

Readers' Forum

To the Editors:

In your September 1988 issue, you carried a piece entitled "What Should We Do About Luck?" Without wishing to plunge into the intricate philosophical issues raised by the question of whether having "character" is a matter of luck, I do wish to make one important observation. If being competent, self-assured, and therefore successful is a matter of luck, this is all the more reason not to penalize success. If we are, basically, subject to determinism, then it is surely essential to structure penalties and rewards in such a way as to manipulate people into having successful, rewarding lives. The more scope there is for character to be self-grounded, the more we might expect people to strive and succeed without tangible rewards, although we might still want to say that character is admirable and should be rewarded. But if character and aptitude are determined mechanically by the outside world, let us by all means create an outside world in which as many people as possible are determined into having character and aptitude. Either way, reward success, not failure.

—JOHN S. P. ROBSON
Austin, Texas

To the Editors:

As a Jew and a libertarian, I read with interest Milton Friedman's essay, "Capitalism and the Jews" (*The Freeman*, October 1988). Dr. Friedman admitted to having no answer for the question of why intellectuals, and Jews in particular, tend to dislike capitalism. I think I have one.

Judaism stresses education, and college degrees are common among Jews. But before we conclude that Jews' anti-capitalist beliefs were instilled by their professors, we must analyze this argument. It assumes that the professors in

question, in their turn, were radicalized by *their* professors, and so on. So where did the original radical professors come from? While there is ample truth in the assertion that professors tend to radicalize students, we must reject it as another chicken-vs.-egg argument.

I find it far more accurate to say that intellectuals tend to feel guilty about not being poor or not feeling as though they belong to the working class, as it were. And if one did feel such guilt, would one support a system that allows citizens to work for their own benefit (capitalism), or would one support a system that demands that citizens do penance by working for the benefit of others (socialism)? Leftist and egalitarian beliefs, not surprisingly, have always figured prominently in the lives of those who have the most guilt to relieve, and this puts intellectuals in the same category with film stars, poets, and writers even though the intellectuals may not be wealthy. One's surname need not be Rockefeller or Fonda to regret not being poor; all one need do is not be poor. Educated people, in many cases, have the same sort of vulnerability, since their education relieves them of the necessity of performing manual labor. Since most Jews fall into this category, they can be expected to favor guilt-relieving (egalitarian) politics to any other kind.

For those who are working to win over bright minds to our side, I therefore recommend, along with the usual reliance on facts and logic, an equal emphasis on promoting pride and self-respect—or anything else that might successfully combat guilt.

—ALLAN LEVITE
Dallas, Texas

(Readers are invited to share their opinions on ideas appearing in *The Freeman*.)

Private Property and the Environment: Two Views

by Jane S. Shaw and John Hospers

Editors' Note:

In the May 1988 issue of The Freeman we published John Hospers' review of Property Rights and Eminent Domain by Ellen Frankel Paul. In the following essays, Jane S. Shaw and John Hospers exchange views on some issues raised in that review.

Jane S. Shaw:

People concerned about freedom recognize the importance of property rights as the foundation for a system of cooperation and mutual exchange. Often, however, they abandon their convictions about the value of property rights when they address environmental issues. Yet a more thorough understanding of property rights would lead them to recognize that private rights offer the best hope for protecting many components of the natural environment.

Many writers have expressed concern about environmental devastation such as the loss of wild animals in Africa and the destruction of tropical forests in Latin America. In the May 1988 issue of *The Freeman*, for example, John Hospers shared his alarm about these losses and suggested that private property rights are part of the problem: "And here the property rights in

land conflict sharply with the need for retaining the natural links in the food-chain. . . ."

It's right to be concerned about environmental harm, but we need to understand that solutions will occur when private property rights are strengthened rather than weakened.

Wanton destruction of animals occurs primarily because no one owns wildlife. Contrast wildlife with cattle: No one worries about the destruction of livestock and the reason is simple—cattle are owned and the owner has a direct interest in protecting them.

It is lack of ownership, or common ownership, that leads to destruction. Aristotle observed this more than 2,000 years ago. He noted that "what is common to many is taken least care of, for all men have greater regard for what is their own than for what they possess in common with others."

As James Gwartney and Richard Stroup wrote in *The Freeman* in February 1988, the devastation of the American buffalo on the Great Plains came about because no one owned the buffalo. Without ownership, it was to the advantage of Indians, and later white men, to kill whatever buffalo they could. Without ownership, no individual could benefit by saving more buffalo—someone else could easily go after any buffalo an individual refrained from killing. Had the buffalo been owned, it would have been in the interest of the owner to assure that enough buffalo remained to reproduce for the future. While ownership of the buffalo was not practical then, Gwartney and Stroup point out

Jane S. Shaw is a Senior Associate of the Political Economy Research Center in Bozeman, Montana.

John Hospers is a professor of philosophy at the University of Southern California and editor of The Monist. He is the author of numerous books and articles on aesthetics, ethics, and political economy.