as a consequence, it relies on the earthly ways of humans. Even so, we must never sell it short; it is unbelievably clever.

Aladdin's genie performed only on call; it responded to wishes when requested. This modern American version, on the other hand, displays zealous initiative in that it:

1. invents wishes for people.
2. persuades people that these wishes are their own and, then, actively solicits their gratification;
3. convinces people that these wishes are among their natural rights, and
4. casts itself in the role of "helper."

Mythology in its heyday never came up with a genie to equal this.

Golden goals for people to adopt? It was this genie, not the people of the Tennessee Valley, that initiated TVA with its below-cost pricing. It was this genie that conceived "social security," the Peace Corps, and so on.

Further, the genie insinuates its golden goals into the minds of people as wishes capable of fulfillment. The genie appears in nearly every community of the nation and in many countries of the world selling its wishing wares. Federal urban renewal projects are promoted far more by the bureaucracy in Washington than by local citizens. Federal largesse is urged upon the citizenry. Of course, the reason is clear enough: urban renewal is an integral part of the numerous Federal "full employment" projects required as cover-ups of the unemployment caused by other Federal policies.

But it would hardly do for this genie to gratify wishes were the performance attended by any sense of guilt on the people's part. So, how does the genie dispose of this hazard? Simple! It transmutes wishes into "rights," and remains above suspicion in this legerdemain. Do you wish a restoration of your decaying downtown? Very well; that wish is a right. Do you wish lower rates for power and light? Presto! The wish is a right. Do you wish a better price for your tobacco, a better job, a better education than can be had by your own efforts in willing exchange? These wishes are now your rights.

Labor unions with their right-to-a-job concept and businessmen with their right-to-a market idea (outlawing competition) are dealing in the same category of false rights. Indeed, this can be said for all of socialism—without exception!

When people say they have a right to a job or to lower power and light rates or to an education or to a decent standard of living, they are staking out a claim to the fruits of the labor of others. Where rests the sanction for this claim? It simply comes from the notion that a wish is a right.

The absurdity of this wish-is-a-right sanction comes clear if we reduce the problem to manageable proportions: a you-and-me situation. Do I have a just or rational or moral or ethical claim to use your income to provide a "living wage" for me? Do I have a valid claim to use your income to erect my school and staff it with teachers, or finance my church and supply clergymen?

Most people victimized by the magic transmutation of wishes into rights will, in this you-and-me situation, answer the above question in the negative. What escapes them is that the problem is not altered one whit by adding one person or a hundred or a million of them. And, if it be contended that numbers do matter, then, pray tell, what is the magic number? A majority? Must we not infer from this majoritarian cliché the indefensible proposition that might makes right?

In any community in the land may be found people pointing with pride to some "necessity" the local citizens could not or would not finance, explaining that it was made possible "with *the help* of the Federal government."

The modern American genie, lacking supernatural powers, cannot bring down manna from heaven. Being earthly, its manna is earthly in origin. Having nothing whatsoever of its own, its "gifts" must, perforce, stem from what is taken by coercion from others. It cannot be otherwise.

The questions posed are: Do these "gifts" qualify as help? Is this genie, in fact, a helper? Are the "beneficiaries" really helped? If we can answer these questions in the negative, we come out from under the genie's spell.

Help is a social term. At least two persons—the helper and the helped—are implicit in its meaning. There cannot be one without the other. The extent to which one is helped is measured precisely by the nature and amount of the helper's contribution. What is received by the one is what comes from the other.

Property taken without consent is correctly branded as ill-gotten. If passed on to another, the other receives ill-gotten property. *Nothing is altered by the transfer*. According to moral law, as well as the law of the land, one who takes property without the owner's consent commits a crime. When such property is passed on to and accepted by another, the other is adjudged an accomplice to the crime.

Property taken without consent cannot be given, for *to give* is conditioned on and presupposes ownership by the giver. I cannot give that which is not mine. Thus, the genie's largesse cannot qualify as gifts but only as loot.

Loot is not help, one who loots is not a helper, and one who accepts the loot is not really helped.

Power to tamper with the volitional faculties of others is, in fact, a dangerous possession. Nor does it matter whether this power be used to restrain these faculties, as in private or political dictatorship, or exerted to relieve the need for the exercise of these faculties, as in private or political welfarism. However strong the compulsion in most of us to modify or improve the lot of other people, if we would avoid causing more harm than good, we must confine ourselves to those aids that stimulate the renewed exercise of the volitional faculties in others. This suggests a rejection of *all* power to impose, leaving instead a reliance upon ingathering or drawing power—that magnetic, attracting, emulating force, the power that derives from such self-perfection as one may achieve.

I must not, in picking to pieces the notion that wishes are rights, leave the impression that wishes, of and by themselves, are proper objects of scorn. On the contrary, wishes, hopes, aspirations are among the most important forces motivating human progress, evolution, emergence. At issue here is only the means of their gratification.

We who reject illusory schemes are not denying the good life to others but merely pointing out that these political nostrums can lead only to desolatory dead ends. No good end can be reached by choosing a wrong way.

As we uncover more and more wrong ways, the right way begins to take form. It is the greatest gratifier of human wishes ever come upon—when allowed to operate. It is as morally sound as the Golden Rule. It is the way of willing exchange, of common consent, of self-responsibility, of open opportunity. It respects the right of each to the product of his own labor. It limits the police force to keeping the peace. It is the way of the free market, private property, limited government. On its banner is emblazoned *Individual Liberty*.

Leonard E. Read

President

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