

The Peaceful Revolutionist

Josiah Warren

1833

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Josiah Warren's claim — or others' claim on his behalf — that he was the first American anarchist, rests largely on the now extremely rare periodical *The Peaceful Revolutionist*, of 1833, which Warren wrote and printed. That date indeed, for what it's worth, places Warren's expression of anarchism before Thoreau's, or the radical abolitionist Henry Wright's, though I daresay it was fairly commonplace in radical Protestant religious movements of two centuries before. We could say, however, that *The Peaceful Revolutionist* was a very early expression of secular anarchism, preceding Proudhon, for example. But however we may adjudicate priority, *The Peaceful Revolutionist* contains some of Warren's liveliest writing (e.g. truly public-spirited officials "are not found even in the proportion of ten to the population of Sodom") and demonstrates that his anarchism and individualism were fully formed by that date. His economic theory was still nascent, and in place of the cost principle he deployed Owen's principle of the equal exchange of labor; Warren's economics were not formed fully until he had performed a variety of practical experiments.

The PR was presented from the edge of America (deepest Cincinnati) and in a different context altogether than his work of the 1850s or 1870s. Warren's reaction to Owen was still his fundamental source of energy, and he had recently read Alexander Bryan Johnson. In addition, he's a bit bolder on some matters than he was later to become: he rarely expressed his atheism post-PR, for example. What I intend to do is reproduce one entire issue (dated April 5, 1833, and listed as vol. 1, no. 4; holdings of the Wisconsin Historical Society), which I think imparts a nice savor. Then I will give extracts of other issues.

My "redaction" consists of alterations of punctuation, removal of italics, small caps etc.

The texts are drawn from three issues. As far as I have been able to conclude, these are the only issues extant, though there were at least five: four from 1833, and one printed in 1848. There may have been others. The final bit reprinted here, "On Originality," is one Warren's liveliest and most personal essays.

Individuality

When Robert Owen promulgated the proposition that "we are effects of causes, and therefore cannot deserve praise or blame," a very few looked upon this as the proper basis of an entirely new state of society which alone could produce "peace on earth and good will among men"; while others called Mr. Owen a madman, some charged him with being an agent of the king of England sent here to undermine our republic.¹ Some suspected he was a designing speculator; some thought he was the antichrist spoken of in the Christian bible; and some took him to be the preacher of some new religion.

Thus did this simple language of Mr. Owen produce almost as many different conclusions as there were individuals who heard it. The general observer referred it to all human thoughts, feelings, and actions, and attributed this difference to the different causes which had acted upon each individual, and therefore attached neither merit to themselves nor demerit to those who differed from them; and upon this knowledge individual liberty was so far established. But it

¹ Owen derived his determinism and the political and ethical conclusions from William Godwin. He expressed these views, for example, in *A New View Of Society, Essays on the Formation of Human Character* (London: 1813).

was established only with a few, and with them, in the mind only. Our surrounding institutions, customs and public opinion calls for conformity: they require us to act in masses like herds of cattle: they do not recognize the fact that we think and feel individually and ought to be at liberty to act individually. But this liberty cannot be enjoyed in combinations, masses and connections in which one cannot move without affecting another.

Nothing is more common than such remarks as the following. "No two things are alike." "There can be no rules without exceptions" &c. Yet, we are constantly called upon to conform to rules that do not suit our case, to acquiesce in numerous different opinions all at the same moment, and no laws in the world preserve the liberty of the governed to make exceptions to the rules which they are required to obey. To give others the power to construe laws and make exceptions is equivalent to giving them the power to govern without laws.

A little observation will disclose an individuality in persons, times, and circumstances which has suggested the idea that one of our most fatal errors has been the laying down rules, laws, and principles without preserving the liberty of each person to apply them according to the individuality of his views, and the circumstances of different cases. In other words, our error, like that of all the world that has gone before us has been, the violation of individual liberty.

The first objection that is made to the above will illustrate the individuality of minds and show our error in depending on conformity.

The foregoing article was chiefly written soon after our experiment at New Harmony to suggest the cause of our failure. I had written much more to illustrate that individuality to which I have alluded and which may be considered the governing principle in every step which has been taken in the experiment now in progress.

But I suppress what I had written and refer readers to a much superior illustration of the same subject which came to hand last week in a pamphlet entitled "A Discourse on Language," by A.B. Johnson.²

This is a continuation of his invaluable labors on language. The perusal of it furnished another strong proof that there are great truths upon which men, even strangers to each other and in different parts of the world will agree as soon as we begin to look through words to things. The singular coincidence of my own views with those of such a mind as Mr. Johnson's would amply compensate me for their being out of fashion with half the world beside.

I have already had, and shall often have, occasion to avail myself of Mr. Johnson's labors. I crave his forgiveness for detaching as it were an eye of the forehead of a fine portrait, but my apology will be found in utility.

The labors of this gentleman appear but little known. Whether it is because they are superior to the intellects of the critics, or whether because as he says "criticism like every other mercenary employment will conform to the market," or whether the veil of individuality precludes our investigation of motives, I shall not wait for critics, but act individually and without hesitation acknowledge the benefit I have derived from Mr. J's "Lectures on Language."

It is the first of all books which I ought to have read, and I shall take care that my children benefit by it. I recommend it to all of whatever age or profession, and especially to those with whom I am to hold any intercourse; and, let me here inform my readers that I use language with a constant regard for its principles as developed by Mr. Johnson. Enquirers will thus always have

² A later edition of this astounding work: Alexander Bryan Johnson, *A Treatise on Language* (New York: Dover, 1968).

a key to my meaning, and opposers (should I have them) may save themselves much labor by studying his work, as I do not intend to enter into any argument where the language does not refer to some sensible “phenomena.”

Mr. Johnson’s elucidation of language is a bridge over which I have escaped from the bewildering labyrinths of verbal delusions called arguments and controversies, and I do not expect to recross it but as a free child of a peaceful village would approach the uproar and confusion of a noisy city on a holiday in pursuit of variety.

Ed. P.R.

Cure for the Ague

Passing through the New York canal in 1831, I was seized for the first time with a fit of the ague. It was soon stopped with sulphate of quinine. It returned again in ’32, on getting wet in a shower. Quinine would now keep it off only a day or two; a little exercise or exposure to the sun brought it back repeatedly till I lost all faith in quinine and resorted to a variety of other prescriptions with little success. A friend referred me to an article in the *New Harmony Gazette* (3rd vol.) on Piperine, or extract of black pepper, which it described as superior to quinine as a cure for the ague, that it was more effectual and left the patient less liable to dropsy and some other diseases. A medical friend also concurred in this, and added that he had for several months used no other remedy than common black pepper. His common practice was to advise patients to take their pepper box and mix up the pepper with flour and molasses or any thing that will make it into pills, and to take one or two every hour or two. He said he had scarcely ever known this to fail, nor had the disease ever returned as after taking quinine.

I tried this and have not had a fit of ague since. I have also recommended to four of my acquaintance, one of whom had had the ague six months; it succeeded in every case.

How far these facts justify a general rule I leave each individual to judge.

Ed.

A Brush at Old Cobwebs

Laws and governments are professedly instituted for the security of person and property, but they have never accomplished this object. Even to this day every newspaper shows that they commit more crimes upon persons and property and contribute more to their insecurity than all criminals put together. The greatest crime which can be committed society and which causes poverty and lays the foundation of almost all other crimes, is the monopoly of the soil. This has not only been permitted but protected or perpetrated by every government of modern times up to the last accounts from the congress of the United States. For this enormous crime, according to the spirit of all law, these legislators ought to be severely punished. But the principles of law are false. Every act of every legislator has been an effect over which he could have no control

while the causes existed. This is the only ground upon which they can rationally be acquitted, and the same would protect all other criminals from being lawfully murdered and should teach legislators to remove causes rather than spend people's money in punishing effects. (Legislators have decided that "society has a right to take the life of criminals to preserve itself." Society has left its interests to be preserved by forms of words like this, and gone to sleep, while the causes of crime have remained untouched, and continue to accumulate unseen [Warren's note]).

Beauchamp was hanged for killing Col Sharp to revenge what public opinion called an unpardonable offence, thus showing that he would risk his life to stand fair in the public eye.³ Surely the public safety could not require the death of one so blindly obedient to its voice. But the law required his death; he was a sacrifice therefore to law, but not to the public good. If any cases would justify murdering a criminal, they must be very different from this, and if the experiments of three thousand years have not produced laws better adapted to the individuality of cases, perhaps we had better give up such projects and try the effects of so arranging our affairs that we can act in each case according to its merits.

Laws cannot be adapted to the individuality of cases, and if they could, laws are language which is subject to different interpretations according to the individuals who are appointed to administer them. Therefore, it is individuals rather than laws that govern. Every election illustrates this: we are told that our destinies depend on the election of this or that man to office. Why? It is men not laws or principles that govern society. There is an individuality among judges and jurors as among all other persons, so that he whom one judge or jury would acquit, another would condemn. Judge Jeffreys acquired the popular epithet of "bloody Jeffreys" from the remarkable number of persons condemned under his administration of the same laws which in other hands would have acquitted them.⁴ There is no security in laws. We must seek it elsewhere.

Citizens cannot know today what will be lawful tomorrow; laws made this year are unmade the next and their repeal is often our only intimation that they existed. All these uncertainties must exist even when laws are framed with greatest wisdom and administered with the purest devotedness to the public good without the least tinge of personal feeling or private interest, provided such phenomena are to be found, but every newspaper that comes to hand convinces that such are not found even in the proportion of ten to the population of Sodom; but that, notwithstanding all that revolutions have cost the world, laws and governments still are what they always have been, viz. public means for private ends.

To be continued

From an English Paper: Glorious Uncertainty of the Law

The late Charles Gardyne, of Middleton, had an interesting lawsuit some time previous to his death, with the taxman of the tolls and the road trustees there, on the doubtful question whether

³ This refers to the "Beauchamp-Sharp Affair" (1825) a sensational case in which a Kentucky lawyer, Jereboam Orville Beauchamp killed the former attorney general of that state, Solomon P. Sharp, who had some years before jilted the woman who became Beauchamp's wife. Apparently, the murder was a condition imposed by Mrs. Beauchamp for the marriage to take place. Beauchamp was hanged in 1826.

⁴ George Jeffreys, seventeenth century Lord Chief Justice of England, known as "hanging Judge Jeffreys" or "bloody Jeffreys" due to his enthusiasm for capital punishment.

the vehicle in which he rode was a taxed cart or a chaise — a point which made an essential difference in the rate of toll. After the decision of the supreme court, Mr. Gardyne had the result painted in large legible characters on the back of the carriage as follows.

A Taxed Cart by act of Parliament.

A Taxed Cart, by decision of the sheriff of Forfairshire.

A Taxed Cart, by decision of the court of session.

A Chaise, by a second decision of the same court.

Eight wise Judges said it was a Chaise.

Six not less wise said it was a Cart.

It has been three years on its law journey and at last has been obliged to stop for want of law grease.

Charles Gardyne Froick's Taxed Cart

Mr. G rode in this vehicle on all necessary occasions, during the remainder of his life, and exhibited it at Perth once during the circuit, at the George Inn door, to no small dismay of the judges, council, and agents, and the amusement of the citizens.

The Utica Co-Operator

invites discussion relative the use of machinery. This is well; it is surely time that this subject was understood. I therefore invite attention to the application of the equal exchange of labor to the use of machinery as was stated in our first number, and as illustrated in our report of practical progress which will be found below.

I submit this view of this important subject for the consideration of all those who are honestly pursuing the solution of this riddle.

J.W.

Principles and Progress of an Experiment of Rational Social Intercourse

There is now in operation a steam saw mill, probably the first machinery of importance ever got up and worked upon such principles. It is intended to work upon the principle of equal exchange of labor, by which nothing is allowed for capital invested, but all who act upon this principle are to receive the lumber by giving as many hours of their labor as has been the human labor bestowed on the lumber. Upon this principle machine labor benefits all equally, the owner receiving no more of its advantages than any other citizen.

It will be perceived upon reflection that the use of machinery upon this simple and just principle will enable society to preserve itself from the dreadful reaction to which machinery is now driving the working classes.

The principle upon which this machinery is to work, makes it for the interest of every one to assist in getting it into operation, therefore several persons have been steadily co-operating together for two years past to attain this result, without entering into any verbal contract, combination, or partnership. Every one has acted upon his own individual responsibility and judgment. No one has been required in any particular to conform to any laws, rules, or votes of majorities, nor to surrender any portion of his individual liberty. Rather, in every step of the progress the sovereignty of every individual has been strictly preserved, and the most complete and harmonious co-operation have been attained.

There is an old dogma held as much mysterious reverence as many others equally vague and mischievous that “when we enter into society we must necessarily surrender a portion of our individual liberty.” Aesop saw the subtilty and mischief in this verbal delusion when he wrote the fable of a man modestly asking the forest for a bit of wood, just to make him an axe-handle. The good-natured, unsuspecting forest readily granted it, but no sooner did the man get the handle than he fell to work prostrating the whole forest, who began to repent giving the little bit of wood. But it was too late; it should not have granted the axe-handle.

Men have consented to give up a portion of their liberty of construing their own language and of determining how much liberty the word ‘portion’ shall mean in different cases, but they have left it to the rulers, who have almost invariably decided that the word means the axe-handle.

In our little experiment we have never granted this axe-handle: we have at no time agreed to surrender any portion of our future liberty, nor have we pledged not to make small sacrifices for the greater benefit of others, but we have preserved our individual liberty to act according to the circumstances of individual cases.

Thus, in Feb. 1831 the writer of this was present when one of a company suggested that the first thing requisite upon our future location would be a saw mill. This was seen by all, but had it not been, no law or vote of the majority could have convinced any one. Therefore neither would have been resorted to, but such persons would have been left to the free exercise of their own judgment, while others who felt more confident would have gone forward. They could have involved no one but themselves.

Another of the company suggested that we meet that evening to ascertain what could be done towards raising enough credit for the accomplishment of our purpose. It was enough to suggest this, for, as the machinery would work equally for the benefit of all, each felt an interest in attending the meeting and in contributing what he could do to forwarding the object. So everyone attended without any rule or law on the subject. When there, we did not refer to any laws or rules to tell us how to act, but some one, knowing the object which brought every one there, perceived that anything calculated to promote that object would be acceptable to all present. On this knowledge he acted, and proposed that anyone disposed to invest capital in this in this undertaking by making it known would enable us to judge whether our object was attainable; but no rule, law, dogma, or pledge, or vote of the majority was resorted to in order to induce any one to make an investment. Every one was left free to act according to his individual means, and to be the only judge what portion of his individual convenience he would “give up for the general good” in that particular case. Nor did any law or vote of the majority appoint any person to receive the investments and manage the machinery, but every one was at liberty to

invest his means where he had the most confidence, &c. Notwithstanding all this individuality of action, not the least clashing or jarring has occurred on any one point, but the machinery is now in operation; it employs the capital of several persons who are at liberty to withdraw it at any time they may choose to do so. But while the machinery is used upon the principle of equal exchange, we cannot choose to embarrass its operations. Therefore any pledge or contract to invest for any certain time is not only unnecessary, but it would produce a feeling of restraint which would render us all uneasy until our capital was withdrawn, and thus might the machinery be stopped by the injudicious means used adopted to ensure its permanence: and thus would this violation of individual liberty perhaps defeat its own object as laws and governments defeat their object. Their professed object is the security and good order of society. But the moment that any such power is erected over one's person or property, that moment he feels insecure and sees that his greatest chance of security is in getting possession of the governing power — in governing, rather than being governed — of being the hammer rather than the anvil and the strife for the attainment of this power, has in all ages up to the present hour produced more confusion, destruction of life and property, and more crimes and intense misery than all other causes put together.

I venture the assertion that the establishing of such powers has been the greatest error of mankind, and that society never will enjoy peace or security until it has done with these barbarisms and acknowledges the inalienable right of every individual to the sovereignty of their own person, time, and property.

J.W.

To the Readers of the *Free Enquirer*

In No. 18, third Vol. of the *Free Enquirer* I commenced a report of our new social experiment founded upon individual liberty and equal exchange of labor, and partly promised a continuation of it. But the circumstances explained in the first number caused the delay of this report until the present time.

Will the editor of the *Free Enquirer* if he please insert this, and inform his readers that *The Peaceful Revolutionist* is established for the purpose of continuing the subject.

The P.R. is published on, or near, the first day of each month. Each number consists of four pages of the same size as the pages of the *Free Enquirer*. The price, when paid in money, is thirty-seven cents for the first six months. But, as circumstances may require changes, no subscriptions are at present received for a longer term.

All subscriptions payable in advance, as the amount would not justify any expense in its collection.

Any person who will forward one dollar post paid, will be entitled to have four copies sent to any names they may furnish, and in the same proportion for a greater number.

A few copies from the first to the present (fourth) number are yet on hand.

Address the proprietor of *The Peaceful Revolutionist*, or Josiah Warren, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Previous subscribers will perceive a little difference between the above terms and those proposed in a former number but the difference will be placed to their credit.

Society as it Is

If one wishes to hire a house, the owner knows not what rent to ask, he considers the demand or want for houses and asks whatever he thinks he can get without any regard to the cost of the house, and the one who hires it, seeks to get it as cheap as possible and is regardless of the cost as the owner. Each contends for the victory rather than for justice. It is for the interest of one to make the other feel as much want as possible, and for the interest of the other to conceal his wants. Whatever either may say, neither can be believed. Confidence cannot exist under such circumstances.

The owner of the house goes to purchase a pair of shoes, and he knows by experience that the seller will ask as much as he thinks he can get and is therefore prepared to commence a little war about the price. He puts his shoes on and the sole rips off the first day. He goes to the seller who tells him the maker lives in Boston or Lynn or some place so far off as to be beyond the reach of responsibility. The responsibility is divided between the maker and the seller and rests on neither. (Such are some of the reasons for individuality of responsibilities and arranging our affairs within such limits that responsibility may rest unequivocally where it ought, so that every one would be governed by the only government that can safely be trusted, viz, the natural and unavoidable consequences of actions. [Warren's note]).

The shoe seller wants to purchase a coat, but he cannot tell where, to apply to the best advantage till he has tried all over the city, because "new arrivals" may have changed the prices since yesterday at twelve o'clock. After having made enquiries from one store to another and striving with the sellers to get it as cheap as possible and they sell it as dear as possible, he purchases perhaps a blue coat after having spent as much time and labor as might have made the cloth — he puts it on and is caught in a shower and his blue coat turns red. But the manufacturer lives in another state, or another nation, is beyond the reach of responsibility, and may continue to manufacture and sell blue red coats as long as this species of fraud enables him to get more than he could by any honest, useful employment.

No wonder that Jefferson called cities the sores of society.⁵

The equal exchange of labor would give as great a reward for honest and useful employments as for useless and fraudulent ones, and individual and unequivocal responsibilities (if for no other reasons) would induce a preference for the honest. The necessity of paying for what we consume in equal amount of our own labor might induce a preference for the useful.

To be continued.

⁵ "The mobs of great cities add just so much to the support of pure government, as sores do to the strength of the human body." Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Query XIX, e.g. in *Jefferson* (New York: Library of America: 1984 [1787]), p.291.

The Western Courier

I thank the editor of that paper for publishing my advertisement regarding the printing apparatus, but by transferring the article without explanation it reads as if the *Courier* was printed with the apparatus. I need not suggest the necessity of a correction. J. Warren.

Moral Philosophy According to Paley⁶

Morality has for its object the good of society and is founded upon three laws, as follows: (1) The law of the land. (2) The law of custom. (3) The law of scriptures. Therefore, whatever practice among men is agreeable to the law of land, to the law of custom, and the scriptures is moral and just because it promotes the good of society.

Remarks. Nothing is easier than to construe the language of these laws to mean any thing which suits the interests, prejudices or passions of those who construe and apply them. Consequently, nothing is more common than to see them prostituted to the basest purposes.

Moral Philosophy According to Truth⁷

Morality is the practice of securing to man his just rights, or permitting him to enjoy them, and has for its object the happiness of man. Otherwise, it is but an idle word, and worse than useless.

Man's rights are as follows.

(1) All men, women, and children have an equal right to the free use of all elements existing in a state of nature. (2) All men, women, and children have a right to enjoy or consume whatever is produced by his or her labor, or an equivalent when exchanged. Therefore, any law of the land, law of custom, or law of scripture which has any tendency to prevent any man, woman, or child from enjoying these rights is immoral.

J.P.

It may be objected that our friend J.P.'s language is as equivocal as Mr. Paley's, and like his admits of being prostituted to the worst purposes: but neither these nor any other verbal forms would be subject to this objection provided every citizen was at liberty to construe and apply them for himself, and only for himself. But the exercise of this liberty as in most other cases, requires an organisation of society without close connections of persons or interests.

Ed. P.R.

⁶ William Paley (1743–1805), popular British moralist and theologian.

⁷ This bit of text is presented over the initials "J.P." I am going to speculate that this refers to the British reformer Joseph Priestley (1733–1804), who would have engaged Paley in various debates.

Education by Legislation

I received a few days since a copy of a petition to congress “praying” their aid in the establishment of schools throughout the Union for the education of all children at public expense.

I know this measure has been advocated by some of the best heads and hearts in the world, but they are not of this world.

However benevolent the motives of those who are active in this measure, I fear it is not calculated to produce the results which the enlightened friends of the rising generation aim at. At least, this is my individual opinion, therefore I cannot find a motive to co-operate in this measure. I could give many reasons for this opinion, but it may be sufficient to state a few of the most prominent.

I would prefer to ascertain and assist in establishing remedies rather than waste time in exposing the sickening corruption that every where surrounds us, and would speak of principles rather than of persons, where the liberty of choice is allowed me. But in this case, as legislators stand in the way, I must say that I have no confidence in them, nor in the ultimate benefit of any measure that might be entrusted to them. If there are any among them who would not sell their people for a mess of pottage, they cannot place themselves above suspicion.

Again, I think that the power of educating the rising generation is of too much importance to be trusted in a manageable shape in the hands of any small body of men, as society is now constituted.

The iron ore while diffused through the quarry, is at least harmless, though useless. But, converted into a surgeon’s knife it may preserve life or administer death, according to the manner of application.

Another objection to such a measure in my mind is that it would increase our connected interests and divided responsibilities, which I think are two of the roots of our social evils. The reverse of this is the very foundation of the education which I expect to give my children, and which I will now attempt to give in a few general terms, but in detail hereafter as we progress in practice.

First, I shall dissolve as far as practicable all connected interests and connected responsibilities between myself and my children, throw them upon their own resources, and enable them to learn by experience the responsibilities of life, assuming all the consequences of all their actions and inaction. Thus situated, they see and feel the utility and the necessity of the instruction and the habits which we desire to give them, and ask our assistance as a favor, which is commonly resisted as an arbitrary infliction of tasks which they cannot appreciate and consequently can feel no interest in acquiring. Thus placed they will experience the natural rewards and punishments of their conduct, which I consider the only form of government that does not produce more evil than good.

I shall see that they are in possession of their natural birthright, the soil, and all the products of their own exertions, or their equivalent, and shall act as their friend rather than as their master: or, as one member of society should act towards another, strictly respecting their individual rights and thus teaching them by example to respect those of other people.

I am convinced from all I have read or seen that law makers will be the last to learn and respect these rights: a proof of which is they are no where enjoyed. Nowhere is the soil inherited as an inalienable right, scarcely anywhere is labor rewarded with its equivalent, no where under any government is personal liberty enjoyed, nor (except for a few individuals) is it even understood.

Instead, therefore, of praying law makers to take care of my children, I should consider it as praying the fox to take care of the chickens.

A man of old called great [Alexander], offered his services to Diogenes [the Cynic], who replied that the greatest service he could render, would be to stand from between him and the sun. And all I ask of lawmakers is to stand aside and keep from between me and my individual rights.

J.W.

To subscribers

It is probable that the next number will be delayed by the removal of the printing apparatus to our new location, but this interruption will not be unnecessarily prolonged. As the time of removal is uncertain, it would be well to address all letters and papers to Cincinnati till the removal is announced.

Perhaps there has been too much repetition of the same ideas in our paper for the taste of some. I regret the necessity for this, but it appears unavoidable in coming to the understanding of others.

Ed. P.R.

February 5, 1933 (Vol. 1. No. 2.)

Surrounding Circumstances

alone produce the differences between people of different nations: between a Hindoo who is painfully careful of the feelings of the minutest insect, and a holy inquisitor of Christendom who sits with perfect unconcern and hears the agonized shrieks and sees the cracking skin and frying flesh of the burning unbeliever. It is the influence of surrounding circumstances that makes one man a king, and another a beggar, which divides society into rich and poor, which enables some to command and others unable to do otherwise than obey. It is the influence of circumstances which produces different classes in society, and that influence only, which divides men into different political parties and ranges them under different banners of religion. By that influence alone some are made to observe with conscientious nicety the forms and ceremonies of the worship of a mass of hideously painted wood, and the same influence induces others to seek favor in the eyes of their god by murdering the former as idolatrous heathens.

If a child be placed at birth among cannibals and surrounded with them only, will adopt their habits and manners, and will eat human flesh with as little compunction as he would eat the flesh of beasts and fowls, were he bred among us; and were he placed at birth among the Hindoos, he

would respect and worship bulls with as conscientious a devotion as he would worship a mass of wood in India, or some form of his imagination among Jews or Christians.

If he be placed at birth exclusively among Presbyterians and their practices, he is likely to become a Presbyterian; if among Quakers, a Quaker; among Shakers, a Shaker. And upon the same principle he might be compelled to become a sincere believer in any religion in the world, or a disbeliever in all religions.

He may be rendered kind, hospitable, tender, and respectful of the feeling of others, or he may be made brutally careless of all but himself, and a “demon of mischief to all around him.”

It will be seen that this knowledge warrants us in a critical examination into our own condition and all the circumstances which have surrounded us from birth, to see whether they have been, or are, such as are most favourable to our happiness. And it teaches us not to reverence or perpetuate bad circumstances simply because we are born under them, for the same reason would justify cannibals in continuing the custom of eating each other.

This knowledge therefore lays a broad, rational, and consistent foundation for unlimited improvement. It furnishes us with the rational data by which to estimate ourselves and our customs, laws, habits, and opinions. And when we have so estimated them, we are enabled to respect our own judgment and persevere in the measures which it dictates and approves.

Of our State Difficulties &c.

We daily and hourly hear our citizens ask each other, “What do you think of nullification?”⁸ “What new states have come out in favor of nullification?” and so on. If I can form any clear idea of this subject, it is a quarrel between dignity and liberty — the one a shadow, the other a ghost.

Dignity insists upon it that the laws shall be obeyed, and that the union must be preserved. But these two words ‘must’ and ‘shall’ rouse the ghost of murdered liberty to resistance. Dignity abandons the real subject of dispute, and resolves the whole matter into a mystical reverence for the two words ‘union’ and ‘laws.’ I say for two words, because if we look for their meaning we find, as in all other words of a general and indefinite character, that there are very few if any who will agree in their manner of applying them. If the word law has ever meant one thing more than another, that thing has been *the will of those in power*.

By the word ‘union,’ some refer to certain words on paper, which serve as an excuse for a great deal of speech making and disunion every year at the rate of eight dollars per day. Others by the word ‘union’ understand a similarity of interests, feelings, and objects; co-operating action and mutual assistance in case of need. The question now occurs, which, or what union is it that is to be preserved? It can be the former only that can be preserved; the latter is to be *attained*. It never has existed since the revolution, and existed then only from the circumstances of the time.

⁸ “Nullification” referred to the doctrine that a state can override a federal law within its territory, or, in a pinch, secede. The people talking about secession in 1833 were Garrisonian abolitionists, whose motto was “no union with slaveholders!” One may be disappointed by Warren’s failure to condemn slavery, and he simply denies the presuppositions of both sides of the nullification dispute. Nevertheless, it is obvious that he regards his principles as incompatible with slavery: fixing cost as the limit of price, for example, would immediately remove all motivation for slavery.

Mutual danger and similar interests at that time induced fellow feeling and union in sentiment and action. This union existed independent of words: it was the necessary and unavoidable effect of the circumstances of that time, and it as necessarily ceased as those circumstances ceased to exist. But our ancestors, under the influence of that excitement, were betrayed into a compact of union: a thing so extremely indefinite that perhaps there are no two individuals concerned who can construe or apply it alike, and they did not preserve the liberty to differ.

It might rationally be asked, what has that to do with us? yet this incomprehensible something now calls on us their posterity to feel and to act and talk alike, in cases where the reasons for it and the power to do so do not exist. If there is any one point upon which union of sentiment can be attained and to which every individual will consent, it is, perhaps, in their liberty to differ from others. And if we are ever to commence doing so doing as we would be done by, now is the time to respect the liberty of others to differ from us.

“Language has no meaning when it does not refer to some taste, smell, sound, sight or feeling, or, to some combination of these sensations” [Alexander Bryan Johnson] — what does the word ‘union’ refer to? Not a taste, not a smell, not a sound; it refers to nothing or, to sights or feelings. What sights? Co-operating actions? These will be seen only as force excludes co-operating feelings, or only when we have co-operating interests, as in the time of the revolution. What feeling does the word ‘union’ refer to?? Does it refer to such of our clashing interests have excited during the last ten years? Are these to be “preserved”? Or, as artillery has been sent to enforce union, perhaps the word refers to those feelings which accompany a broken head.

Or, is the artillery sent there to compel our neighbors to bear expenses where they receive no benefits? Jefferson says, “A wise and frugal government which restrains men from injuring one another and shall leave them otherwise free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvements, and shall not take from the mouth of industry the bread it has earned; this is the sum of good government.”⁹ Instead, therefore, of sending troops to compel our neighbors to appropriate a portion of their property contrary to their feeling or judgment, should we not have it sent to protect every individual in the “free management of their industry” and the disposal of their proceeds in any way they themselves may choose? If this is impracticable under present circumstances, then let us turn our attention to these circumstances. Let us direct our artillery against them rather than against persons. If the fault is in surrounding circumstances, we are as much to blame as our southern brethren.

If our southern neighbors cannot exercise their inalienable liberty without involving us in consequences contrary to our interests, it shows that connected responsibilities and clashing interests are the evils to be cured, and that disconnection or co-operating interests are the rational and proper remedies. Not a disconnection that would leave us liberty to act together where we might have similar interests, but an undoing of whatever was done by our ancestors in a moment of excitement. This makes us now think that we are bound to act together in all cases even though all parties would be most benefited and union be best preserved by encouraging the liberty to differ and to act individually. By preserving the liberty to differ, we do not necessarily bind ourselves not to agree in any cases, but let us preserve our liberty to agree or to differ as circumstances may govern. Liberty is a safe, and the only safe principle to which we can pledge ourselves. If it be objected that this liberty is unattainable, and that great national objects could not be attained where such latitude was encouraged, I reply that there can be no national object

⁹ Jefferson’s First Inaugural Address (1801), e.g. in *Jefferson* (New York: Library of America, 1984), p. 494.

greater than national happiness, and that this, as I understand it, consists of the happiness of the individuals who compose the nation, and that individual happiness consists in nothing so much as the liberty of person and property. If this is unattainable in large masses, that shows us one circumstance with which we have to contend, and proves that society will have to dissolve its imaginary masses and resolve itself into individuals before liberty can be anything but a word.

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Progress

Straws are often better to show which way the wind blows than the most labored invention. I cannot give a better sign of progress, than that the store-o-crat in the neighborhood says we “must be stopped.” I suppose he has heard of calicoes being sold here on the cost principle for eleven cents a yard, similar in quality to those often sold for twenty cents. It seems that his public spirit has taken the alarm; he cannot allow the public to be so imposed upon; threatens us with law on account of issuing labor notes as a circulating medium. Why, bless you sir, this is nothing. The sun will still rise as usual.

I was prepared for hostility from the store-o-crats, but found none that was alarming. On the contrary, I met with two merchants whose hearts had not been destroyed by profit making, and who acknowledged that these were the only correct and equitable principles, that the sooner they prevailed, the better for every one, that they almost hated themselves for the manner in which they were now compelled to get their living out of their customers. Some of my best friends are no store keepers in New Harmony, and were so, during the two years and a half of the Time Store in that place. However, if we cannot get attention to the subject in a more pleasant way, I, for one, should be glad of a little persecution, particularly from a source so evidently self-interested.

Signs of Returning Reason

The “combined wisdom” of New York, it appears, has passed a law to unmake the laws heretofore preventing married women from exercising their right of individual property, beyond the control, and free from the liabilities of the husband.¹⁰ The legislators of several other states have already done themselves the credit of doing this little item of justice. It is but an item of their just rights, and yet this one step toward individuality constitutes one of the most important features of modern legislation. How long are Ohio, Indiana, and the rest of the states and the world to linger behind this simple demand of self evident equity and common sense?

¹⁰ Passed by the New York legislature in on April 7, 1848, the law specified that “The real and personal property of any female who may hereafter marry, and which she shall own at the time of marriage, and the rents issues and profits thereof shall not be subject to the disposal of her husband, nor be liable for his debts, and shall continue her sole and separate property, as if she were a single female.”

Revolution

All the world is convulsed with revolution. Labor has at last suddenly recoiled from the degradation, the starvation allotted to it and claims its rights. Alas! What are they? This is the great problem which they aim to solve in the midst of contradictory theories, clashing interests, and the confusion of political revolution. The people govern the governments, and yet they demand of the governments what they cannot do for themselves. If all the philanthropy, all the capital, all the intellect, all the labor that have been bestowed upon community and Fourierist experiments, by chosen spirits, peacefully stepping aside from the confusion of the world and acting at their leisure; with the best of motives and feelings; backed by the most desperate resolution; all end in defeat and disappointment, what will be the end of the attempts to carry out these systems, or any other, in large, promiscuous, national masses, in a day! In a moment! In a passion! In the frenzy of starvation! I tremble for the result. The spirit is good, is holy; it is glorious. But here alone may ye exult. Exult *now*, for the future is not for exultation. Ye plant the worm with the tree: the future is for disappointment, for confusion, perhaps for despair.

A Word on Originality

To J.H.L.

It seems almost necessary since what you mentioned yesterday, to say a word or two upon a subject which I intended never to dwell upon, nor to be the first to broach. I have always found that the idea of merit for originality, by exciting envy of rivals, stood directly in the way of progress, and through the whole course of twenty one years labor I have found the greatest obstacle in myself. My personality stood directly in my way at every turn I could make. I have seen a man deny the very success that he himself had prophesied beforehand, which I could account for in no other way than that he feels jealous of the credit which would attach to the author, and I have seen more than this.

I have a thousand times felt that if the subject had originated with some one who was dead I could have done, perhaps, a thousand times more for it. I have suffered and I know that the subject has suffered much from this detracting spirit. A man by the name of John Pickering in Cincinnati has put forth what he denominates a "criticism on Warren's system of equitable exchange" and says it "professes to be a new development" &c. Now, whence this word 'professes'? Does he wish to intimate that I have put forth claims for originality which are not true? My reputation is my property, and I am not ready to surrender it at the demand of every one who chooses to attack it. He calls it "Warren's system." I never called it so. He calls it "Equitable Exchange," thereby confining the subject to merely pecuniary matters. The work is entitled *Equitable Commerce* and it is explained on the title page as extending to all intercourse of mankind.

In Cincinnati, in 1827 and '28, when, by placing my labor on equal terms with his as clock maker, he saved about one third of his previous expenditures for store goods, he and all others, I

believe, pronounced the operation *new*. When his son, about 14 years old, learned shoe making by paying 12 hours labor for instruction, instead of serving the customary apprenticeship, and when he afterwards continued for months to make shoes, which I sold him out of the Time Store at ordinary prices, these “developments” were termed *new*. And when, in 1828 Mr. Pickering and his two sons attended my school for instrumental music over the Time Store on the corner of Fifth and Elm streets in Cincinnati, while some paid me ten dollars per quarter, they paid for the same instruction, fourteen hours of their own labor. If such developments as these and others peculiar to equitable commerce in 1828 were made before the eighteenth of May 1827, then I was not the first to develop them, and the principal obstacle to my freedom of speech and action on the subject will be removed.

I entitled my work “a new development of principles” because I wished to inform the despairing that there were grounds unknown to them, upon which they might rest a hope; but I did not consider any man the originator of principles or truths. We only discover and develop them. The idea of labor notes was suggested by Robert Owen in 1826 as a medium of exchange between communities at New Harmony. Whether the idea was ever applied before the Time Store of 1827, I know not.

A man must have a good memory and more than memory to be able to trace his general conclusions back to all the minute circumstances and reflections that have led to them; and in this view, originality amounts to very little, even if it were worth establishing. I think it high time that these trifles ceased to assume so much importance with those who are acting the part of pioneers in the great work of man’s redemption from error and suffering. The principal reasons that I can see for making this a subject at all are the necessity of replying to others when they broach it and that, after having passed nearly a lifetime in something like martyrdom for doing and thinking strange things, it is but natural to wish to show our censors that we were all the time right and they themselves were insane, were visionary. Having done this, we may consider the account settled and we can begin anew, if it is not too late, or we can die free from the affliction of having attached odium upon truth.

I hope this is the only time that I shall feel called upon to say any thing upon the subject. I would prefer to spend my time in a peaceful and uninterrupted practical exhibition of the subject itself, which may qualify everyone to judge of it according to its own intrinsic value, independent of any merely personal considerations.

J.W.

I make no apologies for the size of the sheet, for the type or the printing. I think that those who would require them are not very desirable as pioneers in a reformation based on common sense. If I saw a house on fire it is most likely I should cry out to its inmates without hesitating to consider what tones would be prescribed in the schools of elocution. I love to contemplate the beautiful, but cannot afford to be whimsical. Nor am I disposed to acknowledge an authority set up by capital, the direct tendency of which is to smother the voice of poverty and suffering because it cannot speak with “new type,” “fine paper,” “large sheet,” &c., &c., &c. I refuse to follow any such lead; but rather intend to show at how cheap a rate the voice of improvement can be heard. Particulars relative to this will be given in the next number.

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Josiah Warren
The Peaceful Revolutionist
1833

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