

FREE-MAN'S PERSPECTIVE

How Life, Liberty & Sanity Can Win

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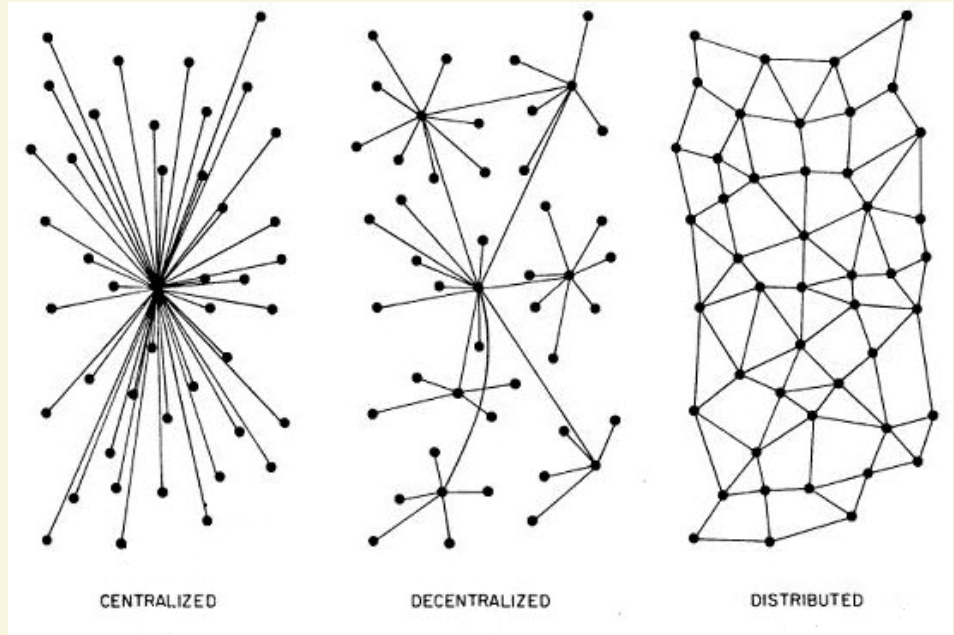
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A DECENTRALIZED WORLD ORDER, PART 1



I've been waiting for some time to address the "hard pieces" of living freely upon planet Earth. Previously I've tried to note them as we passed by, but I think this is a good time to face them down. And so, this month we'll start taking on war, defense, crime, justice, and so on... all the things that are now centralized but really shouldn't be centralized. And by doing so, we'll be describing a new and better world in some detail.

Bear in mind, however, that the "hard things" seem hard to us mainly because we *think* of them as being hard. In actual fact, they've been transcended for a thousand or even two thousand years at a time, by people far more primitive than ourselves. We covered such civilizations in [FMP #37](#) and [FMP #50](#), and if you have some extra time, you might want to look through those issues again.

As we go through the areas of human life that we want to decentralize, we'll consider both escaping centralization and operating in a free environment.

“Centralized” Does Not Mean “Civilized”

Right now, as we all know, centralization is enforced; if you try to leave the centralized system you will be insulted, branded as a law-breaker, or perhaps hunted down and jailed. But this just exposes centralization’s weakness: If it were desirable, force wouldn’t be necessary. People aren’t forced to buy cars, for example. Rather, they see their utility and labor to get them.

Centralization, then, isn’t a terribly desirable product. If it weren’t forced upon the world, it wouldn’t be chosen very often. In fact, many people pay to *escape* centralization. Homeschooling, for example, requires a large investment in time, outlays for books and supplies, and bearing the scorn of others... and homeschoolers are still taxed to support government schools. And yet millions of people have paid this price to evade centralized schooling.

So, explaining how to escape from centralization (hopefully, at not too high a cost) will be one of our objectives.

Another objective will be to portray how things would work in a truly free world. That is, a world in which you could do anything you liked so long as you didn’t harm anyone else.

Honestly, I’m not sure how long this series will run. It will be several issues at least. Defense, war, crime, and justice are not trivial issues, and I want to answer them in some detail. I’ll also share a few personal experiences in this series; I want to explain how these things have operated in real life.

What’s the Worst That Could Happen?

Humans in our time, as we’ve noted more than once, have been trained to address any new idea by imagining the very worst results it could produce and then fixating on them. I condemn that for a number of reasons, but this time I want to address it directly.

So, let’s imagine that by some magic a few billion people actually heard these ideas and decided that they wanted to live this way... and let’s further imagine that all the politicians and enforcers who might impinge on them either went somewhere far, far away or took up honest work.

Here are the great fears of this scenario:

- The powerful will lord it over everyone else by force. They’ll tell us what to do and we’ll have no choice; their weapons and ours will be grossly unequal. They’ll take our money whether we like it or not.
- The big men will go to war against each other in an effort to rule the whole world if possible. They’ll kill millions of us in the process.
- The powerful will grab our children and force them to fight for them... and they’ll come home dead or in pieces, if they come home at all.
- Millions will be starved as the powerful take away our food for their own use. There will be no way out.
- Minorities will be rounded up, put into concentration camps, and even exterminated. They’ll have no way to escape.

- The friends of the powerful will control our money. They'll keep us living on the edge, make us beg them for loans, and bill us for their mistakes. They'll turn us into permanent debt slaves.

I think that's a pretty fair representation of the fears spawned by the prospect of leaving centralized rulership behind.

But please recognize something here: ***What this list describes is the 20th century.*** (You might want to read through the list again.)

Notice also that most of these things happened in the *most* advanced countries. Concentration camps, for example, existed in the US and Germany, as well as in other places.

"Grabbing children and sending them to die" has happened in every advanced country and is still happening in many of them.

In other words, we've already had the worst that could happen. The only difference between "what has happened" and "what might happen" is our tendency to pass off what has happened without a second thought.

What's "ours" we have learned to accept and to justify. Things we fearfully imagine do not enjoy this protection.

But whether or not they were "ours," modern governments killed some 262 million people in the 20th century¹. That level of death is unprecedented in world history.

Could things get even worse? Well, that's always a possibility, but doing worse than what we just went through would be a tall order. And we shouldn't forget that under the governments we still have, we were lucky to escape nuclear war... more than once.

So, let's be clear: *The toxicity of rulership has never ever been worse.* No arrangement has ever abused and killed more people than the one we have now. No matter how we feel about it, that's a fact.

Which was worse, a Roman silver mine in 384 AD or the streets of Hiroshima in 1945? A medieval village or the Warsaw ghetto? Would you prefer to live in rural Romania in 1150 AD or in rural Ukraine in 1933? Would you rather be an Italian Christian in 960 AD or an Armenian Christian in 1915?

The 20th century was by far the deadliest in all of human history. And it featured – not coincidentally – the most centralized ruling systems in human history.

The truth, if we dare to admit it, is that the 20th century was the Century of Centralized Disaster. Put simply, centralization has proven to be the deadliest arrangement ever seen for human life.

And to cover all the bases: The scientific progress of the era had nothing at all to do with the present rulers; it was the continuation of a process that began centuries earlier.

So, for something new and different to be worse than what we have now would be, as I said, a very tall order. We already have "the worst that could happen."

¹ This figure comes from the [work of Prof. Rudolph Rummell](#).

“But Some Things Have to Be Centralized”

This is the next objection to decentralization. The answer to this is two-fold:

1. Those things that must be centralized are few. Take any of the “must be centralized” examples you can come up with and imagine decentralized alternatives for five minutes. In the majority of cases, alternatives exist in multiples.
2. Certain systems (like anonymous communications systems running n-of-m decisions) work better when one node acts as the center. But even this type of centralization needn’t last for more than a moment. The node that functions as the center for one iteration doesn’t have to serve as center for the next. And this principle can be applied very widely.

There is one more point to add here, as we’re discussing objections: *We must accept losses*. We may lose contracts, jobs, conveniences, advantages, and possibly worse. Certain kinds of suffering are unavoidable if we want to change the world. Comfort addicts never accomplish much.

And the truth is this: *No matter what strategy we take, we’ll suffer anyway*.

If we run from responsibility, we’ll still suffer, but we can always call it someone else’s fault. If on the other hand, we accept responsibility (and the possibility of suffering), we’ll bear somewhat less pain and move into a better situation.

The Energizing Myth

A decentralized world would be a change more profound than the Industrial Revolution. It would turn everything big upside down and leave humanity in a drastically new condition. There can be little doubt that it would be a massively beneficial change, but it would not be a minor one.

The Italian historian Federico Chabod concluded that at the core of the Renaissance was “an energizing myth” that was shared by all involved. In other words, the change in conditions we call the Renaissance began because a new set of values and principles were available... values that gave people a new way of dealing with life and each other... values that validated their experience and provided a new and pertinent vocabulary.

Humanists like Petrarch gave the people of the Renaissance the self-confidence to experiment, just as the ideas of Bacon, Newton, and Locke gave the people of the Enlightenment the confidence to embark on a new thing.

So, we’ll need an energizing myth if we are to build a decentralized world. And it’s most fortunate for us that both a new myth and the decentralized world have been forming over the past few decades... just as the centralized model has been losing its legitimacy.

As I see it, our new energizing myth should contain these concepts:

- What has held us back has not been ourselves, but negative assumptions *about* ourselves. Aside from a small percentage of sociopaths, we’re basically pretty decent.
- We don’t know what perfection looks like or how best to reach it. But we do know what improvement looks like, and that’s enough.

- We've been blessed with the fruits of the scientific revolution, and by it, scarcity is dying upon Earth.
- Centralized systems are incompatible with a post-scarcity world; they've responded to its arrival by creating replacement scarcities.
- Our relationships are far richer when conducted directly, without centralized power as an omnipresent and threatening third party.
- The agents of centralized power portray themselves as the adults in the world and us as children. This is a fraud, an insult, and an obstacle to development.
- Centralized power restricts human action, drastically narrowing the scope of innovation. That is anti-life and thus unacceptable.
- Centralization requires us to obey people we know to be liars. That is a corruption of mind and morals.
- Centralized power is parasitic by nature.
- The voice of authority must be evicted from our minds if we are to think authentic thoughts.
- A healthy civilization is held together by the things we jointly love; an unhealthy civilization by things we fear.

I'll continue working with these ideas, but I think they're sufficient to energize a community in which an individual can thrive, where talent is unfettered, and where a new social imagination can form.

And more than this, a decentralized world is already forming, giving us multiple opportunities to get involved. If perhaps the cryptocurrency economy doesn't suit us, we can begin biohacking, 3D printing, homeschooling, working with micro-agriculture (many types), open source machines, delivery drones, encryption, or anonymity technologies.

The decentralized world is already here and spreading day by day... but it needs our *actions* if it is to overcome the model of enforced centralization. Mere words are not enough; we must insert our energies into the physical world.

We must also avoid fighting the old system. Yes, we retain a right to self-defense, but politics is poison and violence is a primary pillar of the centralized world. These things would corrupt our new world before it was born.

I've quoted this passage from Buckminster Fuller before, but it's worth quoting again and again:

You never change anything by fighting the existing. To change something, build a new model and make the existing obsolete.

These are the things that will bring us success. We must build our new model, keep building it through attacks, and keep building it through successes. And once the old model is truly gone, we must never again pick up its tools or techniques. Decentralization is not a way of gaining things, but a way of living.

An Example from My Youth

What we're really talking about here is a social transition, and I was fortunate to have lived through the last such transition in the West, which ran from about 1965 to 1975. (You can find the reasons for it back in [FMP #10](#).) Nonconformist thought was not only possible during this period; it was required for a young person if he or she was to be taken seriously by their peers. (It certainly was where I lived.)

During that time, we didn't identify ourselves by politics, traditions, or nations. Rather, when meeting another young person for the first time, we asked, "What are you into?" Whatever the answer might be, it was something that this person *chose*, not something they inherited or something that was imposed upon them. It said something about them as an individual.

We were very serious about such things and expected that whatever we chose should be done in new ways. For example, here's a quote from musician Tom Petty, who also lived through the era:

If they had tried to offer my generation music from someone that had won a game show...
[they] would've been laughed out of the room.

The way of the status quo was unacceptable to young people during this time; it was uncool to the point of betrayal. Some took that too far and too long of course, but the air was a lot easier to breathe during those years.

I think we can expect some variation on this as we move into a decentralized world. And the truth is that we can be not only different, but much better. During the Renaissance, Leon Battista Alberti wrote this:

[A] man can do all things if he will.

Perhaps that's something of an overstatement but not too much of one. We've been limited by expectations more than nature. Eric Hoffer, for example, was famous for being both a longshoreman and a philosopher. And the participants in the Scottish Enlightenment stepped back and forth between working as doctors, poets, geologists, mechanics, experimenters, and patrons.

So why should we be held to narrow expectations? These people weren't a different class of beings.

And that brings up my final point before describing our new, decentralized world: Building a decentralized world will be useful, it will bless the future, and it will bless us as well... but more immediately that that, it will be *fun*.

I'll talk about a few more personal experiences as we go, but right here I want to make an important point: **Doing new things is fun and rewarding, and very strongly so.**

I can't think of any such adventure that I regret taking, even though some were subsequently wiped away. I'm glad I chose them. And, I think, so are the people who joined me in those ventures.

Remaking the world isn't something we do for a final payoff alone; it's also essential because it awakens us and invigorates us. And it's massively more entertaining than TV, movies, or a dozen other things that suck up people's time and money. *It's worth it merely for the fun of it.*

Culture and Entertainment

Being that we're already well into this issue, I don't want to jump into a big subject like justice or war. And so, I'd like to examine the centralization of something we less seldom consider: culture and entertainment. Let's start with an observation from the ever-interesting Robert Basco Zeigler, commenting on Western culture:

Culture ended in 1914.

The First World War (which began in 1914) was when the old model of patronage for artists failed and the two new models for art began taking shape: either art as elite status symbol or art for the mass market.

The patronage model was typified by a wealthy patron paying the living expenses of a great artist, so they could paint, compose, etc., rather than work a job. This existed in many variants over many centuries, and whatever flaws it had, it most certainly produced great art: Beethoven, Bach, Brahms, Mozart, Titian, Da Vinci, Michelangelo, Rubens, Bernini, and so on, at great length. What most of us still consider the greatest works of art were produced under this model... a very strongly decentralized model.

Since then, we've seen art centralized, however strangely. Here are the two centralized models:

Art as an elite status symbol

We've all grown up with modern art, and we all know that it simply does not appeal like the beautiful paintings of the age before it. Special courses are required to "understand" this art, such as the piece shown here, Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* of 1917. This piece, believe it or not, was voted the most influential artwork of the 20th century by 500 selected British art-world professionals.



It would seem difficult to find artistic value in a urinal, but people strive to do just that... and very "cultured" people at that. Being able to appreciate such art has become an elite status symbol of immense proportions.

One more example: This painting was sold for \$179.4 million in 2015 to the former prime minister of Qatar:



This was painted by Pablo Picasso, who in a moment of candor (*Art/The Artist*, 1952)² wrote the following:

But when I am alone, I do not have the effrontery to consider myself an artist at all, not in the grand old meaning of the word: Giotto, Titian, Rembrandt, Goya were great painters. I am only a public clown – a mountebank. I have understood my time and have exploited the imbecility, the vanity, the greed of my contemporaries. It is a bitter confession, this confession of mine, more painful than it may seem. But at least and at last it does have the merit of being honest.

Picasso admitting he's a swindler, however, hasn't made much difference. His art carries high status, and that's all that matters to elite-status seekers.

And this is a very centralized game, focused in New York, Paris, and a few other centers. As Tom Wolfe wrote in *The Painted Word*, "[B]elieve me, you can get all the tubes of Windsor & Newton paint you want in Cincinnati, but the artists keep migrating to New York City all the same." That's where the center is.

I happen to know one of the world's great painters, a man who does *not* live and work in New York. As a result, the only paintings he can sell for appreciable sums are portraits, a type of art that New York and the others look down upon... and which was not centralized.

² We try to verify our quotations carefully, and my editor wasn't able to find the reference for this one... and I don't recall which book I pulled it from. I'm leaving it (with this note) because Paul Johnson recorded Picasso saying something very similar in his book, *Creators*.

Music has followed this pattern in part. The atonal compositions of the 20th century appeal almost entirely to the same status-conscious class and have seldom spread farther, save in movie scores. In certain circles of musicians I've been involved with, Mozart, Bach, etc., were held to be passé, and I was encouraged to "learn to appreciate" the atonal pieces. (I never could.)

Art for the mass market

Painting and sculpture have never really taken off in the mass market. Prints of paintings from a few of the great masters are sold, as are some Impressionist works and a fair amount of devotional art, but new commissions are for elites only and tend to be forms that one must "learn to appreciate." In addition, many paintings sold in the mass market are decorations rather than art proper.

The forms of art that have come to matter to large audiences are music and cinema. And these have clearly become centralized, primarily in Hollywood. This was a process of course, with certain parts of the music business remaining vital in New York into the 1960s and Nashville still later. Hollywood, however, is now the undisputed center of the film and music businesses.

And Hollywood has chased after "base-instinct" entertainment, generally aiming for the teenage market, particularly children who pay with their parents' money. That's a generalization of course (the streaming market includes older people), but there is a good deal of truth in it.

Certainly some number of meaningful films and recordings are produced, but not a strong percentage of them. And I can tell you from personal experience that Hollywood is no more concerned with artistic quality than with what demographic it will play to. (One of the screenplays we have in the member's section went through that process.)

I suppose it's worth mentioning, as it relates to centralization, that Hollywood has strong ties to centralized power. These days their ties are primarily to Washington, DC, but decades ago there was a good deal of influence from the USSR. Moscow was apparently quicker to grab at the propaganda value of cinema than Washington was in a somewhat more innocent time.

Decentralized Art and Entertainment

It's common to draw a line between art and entertainment, but that's a difficult exercise, and it really doesn't matter anyway. The best art is entertaining and the best entertainment is artistic. And Leo Tolstoy's definition of art (from the aptly named *What Is Art?*) applies to both:

Art is a human activity consisting in this, that one consciously, by means of certain external symbols, conveys to others feelings one has experienced, and that others are infected by these feelings and also experience them.

Changing over from centralized art to decentralized, like many things we'll cover in this series, has just now become much easier. (Not to mention a possible reversion to the patronage model, of which I am

seeing a few signs.) Producing films is far cheaper and better outside of Hollywood than it ever has been before. (Hollywood remains tied to very expensive unions, among other legacy costs.)

In addition, it is easier than ever to work in ad hoc groups to produce new works, and several groups have already begun doing just these things, even financing films via crowdfunding.

At the same time, we have more recorded entertainment than any of us could watch in a lifetime. Along those lines, I recently ran into a fascinating quote from Bob Dylan³, obviously no newcomer to the field of entertainment. He said this:

The world don't need any more songs... They've got enough. They've got way too many. As a matter of fact, if nobody wrote any songs from this day on, the world ain't gonna suffer for it.

Consider the results from a few recent searches at Amazon.

For movies:

349,481 results for "movies on dvd"

For TV series:

12,874 results for "tv series dvd complete series"

For music:

83,539 results for CDs & Vinyl : "record albums"

So, we could go without anything new from Hollywood for a long, long time and never be bored. But at the same time, truly good new art (which new groups will hopefully produce) is always worthwhile, no matter how much we have stacked up. And Mr. Dylan notes just that as he continues:

Unless someone's gonna come along with a pure heart and has something to say. That's a different story.

The crucial point here is that we can produce *better* art and entertainment than has arisen from the modern centralized model. In fact, far better art *was* produced under a previous decentralized model. And so, I'll finish this section with some of my favorite quotes on art:

It is the sense of the sublime that we have to regard as the root of man's creative activities in art, thought, and noble living.

– Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone, A Philosophy of Religion*

The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer pause to wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead: his eyes are closed.

– Albert Einstein, *Einstein on Politics*

³ In a book called *Songwriters on Songwriting*.

Art for the sake of art itself is an idle sentence. Art for the sake of truth, for the sake of what is beautiful and good, that is the creed I seek.

– George Sand

Homer is one of the men of genius who solve that fine problem of art – the finest of all, perhaps – truly to depict humanity by the enlargement of man: that is, to generate the real in the ideal.

– Victor Hugo, *William Shakespeare*

A Final Thought

We've spent centuries feeling weak and bending our wills to the edicts of authority; where has it brought us? We're ruled with disgust by the worst among us, we're stripped of our money because of our supposed unfitness to help an ever-increasing victim class, and we've been hammered with fear. Most people are emotionally stunted, daily life is anything but free and easy, and the world is covered with wars at all times.

All evidence argues that we as individuals are far better than this. And yet, a stream of fears and distractions prevent most people from seriously considering that possibility.

It is time for people to stop thinking of themselves as weak, flawed, and miserable, to stop praising maniacs, and to start seeing ourselves for what we really are: inherently moral and creative beings.

In other words, it's time for us to start feeling, and to start being, wonderful.

Let's get busy.

* * * * *

Next month we'll jump right into the attainment of justice. See you then.

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