

FEE

Freedom Cuts Two Ways

Before any of us can blithely dismiss our external restraints, each of us must assume a solemn moral obligation to restrain himself.

Sunday, September 1, 1968



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Abraham Lincoln, speaking in Baltimore in 1864, beautifully brought out the double-edged nature of freedom. He did this through a parable, after first explaining that the word freedom for

some may mean for each man to do as he pleases solely with himself and the product of his labor, while for others the same word may mean for some men to do as they please with other men and the product of other men's labor.

The parable had to do with a shepherd, a sheep, and a wolf. The wolf feels free to attack the sheep. But the shepherd drives the wolf from the sheep's throat. The sheep thanks the shepherd as his liberator, while the wolf denounces him for the very same act. Plainly, Lincoln noted, the sheep and the wolf are not agreed on a definition of freedom.

To me, the parable illustrates the conflicting meanings derived from freedom. Today we hear of freedom as never before, but just what does it mean? We hear of Freedom Workers, Freedom Marchers, Freedom Fighters. We hear of Freedom Now, Freedom for Students, Freedom from Want, Freedom from Authority, and, for all I know, maybe even Freedom from Freedom.

Yet in all this clamor over freedom, I find little or no reference to what I think is the necessary concomitant of freedom, the very thing that gives a man his essential dignity, the factor that makes a society livable, creative, and truly free: namely, responsibility.

Without responsibility — by which I mean primarily self-responsibility — liberty becomes license, morals become elastic, and society becomes predatory, its people tending to become like the wolf in Lincoln's parable, lunging at the other fellow's throat.

Neither License Nor Anarchy

No, as I understand it, freedom is not license; it is not anarchy. Under freedom, no man is free to do entirely as he likes. After all, freedom involves morality; it involves discipline, an inner discipline, a conscience within the individual ever reminding him that his freedom stops where the other fellow's freedom begins, that no man is really free if he

renders another man less free. And it makes no difference who lessens freedom, whether it stems from private or public sources. The fact is that most usurpation of freedom has stemmed from the latter. As liberal reformer Woodrow Wilson noted: "The history of liberty is a history of the limitations of governmental power, not the increase of it."

Indeed, this was the design for the American dream, for our Constitutional society. The design was carefully laid down by the Founding Fathers. They realized that freedom was not a grant of government. Such a grant would then be but a slender reed, for what government could grant, government could clearly also take away. In fact, freedom stems from a much Higher Authority than government. The Declaration of Independence holds "that all men are... endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness."

So through the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, the authors of our Federal Republic insisted for the sake of liberty that men in public office could not be blindly trusted, that they had to be made accountable and responsible, that the American government was to be strictly limited in its powers, subject to checks and balances, and expressly prohibited from infringing on the endowed freedom of the individual. Ours was to be a government of law, not of men.

Political Foundations of Freedom in America

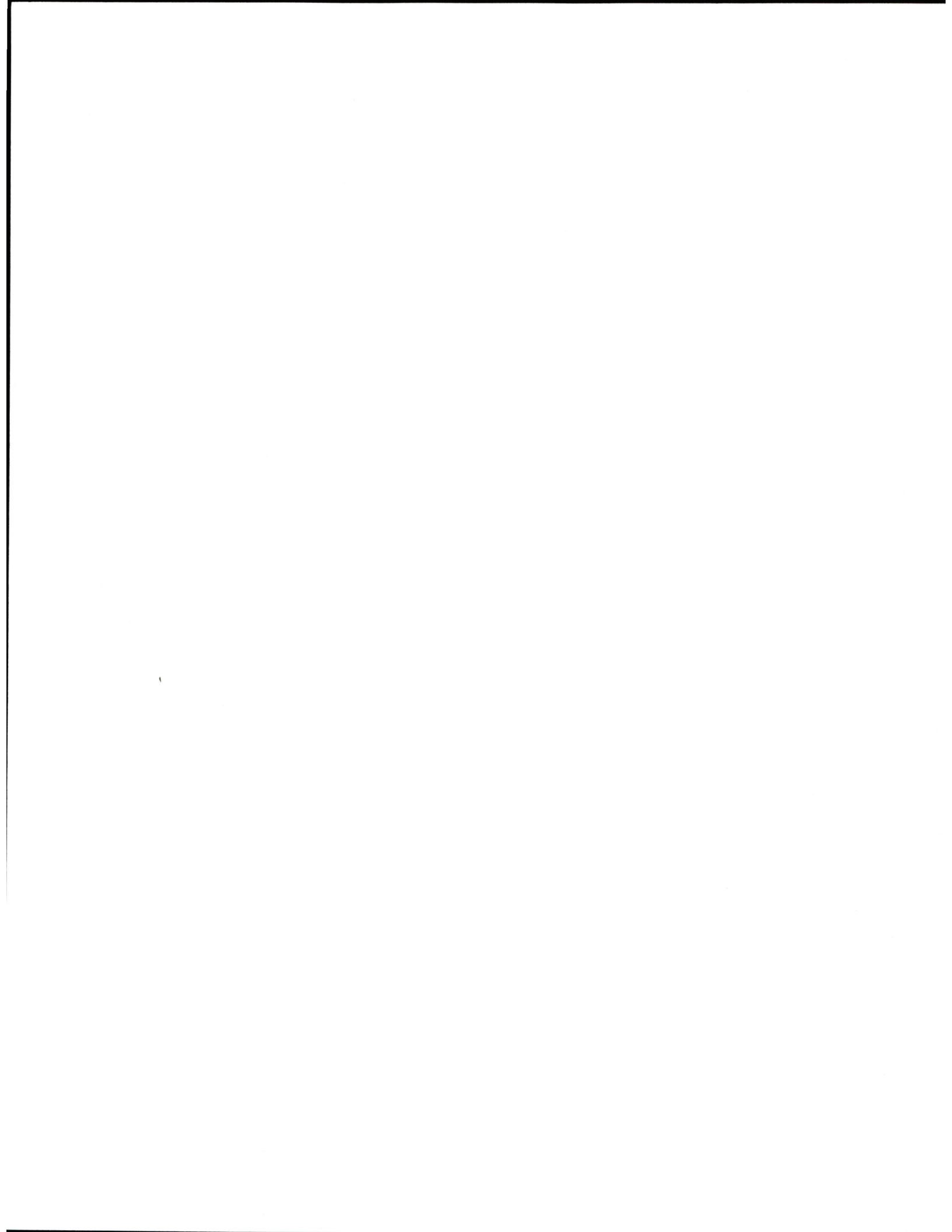
Thus, the theory of government put forth by the designers of the Constitution was something unique in the history of government. They laid down the foundations of a society that was essentially dependent on individual conscience, on self-government, on each individual's sense of responsibility, love of justice, and respect for the framework of the due process of law — that is, respect for the other fellow's freedom. Hence, our society was built on not one but many centers of governing authority, beginning with the governing authority of the person himself and extending to families and churches, communities and states, business enterprises, and other voluntary associations.

So ours is a society — thanks to self-government, to self-realization — that strives to encourage every individual to achieve whatever rank or distinction of which he is capable. It is a society with Constitutionally guaranteed freedoms of the press, speech, assembly, and petition. It is a society of political freedom of choice for the individual citizen. It is a society whose economic system is built upon individual enterprise and ownership within the framework of a free market. As you know, this economic system has made us the most productive people in all history with the world's highest living standards. The system furthermore provides far and away our greatest weapon in the War on Poverty.

Signs of Sickness

Yet, because the responsibility side of freedom has been somehow lost sight of, our society and economy are not well; indeed, they are sick, and the evidence of this sickness can be readily found in the daily headlines, notwithstanding all the so-called references to freedom. Rioters in the streets are beleaguering our major cities. Crime rates keep on hitting new records, with more youthful offenders than ever before. Teenage shoplifting is a mounting problem for our stores. Drug addiction, especially by young people, is an increasingly corruptive and corrosive social problem. Family ties are weakening. Promiscuity is rising.

In higher education, we have also seen a marked deterioration in moral standards. Cribbing during exams, for example, has always been a problem, but today more and more students seem to attach no dishonor to it whatsoever. Students talk of Student Power but precious little of Student Responsibility. Students have even taken over academic buildings by force and have held captive campus recruiters, deans, and other college administrators —ironically and clearly diminishing the freedom of the captives, all too often in the name of civil liberties and civil disobedience. Even the code of civil disobedience calls for accepting responsibility in terms of the



consequences for infractions of the law. Yet when apprehended by the authorities, what is the first "demand" of the disobeying students? It's amnesty. But such amnesty hardly squares with responsibility.

One more point on campus rioting: In practically all the disturbances at our educational institutions, a small but noisy nihilistic minority has commandeered facilities and effectively blocked the freedom of the student majority to attend classes. The adversely affected majority all too often has been silent and has looked the other way. This response of indifference also strikes me as irresponsible. I do not suggest that the majority do battle with the disturbers, but rather that they rally to the cause of peace and rational discussion of issues, that they support the university administrators who are trying to maintain order and so to protect their freedom.

Inflation Attends the Welfare State

Economically, we also see signs of fever — and lack of responsibility. Maybe you heard of the response of the man getting his annual physical checkup to the doctor who told him that he was as sound as a dollar; the man shot back: "Doctor, am I that bad?"

Well, is the economy really sick? The answer depends on how you measure economic symptoms. Certainly, signs of inflationary stress and strain abound. The Federal budget is in perennial and ever rising deficit. The U. S. balance of payments is also in perennial and ever rising deficit. Our stock of gold has been dissipated to a dangerously low level. All manner of controls have been applied to American lending and investing overseas, although history is replete with their failure in previous applications. And, although the so-called "voluntary" wage-price guideposts proved to be a demonstrable failure, talk persists of new controls over wages and prices, while little is done about the underlying fiscal and legislative forces of inflation. That inflation is compounded by wage and salary demands by leaders of organized employees both private and public, both professional and nonprofessional, far beyond any semblance of productivity or merit. It

is compounded by demands for all manner of handouts from the government — local, state, and especially Federal. In the name of welfare, these demands are for more and more — not tomorrow but today. These demands strain the body politic — and economic — and erode the foundations of our liberty.

In all these examples of social and economic sickness, we see abuse of freedom; we see abandonment of discipline and responsibility — of self-discipline and self-responsibility — by those in private and public life. In other words, we see the emergence of the kind of freedom exemplified by the wolf in Lincoln's parable. The wolfish freedom may not always be overt and violent. It can be covert and subtle. It can be seen in disrespect for due process of law. It can be seen in a growing moral laxness, in indifference to corruption, in an ethical softness that is steadily eating away at our values and virtues, in the credit that every man is a law unto himself.

I guess what I am trying to say boils down to this: The other side of the coin of individual freedom is individual responsibility. You can't have the one without the other. Before you and I can govern others, each and every one of us must first learn to govern himself. Before any of us can blithely dismiss our external restraints, each of us must assume a solemn moral obligation to restrain himself.

Character Must Be Earned

When a man is on his own, an individual responsible for himself, he must earn a character—a personal character that is perhaps his first necessity. Others may then learn and imitate his qualities and capabilities. In a planned society he has no need of a character, for no such thing is wanted. No national or universal plan can afford to take the least notice of his personal character.

As an individual responsible for himself, a man must also acquire credit. Others must be convinced that he is credit-worthy; that he can be trusted; that what he undertakes he will perform to the limits of his

ability. But when he is planned, nothing so troublesome is in the least necessary.

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