



THE FOUNDATION FOR ECONOMIC EDUCATION, INC.

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Why Didn't I Think of That?

THE HIGHEST PRAISE we can bestow on another's creative achievement is to ask ourselves: "Why didn't *I* think of that?" Well, why didn't *I*? The answer is obvious: because *I* am not everybody — which is to say that no two of us are alike in perceptive or inventive or creative abilities. So far as abilities or faculties are concerned, we are born only with potentialities. During our life span we fill in the emptiness, more or less, but with the most diverse results. At best, no one of us glimpses more than a tiny fragment of Truth; and what each comes upon is never identical to another's fragment. Were each person left solely to his own perceptive resources, he would perish. Life would be impossible unless each of us were able to draw on an enormous body of perceptivities, discoveries, inventions, human creations. Each of us lives by trillions of other peoples' think-of-thats; only now and then does one have a think-of-that of his own.

Relate this line of thought to the market: Ask anyone if mail delivery, for instance, should be entrusted to the market as is the delivery of groceries or drugs or freight or the human voice. After some reflection, most persons will reply, "Mail delivery must remain a government activity." Why this answer? It is simply because most individuals have no awareness of how miraculously the little think-of-thats perform. Each individual's own think-of-that is so minuscule that he cannot himself see how the free market could possibly deliver mail.

We would witness a miracle in this area any time (1) the law is repealed which prohibits the

private delivery of first-class mail for pay and (2) the Congress makes no more appropriations to cover Post Office deficits, thus forcing the Post Office Department to charge at least break-even postal rates. This would end the government monopoly; mail delivery immediately would become a market opportunity and open to competition. What would happen? Precisely the type of miracle we witness in voice or freight or TV picture delivery; precisely the type of miracle we witness in the production of pencils, jet planes, or symphonies; that is, millions of minute think-of-thats would begin to flourish, little ingenuities would sprout, and they would coalesce as creative accomplishments.

NO SINGLE ONE of these new think-of-thats would be remotely adequate to the undertaking, nor need it be. For this is where the miracle enters: Countless think-of-thats would come together to solve this problem of free market mail delivery, just as they came together to deliver the human voice around the world in a fraction of a second! Just imagine: no one knowing how to deliver mail; yet, shortly, in an open market, government would be out of the business and the \$2 million daily deficit would be turned to a profit.¹ Further, I wouldn't be at all surprised if much of what we now think of as mail would be delivered over the air waves! And following the miracle many of us would ask, "Why didn't *I* think of that?"

¹ Profit resulting from efficient competition and *reduced costs* rather than from monopoly pricing at exorbitant rates.