NOTES from FEE

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How Busy People Can Rescue Liberty

A YOUNG BUSINESSMAN with whom I have a firsthand acquaintance has just begun a new and technical enterprise—from scratch and on a shoestring—straining all his energies and thoughts with only one end in view: getting his entrepreneurial duckling airborne. All other activities have been relegated to second place.

One other observation is relevant: This young man is a well-trained libertarian thinker, as accomplished as any businessman I know. With these facts in mind, it is understandable why he rebelled at a remark of mine: *"Every American is doing all he knows how to do on behalf of liberty."* Concluding that he was doing nothing on behalf of liberty, while solely preoccupied with his new enterprise, he took my remark to infer that he didn't know how to do anything. Mulling over his reaction, I came upon what to me is an important discovery and one which leads to the belief that this individual really is working on behalf of liberty in an effective manner. How? By employing what I choose to call "primary knowledge." Not only does this man have *primary* knowledge to a marked degree but he practices it in every act of his specialized occupation.

Anyway, it was this sequence of talk and retrospection which led to a simple idea as to how our busiest people can assist in rescuing liberty from her present plight. They can do this without any more sacrifice of their chosen work than it takes to learn the essential features of primary knowledge and to get up the nerve to practice it—that is, to make it an integral part of their daily occupations, whatever they happen to be. Let me explain.

While not customarily so divided, knowledge can be said to fall into two broad categories, primary and secondary. The nub of the idea under discussion is that liberty depends exclusively on primary knowledge and its practice, and not at all on secondary knowledge. If this be a correct thought, then the path to liberty's rescue lies in simple outline, even though it may be a rugged path and call forth some difficult virtues to negotiate.

PRIMARY KNOWLEDGE, as the term suggests, is cognition of the fundamental type or, more precisely, knowledge of first importance. As hard to come by as some of it is, it requires little in the way of expensive schools or knowledge factories. It is, in a sense, a universal or natural knowledge which, when not realized, at least lies latent in man and can be freed, more or less, by conscious effort, the energizing of which is a strictly personal matter. The Law of Compensation is an instance: knowing that something dropped should be picked up; that a door opened should be closed; that a promise made should be kept; that money borrowed should be repaid; that with every right there is a responsibility. Other examples of primary knowledge:

Knowing how little one knows, an essential quality of the nonauthoritarian: HUMILITY.

Knowing of the rights of others, sometimes expressed as not doing unto others that which one would not have done unto self: JUSTICE.

Knowing enough to count one's blessings—a riddance to envy, covetousness, political plunder: GRATITUDE.

Knowing the importance of accurately reflecting that which one believes to be right: INTEGRITY.