

Stubborn Facts *and* Hard Heads

ABOUT a dozen years ago, the London magazine, *Contemporary Review*, published an article by Colin Welch, a new Member of Parliament, reflecting on his first year at Whitehall. "Coming afresh to Parliament in this silver age," he wrote, "it is impossible not to feel one is too late. The great debate is over. The voice now silent was a great and uniquely English one: that of Milton and Locke, of Burke, Mill, Gladstone and Morley — [it was the voice] of liberalism, with a small 'l'."

Liberalism with a small "l" is the philosophy of the eighteenth century Whigs which inspired our Founding Fathers and the men who wrote *The Federalist*. Adam Smith outlined a system of economics to go with Whiggery, producing a science which has been

amplified in our day by such men as Ludwig Mises and F. A. Hayek. Present-day spokesmen for this tradition generally call themselves Conservatives or Right Wingers, for the word Liberalism has been captured by the opposition.

Certain of our contemporaries have turned this old liberal philosophy inside out, but they have kept the label. Contemporary Liberalism is an ideology which is the very reverse of classical liberalism. Today's Liberal has his ideological heroes: chiefly Marx, Veblen, and John Maynard Keynes. Today's Liberal is a man of the Left; he seeks political power in order to impose some sort of a "Deal" on the nation. He demands that government manage the economy; he finds religion useful only insofar as the churches focus on social action; he wants to control the schools in order to condition students to play their role in society.

The Reverend Mr. Opitz is a member of the staff of the Foundation for Economic Education, a seminar lecturer, and author of the book, *Religion and Capitalism: Allies Not Enemies*.

The contemporary Liberal has been described as a man with both feet planted firmly in mid-air.

A Man of the Right

I hope I have said enough to broadly identify these two schools of thought, Conservatism and Liberalism. And to let you know where I stand, I am a man of the Right, a Conservative.

I'm a Conservative, first of all, because men of this persuasion approach life with a healthy respect for its variety, its complexity, and its mysteries. Life is full of stubborn facts; reality is very much what it is and our wishes will not make it otherwise. It would be convenient on occasion if the multiplication table did not insist relentlessly that three times two is six; but the answer is always six. The facts are equally stubborn in other departments of life — not only in the natural and biological sciences, but in the religious, ethical, economic, and political sectors as well. We are surrounded by inexorable regularities, laws which we cannot rewrite because we did not write them in the first place. We must accommodate ourselves to these laws, in order to succeed. But there are those among us with hard heads, and this thought does not penetrate.

Somebody said that if you ask

a psychotic "How much is three times two?" he'll give you a definite answer. He knows three times two is seven. Ask a neurotic the same question, and this nervous chap is uncertain; the answer might be five or six or seven, but he's not sure. The Liberal knows the answer; he knows that three times two is six, but he resents it!

Getting the Message

Each of us, as he makes his way through life, might be compared to a blind man at the seashore using Braille to read an important message in the sand, written in code. The man feels a sense of urgency because the tide is rising and he knows that the waves will soon obliterate the message. But the blind man restrains his anxiety, knowing that he must not in his haste thrust his fingers roughly against the letters in the sand lest his heavy handedness disturb and erase them. He must make every move with great delicacy, touching the sand just firmly enough to trace the contours of each letter but not so heavily as to disturb the sand which forms them.

Tactile contact with irregularities in the sand puts the blind man in possession of a cluster of words. He decodes the words and gets the message; and thinking about the message, he gets its meaning.

Life's Meaning

Life is like that; its meaning is not self-evident, nor is it forced upon us. As we grow up into life we feel an inner compulsion to decipher its mysteries, discover some of its regularities, align our lives with what we believe to be real. Our means for doing this are meager, compared to the immense complexity of the task. We possess a spark of intelligence, our instincts are feeble, and we have spasmodic help from experience, tradition, and the conventional wisdom of our society. But with a little luck, we can decode the message and find its meaning. What are some of the things it tells us?

It tells us that we live on a restless planet, a globe where change goes on constantly. The continents float on a molten lake, and they slowly drift away from each other. The earth's crust fidgets with a deep anxiety and occasionally erupts to change the contours of the land. Erosion occurs and we lose huge chunks of the shoreline to the sea. Iron rusts, the dollar is devalued, and each one of us is a day older than he was yesterday.

Although we ourselves change without ceasing and live our lives amidst constant change, we nevertheless know that some things do *not* change. Some things are now what they always were and always

will be. I've referred to one such, the multiplication table. The table of atomic numbers is another instance of fixed relationships, immune to change. In short, there is a realm where things are permanent, a realm of Being in contrast to the realm of Becoming. Some things remain; they are beyond the reach of time, and so they do not grow old, nor do they decay or rust.

Theism

There is God — the same yesterday, today, and forever. You've heard rumors that God is dead. Certain conceptions of the deity are dead, and good riddance. The idea of God as a heavenly Santa Claus or God as a Cosmic Bellhop — these ideas are laid to rest and I hope they remain so. But the idea of an overarching meaning and purpose in the universe is not dead. This is a stubborn fact, and we find meaning and purpose in our own lives only as we come to terms with it.

Belief in God, or Theism, is not an easy philosophy, but the alternative to it — carried to its logical end — is impossible. Theism is the belief that a mental-spiritual dimension is at the very heart of things. It is the belief that Mind is ultimate, and not Matter. If we do not accept this position we are driven to affirm that Matter is ulti-

mate, with Mind being a mere derivative. But to say that Mind is a mere offshoot of matter is to downgrade our own reasoning processes and to discredit any conclusions we might reach by taking thought. Anti-theism makes Matter the master of Mind; it reduces the search for truth to the movement of material particles and thus refutes itself.

Life Without God

I believe that Theism is important, not because theology is my bag, but because of what happens when belief in God goes. First off, we lose our minds! Our mental processes are reduced to the level of a secretion from a gland.

Secondly, we lose a proper goal for life. When a society loses contact with the transcendent there will ensue a passionate pursuit of wealth and power. Every gain by the power-hungry nullifies freedom at that point; and the frantic pursuit of material gain will destroy the market economy.

Thirdly, the materialistic philosophy of the anti-theist throws out free will; it regards every human action as determined by physical causes, overlooking human creativity. And if man is not a freely choosing person, it's pretty silly to try to defend the free choice economic system, and even sillier to work for the free society where

men enjoy maximum liberty to choose and pursue their own life goals.

Fourth, and finally, there is no place for moral values in a universe where Matter is ultimate—where, in philosophical language, the distinction between right and wrong has no ontological status, no reality. In Communist countries, right is whatever the Party commands, and wrong is whatever the Party forbids. In such a society there is no appeal from arbitrary commands to a standard of justice above the law; goodness is equated to Party loyalty. On this point, at least, the comrades are logical; if God is dead, men are creatures of the State; its fiat is their law.

My second stubborn fact is that there is a moral order. The universe consists of more than brute facts; it contains ethical values. If there is a genuine moral law operating in 1973, it is the same moral law which operated in 1973 B.C. Men's interpretations of the moral law might vary, due to ignorance or wishful thinking. But the law which is subject to mistaken interpretations does not itself vary; it is what it is, and our thinking does not make it so or not so.

A primitive people might believe that the stars in a night sky are the souls of departed tribesmen,

and that the sun is a huge torch borne across the sky by the tribal deity. But these erroneous conceptions no more invalidate our astronomy than do the weird notions of right and wrong entertained by these same tribesmen — or by contemporary intellectuals — invalidate the ethical code built up around the Ten Commandments and the Golden Rule. There is a moral order with ideal norms and standards for flourishing human life, and in the long run no society can flout the moral order without courting destruction; every person must eventually come to terms with it if he would fulfill the potentials his life holds.

The third stubborn fact is human nature itself. A piece of silly putty can be molded into any shape you choose; throw it down and it will slowly subside into a formless mass. The human being, by contrast, is a dynamic transformer of his environment; he does not passively lapse into whatever the situation in which he finds himself. We are adaptable and durable creatures, but we adjust to realities only so that we might more effectively cope with the difficulties attendant upon survival and growth.

There are permanent elements in human nature because of our relationship to God and the moral order. There is in us a sacred essence, a private domain in each

person to which he alone has access and over which he alone possesses rights. "We are endowed by our Creator," the Declaration reads, "with certain unalienable rights," and it is a function of government to help secure those rights. We are not mere end products of natural and social forces; we are created beings. God made us free, and any man or institution which impairs liberty frustrates some purpose of the Creator.

Laws of Economics

God, the moral order, human nature; these are stubborn facts. And so are the laws of economics. When certain consequences follow invariably from certain antecedents we are entitled to speak of this regularity as a law. There are indeed economic laws, for we can say: Choose these policies and you will be visited by such and such consequences; the consequences are built into the policies and the only way you can avoid them is to reject those policies. For example:

- Whenever a government expands the money supply — which is the definition of inflation — the price level rises and people find that they cannot afford things.
- Impose rent controls and the growth rate of new housing declines, while present housing deteriorates.
- Pay a man for not working — Un-

employment. Compensation — and he will produce less, or stop working altogether.

- Legislate monopoly unionism and you institutionalize unemployment.
- Impose minimum wage laws and you do someone out of a job.
- Launch a government war on poverty and you increase the number of poor people.
- Allow the trading nations of the world to fix the price of each other's currency and you will suffer periodic devaluations of the dollar — or the mark, or the yen, or the pound.

I might lengthen this list — and I know that each of these blunt propositions needs to be backed by a book — but you get the idea.

The last of the stubborn facts I want to mention concerns government. I remarked earlier that people of my persuasion who today accept the Conservative label would have been called Whigs or classical liberals a couple of centuries ago. Classical liberalism marked a radical departure from all other political theories and practices. It declared that the end of government is justice between man and man, and maximum liberty for each person in society.

Questions of Power

From ancient times to the present, every political theorist — except the classical liberals — tried to frame answers for three questions.

The first question was: *Who shall wield power?* Whether the structure took the form of a monarchy backed by divine right or a democracy based on the so-called will of the majority, it was essential that power be wielded by the small group thought most fit to exercise rule. But it was not power simply for power's sake, but political power for the sake of economic advantage.

So the second question is: *For whose benefit shall this power be wielded?* The court at Versaille is a good example of what I mean. The French nobles favored by royalty lived rather well although they'd rather be caught dead than working. In virtue of their privileged position in the political structure, they got something for nothing. I daresay that each of you can think of parallel instances operating today, even in our own country.

Now, when someone in a society gets something for nothing through political channels, there are others in that society who are forced to accept nothing for something! So the third question is: *At whose expense shall this power be wielded?*

Let me repeat these three questions, for they provide an apt key to most political puzzles: Who shall wield power? For whose benefit? At whose expense? One might put

this in a formula: Votes and taxes for all; subsidies and privileges for us, our friends, and whoever else happens at the moment to pack a lot of political clout.

Equality Before the Law

The American system was to be based upon a different idea. It took seriously the ideas of God, the moral order, and the rights of persons. It discarded the notion of using government to arbitrarily disadvantage a selected segment of society, and instead embraced the idea of equality before the law. Government, in this scheme, functioned somewhat like an umpire on the baseball field. The umpire does not write the rules for baseball; they have emerged and been inscribed in rule books over the years and they lay down the norms as to how the game shall be played. If any person is on the field it is to be presumed that he has freely chosen to be there because he wants to play baseball; otherwise he'd be on the tennis court, the golf links, or in the poolroom. He wants to play ball, and in his thoughtful moments he knows that the game cannot go on unless there is an impartial arbiter on the field to interpret and enforce last resort decisions — such as ball or strike, or safe at first.

Baseball is inconceivable without a rule book, and that goes for

every other game as well. It would not be a baseball game if every man on the diamond merely did his own thing; it would be chaos. The rules of the game are not designed to hamper the player, although everyone who has ever played ball has had moments when he'd like the rules to bend a little in his favor; the rules are what make baseball possible. Or chess. Or tennis. Or any other area of life you'd care to mention. In the absence of rules there is sheer disorder, on the playing field as in life.

But surely not in the realm of art, someone might say. There may be economic laws, and Edmond Hoyle did compile his book of games; but Shakespeare did not write his poems "according to Hoyle." Great artists often compose or paint in a frenzy of inspiration, our objector might say; the creator knows that the rules are there to be broken; the artist is averse to order. At first thought this rebuttal does seem to carry some weight, for some modern composers do disregard the rules; they compose without melody, without rhythm, without harmony — without talent. But there is magnificent order in a Beethoven symphony; the great composer did not write his symphonies "by the book," but most emphatically he did not discard the rules. There is indeed an affinity between the art-

ist and disorder, but only in the sense that disorder or chaos challenges the artist to bring order and harmony out of it.

The order present in all real art might not be immediately obvious to the untrained eye or ear, and in great art it is artfully concealed. Go to the Parthenon and contemplate the frieze sculpted by Phidias. Motion and fluidity strike the eye, but as Gerald Heard writes: "Scrape down the figures to their main structural lines and there, clear and hard as the rib and fret-work of an Arabian vault, stands out the geometrical design, holding all this apparent streaming fluidity in an iron order."

Who would dare argue that Shakespeare's genius was blunted by having to conform to the fixed pattern of the sonnet? This ready-made poetic form actually enhanced the poet's freedom; it allowed him to spend all his genius on content.

Apart from the various forms a written language might take — poetry, novels, essays, dramas, and so on — there is the language itself. Sometimes the niceties of grammar seem to lie in wait just to ensnare the ideas that rush pell-mell out of our minds, or we bog down in a syntactical quagmire. But if it weren't for the language which we absorb as our mother tongue we would have no way to

express our ideas, and our ideas would be of the foggiest sort. Not even the most brilliant mind conceivable could invent a new language from scratch; and even if the miracle occurred he could not use it to communicate. The rules of language, which sometimes are annoying, are at the same time a vehicle for our freedom; just as, for a swimmer, the water whose friction impedes his progress provides the buoyancy without which swimming would be impossible.

Chaos and Disorder

I have belabored this point only because we live at a time of passionate rebellion against the very concept of order, a time when disorder is the new thing, the "in" thing in every department of human affairs. Such key words as Law, Order, Norms, Standards, and the like, are dirty words today. Abandonment of the rules is confused with freedom; the slave to impulse and whim thinks he is a free man. The result is chaos in the souls of men and anarchy in society.

Every society must find ways of dealing with people whose erratic conduct deviates significantly from the norms of human behavior acceptable in that society. Those who cannot figure out what these norms are, or who know but refuse to conform to them, are the crimi-

nals and the psychopaths. In a humane society such people are treated with understanding, compassion and Christian charity; but no society can long survive a takeover by the antisocial. By definition, this is the case. It must, therefore, be able to distinguish social from antisocial conduct, and this our society is having trouble doing.

So far has the erosion of norms gone in our society that the idea of abnormality has just about disappeared. Standards of right and wrong have crumpled, the rule book has been pitched out the window, and each one of us is advised merely to do his own thing. Anything goes; every variety of conduct and any kind of life style is to be tolerated because, it is alleged, no one can say what is normal and what is not. What is right for one man may not be right for another, we hear it said, so let every person decide for himself what is right for him. Anything goes; everything must be tolerated.

No Standards Remain

At this point we turn the corner and the relativist is hoist with his own petard. The relativist can propound his theory and practice his eccentricities only so long as most other people refuse to accept relativism and continue to live

straight. But as soon as the balance begins to tip toward relativism, the result is nihilism. If everything must be tolerated, then *intolerance* is sanctioned. If anything goes, and there's no way to prove that anything is better or worse than anything else, then intolerance is no worse and no better than tolerance! Tolerant is what a person should be if he's so inclined; and intolerant is what a person should be if his conscience impels him in that direction. Having abandoned norms and standards, we have no way of deciding that one thing is better than another, or that this is right and that wrong. "If it feels good," reads the bumper sticker, "do it."

Each of us has his inner world, but we also live in the world outside. Rules and standards, right and wrong, are in the area that exists outside of and above individual subjectivity; feelings, on the other hand, are strictly private, inhabiting the individual's inner domain. Norms are objective; they are "out there," and they are what they are regardless of what we might think they are. A toothache is subjective, it belongs to you alone; it is wholly private, not public at all. There's no limit to the number of persons who can come to a knowledge of the norms which apply to human behavior, but only you experience your pain.

The only response another person can make to your pain is to sympathize.

Go back now to the bumper sticker: "If it feels good, do it." The only referent here is to the domain of individual subjectivity. If an individual says that something feels good he has made an ultimate judgment, for no one is in a position to get inside another and tell him otherwise. There's nothing to discuss; preferences and likes are final. It might occur to you to tell another that the wrong things make him feel good, that his affectional nature is warped and perverted; otherwise, he wouldn't take pleasure in beating up old ladies. But this fellow is a bit of a philosopher too, so he reminds you that he has abandoned norms, and without this plumbline there's no reason why he should not prefer his feelings to yours — which, in fact, he does.

It's another story if we amend the advice to read: "If it's right, do it." Now here there is something to discuss, for the idea of right is "out there." We can talk things over and possibly come to an agreement that the proposed line of action is indeed right, or not; and further, if it is right, whether doing it now is proper, or expedient, or whatever.

I do not mean to suggest that every person who innocently re-

peats the catchphrase, "Do your own thing," is a nihilist, with full awareness of the implications of this position. He might say, Do your own thing, so long as it doesn't hurt anyone; or Do your own thing and allow everyone else the same latitude. But such a person has appealed to a norm, the ancient norm, "Injure no man." This norm implies others, and pretty soon you've restored the rule book. A warning is in order: Those who begin by adopting the vocabulary of nihilism may end by becoming its victims.

The Cult of Abnormality

Having opened the can of worms this far, permit me to pry back the lid a little further and offer a clinical example: gay liberation. Homosexuality is a sad fact of life, and because homosexuality is not a life-affirming but rather a life-denying attitude, it comes to the fore especially during periods of a nation's decadence. When all standards are in doubt, the norms of maleness and the norms of femaleness become unclear, and so we hear it said that homosexuality is just as normal as heterosexuality. They pose the question: Who is to say what is normal? The question is intended to be merely rhetorical, supplying its own answer, that no one is entitled to say what is normal and what is abnormal. But if

the rule book has been discarded and there is a general rejection of the idea that there are standards which men and women should try to live up to, then ruthless dealing with our fellows is no more to be condemned than kindness and generosity is to be applauded.

It is a fact of the human situation as such, that if a male does cut a sorry figure as a man he will cut an even sorrier figure in the feminine role; likewise the female. Such persons cut themselves off from the understanding and help they need from the rest of us when they employ the false and desperate argument that no one can say what is normal. The argument will eventually backfire in the form of hostility and intolerance on the part of those who have been informed that this reaction is just as normal as the opposite attitude, and twice as much fun.

The Realm of Necessity

I have talked at length about stubborn facts, unchanging regularities, rules, order – and the necessity thereby imposed upon us to conform our conduct to the way things are. I have emphasized the domain of necessity only because its imperatives are widely ignored or denied today. But if this were the whole story, or even the most important part of it, we'd come away with the notion of a mechan-

ically arranged universe in which man cheerlessly and robot-like serves out his sentence under a rigid prison routine of eat, sleep, and work. This is not at all what I have in mind, for such a grim caricature of life would be an affront to our Creator and omit the most important fact of our inner nature, its radical freedom! There is a realm of necessity, but there is also a realm of freedom; successful living demands that we give each its due.

Imagine yourself at the poker table. You are dealt a particular hand. The cards you hold may give you an edge or they may impose a handicap; in either case it is the way you exercise your freedom to play your hand that really counts; it's a combination of luck and skill, with skill being the critical factor.

Now take a look at baseball. I have stressed the importance of the rule book in baseball; but men sitting down to chew over the rules is not baseball. We couldn't play baseball without the rule book, but the game itself is something else again. It is the incredible batting, pitching, fielding, and strategic skills of the players and coach; it is the excitement of Yankee Stadium, the constant murmur of the crowd, the tension that mounts in tight situations; it is winning, and the horseplay in the locker room. This is the game of baseball, and

the only function of the rule book is to make all this possible.

***If Nature Were Unpredictable,
We Could Not Survive***

It is much the same in life; it is only from the neutral base of order and dependability in nature and society that we can exercise our freedom creatively. If nature were completely unpredictable we could not survive, and if we could not count on our fellow men in a variety of situations society would collapse. There are stubborn facts we cannot change, which we must simply accept, to which we must adjust ourselves; but there is also the infinitely expansible domain of our freedom where our capacity to create tips the balance in the direction we will it to go. The things at stake here have been well put in the old prayer: "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

When we do understand the difference, our freedom begets a new awareness of the majesty of the order where necessity prevails; we are awed by its mysteries and charmed by its beauties. Beyond mere survival we get a bonus every time we interact with our world. Reflect for a moment on our five senses; sight, taste, hearing, smell, and touch.

The animal uses his eyes to survive, to spot his prey and to see his foes before they see him. Our eyes also serve a utilitarian purpose, but in addition we can look with them, and when we look we find sheer delight in the colors, the patterns, and the visible arrangements of our planetary home. Beyond this, there is reading, there are the pleasures of art and architecture.

We get a second bonus with the sense of taste. It is conceivable that we might be fed intravenously with all the food elements we need for survival but with no accompanying gustatory pleasure; I don't suppose an earthworm has a palate and the same is true of most other forms of life. How come we human beings are so lucky?

Then there is the gift of hearing. There is survival value in being able to pick up sound waves and be thus warned of danger, but that's only a minor part of the auditory world. There's the murmur of the wind in the pines, the song of a bird, the babble of a brook, the roar of the surf, the sizzle of a steak, the sound of music. Music is a realm unto itself, and without it, the philosopher said with pardonable exaggeration, life would be a mistake.

Nor should we overlook the sense of smell which takes us into the subtle world of fragrances. In-


cense has performed its humble service for the sacred since the dawn of time, and the art of the perfumer antedates history. The blossom and the fruit strike the olfactory sense and an ancient racial memory stirs.

And it is not only for the blind that the world of touch — the feel of textures, contours, warmth, resilience — exists.

Life pours out its richness in a veritable torrent, but we stand alongside this flood trying to scoop up the precious stuff with a thimble! Our container is too small; that's why we take in only a fraction of what's available to us. The bottleneck is within us, in our own thick heads! We've got to enlarge our capacity; exchange the thimble for a tea cup; the tea cup for a bucket; the bucket for a barrel. We've got to work on ourselves, for there's little any person can do for another until he has done

his utmost with his own being. As Gerald Heard put it, we've got to grow as big inside as the whale has grown outside. Some few have made it, and what they have done we can emulate.

Harry Emerson Fosdick tells about baby sitting his five-year-old niece. The child got restless so Fosdick went to an old copy of *Life* magazine and tore out a page on which was a map of the world. He cut this into a number of little pieces and then told his niece, "Now put this map together." He set the child at a table and went back to work in his study.

In ten minutes the child popped into his study and announced that she had finished. This seemed incredible so Fosdick asked her how she had done it. "There was a man's picture on the other side of the map," said the child, "and when I put the man together the world came out right." 

Communication

How do you persuade a man to change his mind? You don't threaten him, you don't lecture him, you don't accuse him of evil crimes. You show your own security in other ideas and you keep on exhibiting evidence of the validity of those ideas. You don't especially try to *prove* anything; that only makes people suspicious; you get busy creating the good society filled with good men of the sort you say flourish naturally under the rules of your society.... You concentrate on production of the persuasive facts.

IDEAS ON



LIBERTY

From MANAS, September 26, 1962



The Passing Parade

R. W. DEMERS

TOO FREQUENTLY too many of us ignore the clear, concise lesson to be learned by incidents and situations which we view only as passing commonplace, and principally a source of boredom or delay, or both.

Consider the situation which has surely confronted us all on frequent occasions — a long, rumbling freight train has crossed our path, and what is our usual reaction? We wait, of necessity, but we are impatient, irritable, and aggravated

at the inconvenience this rolling behemoth has imposed upon us.

What might have been, or could still be, a much more fruitful reaction? Could we not find a wealth of concrete, specific examples of the amazing success formula which has blessed us as the most free and independent of all people? As the cars roll by, starting with the chugging diesels to the rickety caboose, we have a graphic, demonstrative testimony to the genius and industry of free enterprise, acting in concert across a vast span of miles.

Long refrigerated cars bearing

Mr. Demers is a vocational counselor in Veneta, Oregon.