

THE ADVENTURES OF JONATHAN GULLIBLE: THE PHILOSOPHY OF LIBERTY

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EPILOGUE

Mr. Gullible, a wise man many years my senior, gave me far more than a story of adventure. During many months of discourse he provided me with an outline of his intriguing philosophy of life. Over the years it guided him to fruitful activity in his homeland. That is yet another story. Nevertheless, I leave you with words from the conclusion of his journal.

“My philosophy is based on the principle of self-ownership. You own your life. To deny this is to imply that another person has a higher claim on your life than you have. No other person, or group of persons, owns your life nor do you own the lives of others.

“You exist in time: future, present, and past. This is manifest in life, liberty, and the product of your life and liberty. The exercise of choices over life and liberty is your prosperity. To lose your life is to lose your future. To lose your liberty is to lose your present. And to lose the product of your life and liberty is to lose the portion of your past that produced it.

“A product of your life and liberty is your property. Property is the fruit of your labor, the product of your time, energy, and talents. It is that part of nature that you turn to valuable use. And it is the property of others that is given to you by voluntary exchange and mutual consent. Two people who exchange property voluntarily are both better off or they wouldn't do it. Only they may rightfully make that decision for themselves.

“At times some people use force or fraud to take from others without willful, voluntary consent. Normally, the initiation of force to take life is murder, to take liberty is slavery, and to take property is theft. It is the same whether these actions are done by one person acting alone, by the many acting against a few, or even by officials with fine hats and titles.

“You have the right to protect your own life, liberty, and justly acquired property from the forceful aggression of others. So you may rightfully ask others to help protect you. But you do not have a right to initiate force against the life, liberty, or property of others. Thus, you have no right to designate some person to initiate force against others on your behalf.

“You have a right to seek leaders for yourself, but you have no right to impose rulers on others. No matter how officials are selected, they are only human beings and they have no rights or claims that are higher than those of any other human beings. Regardless of the imaginative labels for their behavior or the numbers of people encouraging them, officials have no right to murder, to enslave, or to steal. You cannot give them any rights that you do not have yourself.

“Since you own your life, you are responsible for your life. You do not rent your life from others who demand your obedience. Nor are you a slave to others who demand your sacrifice. You choose your own goals based on your own values.

Success and failure are both the necessary incentives to learn and to grow. Your action on behalf of others, or their action on behalf of you, is only virtuous when it is derived from voluntary, mutual consent. For virtue can only exist when there is free choice.

“This is the basis of a truly free society. It is not only the most practical and humanitarian foundation for human action, it is also the most ethical.

“Problems that arise from the initiation of force by government have a solution. The solution is for people of the world to stop asking officials to initiate force on their behalf. Evil does not arise only from evil people, but also from good people who tolerate the initiation of force as a means to their own ends. In this manner, good people have empowered evil throughout history.

“Having confidence in a free society is to focus on the process of discovery in the marketplace of values rather than to focus on some imposed vision or goal. Using governmental force to impose a vision on others is intellectual sloth and typically results in unintended, perverse consequences. Achieving the free society requires courage to think, to talk, and to act—especially when it is easier to do nothing.”