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Freedom and State Planning

Individualism and Economic Order, by *F. A. Hayek*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948. 272 pp.)

Science and the Planned State, by *John R. Baker*. (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1945. 109 pp.)

The Passing of Parliament, second edition, by *G. W. Keeton*. (London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1954. 212 pp.)

REVIEW BY HENRY HAZLITT, *Business Columnist, Newsweek*

These three books have one major theme in common: the incompatibility of individual freedom with the constant growth of State power and State planning. But each deals with a different aspect of that theme. They supplement without duplicating each other.

Professor Hayek's volume is a collection of a dozen essays, some on broadly philosophical, and some on technical economic subjects. Among the titles are *The Use of Knowledge in Society*, *The Meaning of Competition*, "Free" Enterprise and Competitive Order, and *Socialist Calculation*. All of these essays bring great learning and intelligence to bear upon economic and social issues of central importance to our era. Every open-minded reader of this book will find his own understanding of these questions enriched, clarified, and deepened.

Space does not permit a discussion of these essays in detail. But the first in order, and the broadest in appeal, is also, fortunately, the least technical—*Individualism: True and False*. The "true" individualism which Hayek defends is the philosophy which "began its modern development with John Locke, and particularly with Bernard Mandeville and David Hume, and achieved full stature for the first time in the work of Josiah Tucker, Adam Ferguson, and Adam Smith and in that of their great contemporary, Edmund Burke—the man whom Smith described as the only person he ever knew who thought on economic subjects exactly as he did without any previous communication having passed between them. In the nineteenth century I find it

represented most perfectly in the work of two of its greatest historians and political philosophers: Alexis de Tocqueville and Lord Acton.”

This “true” individualism is contrasted with the “false” individualism that stems in the main from Rousseau. If men are too “individualistic” in the false sense, if they emphasize mere eccentricity and intransigence, and are too insistent in rejecting accepted traditions and conventions, demands are bound to arise for a dictatorial government with the power to impose on society the order which it will not produce itself.

True individualism, in short, presupposes a certain amount of *voluntary* conformity. Its opposition “is directed only against the use of *coercion* to bring about organization or association, and not against association as such. Far from being opposed to voluntary association, the case of the individualist rests, on the contrary, on the contention that much of what in the opinion of many can be brought about only by conscious direction, can be better achieved by the voluntary and spontaneous collaboration of individuals.”

True individualism therefore stresses the Rule of Law. The two chief institutions which it supports in the economic field are private property and the free competitive market. It demands, in brief, a strict limitation of all coercive and exclusive power “to those fields where it is indispensable to prevent coercion by other and...to reduce the total of coercion to a minimum.”

John R. Baker is a lecturer in zoology at Oxford. In his extremely lucid, well-argued, and readable little book, *Science and the Planned State*, he points out that scientists are being urged to regard their subject as existing solely for service to man’s material wants, to press for the central planning of scientific research, and to ally themselves with political groups which advocate the central planning of society in general. Scientists, he urges, should not accept this advice, for three reasons:

First, science does not exist solely to serve man’s material wants. It has a positive primary value as an end in itself, like music, art and literature. Truth has intrinsic excellence, in short, apart from its effects.

Secondly, any thoroughgoing scheme for the central planning of research would gravely damage science. Independent research and informal collaboration are more *efficient* than directed teams. Freedom of inquiry means the freedom of the research worker to decide what he will investigate. The attempt to regiment scientists into teams taking their orders from State bureaucrats must inhibit originality. Baker musters a wealth of evidence to show that, in the realm of pure science, mankind owes most to the independent investigator, or to the voluntary cooperation of two or three scientific friends. Directed teams are useful chiefly for the practical *application* of scientific discoveries—for “technology” rather than for “science”—and the Soviet government, Baker admits, has made great discoveries in applying scientific knowledge to practical ends. It is only natural that totalitarian states which are chiefly concerned with war or preparations for war should develop relatively great military might. This throws no light, however, on the question whether science prospers best under a totalitarian or a liberal regime.

“Only a small fraction of the whole of science is applicable to the intentional killing of human beings or to the defense against being intentionally killed.” Baker proves by ample evidence that pure science has done badly in Communist Russia, and that the level of discussion there is low.

Thirdly, totalitarianism, Baker points out, is precisely the form of government that is least in accord with scientific principles. It denies the fundamental principles of free speech and valid argument. Liberalism, on the other hand, is “the system which puts the liberty of the individual above all else and regards the state merely as a mechanism for minimizing people’s interference with one another’s freedom.”

G. W. Keeton is dean of the Faculty of Laws at University College, London. *The Passing of Parliament* is concerned with the political and legal aspects of the decline of individual freedom. During the past seventy years, he points out, the British Parliament, although still nominally supreme, has conferred on government departments and agencies increasingly wide powers of lawmaking. The jurisdiction of the courts and the legislative powers of the House of Lords have been seriously curtailed. Party discipline has intensified, so that a government may rely upon a firm majority in the House of Commons to give legal force to almost any measure it proposes. The Rule of Law has been gravely undermined. In consequence of these developments, the sovereignty of Parliament is in danger of becoming a fiction: all the necessary machinery for Cabinet dictatorship already exists.

Keeton suggests various legal and constitutional safeguards against this danger. But it is clear that he has little faith in the efficacy of such safeguards as long as the modern world is dominated by a collectivist philosophy. “If the temper of the times remains favorable to increasing interference with the lives of citizens toward the destruction of individual initiative... then any safeguards which legal and political ingenuity may devise” will vanish.

This scholarly and cogent book is a worthy successor to *The New Despotism* written by Lord Chief Justice Hewart in 1929, and an excellent companion to *Law and Orders* (1946) by Dr. C. K. Allen.

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