever new circum-

stances, who avail themselves in their concrete tasks of the new tools and forms of action they have learned.

The non-intellectual part of this process—the formation of the changed material environment in which the new emerges—requires for its understanding and appreciation a much greater effort of imagination than the factors stressed by the intellectualist view. While we are sometimes able to trace the intellectual processes that have led to a new idea, we can scarcely ever reconstruct the sequence and combination of those contributions that have not led to the acquisition of explicit knowledge; we can scarcely ever reconstruct the favorable habits and skills employed, the facilities and opportunities used, and the particular environment of the main actors that has favored the result. Our efforts toward understanding this part of the process can go little further than to show on simplified models the kind of forces at work and to point to the general principle rather than the specific character of the influences that operate.[16] Men are always concerned only with what they know. Therefore, those features which, while the process is under way, are not consciously known to anybody are commonly disregarded and can perhaps never be traced in detail.

In fact, these unconscious features not only are commonly disregarded but are often treated as if they were a hindrance rather than a help or an essential condition. Because they are not "rational" in the sense of explicitly entering into our reasoning, they are often treated as irrational in the sense of being contrary to intelligent action. Yet, though much of the non-rational that affects our action may be irrational in this sense, many of the "mere habits" and "meaningless institutions" that we use and presuppose in our actions are essential conditions for what we achieve; they are successful adaptations of society that are constantly improved and on which depends the range of what we can achieve. While it is important to discover their defects, we could not for a moment go on without constantly relying on them.

The manner in which we have learned to order our day, to dress, to eat, to arrange our houses, to speak and write, and to use the countless other tools and implements of civilization, no less than the "know-how" of production and trade, furnishes us constantly with the foundations on which our own contributions to the process of civilization must be based. And it is in the

new use and improvement of whatever the facilities of civilization offer us that the new ideas arise that are ultimately handled in the intellectual sphere. Though the conscious manipulation of abstract thought, once it has been set in train, has in some measure a life of its own, it would not long continue and develop without the constant challenges that arise from the ability of people to act in a new manner, to try new ways of doing things, and to alter the whole structure of civilization in adaptation to change. The intellectual process is in effect only a process of elaboration, selection, and elimination of ideas already formed. And the flow of new ideas, to a great extent, springs from the sphere in which action, often non-rational action, and material events impinge upon each other. It would dry up if freedom were confined to the intellectual sphere.

The importance of freedom, therefore, does not depend on the elevated character of the activities it makes possible. Freedom of action, even in humble things, is as important as freedom of thought. It has become a common practice to disparage freedom of action by calling it "economic liberty."[17] But the concept of freedom of action is much wider than that of economic liberty, which it includes; and, what is more important, it is very questionable whether there are any actions which can be called merely "economic" and whether any restrictions on liberty can be confined to what are called merely "economic" aspects. Economic considerations are merely those by which we reconcile and adjust our different purposes, none of which, in the last resort, are economic (excepting those of the miser or the man for whom making money has become an end in itself).[18]

7. Most of what we have said so far applies not only to man's use of the means for the achievement of his ends but also to those ends themselves. It is one of the characteristics of a free society that men's goals are open,[19] that new ends of conscious effort can spring up, first with a few individuals, to become in time the ends of most. It is a fact which we must recognize that even what we regard as good or beautiful is changeable—if not in any recognizable manner that would entitle us to take a relativistic position, then in the sense that in many respects we do not know what will appear as good or beautiful to another generation. Nor do we know why we regard this or that as good or who is right when people differ as to whether something is good or not.

It is not only in his knowledge, but also in his aims and values, that man is the creature of civilization; in the last resort, it is the relevance of these individual wishes to the perpetuation of the group or the species that will determine whether they will persist or change. It is, of course, a mistake to believe that we can draw conclusions about what our values ought to be simply because we realize that they are a product of evolution. But we cannot reasonably doubt that these values are created and altered by the same evolutionary forces that have produced our intelligence. All that we can know is that the ultimate decision about what is good or bad will be made not by individual human wisdom but by the decline of the groups that have adhered to the "wrong" beliefs.

It is in the pursuit of man's aims of the moment that all the devices of civilization have to prove themselves; the ineffective will be discarded and the effective retained. But there is more to it than the fact that new ends constantly arise with the satisfaction of old needs and with the appearance of new opportunities. Which individuals and which groups succeed and continue to exist depends as much on the goals that they pursue, the values that govern their action, as on the tools and capacities at their command. Whether a group will prosper or be extinguished depends as much on the ethical code it obeys, or the ideals of beauty or well-being that guide it, as on the degree to which it has learned or not learned to satisfy its material needs. Within any given society, particular groups may rise or decline according to the ends they pursue and the standards of conduct that they observe. And the ends of the successful group will tend to become the ends of all members of the society.

At most, we understand only partially why the values we hold or the ethical rules we observe are conducive to the continued existence of our society. Nor can we be sure that under constantly changing conditions all the rules that have proved to be conducive to the attainment of a certain end will remain so. Though there is a presumption that any established social standard contributes in some manner to the preservation of civilization, our only way of confirming this is to ascertain whether it continues to prove itself in competition with other standards observed by other individuals or groups.

8. The competition on which the process of selection rests must be understood in the widest sense. It involves competition between organized and unorganized groups no less than competition between individuals. To think of it in contrast to co-operation or organization would be to misconceive its nature. The endeavor to achieve certain results by co-operation and organization is as much a part of competition as individual efforts. Successful group relations also prove their effectiveness in competition among groups organized in different ways. The relevant distinction is not between individual and group action but between conditions, on the one hand, in which alternative ways based on different views or practices may be tried and conditions, on the other, in which one agency has the exclusive right and the power to prevent others from trying. It is only when such exclusive rights are conferred on the presumption of superior knowledge of particular individuals or groups that the process ceases to be experimental and beliefs that happen to be prevalent at a given time may become an obstacle to the advancement of knowledge.

The argument for liberty is not an argument against organization, which is one of the most powerful means that human reason can employ, but an argument against all exclusive, privileged, monopolistic organization, against the use of coercion to prevent others from trying to do better. Every organization is based on given knowledge; organization means commitment to a particular aim and to particular methods, but even organization designed to increase knowledge will be effective only insofar as the knowledge and beliefs on which its design rests are true. And if any facts contradict the beliefs on which the structure of the organization is based, this will become evident only in its failure and supersession by a different type of organization. Organization is therefore likely to be beneficial and effective so long as it is voluntary and is imbedded in a free sphere and will either have to adjust itself to circumstances not taken into account in its conception or fail. To turn the whole or society into a single organization built and directed according to a single plan would be to extinguish the very forces that shaped the individual human minds that planned it.

It is worth our while to consider for a moment what would happen if only what was agreed to be the best available knowledge were to be used in all action. If all attempts that seemed wasteful

in the light of generally accepted knowledge were prohibited and only such questions asked, or such experiments tried, as seemed significant in the light of ruling opinion, mankind might well reach a point where its knowledge enabled it to predict the consequences of all conventional actions and to avoid all disappointment or failure. Man would then seem to have subjected his surroundings to his reason, for he would attempt only those things which were totally predictable in their results. We might conceive of a civilization coming to a standstill, not because the possibilities of further growth had been exhausted, but because man had succeeded in so completely subjecting all his actions and his immediate surroundings to his existing state of knowledge that there would be no occasion for new knowledge to appear.

9. The rationalist who desires to subject everything to human reason is thus faced with a real dilemma. The use of reason aims at control and predictability. But the process of the advance of reason rests on freedom and the unpredictability of human action. Those who extol the powers of human reason usually see only one side of that interaction of human thought and conduct in which reason is at the same time used and shaped. They do not see that, for advance to take place, the social process from which the growth of reason emerges must remain free from its control.

There can be little doubt that man owes some of his greatest successes in the past to the fact that he has *not* been able to control social life. His continued advance may well depend on his deliberately refraining from exercising controls which are now in his power. In the past, the spontaneous forces of growth, however much restricted, could usually still assert themselves against the organized coercion of the state. With the technological means of control now at the disposal of government, it is not certain that such assertion is still possible; at any rate, it may soon become impossible. We are not far from the point where the deliberately organized forces of society may destroy those spontaneous forces which have made advance possible.

CHAPTER THREE

The Common Sense of Progress

Man never mounts higher than when he knows not where he is going.

OLIVER CROMWELL

1. Writers nowadays who value their reputation among the more sophisticated hardly dare to mention progress without including the word in quotation marks. The implicit confidence in the beneficence of progress that during the last two centuries marked the advanced thinker has come to be regarded as the sign of a shallow mind. Though the great mass of the people in most parts of the world still rest their hopes on continued progress, it is common among intellectuals to question whether there is such a thing, or at least whether progress is desirable.

Up to a point, this reaction against the exuberant and naïve belief in the inevitability of progress was necessary. So much of what has been written and talked about it has been indefensible that one may well think twice before using the word. There never was much justification for the assertion that "civilization has moved, is moving, and will move in a desirable direction,"[1] nor was there any ground for regarding all change as necessary, or progress as certain and always beneficial. Least of all was there warrant for speaking about recognizable "laws of progress" that enabled us to predict the conditions toward which we were necessarily moving, or for treating every foolish thing men have done as necessary and therefore right.

But if the fashionable disillusionment about progress is not difficult to explain, it is not without danger. In one sense, civilization is progress and progress is civilization.[2] The preservation of the

kind of civilization that we know depends on the operation of forces which, under favorable conditions, produce progress. If it is true that evolution does not always lead to better things, it is also true that, without the forces which produce it, civilization and all we value—indeed, almost all that distinguishes man from beast—would neither exist nor could long be maintained.

The history of civilization is the account of a progress which, in the short space of less than eight thousand years, has created nearly all that we regard as characteristic of human life. After abandoning hunting life, most of our direct ancestors, at the beginning of neolithic culture, took to agriculture and soon to urban life perhaps less than three thousand years or one hundred generations ago. It is not surprising that in some respects man's biological equipment has not kept pace with that rapid change, that the adaptation of his non-rational part has lagged somewhat, and that many of his instincts and emotions are still more adapted to the life of a hunter than to life in civilization. If many features of our civilization seem to us unnatural, artificial, or unhealthy, this must have been man's experience ever since he first took to town life, which is virtually since civilization began. All the familiar complaints against industrialism, capitalism, or overrefinement are largely protests against a new way of life that man took up a short while ago after more than half a million years' existence as a wandering hunter, and that created problems still unsolved by him.[3]

2. When we speak of progress in connection with our individual endeavors or any organized human effort, we mean an advance toward a known goal.[4] It is not in this sense that social evolution can be called progress, for it is not achieved by human reason striving by known means toward a fixed aim.[5] It would be more correct to think of progress as a process of formation and modification of the human intellect, a process of adaptation and learning in which not only the possibilities known to us but also our values and desires continually change. As progress consists in the discovery of the not yet known, its consequences must be unpredictable. It always leads into the unknown, and the most we can expect is to gain an understanding of the kind of forces that bring it about. Yet, though such a general understanding of the character of this process of cumulative growth is indispensable if we are to try to create conditions favorable to it, it can never be knowledge which will enable us to make specific predictions.[6] The claim

that we can derive from such insight necessary laws of evolution that we must follow is an absurdity. Human reason can neither predict nor deliberately shape its own future. Its advances consist in finding out where it has been wrong.

Even in the field where the search for new knowledge is most deliberate, i.e., in science, no man can predict what will be the consequences of his work.[7] In fact, there is increasing recognition that even the attempt to make science deliberately aim at useful knowledge—that is, at knowledge whose future uses can be foreseen—is likely to impede progress.[8] Progress by its very nature cannot be planned. We may perhaps legitimately speak of planning progress in a particular field where we aim at the solution of a specific problem and are already on the track of the answer. But we should soon be at the end of our endeavors if we were to confine ourselves to striving for goals now visible and if new problems did not spring up all the time. It is knowing what we have not known before that makes us wiser men.

But often it also makes us sadder men. Though progress consists in part in achieving things we have been striving for, this does not mean that we shall like all its results or that all will be gainers. And since our wishes and aims are also subject to change in the course of the process, it is questionable whether the statement has a clear meaning that the new state of affairs that progress creates is a better one. Progress in the sense of the cumulative growth of knowledge and power over nature is a term that says little about whether the new state will give us more satisfaction than the old. The pleasure may be solely in achieving what we have been striving for, and the assured possession may give us little satisfaction. The question whether, if we had to stop at our present stage of development, we would in any significant sense be better off or happier than if we had stopped a hundred or a thousand years ago is probably unanswerable.

The answer, however, does not matter. What matters is the successful striving for what at each moment seems attainable. It is not the fruits of past success but the living in and for the future in which human intelligence proves itself. Progress is movement for movement's sake, for it is in the process of learning, and in the effects of having learned something new, that man enjoys the gift of his intelligence.

The enjoyment of personal success will be given to large numbers only in a society that, as a whole, progresses fairly rapidly.

In a stationary society there will be about as many who will be descending as there will be those rising. In order that the great majority should in their individual lives participate in the advance, it is necessary that it proceed at a considerable speed. There can therefore be little doubt that Adam Smith was right when he said: "It is in the progressive state, while society is advancing to the further acquisition, rather than when it has acquired its full complement of riches, that the condition of the labouring poor, of the great body of people, seems to be happiest and the most comfortable. It is hard in the stationary, and miserable in the declining state. The progressive state is really the cheerful and hearty state of all the different orders of society. The stationary is dull; the declining melancholy."[9]

It is one of the most characteristic facts of a progressive society that in it most things which individuals strive for can be obtained only through further progress. This follows from the necessary character of the process: new knowledge and its benefits can spread only gradually, and the ambitions of the many will always be determined by what is as yet accessible only to the few. It is misleading to think of those new possibilities as if they were, from the beginning, a common possession of society which its members could deliberately share; they become a common possession only through that slow process by which the achievements of the few are made available to the many. This is often obscured by the exaggerated attention usually given to a few conspicuous major steps in the development. But, more often than not, major discoveries merely open new vistas, and long further efforts are necessary before the new knowledge that has sprung up somewhere can be put to general use. It will have to pass through a long course of adaptation, selection, combination, and improvement before full use can be made of it. This means that there will always be people who already benefit from new achievements that have not yet reached others.

3. The rapid economic advance that we have come to expect seems in a large measure to be the result of this inequality and to be impossible without it. Progress at such a fast rate cannot proceed on a uniform front but must take place in echelon fashion, with some far ahead of the rest. The reason for this is concealed by our habit of regarding economic progress chiefly as an accumulation of ever greater quantities of goods and equipment. But the

rise of our standard of life is due at least as much to an increase in knowledge which enables us not merely to consume more of the same things but to use different things, and often things we did not even know before. And though the growth of income depends in part on the accumulation of capital, more probably depends on our learning to use our resources more effectively and for new purposes.

The growth of knowledge is of such special importance because, while the material resources will always remain scarce and will have to be reserved for limited purposes, the uses of new knowledge (where we do not make them artificially scarce by patents of monopoly) are unrestricted. Knowledge, once achieved, becomes gratuitously available for the benefit of all. It is through this free gift of the knowledge acquired by the experiments of some members of society that general progress is made possible, that the achievements of those who have gone before facilitate the advance of those who follow.

At any stage of this process there will always be many things we already know how to produce but which are still too expensive to provide for more than a few. And at an early stage they can be made only through an outlay of resources equal to many times the share of total income that, with an approximately equal distribution, would go to the few who could benefit from them. At first, a new good is commonly "the caprice of the chosen few before it becomes a public need and forms part of the necessities of life. For the luxuries of today are the necessities of tomorrow."[10] Furthermore, the new things will often become available to the greater part of the people only *because* for some time they have been the luxuries of the few.

If we, in the wealthier countries, today can provide facilities and conveniences for most which not long ago would have been physically impossible to produce in such quantities, this is in large measure the direct consequence of the fact that they were first made for a few. All the conveniences of a comfortable home, of our means of transportation and communication, of entertainment and enjoyment, we could produce at first only in limited quantities; but it was in doing this that we gradually learned to make them or similar things at a much smaller outlay of resources and thus became able to supply them to the great majority. A large part of the expenditure of the rich, though not intended for that end, thus

serves to defray the cost of the experimentation with the new things that, as a result, can later be made available to the poor.

The important point is not merely that we gradually learn to make cheaply on a large scale what we already know how to make expensively in small quantities but that only from an advanced position does the next range of desires and possibilities become visible, so that the selection of new goals and the effort toward their achievement will begin long before the majority can strive for them. If what they will want after their present goals are realized is soon to be made available, it is necessary that the developments that will bear fruit for the masses in twenty or fifty years' time should be guided by the views of people who are already in the position of enjoying them.

If today in the United States or western Europe the relatively poor can have a car or a refrigerator, an airplane trip or a radio, at the cost of a reasonable part of their income, this was made possible because in the past others with larger incomes were able to spend on what was then a luxury. The path of advance is greatly eased by the fact that it has been trodden before. It is because scouts have found the goal that the road can be built for the less lucky or less energetic. What today may seem extravagance or even waste, because it is enjoyed by the few and even undreamed of by the masses, is payment for the experimentation with a style of living that will eventually be available to many. The range of what will be tried and later developed, the fund of experience that will become available to all, is greatly extended by the unequal distribution of present benefits; and the rate of advance will be greatly increased if the first steps are taken long before the majority can profit from them. Many of the improvements would indeed never become a possibility for all if they had not long before been available to some. If all had to wait for better things until they could be provided for all, that day would in many instances never come. Even the poorest today owe their relative material well-being to the results of past inequality.

4. In a progressive society as we know it, the comparatively wealthy are thus merely somewhat ahead of the rest in the material advantages which they enjoy. They are already living in a phase of evolution that the others have not yet reached. Poverty has, in consequence, become a relative, rather than an absolute, concept. This does not make it less bitter. Although in an advanced

society the unsatisfied wants are usually no longer physical needs but the results of civilization, it is still true that at each stage some of the things most people desire can be provided only for a few and can be made accessible to all only by further progress. Most of what we strive for are things we want because others already have them. Yet a progressive society, while it relies on this process of learning and imitation, recognizes the desires it creates only as a spur to further effort. It does not guarantee the results to everyone. It disregards the pain of unfulfilled desire aroused by the example of others. It appears cruel because it increases the desire of all in proportion as it increases its gifts to some. Yet so long as it remains a progressive society, some must lead, and the rest must follow.

The contention that in any phase of progress the rich, by experimenting with new styles of living not yet accessible to the poor, perform a necessary service without which the advance of the poor would be very much slower will appear to some as a piece of far-fetched and cynical apologetics. Yet a little reflection will show that it is fully valid and that a socialist society would in this respect have to imitate a free society. It would be necessary in a planned economy (unless it could simply imitate the example of other more advanced societies) to designate individuals whose duty it would be to try out the latest advances long before they were made available to the rest. There is no way of making generally accessible new and still expensive ways of living except by their being initially practiced by some. It would not be enough if individuals were allowed to try out particular new things. These have their proper use and value only as an integral part of the general advance in which they are the next thing desired. In order to know which of the various new possibilities should be developed at each stage, how and when particular improvements ought to be fitted into the general advance, a planned society would have to provide for a whole class, or even a hierarchy of classes, which would always move some steps ahead of the rest. The situation would then differ from that in a free society merely in the fact that the inequalities would be the result of design and that the selection of particular individuals or groups would be done by authority rather than by the impersonal process of the market and the accidents of birth and opportunity. It should be added that only those kinds of better living approved by authority would be permissible and that they would be provided only for

those specially designated. But, in order for a planned society to achieve the same rate of advance as a free society, the degree of inequality that would have to prevail would not be very different.

There is no practicable measure of the degree of inequality that is desirable here. We do not wish, of course, to see the position of individuals determined by arbitrary decision or a privilege conferred by human will on particular persons. It is difficult to see however, in what sense it could ever be legitimate to say that any one person is too far ahead of the rest or that it would be harmful to society if the progress of some greatly outstripped that of others. There might be justification for saying this if there appeared great gaps in the scale of advance; but, as long as the graduation is more or less continuous and all the steps in the income pyramid are reasonably occupied, it can scarcely be denied that those lower down profit materially from the fact that others are ahead.

The objections spring from the misconception that those in the lead claim the right to something that otherwise would be available to the rest. This would be true if we thought in terms of a single redistribution of the fruits of past progress and not in terms of that continuous advance which our unequal society fosters. In the long run, the existence of groups ahead of the rest is clearly an advantage to those who are behind, in the same way that, if we could suddenly draw on the more advanced knowledge which some other men on a previously unknown continent or on another planet had gained under more favorable conditions, we would all profit greatly.

5. The problems of equality are difficult to discuss dispassionately when members of our own community are affected. They stand out more clearly when we consider them in their wider aspect, namely, the relation between rich and poor countries. We are then less apt to be misled by the conception that each member of any community has some natural right to a definite share of the income of his group. Although today most of the people of the world benefit from one another's efforts, we certainly have no reason to consider the product of the world as the result of a unified effort of collective humanity.

Although the fact that the people of the West are today so far ahead of the others in wealth is in part the consequence of a greater accumulation of capital, it is mainly the result of their more effective utilization of knowledge. There can be little doubt that

the prospect of the poorer, "undeveloped" countries reaching the present level of the West is very much better than it would have been, had the West not pulled so far ahead. Furthermore, it is better than it would have been, had some world authority, in the course of the rise of modern civilization, seen to it that no part pulled too far ahead of the rest and made sure at each step that the material benefits were distributed evenly throughout the world. If today some nations can in a few decades acquire a level of material comfort that took the West hundreds or thousands of years to achieve, is it not evident that their path has been made easier by the fact that the West was not forced to share its material achievements with the rest—that it was not held back but was able to move far in advance of the others?

Not only are the countries of the West richer because they have more advanced technological knowledge, but they have more advanced technological knowledge because they are richer. And the free gift of the knowledge that has cost those in the lead much to achieve enables those who follow to reach the same level at a much smaller cost. Indeed, so long as some countries lead, all the others can follow, although the conditions for spontaneous progress may be absent in them. That even countries or groups which do not possess freedom can profit from many of its fruits is one of the reasons why the importance of freedom is not better understood. For many parts of the world the advance of civilization has long been a derived affair, and, with modern communications, such countries need not lag very far behind, though most of the innovations may originate elsewhere. How long has Soviet Russia or Japan been living on an attempt to imitate American technology! So long as somebody else provides most of the new knowledge and does most of the experimenting, it may even be possible to apply all this knowledge deliberately in such a manner as to benefit most of the members of a given group at about the same time and to the same degree. But, though an egalitarian society could advance in this sense, its progress would be essentially parasitical, borrowed from those who have paid the cost.

It is worth remembering in this connection that what enables a country to lead in this world-wide development are its economically most advanced classes and that a country that deliberately levels such differences also abdicates its leading position—as the example of Great Britain so tragically shows. All classes there had profited from the fact that a rich class with old traditions had de-

manded products of a quality and taste unsurpassed elsewhere and that Britain, in consequence, came to supply to the rest of the world. British leadership has gone with the disappearance of the class whose style of living the others imitated. It may not be long before the British workers will discover that they had profited by being members of a community containing many persons richer than they and that their lead over the workers in other countries was in part an effect of a similar lead of their own rich over the rich in other countries.

6. If on an international scale even major inequalities may be of great assistance to the progress of all, can there be much doubt that the same is also true of such inequalities within a nation? Here, too, the over-all speed of advance will be increased by those who move fastest. Even if many fall behind at first, the cumulative effect of the preparation of the path will, before long, sufficiently facilitate their advance that they will be able to keep their place in the march. Members of a community containing many who are rich enjoy, in fact, a great advantage not available to those who, because they live in a poor country, do not profit from the capital and experience supplied by the rich; it is difficult to see, therefore, why this situation should justify a claim to a larger share for the individual. It seems indeed generally to be the case that, after rapid progress has continued for some time, the cumulative advantage for those who follow is great enough to enable them to move faster than those who lead and that, in consequence, the long-drawn-out column of human progress tends to close up. The experience of the United States at least seems to indicate that, once the rise in the position of the lower classes gathers speed, catering to the rich ceases to be the main source of great gain and gives place to efforts directed toward the needs of the masses. Those forces which at first make inequality self-accentuating thus later tend to diminish it.

Therefore, there must be two different ways of looking at the possibility of reducing inequality and abolishing poverty by deliberate redistribution—that is, from a long-term or a short-term point of view. At any given moment we could improve the position of the poorest by giving them what we took from the wealthy. But, while such an equalizing of the positions in the column of progress would temporarily quicken the closing-up of the ranks, it would, before long, slow down the movement of the whole

and in the long run hold back those in the rear. Recent European experience strongly confirms this. The rapidity with which rich societies here have become static, if not stagnant, societies through egalitarian policies, while impoverished but highly competitive countries have become very dynamic and progressive, has been one of the most conspicuous features of the postwar period. The contrast in this respect between the advanced welfare states of Great Britain and the Scandinavian countries, on the one hand, and countries like Western Germany, Belgium, or Italy, is beginning to be recognized even by the former.[11] If a demonstration had been needed that there is no more effective way of making a society stationary than by imposing upon all something like the same average standard, or no more effective way of slowing down progress than by allowing the most successful a standard only a little above the average, these experiments have provided it.

It is curious that, while in the case of a primitive country every detached observer would probably recognize that its position offered little hope so long as its whole population was on the same low dead level and that the first condition for advance was that some should pull ahead of the others, few people are willing to admit the same of more advanced countries. Of course, a society in which only the politically privileged are allowed to rise, or where those who rise first gain political power and use it to keep the others down, would be no better than an egalitarian society. But all obstacles to the rise of some are, in the long run, obstacles to the rise of all; and they are no less harmful to the true interest of the multitude because they may gratify its momentary passions.[12]

7. With respect to the advanced countries of the West it is sometimes contended that progress is too fast or too exclusively material. These two aspects are probably closely connected. Times of very rapid material progress have rarely been periods of great efflorescence of the arts, and both the greatest appreciation and the finest products of artistic and intellectual endeavor have often appeared when material progress has slackened. Neither western Europe of the nineteenth century nor the United States of the twentieth is eminent for its artistic achievements. But the great outbursts in the creation of non-material values seem to presuppose a preceding improvement in economic condition. It is perhaps natural that generally after such periods of rapid growth of

wealth there occurs a turning toward non-material things or that, when economic activity no longer offers the fascination of rapid progress, some of the most gifted men should turn to the pursuit of other values.

This is, of course, only one and perhaps not even the most important aspect of rapid material progress that makes many of those who are in its van skeptical of its value. We must also admit that it is not certain whether most people want all or even most of the results of progress. For most of them it is an involuntary affair which, while bringing them much they strive for, also forces on them many changes they do not want at all. The individual does not have it in his power to choose to take part in progress or not; and always it not only brings new opportunities but deprives many of much they want, much that is dear and important to them. To some it may be sheer tragedy, and to all those who would prefer to live on the fruits of past progress and not take part in its future course, it may seem a curse rather than a blessing.

There are, especially, in all countries and at all times groups that have reached a more or less stationary position, in which habits and ways of life have been settled for generations. These ways of life may suddenly be threatened by developments with which they have had nothing to do, and not only the members of such groups but often outsiders also will wish them to be preserved. Many of the peasants of Europe, particularly those in the remote mountain valleys, are an example. They cherish their way of life, though it has become a dead end, though it has become too dependent on urban civilization, which is continually changing, to preserve itself. Yet the conservative peasant, as much as anybody else, owes his way of life to a different type of person, to men who were innovators in their time and who by their innovations forced a new manner of living on people belonging to an earlier state of culture; the nomad probably complained as much about the encroachment of enclosed fields on his pastures as does the peasant about the encroachments of industry.

The changes to which such people must submit are part of the cost of progress, an illustration of the fact that not only the mass of men but, strictly speaking, every human being is led by the growth of civilization into a path that is not of his own choosing. If the majority were asked their opinion of all the changes involved in progress, they would probably want to prevent many of its

necessary conditions and consequences and thus ultimately stop progress itself. And I have yet to learn of an instance when the deliberate vote of the majority (as distinguished from the decision of some governing elite) has decided on such sacrifices in the interest of a better future as is made by a free-market society. This does not mean, however, that the achievement of most things men actually want does not depend on the continuance of that progress which, if they could, they would probably stop by preventing the effects which do not meet with their immediate approval.

Not all the amenities that we can today provide for the few will sooner or later be available to all; with such amenities as personal services, it would be clearly impossible. They are among the advantages which the wealthy are deprived of by progress. But most of the gains of the few do, in the course of time, become available to the rest. Indeed, all our hopes for the reduction of present misery and poverty rest on this expectation. If we abandoned progress, we should also have to abandon all those social improvements that we now hope for. All the desired advances in education and health, the realization of our wish that at least a large proportion of the people should reach the goals for which they are striving, depend on the continuance of progress. We have only to remember that to prevent progress at the top would soon prevent it all the way down, in order to see that this result is really the last thing we want.

8. We have so far concerned ourselves mainly with our own country or with those countries which we consider to be members of our own civilization. But we must take into account the fact that the consequences of past progress—namely, world-wide extension of rapid and easy communication of knowledge and ambitions—have largely deprived us of the choice as to whether or not we want continued rapid progress. The new fact in our present position that forces us to push on is that the accomplishments of our civilization have become the object of desire and envy of all the rest of the world. Regardless of whether from some higher point of view our civilization is really better or not, we must recognize that its material results are demanded by practically all who have come know them. Those people may not wish to adopt our entire civilization, but they certainly want to be able to pick and choose from it whatever suits them. We may regret, but cannot disregard, the fact that even where different civilizations are still pre-

served and dominate the lives of the majority, the leadership has fallen almost invariably into the hands of those who have gone furthest in adopting the knowledge and technology of Western civilization.[13]

While superficially it may seem that two types of civilization are today competing for the allegiance of the people of the world, the fact is that the promise they offer to the masses, the advantages they hold out to them, are essentially the same. Though the free and the totalitarian countries both claim that their respective methods will provide more rapidly what those people want, the goal itself must seem to them the same. The chief difference is that only the totalitarians appear clearly to know how they want to achieve that result, while the free world has only its past achievements to show, being by its very nature unable to offer any detailed "plan" for further growth.

But if the material achievements of our civilization have created ambitions in others, they have also given them a new power to destroy it if what they believe is their due is not given them. With the knowledge of possibilities spreading faster than the material benefits, a great part of the people of the world are today dissatisfied as never before and are determined to take what they regard as their rights. They believe as much and as mistakenly as the poor in any one country that their goal can be achieved by a redistribution of already existing wealth, and they have been confirmed in this belief by Western teaching. As their strength grows, they will become able to extort such a redistribution if the increase in wealth that progress produces is not fast enough. Yet a redistribution that slows down the rate of advance of those in the lead must bring about a situation in which even more of the next improvement will have to come from redistribution, since less will be provided by economic growth.

The aspirations of the great mass of the world's population can today be satisfied only by rapid material progress. There can be little doubt that in their present mood a serious disappointment of their expectations would lead to grave international friction—indeed, it would probably lead to war. The peace of the world and, with it, civilization itself thus depend on continued progress at a fast rate. At this juncture we are therefore not only the creatures but the captives of progress; even if we wished to, we could not sit back and enjoy at leisure what we have achieved. Our task must be to continue to lead, to move ahead along the path which

so many more are trying to tread in our wake. At some future date when, after a long period of world-wide advance in material standards, the pipelines through which it spreads are so filled that, even when the vanguard slows down, those at the rear will for some time continue to move at an undiminished speed, we may again have it in our power to choose whether or not we want to go ahead at such a rate. But at this moment, when the greater part of mankind has only just awakened to the possibility of abolishing starvation, filth, and disease; when it has just been touched by the expanding wave of modern technology after centuries or millennia of relative stability; and as a first reaction has begun to increase in number at a frightening rate, even a small decline in our rate of advance might be fatal to us.