NOTES from FEE

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Keep Freedom a Secret?

WHAT WOULD HAPPEN to the free market, private property, limited government philosophy if those of us who believe in it were to keep this philosophy to ourselves and our friends? Suppose we never sought to communicate our understanding of it to anyone – except to those genuinely seeking to learn about this way of life. Speculate on what would happen if we embraced a counsel of silence toward all but serious seekers.

What *would* happen? Would the libertarian philosophy fare better or worse by reason of this strategy of secrecy?

One thing for certain: There would be no further offenses in liberty's name by her well-intentioned "friends" who use angry prose in their attempt to convert "the ignorant." Is it any wonder that freedom's message, when subordinated to "hate and fear" programs, is so unattractive? More often than not the message is revolting. In these millions of instances would not silence be preferable? Understanding is not advanced by raised voices, and thus the cause of freedom would be better served were these countless effronteries never committed.

> Against a foe I can myself defend,
> But Heaven protect me from a blundering friend!

So much for the "crusaders," but what of the few who are topside in their understanding of the libertarian philosophy? Suppose these, too, were to embrace the idea of keeping their knowledge to themselves except when seriously sought by others. Would freedom suffer as a consequence?

As a matter of fact, the most accomplished students of liberty known to me have adopted this practice of calculated silence, being among those who "have helped the truth along without encumbering it with themselves."[1] They advise only when their counsel is sought; they go only where they are called. But they do everything within their power to qualify to be called! And, miraculously, they *are* called, for their proficiency attracts students, audiences, readers.

WE RARELY observe masters of any philosophy trying to thrust their ideas into the consciousness of others. Were they to do so, their aggressiveness would be just as offensive as are similar practices by the millions of beginning "crusaders." Friends are not made by trying to force one's way into another's mind any more than by forcing one's way into another's home, and it makes no difference how "wise" the intruder is. Contemplate the folly of attempting to impose your hobby on all and sundry! This would send them scurrying. Friends are won by an attracting, not an imposing, behavior. Trying to cast others in one's image not only betrays an evil intent; it can't be done.

This is not to guarantee that the seeker will get infallible counsel from the teachers he chooses, for the whole of truth is unknown to man. Nonetheless, when counsel is sought – as opposed to being thrust at another – an enormous amount of error is avoided automatically. To put it mildly, the tendency is to concede more wisdom to ourselves than others will admit; and, sadly, the less we really know, the less we are aware of our deficiencies. Only the seeker can know when he is ready to sample what we

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[1] Artemus Ward.