

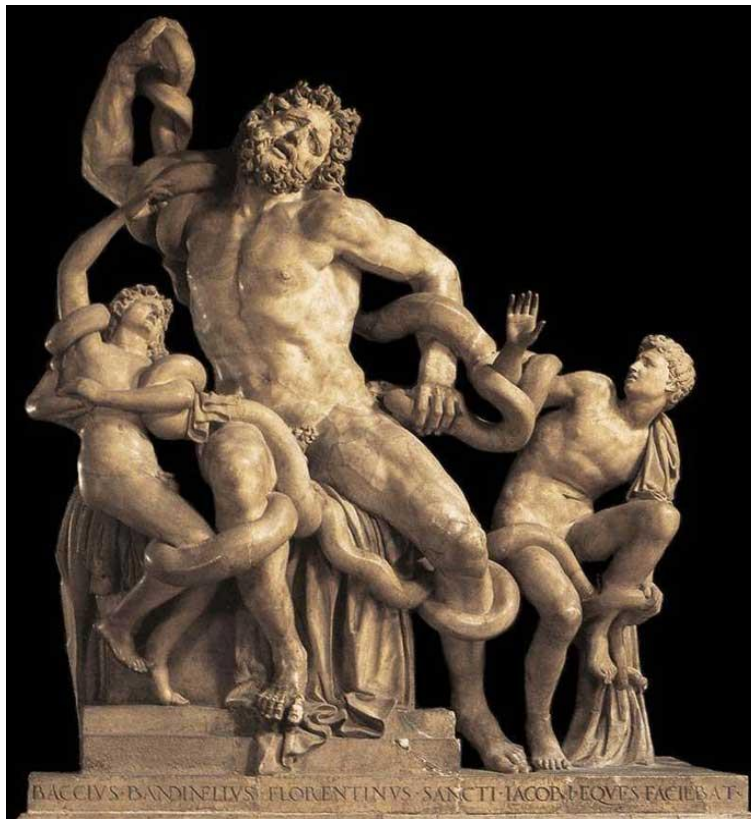
# FREE-MAN'S PERSPECTIVE

How Life, Liberty & Sanity Can Win

Issue #35

May 2013

## The Institutional Suppression of Talent



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Some years ago I read a prescient piece about what would happen in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I'm very sorry that I no longer remember the author's name, but I vividly remember an important line from his work:

*In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the frustration of talent will be seen as a cardinal sin.*

As I thought about this wonderful line – and aside from hoping that the author would be right – I began thinking about the history of talent, of its exercise, its suppression, and how these come to be in

the world. Talent is present in almost everyone, and yet it rather seldom functions beyond a narrow range.

Among other things, this matters greatly for our happiness, which requires us to feel effective.

Aristotle's definition of happiness was this (paraphrased): *The exercise of vital powers along lines of excellence in a life affording them scope*. That's a definition worthy of inspection:

- **Vital powers** we have. We are born with them.
- **Exercising them along lines of excellence** is something that we can do and should do.
- **A life offering them scope** is where the real problem lies. We will examine that problem in this issue.

There are many natural obstacles in our world that limit a man or woman's scope. We are compelled to find food, shelter, sleep, clothing, mates and so on. These things are problem enough; they have restrained talent and happiness through the length of human history, impoverishing us all.

But when the oppositional wills of other humans are added to this, and worse, the *stupidized* wills of grouped men and women, talent is choked, almost to the point of complete suppression.

Think about the things that could have come to us *only* through the operation of talent: Medicine, food production technologies, cars, trucks, trains, airplanes, refrigeration, heating, air conditioning, and much more. How much better would our lives be if talent had been oppressed just 10% less?

To oppress talent is to impoverish billions of humans yet unborn. It is among the worst crimes imaginable, yet it continues in our time. And not only continuing, but accelerating in many ways.

## INSTITUTION MIND

I'm going to give you some historical snapshots of talent in the world. But before I do, I want to point out the great anti-talent mechanism that lies beneath the vast majority of talent's suppressions.

I used the word “stupidized” above carefully, and my reason for throwing an odd new word at you is this: Once humans are held within a group, and caused to act as a group, the quality of their judgment devolves toward the level of animals. Grouping humans *stupidizes* them.

And I bring up institutions because they are – precisely – firm, maintained, groupings of humans. That implies, clearly, that they are stupidizing machines.

This difference in mentality between individuals and groups has been noted by many people, though very few of them have extended their observations at all. The intelligent observers quoted below complained about people acting stupidly, but they didn't examine groups as the *causes* of stupidity, or as problems to be eliminated, which are ideas that logically follow.

*In individuals, insanity is rare; but in groups, parties, nations and epochs, it is the rule.*

– Friedrich Nietzsche

*An individual immersed for some length of time in a crowd soon finds himself... in a special state, which much resembles the state of fascination in which the hypnotized individual finds himself in the hands of the hypnotizer.*

-- Gustave Le Bon



Once this separation of knowledge and state was in place, the men and women of ancient Greece gifted the world with mathematics, philosophy, literature, art, drama, and much more. Had knowledge been contained inside of institutions, as before, such exercises of vital powers would have remained beyond the scope of the Greeks, and we would have been deprived of their gifts.

### 1121 A.D., Ferreux-Quincey, France



*Forthwith I sought out a lonely spot known to me of old in the region of Troyes, and there, on a bit of land which had been given to me, and with the approval of the bishop of the district, I built with reeds and stalks my first oratory.*

*No sooner had students learned of my retreat than they began to flock thither from all sides, leaving their towns and castles to dwell in the wilderness. In place of their spacious houses they built themselves huts; instead of dainty fare they lived on the herbs of the field and coarse bread; their soft beds they exchanged for heaps of straw and rushes, and their tables were piles of turf.*

Peter Abelard wrote these lines after he had been incriminated, shamed, mutilated, supplanted by his enemies and cast out of Paris. He pulled himself back together in this remote hideaway and began teaching anyone who wanted to learn.

Abelard had been born near Brittany in the year 1079 AD. He was the eldest son of a minor noble family and a military life was scripted for him. His father, however, saw to it that each son of his was taught in “letters” even earlier than in the management of arms.

Abelard was not only a very bright boy, but he took immense pleasure in learning. “The more I went forward in the study of letters,” he wrote, “the greater became the ardor of my devotion to them, until in truth I was so enthralled by my passion for learning that, gladly I fled utterly from the court of Mars (that is, life at arms) that I might win learning.”

As a young teenager, Abelard ran away from home and went “journeying through many provinces, and debating as I went, going whithersoever I heard that the study of my chosen art most flourished.” In other words, young Abelard went wandering through what is now France, learning and debating with any learned person he could find.

Somehow, Abelard made it to Paris while still in his teens. There, in the cathedral school of Notre-



Dame de Paris, he was taught for a while by William of Champeaux, a highly regarded teacher at the time. Young Abelard's troubles begin at this point, primarily because he began teaching Aristotle, while the great institution of the day, the Roman Church, remained devoted to Plato.

Abelard's other great 'sin' (as those who mutilated him saw it) was falling in love with a beautiful and brilliant young woman. According to the institutional rules of the time, teachers had to be clergy, and clergy were to be celibate, at least publicly.

I will pass over most of Abelard's story, but I should note that he is responsible for the re-start of learning in Europe. His friends and students defied the Pope and re-introduced Aristotle, began the University of Paris (which remained an unapproved, rogue school for its first hundred years or so) and formulated what became known as "the rule of law."

His persecutions never ended, by the way. A famous churchman named Bernard of Clairvaux pursued him for the rest of his life.

### 1586, Danzig



I wrote about this man's story at length in FMP #2, so I will only cover the highlights in this issue.

His name is lost to us. The only record of his existence is found in a history of inventions written in 1846, and even then, only as a note referencing a lost Venetian book from 1636. He had been murdered some fifty years before that, in 1586.

The place of his death was Danzig (now known as Gdansk), a busy old trading hub on the Baltic Sea: a free city and a member of the Hanseatic League. He seems to have been the first person in the chain that led to the Industrial Revolution.

What we know for sure about this man is that he invented a new and radically improved weaving machine. We also know that the government (then called the City Fathers) stopped him, forbade anyone to use his invention, and secretly murdered him.

His invention was lost, but the idea of a weaving machine was not. Not many years later the city of London was full of illegal, underground weaving operations. The government and the guilds passed laws and even had a riot – all to prevent the use of talent outside of institutional control.

## 1856, Detroit



Here we have a happier story.

Alexander Milton Ross (1832-1897), was a young surgeon from Detroit, and a member of the Underground Railroad, working to free slaves in the American south.

Ross's father died when he was only twelve years old, at which time his formal education ended. Nonetheless, by the time he was 23, he was not only a physician, but a surgeon.

Such things are impossible these days, with people forcibly excluded from professions unless they spend a specified number of years inside institutions and obtain approval certificates from them. In 19<sup>th</sup> century America, on the other hand, the power of institutions was minimal and there were no professional regulation laws. This allowed young Mr. Ross to become a surgeon based upon his merits alone.

This was common not only for physicians at the time, but also for lawyers, engineers, and more or less every profession: If you could demonstrate sufficient knowledge and competency to members of the profession, you became a doctor, lawyer or engineer. Self-study and apprenticeship were sufficient.

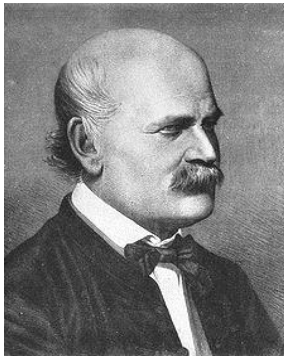
Just one year later, in 1856, Ross became actively involved in anti-slavery actions. Being a very respectable young doctor, he used this technique to free slaves:

Dr. Ross, looking rich and educated, would approach the owner of a slave plantation and request permission to study some interesting birds on the owner's estate. Upon receiving permission, he would wander off into the fields and trees, carefully examining the area. But once night fell, the young doctor would find the slaves and speak to them in secret. He told them where they could find Underground Railroad stations, who to watch out for and who to trust. Before leaving, he would give each slave a knife, a compass, a few dollars, and as much food as they could carry. When he could, he would also distribute pistols.

It should be noted that what Dr. Ross did was completely illegal; according to the laws of the United States, he was a criminal. Laws regarding slaves (and against freeing them) had the full backing of the US government institution. People went to jail for even attempting to free slaves.

Ross made at least five rescue missions to slave states and played a crucial role in the escapes of many slaves, who referred to him as *The Birdman*.

## 1865, Vienna



*The man pictured above is Ignaz Semmelweis, the discoverer of antiseptics and thus the savior of millions. He died in 1865, two weeks after being condemned to an insane asylum (by institutional men), and after being beaten by the guards and developing gangrene.*

Preceding his death, a leader of the Hungarian medical society and Professor of Surgery at the University of Pest named Janos Balassa wrote a letter 'referring' Semmelweis to an insane asylum. Then, the founder of the New Vienna School of Dermatology lured him there. Semmelweis realized what was happening and tried to leave. He was severely beaten by the facility's guards, secured in a straitjacket and confined to a darkened cell.

Only a few people showed up for Semmelweis' funeral. Although the rules of the Hungarian Association of Physicians and Natural Scientists specified that a commemorative address be delivered in honor of a member who had died in the preceding year (and Semmelweis was a member), there was no address for him; his death was never even mentioned.

Semmelweis had been born in 1818, was awarded a doctorate degree in medicine in 1844, and before long specialized in obstetrics, where he confronted the primary killer of young mothers at that time, Childbed fever. (More properly called Puerperal fever.) This condition was common in mid-19th-century hospitals and often fatal, with mortality at 10%–35%.

Semmelweis discovered that the incidence of the fever could be drastically cut by the use of hand disinfection in obstetrical clinics, using a chlorinated lime solution.

But despite results showing that disinfection reduced mortality to below 1%, Semmelweis' observations conflicted with the established scientific and medical opinions of the time and his ideas were rejected by the medical community.

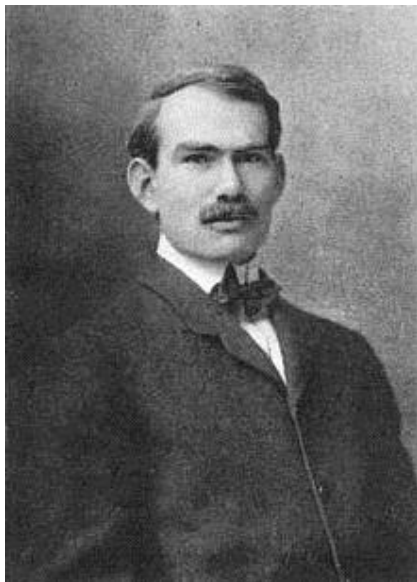
The medical institutions demanded that Semmelweis explain precisely how this hand washing worked. But Semmelweis could not explain it, he only knew that it did work, a fact that the institutions did not

want to address. (Years later, Louis Pasteur and Joseph Lister would explain why.)

Semmelweis was relegated to an insignificant, unpaid position at an obstetric ward in Pest. After taking over, Semmelweis virtually eliminated Childbed fever, but the medical institutions still didn't want to know.

Suffice it to say that Semmelweis' findings were never accepted while he lived. He eventually developed emotional problems, which his enemies seized upon and publicized. His greatest enemy, on the other hand, became rector of the University of Vienna and was eventually knighted.

## 1913, San Francisco



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*"Lee DeForest has said in many newspapers and over his signature that it would be possible to transmit the human voice across the Atlantic before many years. Based on these absurd and deliberately misleading statements, the misguided public... has been persuaded to purchase stock in his company."*

These were the words of the U.S. District Attorney who prosecuted Lee De Forest for selling stock in his Radio Telephone Company in 1913.

Lee De Forest was born in 1873 in Council Bluffs, Iowa. His father was a minister who shortly accepted the position of President of Taladega College, a colored (African American) school in Alabama, making De Forest the son of a rebel.

De Forest attended the Sheffield Technical School at Yale University, where he was once suspended after tapping into Yale's electrical system and blacking out the campus. He paid part of his tuition with money he made from mechanical and gambling inventions. He was awarded a PhD in 1899 and shortly took a teaching position at the Armour Institute in Chicago.

In 1907, De Forest made the breakthrough that created radio as we know it. The device he invented (a special type of vacuum tube) was called the *De Forest Valve*, then the *Audion*, and now the *Triode*.



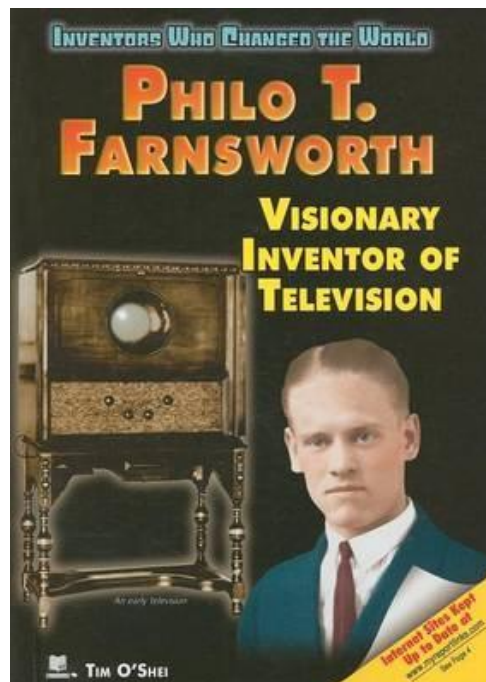
On July 18, 1907, De Forest broadcast the first ship-to-shore message and on January 12, 1910, he conducted the first commercial broadcast, a performance of *Tosca*, featuring the Italian tenor Enrico Caruso, from the Metropolitan Opera House in New York City.

De Forest came to San Francisco in 1910 and worked for the Federal Telegraph Company, which began developing the first global radio communications system in 1912. Meanwhile he promoted his invention.

Being prosecuted by a United States Attorney General nearly bankrupted De Forest with legal bills, forcing him to sell his invention to AT&T and the Bell System between 1913 and 1917. (The rights were sold, first for limited uses and eventually for all uses.)

I have no evidence to suggest that AT&T colluded with the prosecutor to gain De Forest's rights, but many people have wondered.

### 1933 A.D., San Francisco



*Philo T. Farnsworth was a farm boy from Idaho who created television as we know it. But before he could profit from it, RCA sued him, wore him out in the courts, and eventually bought all the rights for far less than they should have been worth.*

Farnsworth was born in 1906, to Lewis and Serena Farnsworth, a Mormon couple living in a log cabin at a place called Indian Creek, near Beaver, Utah. Six years later, the family moved to a farm in Rigby, Utah. The farmhouse was wired for electricity and young Philo threw himself into the technology. Shortly, he was repairing generators, motors, and converting his mother's hand powered washing machine into an electrically powered one. He then moved into electronics, after experiencing his first telephone conversation and finding technology magazines in an attic.

While in high school, Farnsworth realized how electronic television could be accomplished.

(Mechanical television systems were being developed at the time, but it was clear that they wouldn't be good enough for use outside of laboratories.) Young Farnsworth sought help from his science teacher, Justin Tolman, and covered several blackboards with drawings to show how it might be done. Tolman encouraged the boy to continue his work.

Farnsworth continued his work over several years, eventually finding philanthropists in San Francisco to fund a lab for him, in Los Angeles. A few months later he applied for a patent. This was 1927, when Farnsworth was 21 years old.

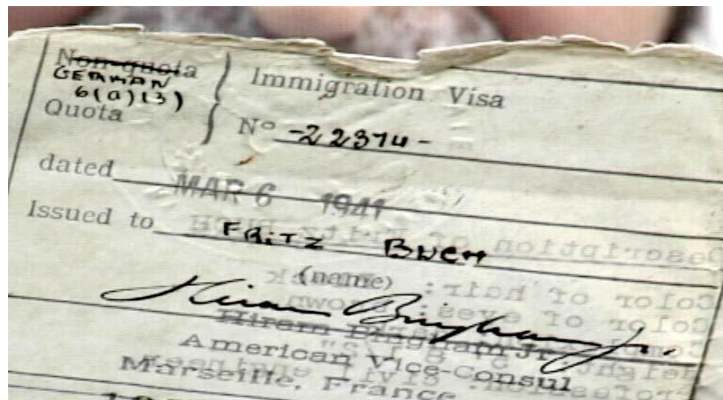
By 1928, Farnsworth had developed his system sufficiently to hold a demonstration. In 1929, he transmitted the first live human images using his television system, a three and a half-inch image of his wife Elma.

In 1931, David Sarnoff of RCA offered to buy Farnsworth's patents for \$100,000, with the stipulation that he become an employee of RCA. Farnsworth refused. Instead, he went to work for Philco in Philadelphia, where he was mistreated. Then ensued a long and complicated series of patent fights. Farnsworth began to experience depression during these years.

At one point, RCA filed an interference suit against Farnsworth, despite the fact it could present no evidence. RCA lost a subsequent appeal, but litigation over a variety of issues continued. In September 1939, after a legal battle lasting more than ten years, RCA finally conceded to a licensing agreement for Farnsworth's 1927 patent for Television, totaling \$1 million. RCA was then free to sell electronic television cameras.

Farnsworth went on to a long, productive career working in other people's labs, but he never made any more money from television and he suffered from depression for the rest of his life. He died in 1971.

## 1940, Vichy France



Hiram "Harry" Bingham came from a famous American family. His father, for example, was the archeologist who unearthed the lost Incan City of Machu Picchu. Harry entered the US diplomatic service and, in 1939, was posted to Marseilles, France as the American Vice-Consul. He was 36 years old at this time.

On June 10, 1940, Adolf Hitler's forces invaded France and the French government fell. The French signed an armistice with Germany and forced most of France's large population of foreign refugees to

move to internment camps. Many thousands of refugees went to Marseille to seek visas to the US and other foreign destinations. This placed Bingham in a crucial position.

The US government – Bingham's employer – ordered its representatives in Marseilles to grant no visas to Jews. Bingham found this policy immoral and undermined it. In defiance, he granted more than 2,500 US visas to Jews and other refugees. He also sheltered Jews in his Marseilles home, and paid forgers for documents that would help get Jews out of Hitler's way. He worked with the French underground to smuggle Jews out of France into Spain or across the Mediterranean. He even contributed to their expenses out of his own pocket.

In 1941, Franklin Roosevelt's government lost patience with him and sent him to Argentina, where, a few years later, he began annoying his superiors by reporting the movements of Nazi war criminals.

Eventually, Bingham was forced out of the American diplomatic service completely. He died, almost penniless, in 1988.

### **1960, Greensboro, North Carolina**



*The four young men pictured here are Joseph McNeil, Franklin McCain, Ezell Blair, Jr., and David Richmond, collectively known as the Greensboro four.*

On February 1, 1960, these four freshmen from the North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University sat down at the lunch counter inside the Woolworth's store at 132 South Elm Street in Greensboro, North Carolina, and asked for coffee. Following store policy, the lunch counter staff refused to serve them at the “whites only” counter and the store's manager asked them to leave. They sat peacefully, but refused to move.

The second day, the student leaders of the University were supposed to arrive early at Woolworth's and stand with them. Not one of the 23 showed up.

The young men were hurt, but persisted nonetheless, and others joined them. On the third day, more than 60 people came to the Woolworth's store. A statement issued by Woolworth's national headquarters said the company would “abide by local custom” and maintain its segregated policy. More than 300 protested on the fourth day.

The sit-in continued and a boycott began, of stores with segregated lunch counters. Sales at the boycotted stores dropped by a third, leading their owners to abandon their segregation policies. On July 26<sup>th</sup> of 1960, the entire Woolworth's chain was desegregated, serving blacks and whites alike.

1973, Washington DC



*We covered the horrifying Tuskegee experiments in FMP #5, and a bit in #25, so I won't go through the details again. But it is important to note that after they were made aware of the torture of hundreds of men, the entire US government institution – congress, courts and executive – did nothing.*

Furthermore, these crimes ran from 1943 to 1973 and the following institutions were either involved or well aware of them:

- The Center for Disease Control
- The American Medical Association
- The National Medical Association
- The US Public Health Service
- The Department of Health, Education, and Welfare
- The Tuskegee Institute

It was individuals who eventually brought this down - not institutions - although the abuse was utterly obvious the whole time.

As I've said previously, the decision processes of individuals involve empathy, those of institutions do not – a lot like animal decisions.



## 2013, Brooklyn, New York

### 'Aaron was killed by the government' - Robert Swartz on his son's death

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*On January 11, 2013, after a bitter and grossly over-zealous prosecution conducted by the US government and involving the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Aaron Swartz was found dead in his apartment, where he had hanged himself.*

Aaron Swartz was an unusually bright and sensitive boy from the suburbs of Chicago. Bored with high school, he stayed home and taught himself how to program computers, just as the Internet came into public use. His abilities put him into important positions before people realized that he was only a teenager. He simply did the work, and on the Internet no one can tell your age.

Aaron had a strong and productive activist streak (which I will not catalog here), and in 2008 he downloaded and released about 2.7 million federal court documents stored in the *Public Access to Court Electronic Records* (PACER) database managed by the Administrative Office of the United States Courts. The FBI wanted to punish him, but ultimately had to drop their investigation, since the documents, were, in fact, supposed to be public.

The incident, however, was widely known, and both the court system and the FBI were embarrassed and incensed. Many people feel that what followed was payback.

In late 2010 and early 2011, Swartz downloaded a large number of academic journal articles from JSTOR, an archive of scientific articles, through MIT's computer network. These articles were being sold for high prices by universities, but their authors generally received nothing at all. Aaron felt that scientific information should be easily accessed and that its creators deserved compensation. So, he downloaded the articles, en masse, with a laptop connected to a networking switch, inside a wiring closet whose door was kept unlocked.

On January 6, 2011, Swartz was arrested near the Harvard campus by two MIT police officers and a U.S. Secret Service agent on state charges of breaking and entering a building with intent to commit a felony. Some months later he was also indicted in federal court.

Rather than seeking minor penalties (Aaron had no intention of profiting from the effort and never deprived MIT of their articles), the federal prosecutors charged him with two counts of wire fraud and

11 violations of the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act. These charges carried a cumulative maximum penalty of \$1 million in fines plus 35 years in prison, as well as asset forfeiture. More or less every analyst has concluded that the federal government was trying to “send a message.” In other words, they went beyond justice and into intimidation and terror.

Aaron had a long and well-known history of depression, and many people asked MIT and the prosecutors to ease off or they might kill him. Larry Lessig, a highly respected legal analyst and a friend of Aaron's, went to the prosecutors and begged them, saying “this young man is fragile, we need to protect him.”

“I'll protect him,” replied the prosecutor, “I'll put him in a jail cell.”

Predictably enough, Aaron became deeply depressed and hanged himself, depriving himself of long life and the world of his talents.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Consider the subjects we've covered in this short list: The beginnings of knowledge, the beginnings of teaching, the beginnings of the industrial revolution, the beginnings of modern medicine, the beginnings of new technologies and the battles for free information on the Internet. In addition, we've covered the great modern fights against slavery, bigotry and genocide. And in all of these cases, the institution has stood in the path of talent and progress, punishing those who wished to pass.

But the people in these stories – even the saddest cases – were the lucky few. There were many others who never got to develop their talents at all, or who made discoveries but had no way to communicate or develop them, or who knew they had talent but were physically or emotionally damaged beyond their ability to use it.

It is a sick condition where people are forced to suffer before they can bless humanity with their talents, and whatever causes such a condition is something that we should alter or abolish. Talent is to be used, not restrained.

I should not, however, give you the impression that the oppression of talent affects only large events; it also affects everyday things. The creation of beauty by average people is an excellent example of this:

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century - even through the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century - it was common for families and friends to gather around a piano, or an organ, or a guitar, and sing. In other words, they were all involved in creating beauty. Since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, however, talent was confined to entertainment corporations and accessed via radio and television.

I once knew a group of a few hundred people who jointly decided that the creation of music was available to all of them. As a result, the vast majority of them not only sang and played instruments, but wrote some fairly good music. People become capable when they think they are.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

The implications of my new word and its associated hypothesis are profound. If grouping humans is inherently stupidizing, then institutions are anti-human and a cause of protracted suffering.

To prove this hypothesis, facts would have to be assembled, pro and con. I've given you a handful of facts in this issue, but there are many more. And we never touched the strongest evidence – that of government institutions and their death tolls. The number of murders committed by individuals is troubling, to be sure, but governments kill many times more people than individuals do.

Arguments against this theory – at least those which I have heard – are really not arguments at all, but are, rather, simple fear: *If you believe that, powerful people will hurt you.*

A threatening response, especially when it arises almost instantly, is the mark of a lie defending itself.

To close, let's restate this hypothesis for clarity:

- 1. The institution is, regardless of its pedigree, nothing but a group held together by rules.*
- 2. Human consciousness is self-monitoring and has an ethical mechanism built in. Institutional decisions lack this ethical mechanism.*
- 3. The effective 'mind' of the group – of the institution – is not equal in quality to the mind of the individual; yielding primacy to it is inherently problematic and dangerous.*

\* \* \* \* \*

In the next couple of weeks (May 13) we'll be sending you a brief but timely report on Bitcoin. I didn't want to add it to this already long issue, but Bitcoin is a very important new technology and I think you should all know about it.

This report will show up in your inbox mid-month.

\* \* \* \* \*

See you next month.

PR