we breathe as an essential to life, for instance, is not usually scarce enough to command a price.

So unless a thing is both desired and scarce, no bargain basement is low enough to attract any customers. But there is a third feature, too, that is required of things before they are economic. A thing may be both scarce and desired, yet not enter into these economic processes. Faith, dreams, and imagination often focus on things which are difficult to put in a form that can be traded. Heaven, for instance, is not listed for sale — as such — in the mail order catalogs.

So measles and fresh air and heaven are not generally for sale over the counters, yet the reasons for their absence differ. Each of them has certain qualities requisite to economic things — each is desired, or scarce, or producible and available for trade — but not every requisite is present. Lack of any one of the three keeps an item out of the economic arena of human affairs.

EVEN IN INFANCY the child is a budding economist. We do not know precisely when he first ponders problems of value and distribution, and the law of diminishing returns. Probably the age when this first appears varies widely from child to child. But I suspect there is economic consciousness in most of them at a very young age, and long before we as parents realize that it is there. Some child psychologists assert, for instance, that when the infant clings to his bottle of milk, he is asserting a rudimentary sense of economic perception — a consciousness of something which is desired by him and also scarce.

I wonder, in fact, if an economic sense doesn't really arise before the infant treats his bottle of milk as something desired and scarce. I wonder if the beginnings of economic consciousness may not be at the time when the child first attains his vague sense of the self-conscious. For if we apply the economic test, self-consciousness itself seems to qualify as a matter of economic consciousness. Let me explain why I think so in terms of the three tests of economic affairs already listed.

Are you desired? You certainly are. You are desired by yourself to whatever extent you have any pride and conscience. And, in addition, you are desired by others — by your family and your friends — for both economic and other reasons.

Are you scarce? Exceedingly so. There is only one of you, and there can never be any more. In the sense of being reproducible by exact duplicate, you are as scarce as the Hope diamond.[2]

Are you exchangeable or capable of being traded? Yes. In our society, of course, we do not allow one person to own or to buy or sell another. But the person who owns himself as a free man may offer to serve another; he may offer his time and effort in exchange for a wage. Or, instead of offering his services for hire, a person may work for himself and offer for sale whatever he has produced.

So in making yourself available for trade in the form of little pieces of your time, your effort and your life, the third and final requirement that marks you as an item of economic concern has been fulfilled. You are not only desired and scarce, but you are capable of being traded as well. The difference between you and a bushel of wheat in this respect is that you own yourself and control your own sale whereas the wheat does not. And this difference has to do only with *how* you are involved in economic matters, not whether you are involved in them.

That is why it seems to me that the most elemental form of economic consciousness originates in the remote recesses of early life when one first becomes self-conscious. This must be at a very tender age. Psychologists tell us that the first vocal effusions of the baby, which keep his parents awake at night and disturb the peaceful quietude of the community, is in part an expression of self-consciousness as he loudly proclaims in his own way: "Here I am." From some such beginning, he will go on to increase in economic consciousness until finally it takes on quite tangible forms in his mind and life.

WHEN A BABY clings to his bottle of milk, he is evidencing a sense of possession more advanced than that of mere self-consciousness. He has then taken another important step in economic comprehension. Something specific other than himself has become desired and scarce. And only by realizing this is he ready to begin to act wisely from an economic standpoint.

This sense of worth as applied to overt economic objects appears in strange ways at first. The infant may scramble to retain possession of a toy. It may be only some old can or perhaps some crude block of wood that fell from father's carpentry. But he wants it. And in laboring to retain possession of something he deems to be his, he is acting like the farmer who will labor to protect a bushel of potatoes he has grown. Oldsters may ridicule his selection and scorn his judgment of value, but they should not scorn the child's growing sense of valuation because it is a necessary early step in this budding economist.