

*The Voluntary Society*

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The honor of a Tanner lectureship tempts all the instincts of pretentiousness. It is particularly seductive to one who, in his two most recent tours of servitude, has been expected to masquerade rhetoric as wisdom. Universities are now responsible for the secular liturgy of our societies. The President, or in your case the Vice Chancellor, is clothed in the pomp of high priest. As for an Ambassador, he had better not venture outside his tied residence without a small card in his left pocket inscribed with banalities suitable for laying wreaths, opening exhibitions, or responding to toasts.

Both of my recent professions were highly verbal. But they did not demand the specific gravity of definitive knowledge of any field. They dwelt, rather, in the region which has been called the horse platitudes.

Actually, at the risk of being a traitor to my former callings, I would also note another attribute of both the academic and the diplomatic professions. That is timidity. How perverse. The one clothed in the privileges of academic freedom, the other protected by the insulation of diplomatic immunity. One might think that, thus fortified against normal citizen risks and responsibilities, both professions would be marked by outspoken boldness. Not at all. The timidity of the scholar is best caught by a remark made to me by a friend and colleague when I became Provost of Yale in 1960. He said, "Kingman, you will find that your faculties are divided into two classes. One very large, the other very small indeed. The small minority are productive. The vast majority are, by their own urgent admission, perfectionists."

There is also another dimension to academic timidity, that is specialism. Particularly in American academic life, you do not find the humanist, particularly the historian, even the economist

or student of society, certainly not the academic jurist, venturing in learned print beyond his narrow specialty. He would run the risk of being called a mere publicist. Scholarly publication is dominated by those who can claim to know more than anyone else about some tightly confined corner of the cosmos.

The timidity of the diplomat derives simply from his bureaucratic dependence. He is a staff member far from home. In the very short term, let alone the long run, events may prove him wrong. Even if "in his heart he knows he's right" the authorities back home may disagree, and disagreement may fester into disapproval. His career is at risk. So diplomatic reporting is always couched in the third person. "It is suggested that. . ." "Foreign office officials indicate that . . ." "Some concern has been expressed that unless . . ." Rarely "I believe," never "I am convinced."

So three cheers for Professor Tanner. There is no way one can respond to his charge to talk about "human values" without breaking out of the ruts of disciplinary specialization. There is no way a lecturer who would be true to the mandate of these lectures can avoid affirming his own convictions.

You, Lord Ashby, so admirably vindicated Professor Tanner's hope in your lectures at the University of Utah in 1979,<sup>1</sup> that it is perilous indeed to try to follow in your footsteps. But it is fun to try.

I assume, Mr. President, that it is the lecturer's privilege to give whatever meaning to his ambiguous title he wishes. When I chose "The Voluntary Society" as the banner under which I preferred to march through these lectures I did have something in mind! The purpose of the State should be to permit life to be as voluntary as possible for its citizens.

The voluntary life has many components. Freedom of choice; but also, the right to be committed to a calling or a cause. Free-

<sup>1</sup> Eric Ashby, "The Search for an Environmental Ethic," delivered at the University of Utah, April 4, 1979, and published in *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, Volume I, 1980.

dom from coercion; but also, the right to be secure in person and property. For almost all it presupposes minimal assurance of health, welfare, and decency. But it also may, in some measure, require risk, or at least freedom from boredom. In most cases it connotes the ability to develop special relationships with family and friends, yet it also means some measure of private autonomy. It is more than welfare. It is more than the protection of law. But it includes and gives high priority to both.

I use the broad and admittedly ambiguous notion of a Voluntary Society in order not to be restricted to a single concept of the voluntary life. I also use it because it suggests to me both the scope and limits of the proper task of the State. I say scope because the State must enhance both the capacities and the opportunities of the citizen. I say limits, because in our countries the State should not make the choice for the citizen about how to use his capacities, how to select among his opportunities.

This sounds obvious to the point of banality to the Anglo-American ear. But that is only because for a long time now you have not, and, from our founding, we Americans have not, looked to the state to provide, let alone impose, life's purpose and direction for the citizen. Both of us have rejected an "Escape from Freedom" to borrow the title of the American edition of Eric Fromm's classic work.<sup>2</sup> To be sure, even in our two countries, despite Karl Popper's warning,<sup>3</sup> the Open Society still has its enemies. But I am assuming with modest confidence that our peoples as a whole will not find the voluntary life in blind conformity to some creed or catechism handed down from above by either secular or religious authority.

This sense that purpose must be individual is a tradition we share. And as one looks around the world at nations large and small who seek, or who in this century have sought, to organize

<sup>2</sup> *Escape from Freedom* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1941).

<sup>3</sup> *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, 5th ed., rev. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966).

all of life around some secular or religious God and his dictates, this Anglo-American tradition is, to say the least, “distinctive.” We both insist that life can be truly voluntary only if there is a chance to exercise individual choice.

However, for life to be voluntary, as Ralf Dahrendorf has pointed out, “ligatures” are as important to what he calls “Life Chance” as choice is.<sup>4</sup> If there is no commitment to some-one, some group, some community beyond the self, choice alone will not make life voluntary. In the magnificent questions found in the wisdom of the Talmud:

If I am not for myself  
 who shall be for me?  
 But, if I am for myself alone,  
 what am I?

In our pursuit of a voluntary society it might be said that each of our countries has emphasized the relative importance of choice and of ligatures according to our own history, and also according to our own physical and economic circumstances. We Americans have tended to emphasize mobility, often at the expense of ligatures. You, perhaps, have relied upon ligatures to keep life voluntary, often at the expense of mobility. (You and I will both take satisfaction and relief from the assurance that this minor observation is the first and last one I plan to make about your society.) The balance of these lectures is addressed to a distinctively American problem: how does a society which has relied upon mobility to keep life voluntary react when the promise of mobility begins to fade? (I would leave it to others more intimately experienced to address themselves to the equally interesting query of how a society which has relied upon ligatures to keep life voluntary should react when the ligaments of family, community, craft, and calling begin to lose their ability to bind.)

<sup>4</sup> *Life Chances: Approaches to Social and Political Theory* (London: Meidenfeld & Nicolson, 1979).

I intend to talk about the Voluntary Society in purely American terms, although many of my notions occurred to me as a result of the salubrious circumstance of removal to these islands for my happy Ambassadorial years. I became much more aware than I had been of the distinctive, if not unique, characteristics of the American experience, particularly the American approach to achievement of a voluntary society.

The first lecture will elaborate these characteristics. It will also discuss the challenge posed for them by the realities of the present world. The second lecture will suggest some ways by which American society might be kept voluntary in spite of these challenges.

We Americans are a nation of skeptics, even cynics, about established authority. We were born that way. We declared our independence largely on the grounds of the right of Englishmen not to be pushed around by absentee authority. In the former colony of New York we were even on the verge of rejecting the common law because of the discretion it accorded appointed judicial officers, too reminiscent of Crown appointees. We were even tempted by the seeming clarity of the civil law tradition of our French allies. Happily, that temptation did not last long.

The edifice of democratic government in the newly United States was not shaped by prolonged and gradual whittling away at supreme central authority as were those of our British and Continental forbears. We, in our newly won freedom from colonial fealty, were most reluctant, most gingerly in our creation of any central authority at all. The United States Constitution reeks with distrust of government. First it insists that the delegation of power by the states to the federal government is limited, and those powers not expressly given are reserved to the states. There was and is an acceptance of the fact that there are some things the federal government just cannot do, no matter how much public support there may be for them. The United States Constitution is not a self-denying ordinance. It embodies a limited grant of power and

other powers are denied, not by the central self, but by the several states and ultimately the people. It is woven around a determination to avoid the creation of a new absentee political landlord who might arrogate to himself more powers than intended by those who created him.

This conviction — that power should be absolutely limited, not just made accountable — differentiates our constitution from those of our ancestors, who might well claim that “parliamentary supremacy” is more truly “democratic” than the American model with its constitutional checks on the popular will.

The spirit of distrust inspired not only the dispersal of political power among the several states, but also insisted upon the trifurcation of power among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of the central government.

Not only to the parliamentary eye but to some American commentators today this separation of powers is a prescription for governmental paralysis. It was, and, with some exceptions, still is. However, it is a price we seem willing to pay for assurance that discretionary power shall not be unleashed and that even an overwhelming majority shall not find it easy to succumb to the tempting convenience of tyranny.

The arbiters of conflicting jurisdictions, state and federal, the monitors of the exercise of power, and the guardians of this requirement that there must be a constitutional basis for both legislative and executive acts are, of course, the federal courts. It is in the political genes of my country to insist that some objective reviewing body, independent of electoral fear or favor, should have the authority to hold both legislature and executive to account by constitutional standards. Some objective locus of power to determine whether the asserted lawmaking or administrative power exists at all and, even if it does, to ask whether it has been exercised according to the processes of law which the Constitution prescribes is central to the American tradition.



The distrust of power implicit in the federal system, explicit in the Bill of Rights, was designed to secure that freedom from coercion in which Friedrich Hayek puts such store in his *Constitution of liberty*.<sup>5</sup> It is a keystone in the American foundation of a voluntary society.

But a nation's character and outlook on life is only in part a function of its governmental institutions. It is the individual experiences of a people that sometimes matter more. We Americans are a nation of people all of whom (with the exception of the American Indians) have immigrant ancestors. With the exception of the victims of the slave trade, our ancestors were voluntary refugees. The frontier, in turn, was pushed westward by "internal refugees." Escape from oppression, escape from boredom — whatever the negative cause — all were inspired by hope that the fields would be greener in some distant place.

As Oscar Handlin has pointed out in his classic book, *The Uprooted*, peasants from Europe were often miserable, alienated strangers in the ghettos into which they were dumped after a harsh passage.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless they bore the burden, the moral burden of to some extent having chosen their lot.

There was no expectation that their children would die where they were born and grew up. They were kept alive in spirit by the hope, the plausible hope, that their sons and daughters would do better than they had done.

This hope was made plausible and was in many cases vindicated because of the country's geographical expansion. Even more important was its phenomenal economic growth. Ever-widening prosperity, although punctuated by occasional depressions and panics, meant that each generation outdid their parents. Yesterday's luxuries became today's necessities on the ever-rising tide of affluence.

<sup>5</sup> *The Constitution of Liberty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).

<sup>6</sup> *The Uprooted*, 2d ed. (Boston: Atlantic-Little Brown, 1973).

Some were left out because of race. Some regions, like the deep South at the turn of the century, did not share in the spread of industrialization. More recently, once-prosperous areas, like mine in New England, lost their historic economic base of industrial leadership. But migration of labor responded to the call of employment opportunity. "Depressed areas" were deserted as areas of growth beckoned. Mobility, mass mobility, probably had more to do with keeping life voluntary than any other aspect of the American experience. There was for many Americans, even if not for all, a sense of having a second chance, an opportunity for a fresh start, if not for yourself, at least for your children.

This fact, or at least the feeling, of being able to escape inherited, perpetual misery has, I believe, been the most central feature of American life.

Opportunity, of course, is not just a question of freedom of choice. Options depend upon capacities, too. But the higher and higher levels of economic prosperity, coupled with a tradition of compulsory public education in elementary and secondary schools and the spawning of state colleges and universities, did mean that the barriers to the acquisition of skill and talent were steadily lowered from generation to generation. Hayek and Friedman were right in that freedom from official coercion and freedom of market choice did provide a fruitful seedbed for the nurture and harvest of widely dispersed talent and skill, ingenuity and creativity. The resulting level of productivity and prosperity seemed well suited to provide not only a minimal but for many a prosperous life. Riches were thought to be fairly, albeit roughly, distributed in accordance with contribution. Margaret Mead was not excessively chauvinistic when she wrote in her wartime morale-boosting book *And Keep Your Powder Dry* that in America there was a widespread confidence that success was more related to skill and effort than it was to favor or status.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> New York: William Morrow, 1942.

Possibly because of our reliance on escape, on mobility, on the fresh start and the second chance we had to invent synthetic “ligatures.” Associations without roots abounded: Rotary Clubs, Y.M.C.A.’s, trade and professional associations, fraternal groups, all in the nature of “portable communities.” The nation of joiners which de Tocqueville had earlier remarked became a nation of those who were fiercely loyal and sentimental — and happily generous — in the alumni associations tying them to schools and colleges which in later life they might see only through the spirited haze of alumni reunions.

In terms of keeping life voluntary, however, as long as the hope for improvement and the promise of choice were real for enough people, the gains of mobility were worth the loss of roots and ligatures.

Finally, although we cannot expect that personal purpose will be given to us in tablets from a latter-day Moses descending from the clouded mountain top; there is a sense in which life will be less than voluntary unless there is confidence in the ends and means of the society.

I would submit, Mr. President, that if the citizen does not feel that the society or nation of which he is a part has some worthy purpose, he may have all the personal capacity and opportunity he desires, his intimate bonds may be strong, but still life will not be truly voluntary, at least not as voluntary as it might be.

At times in our history Americans have exhibited a national self-confidence bordering on hubris. One need only recall Washington’s farewell address, the era of Senator Benton’s “Manifest Destiny,” and Henry Luce’s proclamation of the “American Century.”

Almost everything I have said thus far might have been said by an optimistic American traditionalist of the late nineteenth century. At least it is in tune with the sentimental nostalgia which seems to be the current yearning of so many Americans.

What is it, then, that makes us feel instinctively that the validity of this traditional American dream is now challenged by

reality? For the balance of this lecture I would like to try to touch on some of the factors which seem to challenge the historic American approaches to the task of keeping society as voluntary as possible.

Let me first state them cryptically and then return to their elaboration.

First there is the evolution of the welfare state into what I have referred to elsewhere as the "entitlement state." This poses seemingly intractable obstacles to keeping government accountable to the rule of law.

Second is the spreading fact and feeling of captivity in large, impersonal institutions, public and private, often directed from some remote headquarters.

Third is the barrier to a fresh start and the second chance erected by the degree of specialization increasingly required by all callings.

Fourth is the limits to growth, the disappearance of the physical frontier, the slow-down of economic growth; also what the late Professor Hirsch had in mind in his final work, *The Social Limits to Growth*.

Fifth is the difficulty of defining success in terms which make ambition worthy.

The responsibility of government, not only in the vast area of national security, but increasingly in the meeting of social needs and its responsibility for the level of economic activity generally, has made the citizen, both corporate and individual, more and more dependent upon public expenditures. I call this the entitlement state, not because it is literally confined to or even dominated by automatic entitlements such as social security, veterans' benefits, Medicare, and agricultural subsidies, but because increasingly there is a widespread sense of dependence upon discretionary federal outlay. Often the disbursement is in the name of national security. The defense budget is so enormous. The specifications for defense procurement are often so detailed and specialized as to defy effec-

tive competitive bidding. The political pressure for defense contracts is so important politically under the federal system. The “bail-out” is not limited to Lockheed, or Chrysler, the loan guarantee is not limited to merchant shipbuilding. The contractual allocation of discretionary federal support determines the fate of firms and of entire regions.

It is in the effort to assure minimal human capacity in health, education, and living conditions, however, that the scope of federal spending has burgeoned. Individuals as well as businesses are increasingly dependent upon federal largesse.

This role of government as dominant purchaser, significant lender and guarantor, and in the case of the arts and sciences as grantor, has radically changed the American vision of limited government, limited in its powers and accountable to the rule of law for the exercise of those powers.

Whole regions and states have become crucially dependent for their destiny on whether or not a large contract is lodged in the area. The economic sunburst in the sunbelt was not wholly dissociated from the location of the Space Agency in Texas. The vitality of the West Coast and the revival of New England has not been unrelated to defense contracts to firms appropriately named United Technologies, General Dynamics, and the industries applying the miracles of the microchip and the mini-computer, in areas bearing such names as “Silicon Valley.”

The role of federal spending, of course, has changed the relationship between state and federal governments. The independence and self-determination of the states has been significantly eroded by the dependence of their economic prosperity on federal spending. Also the relationship between the executive and the Congress has been altered. In one sense the executive is more dependent than ever upon the Congress; for the power of the purse and the requirement of annual appropriations for an expanded scope and variety of substantive programs has enormously strengthened the hand of the legislature vis á vis the executive.

On the other hand, the power of the executive to decide on a case-by-case basis who will receive the federal bounty has created a degree of political dependence of Congressional delegations upon executive favor which was unknown in simpler times.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the pervasive dependence of persons, companies, and communities on the allocation of federal funds is the fact that to a very large extent the exercise of this enormous power escapes the rule of law. Only in the case of alleged willful or grossly negligent abuse can the failure to award a contract be questioned. It is even more difficult to question the decision to extend or withhold a subsidized loan. Certainly the failure to award a grant is almost beyond legal scrutiny. This is because of the quaint fiction that receipt of the federal financial support is a privilege, not a right. Broad discretion is accorded to the administrator. The courts will not easily be persuaded to question its exercise. So, in large areas the citizen has become the dependent of the state, and to a very large extent he has no recourse to objective review if he feels poorly dealt with. A. V. Dicey may have been a premature calamity-howler when he viewed with alarm the consequences of the state's assumption of relatively primitive welfare responsibilities at the close of the nineteenth century.<sup>8</sup> If one takes seriously the citizen's non-dependence on his government as an important element in the voluntary society, perhaps Dicey's time has now come.

A second dimension of this relative immunity of the spending power from the rule of law is the ease with which the Congress can make the loans, the subsidies, or the grants contingent upon the recipient's compliance with a variety of conditions. These conditions may have nothing at all to do with the performance of the activity which the government is assisting. The conditional contract or grant, carrying with it the penalty of forfeiture for breach

<sup>8</sup> *Law and Public Opinion in England During the Nineteenth Century*, 2d ed. (London: Macmillan, 1962).

of condition, has been the principal instrument for securing federal compliance with various policies concerning the employment of women and minorities. Whatever the substantive merits of the policies involved, it is clear that the leverage afforded by attaching conditions to federal expenditures bypasses accountability to constitutional standard.<sup>9</sup> Covert regulation by way of the conditioned grant or subsidy or loan has subverted the ancient American effort to keep the government from intruding on the voluntary, self-determined life of the citizen, the institution, the locality.

The enormous expansion of government and the spreading sense of dependence upon political favor has been matched, maybe exceeded, by the growth of and the impersonalization of private organizations. As the number of firms producing a product or performing a service diminishes, and what they have to offer is differentiated from their few rivals only by the artistry of the electronic huckster, the fact and the feeling of consumer choice shrivels. Not only is choice narrowed and robbed of its meaning, but personal identification of customers with suppliers — commercial ligatures, if you will — may be lost. The papa-mama neighborhood store closes. The impersonal, computerized, saran-wrapped supermarket in some shopping center without any neighborhood at all takes its place.

By acquisition, merger, or raid or takeover, the bosses' bosses can change overnight. Effective control of policies governing the daily life of an enterprise can be removed to other states or to other countries which have no feeling for the local situation. The concentration of economic power can diminish the sense of identity and the reality of choice which were counted on to make life voluntary.

As centers of economic activity become more concentrated there are fewer doorbells to ring in order to find support for a new idea,

<sup>9</sup> See Kingman Brewster, Appendix to Annual Report of the President, Yale University (1975).

a new product, a new way of making an old product. If very large outlays are needed to cultivate markets as well as to support the research and engineering needed to turn invention into innovation, the chance for the individual to “do his thing” will be confined to the mazes and channels within existing, very large, hyper-organized financial and corporate institutions. The sense of a fresh start, the opportunity for a second chance may be less and less an individual reality, and more and more dependent upon the ability to get on the escalator of some organized institution whose management is alert and perceptive enough to indulge the creative and risk the new.

There are other new barriers to the fact and the feeling of mobility which have nothing to do with “bigness,” public or private. One is inherent in the degree of refined, specialized knowledge and skill which an increasing number of professions and vocations now require. The fresh start, the second chance is less realistic even for the most talented and accomplished. At least it is not easy any longer to change ruts, once you have chosen one. This is not new, of course. Transferability from medicine to engineering or vice versa was never a realistic prospect. However, I suspect that the ruts have become narrower as all callings, including medicine and engineering, have become increasingly sub-specialized.

In sum, the “point of no return” is reached sooner, as one becomes committed by training to a highly specialized calling or profession. And the point of “no transfer,” even within a profession, is also likely to be reached early on, as you accumulate the refined specialism of a particular career.

By all odds the most frightening challenge to the American tradition of voluntary society is posed by the limits to growth. It is not necessary to buy the model of our shrunken future produced by the Club of Rome.<sup>10</sup> Nor is it even required that we adopt the

<sup>10</sup> Club of Rome, *Limits to Growth* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Associates, 1972).



somewhat frightening projections of the United States government study entitled *The Year Two Thousand*<sup>11</sup> in order to conclude with some certainty that the phenomenal growth of the first thirty years after the Second War is not likely to be resumed. Or, if it is resumed, it is almost bound to be at the expense of our children's children. It is enough to say that the planet's resources of energy and materials are finite and that population will continue to expand, so that even if full employment without inflation is achieved, constant growth of consumption and production must be slower than it has been since the days of our grandfathers.

Obviously if the kitchen is not producing more and new guests are coming to the table, if they are to be fed the family must hold back. Or put from the outside looking in, those who ate crumbs had better not expect a place at the table if the larder is running low. Competition from immigrants, or in the case of the United States, from traditionally oppressed minorities, becomes a threat. More pervasively, the optimistic notion that riches may replace rags in a single generation carries with it for the first time the inference that rags must replace riches for someone else as a consequence. The pressure for "fair shares" replaces the reliance on infinite competitive opportunity. Conversely, "keeping the upstarts down" replaces the traditional energetic effort to see the American dream fulfilled, even for the most wretched among us. A generous openness becomes cast o'er by a selfish, tight-fisted meanness. Such a society can scarcely be called "voluntary," since eventually it becomes a continuous confrontation between the fearful "have's" and the envious "have-not's."

But even if the limits of material growth are overdrawn, or even if they can be pushed back in time by exploitation of the riches of the sea bed or the energy of the sun, there are, as Professor Hirsch has pointed out, severe social limitations on the "leveling up" promise of material growth.

<sup>11</sup> United States Government (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1980).

The nub of Hirsch's message is best left to his own summary statement:

The themes developed in this book qualify both the priority and the promise of economic growth in two major ways. First, the paradox of affluence — economic growth in advanced countries — carried some elements of built-in frustration: the growth process, when sustained and generalized, fails to deliver its full promise. The growth process runs into social scarcity. Second — the reluctant collectivism — continuation of the growth process itself rests on certain moral preconditions that its own success has jeopardized through its individualistic ethos. Economic growth undermines its social foundations. These then are the dual social limits to growth.<sup>12</sup>

The first point emphasizes the vast difference between material goods and what Hirsch calls “positional goods.” Once the minimal material requirements are satisfied, the aspiration for the “positional goods” takes command. They are inherently scarce. Indeed, their value may be lost if they cease to be scarce, like a beach which hordes suddenly have access to, or tokens of community respect which, like prizes, cannot be awarded to all competitors without vitiating their value.

The second point — reluctant collectivism — is the inevitable consequence of the pressure to distribute as fairly as possible the “positional” goods which are inherently scarce. This becomes of vastly more consequence for society when the economic pie is large enough to allow all to live quite well materially. If infinite expansion will not make room for all, the rationing of positional goods must be guided by some process informed by a popularly accepted ethic other than a scramble of competitive self-interest.

This is obviously a dangerous oversimplification of a most comprehensive, perceptive, and analytically brilliant thesis. But I hope it is sufficient to indicate that the traditional American path to a

<sup>12</sup> *Social Limits to Growth* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), p. 175.

voluntary society by way of upward mobility may be obstructed by social limits to growth. Not only may the quest for higher and higher levels of satisfaction for all be frustrated, but the ethic of individual self-determination so central to the traditional American way of life may be inadequate.

Finally, it will be recalled that I mentioned in my preliminary summary of the challenges to the American way of achieving a voluntary society, the loss of enchantment with traditional American definitions of success. The quest for material gain and political power certainly have not lost their appeal. But to some extent their lustre has become tarnished. When a democratic polity accountable to a rule of law seemed to square with reality, political power was a worthy and respected goal. When financial success through an expanding free market seemed to reflect an ability to give people more of what they wanted at lower cost, affluence might be envied, but by and large it was more an object of respect than a target of resentment.

As the rule of law seems less able to constrain political favoritism, as the market seems less able to assure that reward correlates with contribution, the dream begins to fade. Most important, the fresh start, the sense of being able to make it on the merits becomes more dubious; at least the chances become more dependent upon someone else's decision and favor than on one's own skill and effort.

When I assumed responsibility for the direction of Yale University in 1963, I was acutely aware of what I then called the "crisis of purpose" of the student generation. That was well before the outbreak of what was later politely called "student unrest" in the late sixties. I suggest that this crisis of purpose has also outlasted that turbulent episode in American campus life. It persists today, despite the "eerie tranquility" which characterizes the surface stability of our campuses.

There is a new vocational seriousness extruded under economic pressure. There is a new patience, perhaps born more of cynicism

than of satisfaction. I worry now about a patience without purpose. It promises boredom for the privileged. Among the less privileged purposeless patience can readily fester into resentment, particularly for the frustrated and the envious.

I am haunted by a warning suggested by Rebecca West's characterization of the state of Empire at the time of St. Augustine's birth, although it is so extreme that to apply it to the present American situation is perhaps a gross caricature. She wrote of the mood of the declining empire:

Man could not use time in the only way it can serve him; he had no chance to devise a drama in which he could play his part and reveal the character of his self. Since he needed that revelation for his own enlightenment, since without it he goes out of the world knowing no more than the beasts of the field of anything beyond his sensations, it was as if life had been cancelled, as if he had unfairly been given over to death while his flesh still promised him preservation from it. The children of the time of his birth "sat in anguished lethargy."<sup>13</sup>

If our children's children are not to be robbed of their sense of purpose, are not to "sit in anguished lethargy," I submit that America must rediscover the path to a voluntary society; for without that promise there is little in the American prospect likely to give us heart.

## II

In my first lecture I attempted to describe what I mean by a "voluntary society" and to discuss what I believe to be some of the distinctively American ways of achieving it. I indicated some of the tendencies in contemporary America which challenge these traditional ways of allowing life for most citizens of the United States to be as voluntary as possible.

<sup>13</sup> *St. Augustine* (London: T. Nelson, 1938), p.16.

All of this could, perhaps, be stated in negative terms. How does a society minimize resentments? Most particularly, can America avoid becoming an increasingly resentful society as it faces the realities of pervasive government, ever-larger and increasingly impersonal private business and financial organizations, barriers to mobility imposed by specialization, and both physical and social limits to growth?

I suggest that a society which minimizes resentment, even though it may not be a “good” society in terms of perfect justice or optimum efficiency in the production and allocation of resources, is not an easy objective or an unworthy goal. The state’s modest aim, then, should be to minimize justifiable resentments.

By justifiable resentments I would emphasize the distinction between those disappointments, frustrations, and envies which are simply the result of bad luck, attributable to fate and natural circumstance, and those which can be traced to conscious manipulation, or which systematically load the dice, as it were, or rig the outcome.

I do not mean to imply that resentment is justified only when the cause of disappointment or frustration or envy can be traced to some identified person, such as a malevolent public official or exploitative employer, buyer, or seller. The butt of resentment may be “the system.” A political system, an economic system, a social system can breed justifiable resentment even though those who control it and benefit from it are not wicked.

Indeed, resentment against “the system” may be enduring, whereas the irritation at being done in by some malevolent wretch in a particular official incident or private transaction is transitory. If the whole system seems unfair, to the bitterness of the immediate hurt is added the feeling of being trapped for all time, even unto your children’s children’s generation.

Anyone can put up with the occasionally high-handed official. Resentment digs in its heels, however, if you become convinced that all officials can get away with being high-handed. In private

transactions, too, hostility may be sparked by an individual outrage, but if crass exploitation is ubiquitous then resentment sours all of life.

I would venture the opinion that the two most fundamental causes of a resentful society are: first, the widespread feeling that the power to push other people around is able to perpetuate itself; and, second, the widespread feeling of being trapped in an inescapable, perpetual disadvantage which is not your own fault. (I would also, at the risk of chauvinistic smugness, suggest that the reason why our two societies are as voluntary as they are is precisely because we have been convincing in our determination to rid power, particularly political power, of its ability to perpetuate itself by abuse; and because of our credible determination to lift the curse of perpetual social and economic disadvantage.)

So, when I ask “can we keep society voluntary?” I could just as well ask can we prevent the attitude of most of its members from becoming resentful? In either case I am concerned primarily with these two provocations to resentment, the same two enemies of a voluntary life: self-perpetuating power and the trap of hopeless, perpetual disadvantage.

I suggested in my first lecture that the American approach to these objectives emphasized, first, the limitations on and accountability of power, and second, a sense of opportunity and mobility, the fresh start and the second chance. Can American society long remain voluntary, or avoid becoming resentful, if the prospects of limits on power and the vision of unlimited individual mobility have lost their promise? What can be done to revive their hope?

First, the reach of government cannot be rolled back if the nation is to avoid the wasteful neglect of its citizens’ capacities, whether in terms of their health, their development, or their conditions of life.

It was one of your turn-of-the-century philosophers, Bernard Bosanquet, who made the point that freedom is, after all, a prod-

uct of capacity times opportunity.<sup>14</sup> In modern society there is no way of assuring physical capacity in the face of the costs of sophisticated health care; nor can intellectual ability be fully developed given the costs of higher levels of education; nor can housing and minimal conditions of life be provided to the poor and the disabled without supplementing what would be provided simply by leaving the task to a wholly free market.

Indeed, if I were to single out one point of emphasis which marks contemporary conservatives from their progressive critics in both our countries, it would be the conservatives' preoccupation with choice and their relative neglect of the capacity side of the freedom equation. Conservatives in their turn were quite properly critical of the New Deal, Fair Deal, New Frontier, and Great Society succession because of the excessive preoccupation of these programs with governmental responsibility for underwriting capacity without sufficient regard for its vulnerability to political abuse on the one hand or its tendency to sap initiative and self-reliance on the other.

For a while it seemed as though right and left in these terms were to find common ground in the substitution of some form of automatic guaranteed income, whether by a "negative income tax" or otherwise, as an alternative to administered welfare. The scope of specific proposals varied widely between Nixon and McGovern. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, then a Nixon staff member, made a strenuous effort to do battle with that latter-day professionalized version of Tammany Hall, the welfare administrators' lobby.<sup>15</sup> The government lost, but they tried.

The American experience in the provision of low- and middle-income housing is instructive. Instead of relying primarily upon public housing, which requires the citizen to be a tenant of the

<sup>14</sup> "Life and Philosophy" in *Contemporary British Philosophy*, J. H. Muirhead, ed. (London and New York: Macmillan, 1924), p. 69.

<sup>15</sup> For a chronicle and analysis of this fight, see Moynihan, *The Politics of Guaranteed Income* (New York: Random House, 1973).

state, in the administration of Herbert Hoover the government turned to the federal guaranty of mortgages. The federal guaranty permitted lower interest rates. More important, by providing a secondary market for such guaranteed mortgages, the government made it possible for the house owner to obtain a term for his mortgage loan far longer than a bank could otherwise afford to offer. Of course the government as well as the bank had to be sure that location, design, and construction made economic sense. These requirements could be governed by standards of general applicability which defined eligibility of both plans and borrowers. The government, however, did not know who the individual beneficiaries would be, nor did the citizen have any detailed negotiation with public officials. It was the bank, not the government guarantor who did the financing and monitored compliance with the government guarantor's regulations. This device illustrates, if you will, the possibilities of using the power of government to rig markets rather than supplant them. Like free markets, governmentally rigged markets can rely upon myriads of private transactions made by thousands of private centers of self-interested decisions. This is vastly preferable to a monolithic centralized allocation by officials who have a discretionary power to give or withhold the federal bounty. The rigged market as the distributor of public assistance is a healthy buffer between the citizen and his government.

Given my own background in the university world, it is natural that I should have been particularly sensitive to the growing need in the sixties and seventies to tap the resources of the society as a whole to help meet the mounting costs of higher education and research. At the same time I was fearful of the burden of red tape at best, political abuse at worst, if government were given the power to make discrete decisions about which students or which universities should receive support. Again, taking a cue from the Federal Housing Administration, it seemed possible to devise a scheme which would leave the decision about who goes where,



and which institution receives the subsidy, to private, market-type decisions by students and university admissions officers.

The society could invest in its successor generations without requiring the government to deal directly with either the student or the institution.

If lending institutions — savings banks, savings and loan institutions, insurance companies, for example — could be reimbursed by government, dollar for dollar, for any amount which they had advanced to students toward the cost of their education up to some stated ceiling, then the government would not have to deal directly with the students. The students would be entirely free to spend this advance at the institution of their choice, provided that institution would take them. The whole scheme could be made self-policing and self-liquidating over the life of a generation by requiring the student who received such an advance to accept a small income tax surcharge for his or her earning lifetime. Collection would therefore be done by the Internal Revenue Service, with all the penalties which attach for fraud, nonpayment, or underpayment of taxes generally. (I was pleased to read that Milton Friedman approved, indeed seems to have suggested, such a scheme back in the fifties.)<sup>16</sup>

By all odds the most difficult problem arises in those areas where individual need defies measurement, either because of its urgency, as in the case of those who become ill, or because of its intangibility, as in the case of the creative and performing artist. Without confidence, let alone pride, in my own solutions, I would suggest that ingenuity might produce ways in which health care could be less bureaucratically provided than its direct provision by the state involves, more equitably available than a free market in fee for services permits, and at less cost than third-party payments through insurance of private billings seems to entail.<sup>17</sup> Tax or

<sup>16</sup> *Freedom to Choose* (New York: Avon, 1979), p. 174.

<sup>17</sup> Brewster, "Health at Any Price?" Stevens Lecture, Royal Society of Medicine, London 1979.

other incentives for doctor-managed, pre-paid group practice seem to offer some range of intermediate solution, midway between the government and the free market, which would be vastly preferable to reliance upon either the state or the marketplace to do the job.

Although it represents a small part of the gross national product, the importance to the society of maintaining vitality in the work of succeeding generations in the fine arts, literature, and music seems to me crucial; not so much for the benefit of the artists as for the sake of their beneficiaries: the beholders, the readers, the listeners. Yet here the dead weight of bureaucracy on the one hand or the philistine standards of the marketplace on the other make political choice and consumer choice, to say the least, inadequate to the task of nurturing the creative talents of the oncoming generations. Again, I have no brief for any particular device or arrangement, but there is room for ingenuity along the same lines mentioned in the case of housing, education, and health care.<sup>18</sup> It should be possible to create and support intermediaries who would not be beholden to a bureaucracy whose views they had to consider in deciding whether to show a particular painter, publish a particular poem, or commission a particular piece of music.

The common denominator of all of these examples is the “rigged market” as a far preferable alternative to government abdication of concern for the development of the citizen’s capacities on the one hand, or government assumption of direct administrative responsibility for distributing favors on the other.

However, no amount of ingenuity will enable the government to avoid the need to make some noncompetitive, selective awards, particularly in the research-intensive, high-technology fields, whether in biomedical research, nuclear energy development, communications systems, or monster weapons production. As men-

<sup>18</sup> Brewster, “Paternalism, Populism, and Patronage,” unpublished lecture, Victoria and Albert Museum, 1978.

tioned in my first lecture, on these federal awards the fate of industries, sometimes whole regions, may depend. There will always be the temptation to be influenced by political or personal friendships or antipathies. Whether in the allocation of procurement, public investment, or guaranty of private financing, the government wields a power of economic life and death far more potent than any conceivable administrative regulatory sanction or criminal penalty. Yet unlike the exercise of the police and regulatory power, the exercise of the discretionary spending power is, generally speaking, not subject to judicial review. A society which does not even try to curtail this discretionary power, or at least to make it accountable to objective standards to the extent possible, can no longer pretend that the government's power to affect the citizen is insulated by a rule of law from the temptations to abuse. If I am right, that in large part the voluntary spirit in a society depends upon the citizens' confidence that what happens to them is their own fault, more the result of effort and skill than of status or favor, then it behooves those who support or at least accept the responsibilities of the "entitlement state" to be sure that its entitlements are handed out in such a way that they cannot be used to play favorites.

I am not pessimistic about this. The proliferation of the regulatory state, first under President Wilson, more broadly under the second Roosevelt, did give rise to doctrines and procedures of administrative law. There was a conscious effort to balance the need for administrative discretion to get the job done with the need for judicial review in the name of fairness to those regulated. A comparable effort of legal invention ought to be possible in the area of discretionary spending. The right of redress against abuse should not require the stultification of the contractual or the financing powers of government.

Big government is not the only threat to voluntary life. More and more of the economy is dominated by centers of private economic power which seem immune from accountability either to

government or to the marketplace. The closed shop and the captive market both run against the grain of the American tradition of being able to take your custom elsewhere without having to give reasons. If there is no elsewhere, or if the elsewhere's are all identical, the right to choose loses much of its meaning.

In their efforts to assure a dispersion of and limitation upon economic power in the American tradition, the Sherman Act and its progeny are of almost constitutional significance. In many ways they seek to achieve economic pluralism and limits on "economic sovereignty" comparable to the dispersion of and limitation upon power which the Constitution sought to achieve in the political sphere.

The antitrust laws cannot fairly be used to strike down bigness which is merely the evolutionary result of competitive survival.<sup>19</sup> But they could be used to prevent expansion by merger or acquisition which holds no promise of increased efficiency. They could be used to strike down practices which are more restrictive than efficient conduct of business requires. In short, they could call all mergers and all restraints on dealers and suppliers into question, putting the burden of persuasion on the defendant to demonstrate the efficiencies which would be lost if the merger or the practice were banned.

The conglomerate merger, for example, could be made vulnerable unless it could show demonstrable operating joint costs and savings through the combination of seemingly unrelated products or services. It would not outrage my sense of fairness to have a double standard for the large firm with few competitors and the smaller firm with many rivals. The latter might be absolved by a failure to show a purpose to restrain or monopolize. The former, the large or dominant firm, might be held to a higher standard, be required to make a positive effort to exhaust all less restrictive

<sup>19</sup> Brewster, "Enforceable Competition; Unruly Reason or Reasonable Rules?" *American Economic Review* (May 1956).

options. It is the difference between “not meaning to” and “meaning not to.”

This, it will be argued, is a change in presumption; from the presumption of innocence to the presumption of guilt. Not so. My suggestion simply would say that restraints and acquisitions are presumptively illegal. Public concern is not limited to their economic effect on the degree of competition in the market for the benefit of consumers generally. There is also a social presumption against higher degrees of monopoly power or higher levels of concentration than managerial, technological, and distributional efficiencies require. The dispersion of private power is no less worthy a goal for those who would keep society voluntary than is the dispersion of political power.

Even if such a rigorous deconcentration policy were to be pursued, however, it is still true that economies of scale in many industries would create what might be called politely “centers of economic dependence.” Even in such cases it would be better to leave them in private hands in order to avoid the even heavier hand of centralized authority. Rivalry is a dynamic thing, even if the rivals are few. As long as there are plural centers of initiative, at least no one can afford to become set in his ways. Innovation in distribution and service as well as in products and ways of making them will still afford vastly more choice over time than would any centralized monolithic commissariat. If government permission had to be obtained before major capital decisions could be made, even if there were no official abuse, bureaucratic timidity would tend toward a “riskless capitalism,” which is a contradiction in terms. However, if “private centers of economic dependence” are to be tolerated, they should have a legal obligation to treat their satellites in a nondiscriminatory way, whether such satellites are dependent distributors or dependent suppliers.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Brewster, “The Corporation and Economic Federalism,” in Mason, *The Corporation in Modern Society* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959).

Furthermore, as in the case of decentralized political power, so the dispersed centers of economic power ought not to be able to erect barriers to the mobility of people. Retirement plans should be transferable; so should contingent or deferred compensation programs. Even if corporate “sovereigns” cannot be deprived of much of their power, the barriers to mobility among them should be kept as low as possible. It is not private profitability of each firm that is the goal. It is the voluntariness of the society as a whole which is the ultimate objective. The feeling of the possibility of escape, of mobility, of a fresh start has its claim which must be weighed against both the public and the private economies of continuity of association and employment.

Finally, without penalizing bigness, it is possible to encourage new entrants to a market. This may urge relief of new or smaller business from the burdens of regulation. It may even warrant special tax incentives for small or new businesses.

Even when the ways of limiting both public and private power are exhausted, however, it will not make life voluntary for those at the bottom of the social or economic heap if they feel that their chance to escape upward is forever frustrated by circumstances about which they can do nothing. It is the narrowing of horizons, the lowering of general expectations which pose the greatest threats to the mobility, the second chance, the fresh start, which have played such an important role in keeping American life voluntary. How do we prevent a society which is bound to be cabined by limits to growth from becoming riddled with resentment among those stuck on its bottom rungs?

If life in the constricted society is to be voluntary, much more emphasis than ever before must be placed on measures to assure that, insofar as possible, even if there is not room at the top for everyone, the paths to the top are open on the basis of merit. Perhaps the best we can hope for is to have those who end up at the bottom feel that “I had my chance, and I muffed it.”

Recently, in the United States, equality of opportunity has been clumsily and not very effectively advanced by requiring “affirmative action” by employers to seek out qualified members of “under-represented” groups. Also, progressive taxation, especially progressive estate and inheritance taxation, has somewhat reduced the power of wealth to perpetuate itself from generation to generation. Mandatory regulation and taxation, however, can only deal with the extreme cases. If upward mobility in the constricted society is to be reinvigorated, it will depend far more upon the provision of the chance to develop talent and capacity than it will on “leveling down” by taxation or the prohibition of willful exclusionary practices.

A widespread chance for self-development has long been an important part of the American dream. Jefferson saw it as the only way to assure an “aristocracy of talent.” Horace Mann and his followers persuaded the states to require education through the high school. The land grant legislation assumed a federal responsibility to assist the training of farmers in modern agriculture and workers in the mechanic arts. The provision of educational opportunity for all veterans of the Second World War through the so-called G.I. Bill probably did more than any previous measure to make higher education available to substantially all male members and a number of women of my generation. I have already suggested ways in which federal financing could assist all those with the motivation and the talent for it to go on to as high a level as their drive and ability warranted. This could be done without undue burden on them, and without requiring the government to deal directly with either the student or the institution.

If the sense of mobility, with its special emphasis on the fresh start and the second chance, is to be made real in a relatively static society, educational opportunity must not be limited to traditional degree-granting institutions or confined to the early years of life. Correspondence schools, community colleges with their part-time

enrollments and after-hours classes have long been major resources for adult self-improvement. And, as in the case of the workingmen's college movement in your country, improvement has not been limited to vocational or career-related study. Liberal learning, too, has its place in mid-career education. Already we have borrowed bits and pieces of your experience with the Open University which has been followed with admiring scrutiny by American educators.

Now, suddenly, the communications revolution is upon us. Its potential must be seized to bring within the reach of every family access to audio-visual educational materials at the convenience of the viewer.

The first trouble, of course, is the difficulty of knowing which technology to bet on. The art and the science are moving so fast that if you invest in the cassette, then the disc looks better. Both may be made obsolete by the video recorder. Channels will seem to proliferate as cable television fans out across the land. But no sooner will capital be sunk in the cable spiderweb than direct transmission via satellite will become economically accessible to the average set owner. And computer technology will make it possible to store and retrieve upon instant demand any number of sequences.

We are, at the moment, so bemused and distracted by all kinds of entertainment from video pornography to star wars in the parlor, that it is easy to overlook the immense self-education potential in this communication and computer revolution.

Education is, I fear, inherently paternalistic. It is somewhat officiously missionary. Learning may not have to be compelled, but it does have to be "sold," if all those who would benefit most from it are to be provoked to learn. This does not call for the salesmanship of the huckster. It demands rather the genius of the inspired teacher, the dedication of the devoted headmaster, the vision of the gifted educational administrator.

Government has its role, but it must not smother either invention or innovation, which are far more likely to be fostered by a



broad variety of initiatives. Universities and other established institutions of learning have a role, if for no better reason than because their identification with the effort will give self-education the prestige and cachet to whet the status ambition of the potential students. However, universities, particularly their faculties and staffs, are notoriously resistant to academic change. They are quick to be snobbishly scornful of any but the tried and true way of performing the educational task. (Indeed, Lord Perry's technical and pedagogical achievements were nothing compared to his winning a place among the Committee of Vice Chancellors and gaining full accreditation for Open University degrees.)

It is hard to predict where the drive and the breakthrough will come from. The self-education revolution may have to rely more on the tradition of encyclopedia or insurance salesmen than it does on dons and professors. It may be spawned by some middle-level manager in a conglomerate giant who has a sharp eye for the main chance. It may be a byproduct of some new technology which has a higher potential for educational materials than has yet been revealed. Or it may spring first from the training demands of the military or of the giant public and private bureaucracies which cannot afford to see their thousands of employees be undertrained or become vocationally obsolete.

The fashioning of the new techniques for self-education will probably come from a mixture of several or all of these motivations and interests. But the new era of mid-life self-education will come — soon. And with it will come an opportunity for a fresh start, the second chance, the shift sideways to a new path as well as a chance to step up the ladder you are already on.

Organizing mid-life education in this new day may not be the job of a Department of Education. It may not be within the purview of a Public Broadcasting Corporation. But government can make a powerful difference in the acceleration of this new potential for vindicating the tradition of mobility as a primary way of keeping American society voluntary. The important thing is to

recognize what the self-education potential of the communications revolution could mean to the voluntary spirit of American life. The significance, the success of such a program of turning the communications revolution to the service of public education without walls is not to be measured by the numbers who enroll or even by their potential achievements. Its availability alone has the supreme value of making it easier to convince people that if they do not pull themselves up by their own bootstraps they have only themselves to blame. It is a powerful antidote to the virus of resentment. Self-blame is not a bad alternative to blame of “the system.”

If life is to be voluntary it must have not only freedom from coercion. It requires more than promise of choice. It must not be frustrated by lack of capacity. Even with capacity, a person must have purpose by which choice can be guided. And, at least for most Americans, that purpose cannot be dictated by some all-embracing ideology or theology.

Many of us have found our greatest purpose and satisfaction not in the pursuit of political power or private wealth, but in callings motivated neither by popularity in the marketplace nor by popularity in the polling place. In addition to whatever is meant by the private sector or the public sector, there is a third, not-for-profit, sector. Some would call it the independent sector, but it is really no more independent than many undertakings motivated by profit. Some would call it the voluntary sector, but it has no exclusive claim on the voluntary motivation. Politics and business can be highly voluntary for their participants, particularly their successful participants.

Perhaps self-determination connotes the special quality of those activities which do not aim to please either a political or a commercial constituency. Anyway, I shall call this area the “self-determined sector.” Some activities, such as hospitals, may be found in all three sectors: public, proprietary, and charitable. In my country universities, for example, may be equally strong and

significant whether they are publicly supported state universities or privately supported independent universities.

For their participants, voluntary organizations and activities may provide more binding ties and loyalties than any group outside the family. Their emotional spur can be fierce. (The tribal loyalties of the alumni of American schools and colleges illustrate the point.) The demands of time and energy and worry exacted by nonprofit institutions may be far greater than is asked by any nine-to-five government or business job. Their satisfactions, too, can be more rewarding than permits measurement in terms of income or political power. They may provide a path to community appreciation and status far more reliable than any public or industrial or commercial or financial, or even elected office. This may be true for the paid hands, the compensated executives and staffs, of not-for-profit institutions. It may be equally true for the volunteers, from the senior trustees of a foundation, school, or hospital to the helper at the county fair, the alumni fund raiser, or the amateur docent who guides visitors through the local art gallery.

Most voluntary organizations arise from a shared sense of community needs. They are, for the most part, intensely local. They provide the special satisfaction of being able to see and touch and feel the impact of what you do. Even if the organization is as complex as a hospital or a university, it still is likely to be a local establishment, small enough so that it does provide a community for its members in which relationships are personal. Not only are they local, but most nonprofit organizations are self-governing. Those who run them may have to be recruited by fraud, duress, or other forms of arm-twisting, whether they are asked to be commodores of yacht clubs or trustees of prestigious medical, artistic, or educational institutions. Nevertheless the trustees and executives are not imposed on the organization by some remote, absentee public or private authority. Most self-determined institutions do not have to submit to the sameness and the conformities which the size and the standards of microprocessed managerial efficiency

impose upon the remote outposts of monster organizations. The self-determined sector will, by its inherently local nature, sustain the richness which only variety permits. Such variety will persist as long as the activity, the organization, the institution are reflections of the needs and idiosyncrasies and traditions of local communities, not the fine print of some federal regulation or corporate directive. The “self-determined” sector may, in an otherwise impersonal society, help the citizen to shed his anonymity. It may provide the “ligatures” to compensate for the shrinkage of mobility in modern America.

I suggest that precisely because of the inevitability of bigness and the spreading impersonality in both the governmental and the corporate worlds, the vitality of the self-determined sector is more important than ever, if life is to be voluntary for the citizen. It may be that in the next century it will be in the self-determined sector that freedom from coercion, freedom of choice, and ligatures will be most likely to provide the “life chances” for the majority of citizens, whatever their public or private work-day vocation. There are many reasons to prefer nonprofit institutions for particular functions. But their most important contributions to the society as a whole may be the promise they hold for keeping life in the society as voluntary as possible.

This seems to me an important enough element in any strategy to keep America voluntary to warrant positive public encouragement.

There are people, of course, who feel that all expenditures in the public interest should be channeled through the democratic processes of public revenue allocated by legislative appropriations. Such people are made very unhappy by the ability of the taxpayer, especially a wealthy taxpayer, to support the charitable or educational activity of his choice and thereby reduce his taxable income. Because the size and vitality of the self-determined sector seems to me crucial to the spirit and the morale of American society, for the average person —not just the elite of wealth —there should be

an expansion, not a reduction, of opportunity and tax incentives for its private support.

But when all is said, even if it were all done, is not this just tinkering, dealing with a few eddies and currents, when it is a tide that threatens to drown the voluntary life? Do bring, if you can, a rule of law to the exercise of the growing public spending power. Do what you can to bolster the antitrust laws, at least so that the growth of corporate gargantuas is not made easy. Make whatever use you can of the promise of modern communications and computer technology for a new educational spur to upward mobility. Proliferate the opportunities for self-fulfillment in the self-determined, nonprofit sector. Still, where are the successor generations to find their reason for being, a rationale which makes sense of themselves? Where can they find a satisfying, purpose-giving vision of the society of which they are a part? If both social and physical limits to growth rudely belie the vision of ever-widening opportunity upward, driven by acquisitive self-interest, is there another dream to take its place which will keep the society from becoming resentful, which will keep it, in my sense of the word, voluntary?

Are there goals worthy of aspiration which might supplement, although not necessarily replace, the drives for wealth and power? In order to respond to Hirsch's warning about the social limits to growth, they must be goals which can be pursued without the traditional competitive ethic of grab, grab, grab. Or to use his phrase, they must not be dependent upon a competitive struggle for inherently scarce "positional goods."

There are some recent studies, more anecdotal than statistically persuasive, which would indicate that more and more Americans are finding their greatest satisfaction in nonmaterial accomplishments. Daniel Yankelovich's recent book *New Rules* brims over with warm optimism as he follows defectors from the rat-race of the metropolis to the creative or service life in communities small

enough to give life a personal meaning.<sup>21</sup> Another recent book by Angus Campbell, *The Sense of Well-Being in America*, charts with a rather broader empirical base a widespread search for satisfactions which cannot be measured in terms of either material wealth, political power, or conventional status.”

I can only offer clues from purely personal experience and observation. The experience is admittedly atypical, for I have spent all my life in institutions and callings which were not driven by either money or political power. That is not to say I was uninterested in the paycheck or in popular plaudits. But the principal satisfactions as a student, as a naval aviator, as a law professor, and as an academic administrator lay elsewhere. Even if my own life has been thus sheltered, however, I have had a chance to observe many friends in public life and many friends in trade. Although I have known many in both business and government. I have yet to meet the person who is really unconcerned with the impact he has on others. Their concern for their impact as persons on other human beings is something different from their ambition for power, their acquisitive drive for wealth, or their consciousness of status.

I have called it the drive for “selfish usefulness.”<sup>23</sup> For those in politics or those in business, a very large part of life’s energies and thought’s attention is spent on how to make a constructive difference in the lives of those they affect. There is, I think, in all of us a desire to be valued by someone, whether that someone is another individual, a family, an institution, or a community; the desire to be someone known and needed, as Oscar Handlin suggests in his epilogue chapter to the revised edition of *The Uprooted*.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Daniel Yankelovich, *New Rules* (New York: Random House, 1981).

<sup>22</sup> Angus Campbell, *The Sense of Well Being in America: Recent Patterns and Trends* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1980).

<sup>23</sup> Baccalaureate Address, Yale University, 1976.

<sup>24</sup> *The Uprooted*, p. 296

By what standard is this difference, this impact on the lives of others to be judged constructive? Whether your impact is in a small circle, your family, for instance, or whether it is in a larger circle of friends, colleagues, institutions, organizations, or constituencies, the feeling of usefulness depends upon the belief that because of something you did or promoted or prevented you enlarged either the capacity or the opportunity of others.

The scientist, the scholar, the artist are propelled by the hope that by what they discover, by what they reveal, they will add new dimensions to the lives of those who come to understand their thoughts, appreciate their insights, or behold their works.

Teachers, from the most elementary levels to the heights of universities such as this one, obviously build their life satisfaction on the hope that they will contribute to both the capacities and the opportunities of their students.

I could go on with those professions to which people turn for help or to vindicate their hopes. Architects, doctors, even lawyers share the full measure of this satisfaction of selfish usefulness.

Certainly the motivation of selfish usefulness is the engine which drives what I have called the self-determined sector of non-profit institutions, organizations, and activities.

And despite their sheepish reluctance to admit it, the much-maligned bureaucrats in the public sector, and even the most philistine managers in the private sector, derive their greatest satisfactions from those occasions or events which entitle them to believe that they have so organized the activity of others who work with them or for them that capacities have been developed or opportunities have been seized which they might otherwise never have known.

In my wildest spasms of utopian optimism, I can glimpse a vision of a society which encourages each citizen to develop his own abilities in order to enlarge the capacities or opportunities of others. It would be a sort of chain reaction, where each developed his own potential in order to contribute to the potential

of others, and so on until the ripples set moving reached the outer limits of the sea. It would be a kind of breeder reactor which liberated capacity and expanded opportunity all around — not born of righteousness, therefore free of moralizing; but spurred on by the delight of voluntary, selfish usefulness.

At least I would suspect that the goodness of a society has something to do with the extent to which it rewards the instinct for usefulness. If so, then, just as war is too important to leave to the generals, perhaps the economy is too important to leave to the economists. Accomplishment of material welfare may be the largest task of economic organization, but we should also have a concern about giving people the widest possible chance to prove that they have something to offer which other people want. The incentive and the variety of opportunity for material usefulness are at least as important as the promise of efficiency in the allocation of resources. Capitalism is not just an economic system, it is a system of rewards and incentives for usefulness, too, and should be judged as such.

The encouragement of usefulness puts some conventional responsibilities of government in perspective too. It suggests that government's first and foremost responsibility is to deter conduct or arrangements which are designed to limit or to shrink people's capacities and opportunities. Physical harm, neglect, abuse of person or property — the catalogue of criminal coercion or wrongful taking heads the list. Most heinous of all, perhaps, is the systematic exercise of public or private power to hold down or oppress people because of their race, their color, their national origin or their religion or any other class attribute. Even if no gain to the bigot or the oppressor is involved, the willful deprivation of either capacity or opportunity for whole classes or groups of people is the evil most deserving of opprobrium.

On the positive side, development of a capacity for usefulness is an urgent government concern. But care must be taken to go about it in ways which minimize the citizen's dependence upon



official favor. All available technology should be mobilized to try to assure that it is never too late to start, that the citizen should feel that he has only himself to blame if he does not stretch to the limit of his potential.

Perhaps more basic than the negative and positive roles of government to the revival of faith in the voluntary life is the proliferation of the self-determined sector of organized nonprofit activity and the redefinition of success in terms of usefulness rather than in terms of material advantage or exclusiveness.

At least such a course for American society would take us out of the deadening calm of “anguished lethargy.”