

# FREE-MAN'S PERSPECTIVE

How Life, Liberty & Sanity Can Win

Issue #21

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*And now, for something completely different...*

## A Practical, Positive Philosophy



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Yes, the Monty Python foot is a bit silly, but a human foot planted solidly on the earth, with a rainbow above, is a superb metaphor for my main points in this issue. So, please smile. :)

As you may have noticed, the word “philosophy” is brain repellant; it chases people away. That's sad, but there is good reason for it: lots of philosophers have been hard to understand on purpose. Things that are hard to understand intimidate most people (so they won't challenge you) and they impress academic types.

Such things keep people from venturing into philosophy at all, and I can't really blame them – it requires way too much effort and it leaves you feeling stupid. Who wants that?

Honestly, I think being repelled by confusing philosophies is often healthy (though it is sometimes just

sloth). Most of us understand, instinctively, a principle attributed to the great physicist Max Planck:

*If you can't explain your theory to a twelve year-old, you're a charlatan.*

That's not always and absolutely true (who can really explain quantum physics?), but it's true most of the time, and it's true for much of what passes for philosophy.

#### WE'RE *ALREADY* ON THE DARK SIDE

A friend of mine used to run seminars in which she'd ask people, "what do you want?" Invariably, the attendees started complaining about the things they didn't want: work they hated, misbehavior from children and spouses, lack of money, and so on... at great length and in precise detail. My friend would have to stop them and say, "No! I don't want to hear about what you *don't* want. I want to hear about what you *do* want!"

Almost never could an attendee make a coherent list of the things he or she wanted, and there's something very telling about that fact.

Unless we decide – hard and repetitively – to envision and itemize what we want, we'll probably default to focusing on the things we don't like. That's simply the mental soup in which we all swim. We're already on the dark side. Ours may not be as deeply dark as the dark side of *Star Wars*, but it is all around us and leads us to focus on what we hate, rather than what we love.

If you are tempted to disagree, consider what goes on in political campaigns. The professional opinion-makers always focus on the negative, and for very good reason: those are the ideas and images that people retain. It is dark side stuff and it works very well in the current environment.

How often do you hear people talk about the things they love, revere, and want to create? Certainly we hear such things sometimes, and in some circles more than others, but the 'gravitation' of our current world inclines toward bad things: fears, irritations, criticisms and complaints.

Our internal conversations are even worse. Most of us feel inferior and uncertain most of the time. We may cover it up to appear strong and confident, but it remains inside of us.

The crucial fact is this one:

*Most people spend their days thinking about what they are **not**, rather than what they **are**.*

Please re-read that sentence slowly a few times, then try to hold it in your mind and observe how it relates to your own thoughts.

If this is true, we have a huge opportunity sitting in front of us: By changing the focus of our thoughts, we can eliminate a tremendous amount of pain and irritation in our lives... and make ourselves better than we've ever been before. That's not a bad prospect.

#### WHAT IS MAN?

What, really, is man?

Many religions say that he is corrupt by nature; 'education' says he is hazardous until they certify him as safe; television (that greatest of modern teachers) says that man can become happy only through endless consumption. All of these entities tell men that they are badly incomplete, and all thrive by holding men in such opinions.

Consider the extent of this condition: The religion that preached man as a glorious being would be so strange as to frighten people. If education promoted a positive view of man, their certificates would sell for a fraction of the current price. Without men and women obsessing on what they lack, advertising revenues would crumble, along with frivolous purchases.

But is man really this sad, deformed creature?

This low view of man has not always been with us. At about 1000 BC, for example, this view was promoted:

*God made man just slightly lower than the angels and crowned him with glory and honor.*

In another place, the same author (David, son of Jesse) says that man is “wonderfully made,” and informs men that “you are gods.” Jesus of Nazareth, by the way, repeats this “you are gods” phrase without qualification.

Back when humans lived in direct contact with nature, rather than being insulated from it as we are now, we had no questions about being the highest, best creatures on the planet. We knew this like we know that we can breathe. Comparing a human to a beast was an insult. We were clearly better – astronomically better.

So, which view is right? Let's examine:

#### THE GREAT DIFFERENCE

Man's body is not much different from those of other mammals. In fact, it is so similar that animal parts (such as heart valves) can be very effectively used to replace damaged human parts. The great difference between humans and animals is this: *Man can observe and control his own thinking.*

That is a big statement, so please think about it for just a moment: *Man can observe and control his own thinking.* Man has conversations with himself. All healthy humans do this, asking themselves questions and observing their recalled memories.

This ability, and the ability to make willful decisions, made man the first *moral* being on Earth. Man is a creature who can be either divided against himself or true to himself.

Ultimately, this ability of humans to watch themselves, to remember, to decide and act based upon past results, permits them to reprogram their own 'software'. What *that* means is that man is a *variable* creature: He can be good when young and become much worse over time, or he can be neutral when young and become much better over time.

Man, over time, creates his own character. Or, he can abdicate that responsibility and surrender his will, allowing others to mold him according to *their* desires.

Certainly humans are born with a great number of inborn characteristics and tendencies. Nonetheless, it is also certain that people change greatly over their lifetimes, which is the point here: Through our continuing choices, we slowly create our own character. Or, we run away from doing so and allow others to form us as they wish.

#### MAN'S ATTRIBUTES

To thoroughly describe man and his attributes would require many pages. So, I will limit myself to main points, then explain and support them briefly. If you would like a fuller discourse on the subject, please see my book [Entropy & Divinity](#). (Also available on [Kindle](#).)

Man possesses these attributes:

**Individuality.** As I explained in FMP #18: All humans operate individually. I have an overflow of sensory input from my own body and none from yours. The same happens to you. No amount of training, or guilt, or coercion will ever change that – we're supposed to be this way. We are individuals by *structure*.

**Self-observation.** As explained above.

**Will.** The repetitive exercise of will reprograms us and forms our character. As Aristotle said, “we must become just by *doing* just acts.” Regardless of where we start from, it is willing and doing that moves us toward or away from the good. To think or say, “I want to be good,” is of absolutely no value until it is accompanied by willful action.

**A relational database.** Our mental 'database' functions are impressive. We possess tremendous recall and pattern recognition abilities. The crucial factor, however, is that all of this takes place in a database that refers and relates constantly to itself.

You experience this relational function every time you remember something, based upon its relationship to something else. Our memories relate to one another; our new thoughts relate to our previous thoughts, observations and feelings. This is how we work.

This relational structure is why the one-time injection of a good idea doesn't have much lasting effect. In order to change us, a new concept has to be *integrated* into our database, and that takes willful repetition over time.

**Reason.** Though we may sometimes fail to use it well, we retain the crucial ability to carefully compare things. By comparing new concepts or possibilities to the real world, we possess a very powerful and reliable tool.

**Body impulses.** We are not disembodied spirits, we are physical beings, and our bodies inject their own desires into our consciousness. In particular, our bodies promote two main causes: survival and reproduction. These impulses occur in every healthy human and operate quite independently from reason, or even our databases.

These impulses create conflicts in us. For example, when fear overwhelms us, or anger surges, or when we are stupidly led by sexual drives, our databases and our reason are bypassed. This causes many of our problems, but it is not something from outside that we must repel; it is something inside of us that we must learn how to manage.

**Rich interactions.** When we think of other people and things, we do not consider just one aspect. For example, when you think about having lunch with a close friend, many aspects will pass through your mind, such as what kinds of food each you are likely to eat, how your friend is feeling, the challenges or successes of his/her recent life, his/her expectations of you, previous interactions, and much more. These are very rich interactions, and the same thing applies to nearly all of our choices. We conceive of others as complex beings, not as monolithic objects.

**Creativity.** The healthy human, by his or her *structure* is an arrangement of attributes that produce creativity. So much so that over time it is indistinguishable from magic.

Bodily (aside from our brains), we are an upgraded version of apes. Yet our difference has enabled us to create and use language, music, mechanics, courtesy, fire, appreciation and

courage. By it we have deciphered the structure of matter and the nature of the stars. We have dreamed, and made our dreams real. We have proved our ability to build, to cooperate, to sail, to fly, to reach into the heavens, and to love.

This is not what we *can* be. It is what we *are*. And these are not abilities that we gain over time: we possess these abilities by our very structure. We can develop them, ignore them, or even fight them, but they remain present through every breath we take. We are magic machines.

If these things are true of man, or even just partly true, we can use these attributes to build, making use of what we already *are*, instead of punishing ourselves with endless thoughts about what we are *not*.

What we are is magnificent. The sane course of action is to use that, to build with it. In fact, to exclude such a course of action is to sin against ourselves and our creator, regardless of what entity or process we deem that creator to be.

Having been taught all our lives that our nature is flawed, treating that nature as an asset seems alien and dangerous to us. Nonetheless, the logic is clear: it is high time to cultivate our own wilderness.

So, I'd like to postulate a philosophy – a plan – for man *as he is*, not as some ponderer thinks he *should be*.

## A POSITIVE PHILOSOPHY

To be useful, this philosophy must be simple. So, here it is in six primary statements:

1. Integrity is health.
2. Will and act.
3. Expect and accommodate conflicts.
4. Operate richly.
5. Center on reality.
6. Create.

Now, let's put a bit of meat on those bones:

### **#1: Integrity is health.**

Our internal parts (to use a mechanical metaphor) are inter-connected, complexly and intricately. Acting with integrity keeps all those parts operating as they should, strengthening related systems and aligning all operations. Integrity makes us better and healthier. This is not about rules and external standards. It is about operating healthfully according to our inner conditions.

Furthermore (and to continue our metaphor), when our internal gears are synchronized and lubricated, we produce authentic passion, enthusiasm, empathy and love. In this state of internal health, we thrive.

Such integrity affects not only ourselves, but fosters healthful interactions with others. Respect and kindness for others, for example, is an external application of integrity: treating others as we'd wish to be treated.

Integrity is not an obligation, it is health itself; it empowers, improves and enlightens almost

everything we do.

## **#2: Will and act.**

Willful acts may either improve or damage our internal database. Especially so when undertaken repetitively. By willing and acting, we reprogram ourselves and create our future character.

The more common problem with will and action, however, is not willing and acting badly, but abandoning will and action to others.

The locus of our decisions – the point at which they occur – must be *internal* to us, if we wish them to improve us. To merely obey external commands cannot improve our internal machinery.

To become convinced that someone else's idea is right, then to act upon it, is to first make that idea our own, then to willfully act. This is constructive. But to merely surrender our will to an outsider (*any* outsider) and to robotically act accordingly... this insults and degrades our internal machinery – whether or not the action was “correct.”

Only willful actions *of our own* can improve us, and it is these which we must grasp. By choosing, even if we mistakenly choose wrongly, we learn and improve: We locate improperly performing parts, we locate incorrect information, we locate incomplete software.

Failing to act individually, we push ourselves into decline or abuse.

Choosing to act individually, we challenge, improve and refine ourselves, even when we choose honestly but wrongly.

## **#3: Operate richly.**

Almost everything we interact with and everything we do will have multiple aspects to it. The people we interact with are highly complex, and if we are to interact with mutual benefit, we need to consider those many aspects. This, really, is nothing more than accepting reality as it is: complex and multi-faceted.

The usual opponent of rich interaction is the rule. Rules are rigid, binary and bad representations of the real world.

Humans are not rule-oriented beings. Rather, we are organic beings, with dozens of conflicting rules balancing inside of us at the same time. There is no one set of rules that describe everything and react to all other rules with mathematical certainty.

Operating richly is especially important when it comes to cooperation. If several of us have an independent view of a shared goal, we can all engage our full faculties toward reaching that goal. That makes for powerful cooperation, communication and adaptations. Mere rules and obedience engage none of our internal databases, save the one person who decided; the rest are devalued and silenced. It is an insulting and wasteful way to cooperate.

## **#4: Expect and accommodate conflicts.**

As mentioned above, a human is composed of multiple systems, and these interfere with each other at times.

There is nothing to be done about these conflicts, save to accommodate them as beneficially as

we can. Our “problematic” instincts of amoral survival impulses and an arational sex drive have served a crucial purpose – it is highly unlikely that our species would have survived without them. So, these instincts are not bad per se; the problem is that they don't integrate very well with our database. That means that they get in our way from time to time.

The primary solution for this situation is simply to recognize it. Once we recognize our instincts surging, we can choose to accept them, to redirect or modify the impulses, to summon our will to resist, or simply to laugh at the absurd contrasts.

By being aware we can act, even if it must be after the fact, to minimize any damage.

We will also face conflicts when updating our relational database. Our previous decisions (especially when they've been stable for many years) are encoded in that database and will not vanish upon the first insertion of new data. New data or operations replacing old ones will face resistance. This resistance will fade over time, as the new information and routines are worked in to the database, but it will begin with conflict.

#### **#5: Center on reality.**

Centering on reality – upon understanding reality – we continually adapt and grow. This is what life does, on every level. To react, to grow, eventually to thrive... this is life in action.

The contrary choice, which many people make, is to trust in rules. People choose rules because they don't want to remain active; they want to become static, yet to be protected and satisfied. They substitute abstract things for concrete things. The real world, however, doesn't work that way: life itself is motion and growth and change.

There is no ultimate rule-set that we can manipulate to get what we want. The world is desperately complex and rich; rules are narrow, rigid and non-adaptive. These two models are radically opposed.

If we are to use our nature to develop and grow, we must center on reality, not on rules. And that means that we must seek the truth. (By “truth,” I refer simply to what is factual.)

The prophet Jeremiah sought people who were “valiant for the truth.” That is what we are to do: embrace and understand the real world and work your knowledge of it into your database. *That* improves you in deep ways.

#### **#6: Create.**

The well-tuned human is a creative instrument in the universe. We should think of ourselves that way, and we should create at every significant opportunity. We can create (make) buildings, machines, meals, friendships, ideas, stories, new people!, songs, strategies, and so on, endlessly.

Creation is the focus point of the magic machine that is man. Practicing creation tends to draw all the parts of the machine into harmonious operation. By creating, producing, bearing fruit, we make ourselves better than we were, from the inside out.

TO SUM UP...

It has to be one of the most overtly sensible things in the world to use abilities we already possess.

Everything written above can be done immediately. Nothing needs to be added, nothing needs to be taken away, no preparation is required. There is no guilt involved, no shame, no obedience to outside standards.

The only thing we need to do is to change our thinking and start building with those things we possess by our very nature and structure.

This plan is eminently sensible and almost cannot damage us. The only hurdles in front of us are deciding and doing.

#### EVASION & EXTENSION

Changing, however – actually acting differently – clashes with the relational database we've mentioned several times in this issue. Our previous choices and habits are encoded in that database, and they tend to protect themselves.

So, while it is strongly in your interest to start thinking of yourself as an asset to be developed, you must choose, strongly and consistently, to do so. You need to assert your will against a counter-force of your previous self-conceptions.

The usual pushback involves evasion: “You can't do this because...” followed by a stream of innovative reasons. For this reason, I hesitate to continue this discussion. I am tempted to stop right here and say, “do it or don't.”

On the other hand, there is a supplemental point that can be very helpful. The fact that it often arises as a response to an evasion concerns me – I don't want to support that line of thinking – but you are big boys and girls, and you know your own thoughts quite well. So I will make the point:

In this present world, some of our development and creation will run up against obstacles. When that happens, it is easy to fall back into old ways of dealing with the world, which carry us back to old ways of thinking about ourselves.

It doesn't have to be that way. Instead, we can simply extend the principle we've been explaining in this issue: Rather than focusing on the things we *can't* do, we can focus on those we *can* do.

There is one central concept to remember:

*You retain the power of choice. You can choose from hundreds of alternatives. Focus on the myriad things you **can** do, not on the things you **can't**.*

If and when we run into forces that forbid or threaten us, we almost always have multiple options. First of all, we can simply disobey. After all, people and groups who forbid development act stupidly and thuggishly. Our morality is better than theirs.

More importantly, it is *our* morality, growing *inside* of us, and no outsider has any claim upon it. To attempt such control is tyranny.

There can be consequences to defiance, of course. This is a difficult world at present, and many people still think of coercion as a respectable tool. That's bad luck for us, but we can adapt and thrive anyway.

If disobedience is not a particularly good option, we can consider pursuing our plans somewhere else,



where they are not forbidden and punished. And the list of options goes on and on.

The great exponent of this “choose from the things you *can* do” philosophy was the late Harry Browne. In 1973, Harry published his book *How I Found Freedom In An Unfree World* (sadly out of print) in which he teaches people to attain happiness by using the tools and options that are already available to them.

The truth is that almost everyone has far more options than they use. For example, many people don't believe it is okay for them to act toward their own happiness... at least if they haven't seen other people acting in that way. Harry spent many pages trying to disarm such misconceptions. The crucial issue is this:

*So long as you don't hurt other people, it is legitimate for you to make any choice at all to make your life better.*

*It doesn't matter whether others do it, or have ever done it. It doesn't matter if people will like it or hate it. If it will (or even might) make your life better, it's a choice you should take seriously.*

Following are several points from *Freedom In An Unfree World*, some of which I have paraphrased:

- You can live your life as you want to live it, no matter what others decide to do with their lives.
- You don't have to change others in order to become free yourself.
- You don't have to conform to someone else's standard: you need only to be moral in your own eyes.
- The power you ascribe to the noises and scribbles of government officials is your choice.
- You are always free to move on and start a new life.
- You're far better off changing and improving yourself, rather than trying to transform “society.”
- What you've paid to get where you are now is irrelevant. Those resources are gone and can't be retrieved, no matter what you do.
- We always act on incomplete or partially correct information; we take risks in everything we do.

The crux of the issue is that you should use the options that you already *have* to make your life better, and not be limited by past habits or what other people think. And this, as we've explained, is merely an extension of using and developing what you already *are*.

#### THE IMPORTANT EXTENSION

While extending the concept of *working with what we are* to the larger world can be helpful, the really important extension of the concept is to other people.

Every time you walk down a street, you see people who are comparing themselves to each other, and especially to anyone who appears stronger, taller, happier, sexier, or richer. They notice people who look to be in a higher social class. They notice each other's group affiliations. In other words, they notice externalities, and think about what they *are not* far more than what they are.

But each of these people is capable of producing a life-long stream of creativity and beauty. They don't do that because they are never focused on using their own abilities. They remain diverted to obsessions like status. Thus the magnificent machine that is human life operates only intermittently.

This is a massive waste. Every healthy human has stunning capabilities, but they are thinking in ways which prevent those capabilities from operating. The great mechanism refuses to let itself operate. This desperately sad situation brings to mind a line written by the late George Harrison:

*I look at you all, and see the love there that's sleeping,  
While my guitar gently weeps*

Almost every person you will pass today (and tomorrow, and the next day) will have massive abilities sleeping inside of them.

If the non-use of these abilities were simply a matter of insufficient time, that would be unfortunate but not really avoidable. The fact is, however, that these sleeping abilities are unused because they are *displaced*. They are displaced by ignorance and a futile cycle of painful, useless thoughts.

Humanity has been pulled into this negative thought loop over centuries. Not only are people stuck inside the loop, but they don't think that an *outside* even exists. Everything they see and hear (especially when plugged into the entertainment matrix) tells them that they are made happy by external things.

Here is another line from Harrison's *While My Guitar Gently Weeps*:

*I don't know why nobody told you,  
How to unfold your love*

People don't know how to enjoy and develop what they are. They've never been told that they are “just slightly lower than angels.” They wouldn't know how to take such a concept – it is the opposite of what they've been taught most of their lives. They've never been told how to unfold their abilities. They may not even be sure that they have abilities to unfold.

It's time that someone re-introduced them to the concept.

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I'll stop here. This is strong material and that is enough to digest. We should be back to our usual format for the next issue.

See you next month.

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