

BROTHERS IN CHAINS:  
RALPH WALDO EMERSON AND  
GEORGE FITZHUGH'S  
THOUGHTS ON ECONOMIC AND  
POLITICAL LIBERTY

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With the publication of John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* in 1971, followed by Robert Nozick's *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* in 1974, the philosophical battleground in the United States over the moral limits to liberty has received more attention than at any time since, perhaps, John Dewey, writing fifty years earlier. While the discussion over the nature of economic and political liberty is hardly new, these writers more than others have revived the interest among theorists in linking the economics and politics of liberty. Nevertheless, the basis for the anarchic model of a free society proposed by some philosophers and the arguments for an "omnipotent" centralized government advocated by others have certain historical and theoretical features in common. Certainly the affinity of these apparently antithetical positions has been observed by more than a few historians, but virtually no one has attempted to compare the positions of such apparently diverse thinkers on the subject of economic and political liberty as Ralph Waldo Emerson and George Fitzhugh. Even if they had, it is unlikely that they would find Emerson and Fitzhugh as being in general agreement. Yet that is the purpose of this paper.

In the context of modern writing about freedom in general, and modern historiography in particular, an important critique of the Libertarian position, and Modernism—but one that absolutely rejects Marxism and collectivism—has been ignored. This critique, elaborated by Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin, both of whose works bridged the 1950s and 1960s, is only now wading back into the melee. It suggests

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that a radical individualism, which makes freedom the highest value, possesses the same dangers as collectivism.<sup>1</sup>

Libertarians, it should be noted, are sensitive to this critique. Some argue that virtue is the highest individual goal, but that freedom is a necessary coalition for virtue in this regard. They maintain that in striving for the virtuous self, man fulfills his telos, and in the process develops the good society. Strauss and Voegelin, however, argue that concepts of "good" and "virtue" are meaningless without a telos that is a part of a hierarchical ordered universe. Order, in their view, is not a spontaneous result of economic liberty, but rather is a natural precondition for it. The purpose of this essay is less to consider that particular stream of thought on individual freedom than it is to discuss the more radical anarchist-collectivist positions epitomized by Emerson and Fitzhugh.

Since Voegelin in particular argues that the understanding of order is best achieved through the analysis and application of history, the route of my discussion shall lead through the intellectual neighborhoods of some thinkers not normally identified with theories of political economy. Among the stops of this journey are the residences of Ralph Waldo Emerson, one of the foremost American exponents of freedom, and of George Fitzhugh, the nation's most logically consistent antebellum defender of slavery. I will argue that the principles of order and, hence, political economy propounded by the former in his defense of liberty were in fact developed from the same constructs as those used by the latter in his case for slavery. The very "natural right theories" explored to agitate for an ever-increasing series of rights by, among others, the American abolitionist movement were used as a smoke screen to mask their deeper attack on fundamental institutional order. This attack isolated for special attention the market and the family. Using the proslavery arguments of George Fitzhugh, the inherent compatibilities of the abolitionists' ideas and his own shall stand out with rather shocking clarity.<sup>2</sup>

Eric Voegelin has revived the Aristotelian concepts of order and the role of the polis in society by arguing that man's telos is to strive for the ordered—that is the virtuous—society. But virtue requires a standard above that of liberty. That is, liberty or freedom must be a lesser value to virtue. In economics absolute liberty is both undesirable and dangerous, a proposition clearly understood by Adam Smith. Certainly Smith believed that national defense took priority over material considerations. In the *Wealth of Nations*, he noted that it was "The first duty of the sovereign, that of protecting the society from the violence and invasion of other societies." Smith certainly had no qualms about weapons procurement, even at high prices contending that "in modern war the great expense of fire arms gives an evident advantage to the nation that can best afford that expense," because over the long-term, weapons development by civilized nations

"is certainly favorable both to the permanency and to the extension of civilization."<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, most eighteenth-century contemporaries of Smith or nineteenth-century contemporaries of either Emerson or Fitzhugh believed that their case for regulation of the market required a standard of absolutes, or of a "higher law," in William Seward's words. A few, such as Jeremy Bentham, might construct a position based on simply pragmatic considerations. Models of Benthamite political economy are both ludicrously unfair and hideously inefficient. It makes no distinction between "good": if the "best" society ensures the greatest good for the greatest number, how does one weigh "good"? For example, should one man's death count as a negative 100 to be balanced against redistribution of property, arbitrarily rated as a positive 10 per family? Practically, a Benthamite system would create a nightmare of government involvement far worse than now exists in modern socialist countries. Bentham's inability to establish a hierarchy of values represents only the most obvious problem. Again, the deeper weakness is exposed by understanding that the concept of "fairness" by which to judge these "goods" itself implies the existence of absolutes. All "good" (for the "greatest number" or otherwise) must embody some objective, absolute definition of good made in light of some eternal truth. Otherwise, the "greatest good" today might be achieved by killing all Jews, and tomorrow by killing all the bourgeoisie, and so on.<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, just as the market may not be left to its own devices in all cases, neither can simple utilitarianism act as the measure of efficiency. The economics of freedom is more than the economics of license: and if one follows the logic of either Emerson or Fitzhugh, the economics of freedom eventually must embody slavery! No one advocated this concept with more energy than the primary defender of slavery in antebellum America, George Fitzhugh, the Virginia lawyer (1806-1881) whose defense of slavery and his attack on Northern society was so piercing that the modern economic historian Joseph Dorfman contended it left free society with no alternative but to make war upon the South. Although Fitzhugh had little formal education, he studied the "political economists" of the day, including Adam Smith and David Ricardo. He knew some Latin and claimed to subscribe to "Aristotelian" positions. His *Sociology for the South* "aroused the ire of Lincoln more than most proslavery books." Lincoln's perception in this regard is important: he, more than any other American of the antebellum period, embraced in his thought actual Aristotelian principles. While Fitzhugh fancied himself an Aristotelian, albeit without logical cause to, Lincoln's specific concern over *Sociology for the South* reveals that Lincoln realized Fitzhugh's thought stood as the most serious intellectual attack on free society yet mounted in America. Lincoln also recognized the compatibility of the Virginian's ideas to those of the abolitionists who would soon align themselves against the president. Fitzhugh followed *Sociology* with *Cannibals All!*,

a work that "laid bare the essential core of proslavery assumption latent in other writers." Indeed, Fitzhugh's understanding of unlimited freedom as slavery exposed the proslavery proclivities of such supposed advocates of freedom as John Locke and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Although modern theorists of freedom, including Robert Nozick, have reviewed substantial analysis in contemporary literature, their ideas have seldom been examined in light of proslavery arguments made by their intellectual predecessors. By delving more deeply into the thought of Emerson, and Fitzhugh, we can come into a different, and perhaps more accurate, interpretation of the economics and politics of freedom.<sup>5</sup>

No American writer has been as closely identified with freedom (and, ironically, journalistic freedom) as Ralph Waldo Emerson, who "made independence or self-reliance—what is today called liberation...his ultimate teaching." As leader of a philosophical movement known as Transcendentalism, which is the logical extreme of Romanticism and is itself pure gnosticism, Emerson (who frequently referred to himself as "The Poet") maintained that the only lawful thing was that which was "after my constitution." He made freedom, in other words, the highest virtue. "Nothing," he said, "is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind." (Or, as abolitionist Theodore Parker, Emerson's doctrinal brother, said, one must always ask "[I]s it right for me?") Actually, Emerson's freedom is reducible to a radical, atomized individualism that acknowledges no authority, even that of death. For Emerson, creating "your own world" symbolized ultimate liberation (as it did for Marx), and if man is his own creator, then man's death is the ultimate expression of freedom.<sup>6</sup>

Certainly modern freedom theorists, especially Libertarians, would hardly wish to identify themselves as socialists, and yet Emerson's freedom is exactly that of not only Marx, but of the Marquis de Sade as well. Marxists not only demand the death of the individual: rather, the "death of mankind is...the good of socialism." Marxist scholar Alexander Kojève suggests that "Death and Freedom are but two...aspects of...the same thing." Donatien de Sade, the eighteenth-century advocate of rape (and, as many see him, pornographer), placed freedom and death in their proper perspective by boldly stating, "The freest of people are they who are most friendly to murder." Emerson wanted to kill only authority and order, proclaiming, "I would write on the lintels of the door-post, Whim." This interesting statement, rather innocent in appearance, is laden with revelations about Emerson's true beliefs and intentions. First, Emerson had a habit of deliberately but carefully inverting and confusing classical texts and the Bible. His revisionism targeted especially Plato and the Old Testament, arguing as he did that "Two ideas, Greece and Jewry, sway us." He therefore maintained that Plato embraced "both sides of every great question," or that Plato "could argue on this side and on that." In fact, Plato flatly rejected relativism, and made clear that there existed differences between the One, the *metaxy*, and the

*apeirontic*. Emerson sought to eliminate in the metaxy or the in-between (i.e., remove man from his special condition to either the realm of God or beasts). Whereas Plato viewed liberation from death as possible by *eros* (love of "The One" or "The Good"), Emerson's *Orphic Poet* taught that man was liberated by creating his own world, i.e., by rejecting the order of the universe present in the One. Emerson's revisions of Biblical texts directly focused on the Second Commandment by admonishing that "You cannot say God, blood, & hell too little." For Emerson invoking the name of God in a nonsacred sense was important. "The Jew," he noted, "named him not," referring to the Jewish practice of not speaking God's name.<sup>7</sup>

Second, Emerson's "writing on the lintels" bespoke exactly what the Poet's understanding of freedom was "Whim." Whim is caprice, or total absence of obedience to authority. Clearly, Emerson intended man to be free from authority, although he did not logically extend his position as far as Marx or Sade. But he did invert the obedience found in the Israelites' actions during the Passover (*Exodus* 12:22-23), when God spared those who splashed lamb's blood on the doorposts, and the obedience of the Sh'ma, a Jewish prayer liturgy (*Deuteronomy*) in which the individual's obedience to God is proclaimed in the words "Hear O Israel...The Lord is One," and posted in the mezuzah on the door, with the word "Whim." The word *whim*, of course, epitomizes rebellion, and it also can be subjected to an interesting game: if the W is removed (and W in Hebrew is the letter for God), then the remaining word is *him*, which Emerson used to mean "the Poet" or himself. Removing God from man equals freedom. In other words, Emerson understood freedom to be the absence of all authority over the individual; but also the freedom of the individual from all "institutions," including family and the market. Within man, he wrote, is the eternal One: "One Man." This bold statement of idolatry contradicts specifically the Sh'ma. Emerson would transform the self into a "we." Man is free when he surrenders his will to the collective, as surely as he is enslaved by subjecting himself to God. The collective, however, removed the individual from the bonds of authority and freed him from order. Or, as Emerson put it, all mean egotism had to be submerged in a stream of spontaneity, or "self reliance." By that term Emerson meant the identification of will with truth, unhindered by choice, bound only by action. For Emerson, there is no real choice, because there are no values other than one's own—from which to choose. All thought is action. Man is the maker or creator of all freedom at the point where the self dies. Marx could not have said it better.<sup>8</sup>

In wishing to free individuals from the bondage of God, words, the self, the family, or the market, Emerson shared with Fitzhugh a hostility toward natural order, and such things derived from it as government and the family. And in course he came to adopt many of the positions of John Locke, that "presumptuous charlatan," as Fitzhugh called him. Fitzhugh certainly thought of himself as the

antithesis of Lockean thought, and subsequent writers and historians have accepted Fitzhugh at his word without question, labeling him a fascist, a reactionary, or a conservative. Yet his thought embodies far more of the principles of socialism than of conservatism. This becomes quite clear when assessing Fitzhugh's attack on Adam Smith: "The ink was hardly dry [on the *Wealth of Nations*]...ere the hunger and want and nakedness of that society engendered a revolutionary explosion that shook the world.... The starving artisans and laborers...of Paris, were the authors of the first French revolution." Certainly Fitzhugh stood in agreement with Rousseau when he wrote, "Whatever rights [man] has are subordinate to the good of the whole" and he has never ceded his rights to it, for he was born its slave...."<sup>9</sup>

Fitzhugh maintained quite candidly that laissez-faire had failed to provide for the worker, and that it was ethically unjust. Capitalist factory owners, he argued, had "command over labor...without the obligations of a master." Industrial workers, therefore, were "slaves without a master." To defend actual slavery in the South, Fitzhugh adopted the labor theory of value ("Labor makes value, and wit exploitates [sic] them"). But since a doctrine of equality was "practically impossible, and directly conflicts with all government, all separate property, and all social existence," a system that recognized inequality had to be permitted. Slavery admitted to the existence of inequalities while institutionalizing protection of the weak. From this, Fitzhugh concluded that most individuals had "a 'natural' and inalienable 'right' to be...protected...in other words...to be slaves." The Virginian's case was made stronger by the fact that it was not racist. "The defense of negro slavery as an exceptional institution is the most absurdly untenable proposition that was ever maintained by man." More important, though, Fitzhugh recognized that slavery constituted "the very best form of socialism...a beautiful example of communism." However, slavery had an advantage over socialism, because it developed bonds of affection between master and slave. Whereas capitalism permitted industrialists to live on the work and labor of others—"moral Cannibalism" (not to be confused with the modern usage of this term), as he termed it—slavery gave all the right "to be comfortably supported from the soil."<sup>10</sup>

As did Emerson, Fitzhugh invoked the authority of the classical philosophers, especially Aristotle, whenever possible. We have already seen that Emerson directly inverted and convoluted the meanings of these philosophers, Plato in particular, so that the classical thinkers appeared to support Emerson's interpretation of freedom. They did not: they stood diametrically opposed to it. Thus, if our hypothesis that Fitzhugh and Emerson actually agreed on the basic elements and directions of a free society is correct, then one would expect Fitzhugh to also misinterpret classical political economy. Indeed he did. His appeal to the authority of Aristotle, for example, specifically sought to separate Fitzhugh's position from that of "liberal" thinkers, such as John Locke.<sup>11</sup>

In his rejection of Locke's major principles, natural rights, consent of the governed, and contract theory, Fitzhugh seemed to stand outside modern liberal consensus (historian Eugene Genovese has called him a "reactionary"). He claimed unashamedly to be a follower of Aristotle, in whom he saw "the true vindication of slavery." Fitzhugh brashly maintained that "Modern social reform...proceed[s] upon the theory of Locke, which is the opposite of Aristotle." But in his vociferous attack on Locke, Fitzhugh broadened his sights to include Locke's disciples, the northern abolitionists, who were also the enemies of the classical view that "society and government are natural to man." Yet, as Robert Loewenberg has shown, the Virginian "was neither Aristotelian nor anti-Lockean." Quite the contrary, Fitzhugh grounded many of his views on the writings of the northern abolitionist, Stephen Pearl Andrews, whose theory of value formed the basis for most of Fitzhugh's reasoning, and the latter quoted Andrews frequently. He also arrived at the same conclusions Andrews did, namely, that land ownership was exploitive.<sup>12</sup>

Andrews pressed Emerson's abolitionist theories farther than the Poet himself did, but Andrews never contradicted Emerson's world view. Most telling about the relationship of Emerson and Fitzhugh is the diagnosis of the abolitionist assumptions about freedom and their own critique of northern society. In *The Science of Society*, Andrews argued that an age of absolute individuality approached in which all government, laws, and institutions that were "adverse to freedom" would wither away. Andrews detailed a view of freedom that closely resembled that of Emerson: "The essential condition of freedom is disconnection—individualization.... The process...must go on to completion, until every man and every woman...is a perfect individual." Like Emerson, Andrews thought that individual freedom was achieved only when every social role had been stripped away. How did this radical atomization fit Fitzhugh's model of an enslaved society? First, Fitzhugh claimed that absolute freedom and absolute slavery were the same thing. Because he agreed with the abolitionists that man had no natural end, Fitzhugh could argue that all relationships were a matter of convention, and hence all political and social institutions were unnatural. By maintaining that the abolitionists constituted slavery's best defenders, he exposed their theoretical structure of socialism. Both slavery and socialism, he contended, sought the end of freedom's most definitive manifestation, the market. He adopted their critique of institutions by insisting that every relationship is slavery: father-son, husband-wife, employer-worker.<sup>13</sup>

Like Emerson, also, Fitzhugh confounded the meanings of words, calling slavery "freedom." He "repeatedly compared the status of wives and children to that of slaves." Fitzhugh had two definitions for freedom, one meaning license, or the condition that exists prior to civilization, and another meaning protection and security. Both of these the abolitionists shared, and they certainly favored the abolition of the market, the family, and religion. When Fitzhugh wrote,

"Government is slavery," he meant exactly the same as Andrews, who wrote, "The true order of government is [one] in which the rulers elect themselves." In *Cannibals All!* Fitzhugh arranged an interesting trial in which several abolitionists of varying degrees of "ultraism" were called into a courtroom witness stand. His questioning exposed the fact that the abolitionists strove "to abolish Christianity as now understood," certainly a development of which Emerson approved.<sup>14</sup>

Calling Horace Greeley to the stand, Fitzhugh also made clear that the power to formulate the issues and to control the language of public discourse "in light of the doctrine of free speech is really a doctrine of power." He understood, as one modern critic has charged, that the press "is radically hostile to just those principles—freedom, republican government, tolerance—that are most often thought to justify its existence in free societies." Fitzhugh recognized that Greeley's *Tribune* was "the great Organ of Socialism, of Free Love and all the other Isms which propose to overthrow and rebuild society and government or to dispense with them altogether." Fitzhugh realized that *freedom of the press* was a code phrase for political power. The *Virginian* complained that "we assert a theory bluntly and plainly, and attempt to prove it by facts and arguments, and the world is ready to exclaim, 'oh what a shocking heresy.' Mr. Greeley for twenty years maintains the same theory...and elicits the admiration and gratitude of the world." Yet Fitzhugh contented himself with the use of force because it defined man's condition.<sup>15</sup>

Ultimately, Fitzhugh's theory, called antinomic pathology (which he borrowed from Aristotle because it balanced negative opposites, or antinomies), would make the interests of the rulers and the ruled identical because it combined capital and labor in the person of the slave. Actually, the strong, because of their benevolence, "labor...[to support] the weak," and in return the strong should have a "right to enslave all" labor. The master, whose "obligations are [often] more onerous than those of the slave" must care for "the sick, the infirm, and the infant slaves." Thus, he "is always a slave himself." Worse, from the master's standpoint, while everyone was to work "according to...capacity and ability," each was to be rewarded "according to...wants." Although Fitzhugh equated the greatest good for the greatest number with society's greatest good, he nevertheless stood fast in the conclusion that man's natural condition at all times was a product of force. Fitzhugh called his political economy (which was slavery for all) "benevolent despotism." In contrast, he called the political economy of abolitionists like Emerson, Andrews, and Greeley "malevolent despotism" because in their unrestrained dynamic toward total freedom they advocated unrestrained "free love." Most socialists shared their propensity to support "free love." Robert Owen warned against the "three-headed Hydra of God, marriage, and property," while John Humphrey Noyes sought to end the four "systems" of sin, marriage, work, and death. This is not surprising: if "the distinction between men and women is the most irreducible and natural in Marx's



sense of the unfree, [then] it is the prototype of all oppression and of all alienation." Indeed, Andrews soon came to be known as the "Pontiff of Free-Lovism," and he echoed Emerson's words when he stated, "The individual himself must decide what the law of God is [since] there is no authority than himself [the individual]." Andrews contended "The legal obligation of marriage was sundered" and it might be possible to rear all children in "one unitary edifice." It was only a short step in logic to agree with the Marquis de Sade that "never may an act of Possession be exercised on a free being." Using this reasoning, Sade could argue that the "exclusive possession of a woman is no less unjust than the possession of slaves [emphasis mine]"; he continued by asserting that "no man may be excluded from the having of a woman...[because] she...belongs to all men."<sup>16</sup>

But the Sadean connection to the Andrews-Fitzhugh-Emerson ménage à trois delineates a political economy as well as a disgusting theory of lustful possession. Consider the very example used by both Sade and Andrews regarding a theory of labor. According to both (but in Andrews' words), "So soon as I have drawn up a pitcher of water from the spring or stream it is no longer natural wealth; it is a product of my labor." Andrews elucidated this theory in his "cost principle," a dialectic that would navigate between the rocky shoals of individualism and communism. This economic law developed from a process in which the individual becomes the means of liberation, with the individual liberated from the market and from all relationships. At that point, "man may be a law unto himself." He argued that in such a system, societal order would be maintained by a simple formula: "The sovereignty of the individual [is] to be exercised at his own cost." Thus, Andrews (and Fitzhugh) contended that self-sovereignty and communism were indistinguishable. In its basic form, the "cost principle" worked toward the "extinguishment of all price," as well as the "disintegration" of special interest. Still, it looked remarkably like Marx's labor theory of value, for in it Andrews found "Cost...the only equitable limit," with cost arrived at by "the amount of labor bestowed on...production." Andrews then made the producer the standard by which value was set, not the market. However, this process threatened to reenslave men to cost just as the market had to price. To escape this dilemma, Andrews introduced a "repugnance" standard, under which distasteful, painful, or repugnant labor set the cost of an item. Of course, the most undesirable labor would be the highest paid, whereupon it might suddenly appear desirable.<sup>17</sup>

Throughout his elaboration, Andrews sought to penalize wit, skill, and talent, noting that "menial...labor will be [the] best paid." Fitzhugh used exactly the same logic: "Slavery...relieves the ignorant mass of slaves from the grinding oppression of skill [emphasis mine]." Competition among unequals, Fitzhugh asserted, led to the "oppression and ultimate extermination of the weak." Again, Andrews: the skill of others represents "natural wealth" such as the stream

in his earlier example. "Every individual has a right to appropriate natural wealth...." The final absurd, yet intrinsically logical, corollary of the "cost principle" generated a dictatorship like that authorized by Fitzhugh. "If," he reasoned, "one has to bear the cost of another's conduct [presumably of less equal skill or talent] he should have the deciding power over the conduct of the other." Ultimately, such ruminations not only reestablished a framework of despotic slavery but resumed Emerson's attack on self, i.e., the attack on every "role" or facet of an individual's existence that was not repugnant (natural wealth). So, like Sade, abolishing sexual distinctions—the ultimate expression of natural wealth—took preeminence in Andrews' and Emerson's thought. One is free when the natural endowments of others, even their physical bodies, are available to him in the same way as water and air. Rape, of course, epitomizes this theory of political economy. And if the taking of "natural wealth" through rape constituted a free act, the state also had the right to take life from those "lacking the qualities to become useful." The inability of one to liberate himself or others thus marked one for death!<sup>18</sup>

Fitzhugh and Emerson believed society to be infallible, because there is no human nature. How can a society fail if each person pursues that which is "sacred" to himself? Man had no freedom with regard to his end, and had therefore become enslaved. Antinomic pathology established no bounds for masters, for, if "masters" cannot have knowledge of their ends...their freedom is...that of conception." In other words, like Emerson's *Man Thinking*, Fitzhugh's masters found themselves limited only by what they could dream. As Emerson wrote, "The mind now thinks; not acts." Thought, as in the purest Marxism, becomes action. For Emerson and Fitzhugh, freedom meant the creation of human existence. The final point of agreement about liberty between the Poet and the Virginian, therefore, involves their rejection of the past. Fitzhugh warned that "a great memory is like a disease of the mind." Emerson rejected the idea that men could learn truth from books, especially the Bible, reminding us that no book "is quite perfect." Books are "other men's transcripts of their readings." "Everywhere," Emerson fumed, "I am hindered of meeting God in my brother, because he...recites fables merely of his brother's, or his brother's brother's God." One must dispense with "the antique and future worlds," as is made clear by Emerson's revisions of Plato and the Bible. Instead, *Man Thinking* must read "God directly." The best book, i.e., the one most "true" is that which the individual writes for himself: "Each age must write its own books.... The books of an older period will not fit this." Fitzhugh, and Andrews, and obviously Marx, would have approved of the need to remake the past. Indeed, remaking or recreating the past only underscored man's lack of nature and the dialectical process of history.<sup>19</sup>

Any discussion of the economics and politics of liberty must work from theory. Both Emerson and Fitzhugh tried to establish a theory of freedom, not just a defense of it. Yet both adopted historicist

assumptions, in which the present was used as the criterion for application of a method, namely the value-free method of social science. Fitzhugh's title—*Sociology for the South*—could not say it better. By theory, Fitzhugh and Emerson meant an opinion about human existence. Or, they rejected the attempt to formulate "the meaning of existence by explicating...a definite class of experiences." Fitzhugh and Emerson understood theory as ideology, and hence excluded all possibility of developing a political philosophy as such. Instead, they proceeded from presuppositions that these "classes of experiences" were not universal or transhistorical but subject to time and place, a methodology known today as historicism. That is, they undertook their studies of freedom and slavery on the grounds that "theories of slavery or of freedom as historical and have, therefore, no claims to truth." Of course, such an approach really precludes any possibility of understanding the past, and obviously does not come to grips with the dilemma posed by its own doctrine: How can this view, then, be "true?"<sup>20</sup>

Do we mean to suggest that Emerson and Fitzhugh did not mean what they said? If so, that is itself a Marxist interpretation, wherein these thinkers only babbled ideas dictated by their own "condition of existence," or "class," or some other deterministic factor. No, this approach must be rejected: Fitzhugh certainly saw himself among the vanguard fighters that would execute radical social changes, the necessity for which the abolitionists all concurred. Yet his own claim to be an Aristotelian—and hence a political theorist—has been shown to be hollow. He subscribed to a view of freedom that advocated the destruction of society and a return to the state of nature, concluding that all relationships were conventional.<sup>21</sup>

Emerson, who appropriately described himself as a "transparent eye ball," indeed proved transparent when it came to his historicism. "Speak what you think now in hard words, and to-morrow speak what to-morrow thinks in hard words again, though it contradict every thing you said to-day," he admonished. The eternal present, for Emerson, required "insight to-day and you may have the antique and future worlds." To be more blunt, Emerson stated, "All history becomes...subjective.... There is properly no history." It should be made absolutely clear, however, that Emerson represented the mainline abolitionists' views in this respect, even though he was not considered a militant abolitionist himself. Theodore Parker, for example, another of Fitzhugh's targets, argued that man could know himself only directly, "not through the media of...the Church or of books.... [Man should not be] bowed down by the weight of conventions or of learning."<sup>22</sup>

Modern observers of political economy, often mistakenly referred to as "theorists," have developed market constructs based on views of freedom similar to those held by Emerson, Andrews, Fitzhugh, and Sade. By proceeding from "state of nature" assumptions, many of the most "conservative" or "reactionary" writers fall into the trap

of ultimately advocating either a malevolent slavery or a benevolent version of it. This tendency is not lost on the trenchant modern Aristotelian Harry Jaffa, who points to a "tacit alliance between the epigones of Karl Marx and those of John C. Calhoun which dominates the American intellectual climate today." One has only to consider the "conversion of Garry Wills from "Right" to "Left" to appreciate Jaffa's remark.<sup>23</sup>

A final piece of evidence in this vein is worth considering. No modern historian has been more acclaimed for his work on slavery and abolition than David Brion Davis. His prizewinning book, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, sought to expose slavery in "all...acts of dominion." Individuals, he argued, are subject to enslavement by "all the subtle stratagems, passive as well as aggressive...all the interpersonal knots and invisible webs of ensnarement" that are a part of our daily lives. Compare this statement with the abolitionist Parker's demand that we remove the "myriad tyrannies that exercise...dominion over the minds of men." By "knots" and tyrannies Davis and Parker specifically had in mind marriage and the market. Slavery, Davis maintained in his earlier book, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*, may be applied in principle to "wives and children in the patriarchal family." His "dream of a perfect society" involving total self-sovereignty is incompatible with "traditional authority" and all "conventional society." Appropriately, Davis asks if "genuine liberation [means] a higher form of servitude," contending that perhaps it is only one's opinion whether subjugation to an omnipotent state is "democratic or totalitarian." Interestingly, but perhaps not surprisingly, it not only appears that the antebellum writers themselves conflated slavery and freedom, but so have the historians who have written about them in modern times.<sup>24</sup>

Fitzhugh was correct when he maintained that "the works of the socialists [abolitionists] contain the true defense of slavery." What appeared to be an irrational attack on slavery by the abolitionists instead was reducible to an attack on all relationships and institutions. Of course, Fitzhugh had to escape this moral dilemma, maintaining as he did that slavery better protected the family, which he tried to do by showing that man is naturally benevolent, i.e., social. Yet Fitzhugh had also contended that, due to antinomic pathology, man has no nature. He is as selfish as he is benevolent. Man's lack of nature formed a position accepted by Locke, Andrews, Sade, Emerson, and the abolitionists. Given that society is a human construct—but that reason is not a component of being but instead a thing of human creation—society is a necessity that is not a matter of choice. In other words, it is "naturally" unfree or enslaved. Just as Fitzhugh's society would make all men slaves, so would the radically free society of Emerson and the abolitionists: if all are free, then the individual is subject to the will of all either through a "General Will" as envisaged by Jean-Jacques Rousseau or a condition of absolute tolerance in which no individual can claim to know the truth because no truth

exists. Such a radically free society must also result in the use of coercion or force, just as Fitzhugh advocated for his own slave society.

Thus the antebellum defenders of slavery actually shared with the abolitionists a world view encompassing human nature (man has none), a view of economics (labor makes value), and a view of politics (man is not a political animal, and consequently absolute slavery or anarchic liberation resulting in reenslavement to a General Will represents the "end" of society). These views continue to shape our understanding of the economics and politics of liberty to this day. One has only to consider the New Deal programs, based on John Dewey's axiom that "the process of transforming...existent civilization" constitutes the only moral end of society. It was somewhat ironic, therefore, that two New Deal political scientists, thinking they had found the exact opposite of modern liberalism, revived the political thought of George Fitzhugh in 1945. They attempted to find in him the strains of conservatism and fascism that would justify their own program of redistribution. Their attempt failed, because it has only shown the affinity between socialism and slavery, not between order and slavery. The economics and politics of liberty must be grounded in a value above liberty itself. Making man's freedom the end of society precludes society from having ends at all. We must, in that situation, be satisfied with "relative, temporary, and proximate truth," as Fitzhugh noted. Fitzhugh's significance lies in the fact that he knew that in economics as well as politics, absolute atomization is not liberty at all, but its pathological antinomy, slavery. And as long as society continues to try to reform itself on its own doctrines, it is, as Etienne Gilson said, "condemned to oscillate perpetually between anarchism and collectivism."<sup>25</sup>

1. For the general historiography of the period, see John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 1971); Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974); Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), and, with Rose Friedman, his *Tyranny of the Status Quo* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983) and *Free to Choose* (New York: Free Press, 1959). A critique of the modernist position, held by all of these authors, appears in Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), *What Is Political Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Free Press, 1959), and his *Liberalism Ancient and Modern* (New York: Basic Books, 1968), and, with Joseph Cropsey, eds., *A History of Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963); and in Eric Voegelin, *Order and History*, 4 vols. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1956, 1957, 1974), and *New Science of Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952).

2. One can consult several works on Emerson: Ralph Rusk, *The Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (New York: 1949); Leonard Neufelt, ed., *Ralph Waldo Emerson New Appraisals: A Symposium* (Hartford, 1973). His own writings include William Gilman et al., eds., *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 1960); Edward Emerson, ed., *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Boston: Centenary, 1903-04); Robert Spiller et al., eds., *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Cambridge, Mass.: 1971, 1979); Ralph Rusk, ed., *The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson*,

6 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939). For Fitzhugh, see Drew Gilpin Faust, ed., *The Ideology of Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Antebellum South, 1830-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981); and his *A Sacred Circle: The Dilemma of the Intellectual in the Old South, 1840-1860* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977); Eugene Genovese, *The World the Slaveholders Made: Two Essays in Interpretation* (New York: Pantheon, 1969); William Jenkins, *The Pro-Slavery Argument in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1935). As for Fitzhugh's own writings, see *Sociology for the South, or Failure of a Free Society* (New York: B. Franklin, 1965 [1854]); *Cannibals All! Or Slaves Without Masters* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960 [1856]); "Revolutions of '76 and '61 Contrasted," *Southern Literary Messenger*, November and December, 1863; "The Impending Fate of the Country," *De Bow's Review*, II, July-December, 1866; and *A Controversy on Slavery Between George Fitzhugh, Esq. of Virginia...and A. Hogeboom, Esq. of New York* (pamphlet) (Oneida, N.Y.: Oneida Sachem Office, 1857).

3. Adam Smith; *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, R. H. Campbell and A. S. Skinner, eds. (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1981 [1776]), II:689-708.

4. Of course, there is a body of Libertarian thought on these matters, much of it found in Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, pp. 73-78, and passim. Invoking Seward's name here is not happenstance. His "higher law" doctrine was quite opposed to the position of Lincoln. See Robert Loewenberg, "That Graver Fire Bell: A Reconsideration of the Debate over Slavery from the Standpoint of Lincoln," *St. John's Review* (Summer 1982): 39-50.

5. Robert Loewenberg, "John Locke and the Antebellum Defense of Slavery," *Political Theory* (May 1985): 266-291 (quotation on p. 267).

6. Robert Loewenberg, *An American Idol: Emerson and the "Jewish Idea"* (Lanham, M.D.: University Press of America, 1984), p. 3; Emerson, "Self Reliance," *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, II:30; Emerson, "Nature," *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, I:41-42. Theodore Parker, quoted in "The Function of Conscience," James Hosmer, ed., *The Slave Power by Theodore Parker* (New York: Arno Press, 1969), pp. 287-315. Also see Henry Steele Commager, *Theodore Parker: Yankee Crusader* (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1947), p. 9. Thanks to Francis Henninger for his unpublished paper on Transcendentalism.

7. Igor Shafarevich, *The Socialist Phenomenon*, quoted in Robert Loewenberg, "Marx's Sadism," *St. John's Review* (Autumn-Winter 1982-1983): 57-67 (quotation on p. 57); Alexander Kojeve, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel, Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1969), pp. 101-102; Emerson, "Self-Reliance," *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, II:30; Emerson, *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, XI:402, 273-279. My discussion here owes a tremendous debt to Robert J. Loewenberg. See his "Emerson's Platonism and 'the terrific Jewish Idea,'" *MOSAIC: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*, XV (1982), pp. 93-108, and his "Emerson and the Genius of American Liberalism," *Center Journal* (Summer 1983): 107-128.

8. Emerson, "Self Reliance," *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, II:30. Again, Loewenberg illuminates this discussion.

9. Fitzhugh, "Revolutions of '76," p. 719; Fitzhugh, "The Impending Fate of the Country," p. 569; Fitzhugh, *Cannibals All!*, pp. 71-72; Fitzhugh, *Sociology*, pp. 57-66, cited in Harvey Wish, ed., *Ante-Bellum Writings of George Fitzhugh and Hinton Rowan Helper on Slavery* (New York, 1960), p. 67. The best work on Fitzhugh's link to the abolitionists is again Robert Loewenberg, *Freedom's Despots: The Critique of Abolition* (Durham, N.C.: Carolina Academic Press, 1986).

10. Fitzhugh, *Cannibals All!*, pp. 5, 8, 17, 69; 210-219; Fitzhugh, *Sociology*, pp. 27-29, 61, 69, 134; George Fitzhugh, "The Conservative Principle, or Social Evils and Their Remedies," *De Bow's Review* XXII (1857): 423; George Fitzhugh, "The Origin of Civilization: What Is Property?—Which is the Best Slave Race?," *De Bow's Review* XXV (1858): 660-661. Also see Rebecca Allison, "The Force of Argument: George Fitzhugh's Defense of Slavery," *The Conservative Historians' Forum* (May 1982): 5-13, as well as

Willfred Carsel, "The Slaveholders' Indictment of Northern Wage Slavery," *Journal of Southern History* (November 1940): 504-520, and James Hite and Ellen Hall, "The Revolutionary Evolution of Economic Thought in Antebellum Virginia," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* (October 1972): 476-488.

11. Loewenberg, *Freedom's Despots*, and his "John Locke," both *passim*.
12. Eugene Genovese, *The World the Slaveholders Made: Two Essays in Interpretation* (New York: Pantheon, 1969), pp. 119, 129, 244; Fitzhugh, *Cannibals All!*, pp. 7, 71-72; Fitzhugh, "Revolutions of '76," p. 719; Fitzhugh, "Impending Fate," p. 569; Loewenberg, "John Locke," p. 269. C. Vann Woodward, in his introduction to *Cannibals All!*, argued that Fitzhugh was *sui generis*. Also see Faust, *Sacred Circle*, p. 127; Harvey Wish, *George Fitzhugh: Propagandist of the Old South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1943), as well as Richard Hofstadter on "John C. Calhoun: The Marx of the Master Class," in *The American Political Tradition, Vintage Edition* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948), pp. 68-92; Jonathan Wiener, "Coming to Terms with Capitalism: The Postwar Thought of George Fitzhugh," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* (October 1979): 438-448.
13. Stephen Pearl Andrews, *The Science of Society* (Weston, Mass.: M & S Press, 1970 [1851]), p. 63.
14. Fitzhugh, *Cannibals All!*, pp. 89, 190-98; Fitzhugh, *Sociology*, p. 170; Andrew, *Science*, p. 34.
15. Loewenberg, *Freedom's Despots*, pp. 46-47; Fitzhugh, *Cannibals All!*, pp. 93-94; Robert Loewenberg, "Journalism and 'Free Speech' as Political Power," [Notre Dame University] *Scholastic* (December 1982): 12. As to the political power of the press, Loewenberg recalls the case of the prominent American newsman. Peter Jennings, whose advertisement for ABC stated, "There is no truth, only news." If this is true, then certainly this truth—that there is no truth, only news—must be open to question. Similarly, Walter Cronkite, once voted the "most trusted man in America," when asked about the rather obvious leftward bias of the media, replied that journalism sides "with humanity rather than authority." But what if "authority" is right and "humanity" is wrong? What is it among moderns that divides human things into "authority" and "humanity"? The answer is that the version of freedom that sustains the media and much of the intelligentsia embodies the notion that every event or principle shall be open to inquiry, particularly by the journalist. Consequently, "free speech" becomes a concept above inquiry. If everything should be open to free inquiry, that should include the notion of "free speech" itself. But "free speech" could be evaluated in another way, in light of truth. However, if no things are true (if there is "only news"), then how can "free speech" itself be immune to this "truth"? A last-ditch position by Jennings and others is that journalism tries to be "fair," but the concept of "fairness" itself implies a standard of good (or values, or absolutes). In other words, news must be evaluated only against a standard of truth. Both Fitzhugh and Horace Greeley appreciated the implications of the power of the press in this regard.
16. Fitzhugh, *Cannibals All!*, pp. 33, 80-81; George Fitzhugh, "Mr. Bancroft's History and the 'Inner Light,'" *De Bow's Review* XXIX (1860): 609; Fitzhugh, *Sociology*, p. 245; Loewenberg, *Freedom's Despots*, pp. 71, 81; Andrews, *Science*, pp. 9, 21, 47; Richard Seaver and Austryn Wainhouse, eds., *The Marquis de Sade. The Complete Justine, Philosophy in the Bedroom, and Other Writings* (New York: Grove, 1965), pp. 318-319.
17. Andrews, *Science*, pp. 8, 35-36, 53, 89, 151.
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 37, 76-77, 109; *Sade, Bedroom*, pp. 335 n. 20, 336; George Fitzhugh, "The False and True Political Economy," *De Bow's Review* XXX (1861): 544-545.
19. Loewenberg, *Freedom's Despots*, p. 149; Emerson, "American Scholar," *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, I:61, 67; Fitzhugh, *Cannibals All!*, pp. 53, 55, 57, 67; Emerson, "Self Reliance," *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, II:45.
20. Loewenberg, *Freedom's Despots*, p. 30.
21. *Ibid.*, pp. 30-35.
22. Loewenberg, *American Idol*, p. 59; Emerson, "Self Reliance," *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, II:33; Emerson, "American Scholar," *The Complete Works of*

Ralph Waldo Emerson, I:67; Emerson, "History," *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, II:6; Park, quoted in Commager, *Theodore Parker*, p. 59. See also Stephen Shack, "Theodore Parker and the Sims Case: A Theoretical Study," (unpublished seminar paper, Arizona State University, 1978), in author's possession.

23. Harry Jaffa, "Inventing the Past: Garry Wills's Inventing America, and the Pathology of Ideological Scholarship," *The Conservative Historians' Forum* (May 1982): 1-4.

24. David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1975), pp. 415, 564; David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1966), pp. 12, 31, 69. Also see Robert Loewenberg, "Freedom in the Context of American Historiography," *Center Journal* (Fall 1982): 71-99.

25. John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1920), p. 177; Arnaud Leavelle and Thomas Cook, "George Fitzhugh and the Theory of American Conservatism," *Journal of Politics* VII (1945): 145-168; George Fitzhugh, "Antinomic Pathology," *The Southern Literary Messenger* 35 (1863): 417; Etienne Gilson, "Concerning Christian Philosophy: the Distinctiveness of the Philosophic Order," in Raymond Klibansky and H. J. Paton, eds., *Philosophy and History: Essays Presented to Ernst Cassirer* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), I:68. A practical application of some of the ideas presented here appears in Larry Schweikart, "Banking in the American South, 1836-1865" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Santa Barbara, 1983), especially the introduction and Chapters 5, 7, and 8.