

# Concepts of Economic Freedom.

Free

'By a world of sand that borders a world of sea.

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## I

Even after partisans of different political-economic systems, all of them honest persons of good-will and reasonably free from vested interest in either the outcome of their discussion or in the ideas involved, have accepted "economic freedom" as an objective which they hold in common, one normally finds them little closer to agreement than they were at the outset. This is due in part to the impingement of values other than economic freedom, which are not held in common. To whatever extent this may be true, it is not our concern in this essay. We are interested here rather in analyzing the role of differing interpretations of "economic freedom" in producing divergences of viewpoint among reasonable men, all claiming to seek the identical value, and hope for pardon if we speak at times as though no other values were involved.

Six inter-related groups of issues appear to enter into men's differences in interpreting "economic freedom," and in judging rival economic systems by this criterion. These we shall try to explain in a certain amount of detail, focussing on two rival points of view which may be called "traditional liberal" and "neo-liberal" respectively. As in most semantic discussions, we shall not attempt to decide the "right" and "wrong" of any

matters concerned, although the personal predilections of the writer will probably be concealed imperfectly if at all.

The problem of defining economic freedom, or at least explaining wherein and why we differ in its definition, has especial relevance in a relatively fluid or transitional economy like the present economy of Japan, which can move toward any of a number of rival systems with almost equal ease and almost without substantial transfer costs. In a relatively solid economy—which need not be "stable" in any technical meaning of the term—like the present American, British, or Soviet systems, or the Japanese system as of 1940, where thoroughgoing change entails heavy transfer costs, the issues become for the short run somewhat academic in the derogatory sense.

## II

It is convenient, we have suggested, to classify six groups of reasons for which reasonable men differ in their definitions of economic freedom and, more important, in their decisions as to the relative degrees of economic freedom to be found or anticipated under different economic systems. These six groups, or bases, will be listed immediately below:

1. The identification and listing of the freedoms in which he is primarily interested, as

a matter of social philosophy. These may or may not include freedoms which are usually considered strictly "economic."

2. The hierarchy in which these freedoms are to be ranked, i.e., which types may require sacrifice in the interest of other types. (Quantitative as well as qualitative considerations may enter here, despite all the difficulties of measurement.)

3. The identification and listing of the types of social restraint which are considered as obstructive to the achievement of the several freedoms.

4. The hierarchy in which obstacles, once recognized, are to be ranked, i.e., which types are to be considered the more obstructive to freedom?

5. The somewhat specialized problem of inter-relation: To what extent, in particular, are economic and political problems inter-linked, so that the sacrifice of an economic freedom unimportant in itself may lead inexorably to the sacrifice of some other freedom which is more valuable?

6. The problem of "Freedom for Whom?" Are there any special categories of persons with whose freedoms we should be especially concerned, or on the contrary, whose freedoms we should be willing to sacrifice for the freedoms, or other benefits, of the remainder of society?

### III

The first of these six fundamental bases for disagreement appears to lie in the listing of the freedoms which we propose to further. A particular freedom may appear on one individual's list and not at all on another's.

It has become almost a platitude in England and America to use "freedoms" in the plural as is done here, but it may be well to

remind ourselves why this has come about. The reason is that to assert A's freedom to perform any act, or even to live, is at the same time to deny B's freedom to hinder A—in the extreme case, B's freedom to murder A if he so desires. The characteristic German Idealist solution to this problem has been to limit *Freiheit* to the right to express some universal or transcendental Ego or Will by following its equally universal or transcendental Moral Law, and to define away under some other head, such as "license," such freedoms as the philosopher deems inconsistent with the Moral Law. This solution seems to lead alternatively to complete totalitarianism or utter confusion. It would seem more practical to admit in a straightforward manner that freedoms conflict mutually, and to seek such resolution as we can of the conflicts which we recognize between them.

Conflict between freedoms is perhaps most clearly apparent, in the United States, in discussion of racial and religious discrimination. Here the freedom of A (Negro, Jew, or Oriental) to enjoy the same privileges as other Americans collides sharply with the freedom of B (Klu Klux Klansman, Christian Frontier, or Native Son of the Golden West) to select the persons with whom he comes into business or social contact. In the field of labor relations, the freedom of A (the employer) to select his own employees is often inconsistent with that of B (the worker) to join trade unions or political parties of his own choosing, or to speak his mind openly on public issues.

If B's freedom to kill or enslave A is equally a freedom with A's freedom to live and avoid enslavement, it does not follow that the entire concept of "freedom" be discarded. Rather it follows that the professed liberal who proposes to maintain or extend "freedom" first

make some definite choice as to which freedoms he wishes to see maintained or extended. This choice cannot be made by mouthing the 18th Century formulas of the Enlightenment. It requires additional value judgments, which are made differently by different people and which result in different answers.

If the choice to be made is between varying economic systems, there are two important positions, taken by self-styled protectors of economic freedom, which should be mentioned specifically. They have been called the "traditional liberal" and the "neo-liberal" (or "modern liberal") positions, respectively. To the traditional liberal, the freedoms to be considered are those associated with life, with the expression of ideas, with association, with movement at least within national boundaries, with disposal of one's labor power, and usually also with the holding of certain property rights in certain types of goods. Only the last two of these are economic in any strict sense, and final one is usually (although not always) included less for itself than as insurance for the other freedoms listed earlier.

To the above list the neo-liberal characteristically adds one other economic freedom, President Roosevelt's "Freedom from Want"—the assurance of a social minimum scale of livelihood, regardless of the vicissitudes of age, health, and the trade cycle. (The "Right to Work" or "Right to a Living Wage" are other expressions of the same idea.) Whether we consider "Freedom from Want" a "freedom" or not depends, at least in part, on our concept of the nature of obstacles to freedom, which is another important controversy in itself and will be considered below (Section V). As if in compensation for the inclusion of this additional freedom, the neo-liberal would characteristically limit sharply both the

scope of the property rights he would protect and the range of goods in which he would protect them at all. This is particularly true for production of capital goods, where even the Liberal- or Democratic- Socialist would maintain few or no freedoms whatever. Even for durable consumption goods such as personal dwellings, however, the neo-liberal, with or without Socialist affiliations, tends to be impatient with individual freedoms which stand in the way of social plans for zoning, public health, noise or smoke abatement, or the alleviation of over-crowding. And in special instances of public calamity, either of an emergency or a long-run character, individual rights to non-durable consumption goods such as food and clothing, held for personal use and not resale, are likely to be ignored or unrecognized by the neo-liberal.

#### IV

Partisans need not go so far as completely to renounce all interest in the particular freedoms maintained by their opponents. More often than not, they do not in fact go so far. They differ rather only as to the hierarchy in which acknowledged freedoms should be ranked, i.e., which freedom should be preferred to which other freedom in the event of conflict or inconsistency. In the sociological sphere, this is the racial discrimination case referred to above. Neither side usually goes so far (in the United States) as forthrightly to deny categorically the freedoms referred to by the other, but only upholds its own as somehow superior in some scale of social values. In the economic sphere, the endemic "human rights" versus "property rights" debate falls in the same category wherever the "human rights" protagonist is not also socialistically inclined.

Here, as a general rule, we find the neo-liberal not only including the "Freedom from Want" (or "Right to Work", or "Right to a Living Wage") among the freedoms he wishes to protect, but placing it at or near the peak of his hierarchy of freedoms. Such "property rights" as he includes, on the other hand, are ranked well down the scale, sometimes so far down in fact as to be overridden in any case of conflict. The traditional liberal, in contrast, never denies the importance of the "human rights" complex, but grants equal or in some cases even superior status to certain freedoms connected with rights in certain types of property.

## V

At the very heart of the controversy between traditional and modern liberal, and indeed of most other controversy regarding the nature of economic freedom also, are variant viewpoints as to the obstacles to freedom. This aspect of the controversy has a peculiar, and indeed a unique, importance to the present discussion.

The traditional liberal, speaking generally, considers a *freedom* as something quite apart from the social or physical *power* which may be required to exercise it effectively, just as he considers an airplane something quite distinct from its pilot. His thinking tends explicitly or implicitly to draw a sharp demarcation between freedom and power in general. Freedom is considered more or less as an absolute quantity, power as relative to the power which opposes it, with the result that whatever meaning there may be to the maximization of freedom in the large, to speak of the maximization of power in general involves a logical contradiction.

Nothing obstructs my freedom to fly to the

moon, in this view. I merely lack the ingenuity to devise ways and means for the journey. Similarly in the case of free expression, the maintenance of the freedom depends not at all on the power to secure publication or other dissemination of one's views. The owner of the world's largest newspaper or radio broadcasting station and the street-corner orator without an audience possess free speech to an equal degree. The only obstacles to free speech, or any other freedom, to be recognized and combated as such, are seen as juristic in nature. That is to say, they involve legal penalties or at least penalties of the sort Westerners associate with legal action. They include death, physical violence, imprisonment, direct fines, and deprivation of contractual rights; they do not include collateral penalties like social ostracism or indirect economic loss. On the positive side, juristic obstacles are limited to legal restrictions carrying penalties of the sort mentioned above. (In the free speech case, we have the laws against libel and slander.) On the negative side also, obstacles considered in this view are essentially juristic in nature—failure to enact or enforce legal prohibitions of the same kind of penalties applied extralegally, as by mob violence or individual action. It is enough to the traditional liberal, if society protects "freedoms"; it cannot be expected to protect "powers" as well.

The neo-liberal's concept of an obstacle to freedom transcends this relatively narrow juristic one. To him, the distinction between a freedom and the power to exercise it is in practical effect "a distinction without a difference." Accordingly, he treats social and economic restrictions—physical restrictions are somehow another matter—upon one's power to exercise a given freedom as tant-

amount to restrictions on the freedom itself. Returning once again to the free speech case, the neo-liberal regards as obstacles not only the legal penalties we have mentioned, both positive and negative, but a great deal more in addition. He considers as a restriction on free speech, for example, the existence of monopolies of news media or high charges for publication, which hamper dissemination of the independent ideas of the poor man. He considers as restrictions also the social pressure exercised by neighbors, schoolmates, and other associates against the dissenter and his family. He considers as restrictive also the economic pressure exercised through loss of employment, denial of promotion, or refusal of patronage to the holder of unpopular views. (The occasional outcome of such thinking is that any modern society, however great emphasis it may place upon abstract freedom as an ideal, differs only inconsequentially from a dictatorship if not from a prison camp.)

The foregoing paragraphs explain in large measure the bases for disagreement between traditional and neo-liberals as to whether or not "Freedom from Want" should be listed as a freedom. If, by the traditionalist view, personal and political freedoms are considered distinct from the economic independence which furthers their effective exercise, "Freedom from Want" is a power and not a freedom. If on the other hand, by the latter-day view, freedoms and powers are considered as inter-locked, personal and political liberties are meaningless "Liberty to Starve," without the additional guarantee of a certain economic status involved in "Freedom from Want" or some synonymous expression.

Certain traditional liberals, as for example Professor Jewkes in *Ordeal by Planning*, seem

to some extent inconsistent when in defending certain property rights they accept the broad neo-liberal concept of insufficient power as an obstacle, while they retain the narrow distinction between freedom and power elsewhere in their arguments. To Professor Jewkes, the freedom to choose one's occupation (dispose of one's labor power) involves the freedom to refuse to work at all if one prefers additional leisure to additional income. The freedom of work-refusal, in turn, requires the freedom to hold income-producing property if it is to be effective. All of which is good neo-liberal argument, but one wonders where Jewkes' thought might have led him had he applied analogous reasoning to the criticism of his own political-economic program.

This section may be summarized in consideration of two historical cases, each concerned, as it happens, with the academic freedom of an economist. The first case is that of the Swedish monetary theorist Knut Wicksell. Legally sentenced to the degradation of a prison term for speeches and writings which the State Church considered blasphemous and sacrilegious, Wicksell was nevertheless treated humanely while in prison, and on his release he resumed his professional chair and perquisites at the University of Lund and continued his career quite as though nothing out of the ordinary had taken place. The second case is that of the American Left-Wing Socialist (later Communist) Scott Nearing. When objections to his radical views on labor and other questions, as expressed in his teaching and writing, were raised at the University of Pennsylvania, there was no serious thought of legal prosecution of the heretic. Nearing's contract, however, was not renewed. He lost his teaching position and has

not returned to academic life. The question arises, which of these cases constitutes the greater breach of the economist's academic freedom? The logic of the traditional liberal's case would seem to force him, however unwillingly, to answer, the Swedish, failing clear evidence of contract violation in the American case. The neo-liberal has no compunctions whatever in answering, the American, whether or not a formal contract was implied.

## V

As concerns obstacles also, problems of hierarchy present themselves. First of all, with regard to generality. If there is to be a restriction on my freedom, does it make any difference whether the restriction be completely general, on the model of a traffic light, or whether it be directed against my race, religion, ancestry, or economic status, or whether it be directed against me personally and by name? If classifications of the citizenry are involved, which bases are reasonable and which are arbitrary? In the economic sphere, is an over-all restriction on my accumulation of wealth and income, such as an income tax or anti-trust law, less or more of a restriction than a series of particular ordinances such as price, or wage, or rationing, or allocation controls over the individual goods or services I happen to produce or require? And as for restrictions general upon their face, such as the tax and monopoly controls just mentioned, what importance should be attached to the fact or the possibility of selectivity in their enforcement? In the United States, for example, what significance should be given the coincidence between careful scrutiny of the American Medical Association by the Anti-Trust

Division of the Department of Justice with the medical profession's campaign against Government health insurance, or the fact that a list of particularly reprehensible tax avoidance and evasion practices, when traced by an inquisitive Congressman to the taxpayers concerned, incriminated only members of the Opposition Party?

The traditional liberal position on this subject is clear. There is a distinct hierarchy of obstacles or restrictions with regard to their reprehensibility. The more general the restriction, the less objectionable; the more specific, the more objectionable. Classification in general is abhorrent, as witness the opprobrious term "class legislation"; to be tolerated, classification must prove its relevance and reasonableness. In economics, this philosophy explains in considerable degree the traditional liberal preference for monetary, fiscal, and anti-monopoly controls over the specific price, wage, rationing, and allocation controls of the economic planner, whenever departure from *laissez-faire* freedom is required by the exigencies of the situation. The neo-liberal on his part is less affected by hierarchical scruples based on generality. To him, one restriction is as restrictive as another, and he is inclined to lay great stress, when pressed, upon selectivity in the administration or enforcement of provisions completely general to the casual reader.

Another set of hierarchical problems is connected not with the generality of the restrictions but with the nature of the restricting authority. Here the traditional liberal is the more inclined to weight all restrictions essentially equally, whether issued by a Czar, a Fuehrer, a representative assembly, or a civil servant with "expert" qualifications. The

phrase "tyranny of the majority" has a very real meaning to him, and "bureaucrat" is a term of abuse if not execration. The neo-liberal, on the other hand, harbors a certain weakness for the "people", or the "experts", or both. A restriction or regulation is somehow less of an obstacle to the freedom of the restricted or the regulated if it has the sanction of society through representatives democratically elected, or through administrators adequately qualified by degrees conferred and examinations passed.

## VII

The man who feels fundamentally oppressed by commodity or financial controls in themselves, or indeed with the other surface features of over-all economic planning, exists mainly in the perfervid imaginations of the planning and the anti-planning extremists. He is a whipping-boy for certain planners, an anti-social anachronism. He is the hot-house plant of certain anti-planners, who must be pampered though the heavens fall. He is not easy to find in the flesh.

The real-world objections to planning measures are directed less against the measures themselves than against the further measures they are believed to imply. Which brings us at once to the issue of the interrelations of freedoms.

The traditional liberal case here has been formulated by Mises and Hayek in Austria, Robbins and Jewkes in Great Britain, Knight and Simons in the United States. Historically, it notes the co-incident rise of *laissez-faire* capitalism, political liberalism, and the individualistic philosophy of the Enlightenment. This co-incident it refuses to consider accidental, particularly in view of a similar co-incident in the decline of all three elements.

Then the case moves to the analytical front, to consider the routes by which the economic planning of the present day, like mercantilism, cameralism, and other more distant precursors, is likely to ascend or has in historical fact been forced to ascend, in order to succeed, up the hierarchy of freedoms from the less to the more vital. This is the *Road to Serfdom*, to have been traversed by *Nineteen-Eighty-Four* according to one forecast.

The several branches of the road to serfdom, it should be remembered, start not with Socialism or nationalization as such, but with the over-all planning of economic activity whatever form of private property rights may be preserved on paper. They start with planning and not with Socialism (unless, with the Communists, we consider Socialism necessarily imperfect and incomplete without the over-all planning feature). The purport of the traditional liberal case, in its analytical aspect, is to demonstrate the indirect importance of the economic freedoms through their interrelations with political and personal freedoms, even granting their insignificance in isolation.

Five possible (some would say inevitable) rungs in a ladder of obstacles to freedom arising from planned economy are indicated below with fragmentary comments or illustrations. No significance attaches to their order, and none are inconceivable in an unplanned economic system:

a. Direct allocation of personal labor and private living space, either as an occasional emergency measure or as a permanent feature of the plan.

b. Control of public expression through such minor features of the over-all plan as the rationing of newsprint, radio time, etc.,

among rival claimants, or abuse of the "confidential" and "secret" classifications in connection with important political and economic facts.

c. Control of private expression in aid of public monopoly of propaganda. This public monopoly may itself be required to insure continuity for the Plan against the fickleness of uncontrolled public opinion, or to maintain public confidence and morale when the general living standard does not advance as rapidly as prophesied, or when some preventable calamity occurs.

d. Impingement on personal liberties in the process of enforcing the provisions of an economic plan. (This is apt to occur initially in connection with the censorship of foreign mail under a regime of exchange control, since exchange control is almost impossible of efficient enforcement without mail censorship.)

e. Control of private livelihood through monopolization of employment opportunities, ration cards, living space, and so on. (This point involves, it is true, the "freedom from want" which traditional liberals sometimes refuse in other contexts to recognize as a freedom at all. It likewise involves freedom of association as related to the activities of trade unions, producer and consumer co-operatives, etc., in bargaining with monolithic Planning Authorities on any kind of independent basis.)

Such, in brief outline, is the traditional liberal case, shorn of its frequent innuendoes against the motives and abilities of the economic planners. The controversy regarding these and allied theses has generated more heat than light, and ended in an "agreement to disagree." It has been unscientific in that it was couched in terms of "inevitably"

rather than probabilities. It has been marked also by confusion between Socialization and planning on one side, between existing capitalism and theoretical perfect competition on the other side, and by large doses of animus on both sides.

The neo-liberal answers have either minimized or flatly denied any necessary or probable connection between economic and personal freedoms. There have been two alternative types of rebuttal, however, which should be distinguished from each other. One we may call a "theoretical" or "economic" rebuttal, and the second a "practical" or "political" one. The end result, to repeat, is the same, but the lines of argument are miles apart.

The "theoretical" solution, associated with the names of Lange and Lerner, has been called "Competitive Socialism." It thinks of a national plan as operating within certain definite working rules, patterned on the pricing system of perfect competition, and pays less attention to the political establishment or administrative enforcement of these rules in practice. Competitive Socialism attempts to avoid the dangers mentioned above, which it recognizes and seeks to escape, by relying to the maximum degree on rules rather than authorities. The rules are concerned with the familiar equations of price and cost, return and productivity, and utility of expenditure, at the margins of production, distribution, and consumption. They cover only imperfectly such problems as investment and innovation.

The "political" solution, advocated by Finer, Jay, and Mrs. Wootton, is less esoteric and more popular among neo-liberals. It thinks of planning not as being over-all in the Russian sense, but as comprising a series



of *partial* plans, admittedly inter-connected but covering in total a portion of the economy which is quantitatively small even if strategically important. (The "Commanding Height," these areas have been termed in British Labor Party statements.) Such a series of inter-related partial plans, it is hoped, can succeed in improving over-all economic conditions while stopping short of either Utopia or the major restrictions on freedom which are recognized in highly centralized planning systems. Furthermore, should the alternative be presented to them of retreat from planning and retreat from freedom, these neo-liberals profess themselves men enough to admit defeat and choose the former route. One Western European journalist has expressed the result in this way: "Instead of the Socialist machine accelerating in a grim geometric progression towards an infinity of State control, the British and Scandinavian models seem to have some inner contradiction which soon brings them to a halt."

### VIII

The issue of "Freedom for Whom?" can be rephrased: Are there any privileged or pariah classes in society whose freedoms should be either prized especially highly or ignored with equanimity? The key groups in practice are "the intellectuals" (however defined), partisans of regimes only recently overthrown, authoritarians unwilling to grant immediately to others the freedoms they desire for themselves, and any relatively submerged racial, religious, social, or economic groups within the community. The intellectuals, the reactionaries, the totalitarians, and the underprivileged; these are the sensitive spots. In comparing alternative poli-

tical and economic systems with regard to freedom, what special attention, if any, should be centered on these four areas?

The thorough-going traditional liberal professes to draw no distinctions whatever, and to weight the freedoms of all persons equally in the scale. There has been wavering in recent years as regards the Fascists and the Communists, yet the unequivocal language of the Bill of Rights to the U. S. Constitution, to cite one example framed in a period like our own when authoritarian sentiment was flourishing, indicates where the basic doctrine lies. The very fact of special concern with freedom, however, has infused into the traditional liberal case a special tenderness with regard to those elements in society for whom freedoms as such bear the greatest significance. These are the intellectual classes and the liberal professions. From these ranks, we should not forget, emerged the authors of the traditional liberal doctrine. Within these ranks even today is concentrated a disproportionate segment of traditional liberal strength. In practice we are therefore not surprised to find traditional liberals in their time and place comparisons of freedom placing particular emphasis on the status of the intellectual—safeguarding, for example, the right of the Professor to remain "Ein Mann, wer denkt anders." The obverse of this emphasis is relative unconcern with the freedoms of the less vocal portions of society, or those less directly interested in freedom as such. In comparing the degree of freedom attained by, let us say, the British Commonwealth, the U. S. A., and the U. S. S. R., traditional liberals tend consciously or unconsciously to weight the comparison between the American, British, and Soviet economist or geneticist more heavily than that between

the Georgia or Johannesburg Negro and the Turkoman nomad.

The neo-liberal's position is usually less clear-cut. In comparing freedoms he professes primary concern with the freedoms of the mass of the people, whether or not freedoms are of over-weening importance in their every-day lives. The comparative status of the intellectual classes is sometimes, although by no means always, a matter of relative unimportance; in extreme cases it may be even a matter to be shrugged off as insignificant. (The intellectuals' freedom is never complete anywhere—why concern ourselves with degrees of imperfection?) As regards the freedom of reactionaries, or of anti-libertarian political minorities of a Right-Wing character, neo-liberals tend to be impatient, and can be induced easily to support suppression on grounds of political expediency. Against totalitarianism of the Left, the neo-liberal reaction is confused. It is confused particularly by sympathy for the Socialistic features of Left-totalitarianism, and by the possibly temporary nature of the "dictatorship of the proletariat." The non-political minority (racial, religious, or otherwise) is on the other hand a particular object of neo-liberal solicitude, so long as it is not tainted like the Roman Catholic Church with "authoritarianism" or "reaction." To such an extent is this true, that the treatment of women and of Jews have each been cited as indices of civilization and enlightenment.

There is a thread of consistency running through these apparently conflicting neo-liberal positions as presented here, but it is a thread of sympathy rather than of logic. Or perhaps we might say rather, of the heart and not the mind. The guiding spirit here is concern primarily with the freedoms of

the presently under-privileged of Western society, and only secondarily with the freedoms of the higher social strata.

## IX

It would be both easy and natural to end this pessimistic essay on a pessimistic note, but such is not our intention. Amid all this welter of confusion and conflict and inconsistency, any thinker or reader may be pardoned for assigning the whole concept of freedom, economic or other, to the limbo of the meaningless. Discarded and ignored in serious discussion, it would then be relegated to newspaper editorials, sermons, and campaign propaganda, where effectiveness and meaning are expected to show a negative correlation. Precedent or authority for such a conclusion would not be lacking. We need refer only to Frank Knight's "Freedom as Fact and Criterion," which has provided the starting point or base line for the writer's own recent thinking in these fields.

Yet such pessimism exaggerated in considerable degree. (Knight himself has retreated somewhat from his extreme position—to the extent of continuing fervent discussion of freedom problems from a traditional liberal viewpoint.) Let us grant "economic freedom" or "freedom" in general to bear no unequivocal meaning common to all users of the term. It is an abstraction, incapable of material or instrumental definition. It is not part of what some semanticists have called the "thing-language." There yet remains room for fruitful discussion, we suggest, among persons who, as between themselves, manage somehow to reach agreement or concensus as to what it shall mean to them, for discussion purposes. Concensus is of value, we suggest, even when it be less

than universal.

Discussion of freedom in the absence of consensus as to its definition is admittedly profitless gabble. Much of the discussion between traditional liberals and neo-liberals is subject to criticism on precisely these grounds. But insofar as consensus can be reached, we repeat, it is useful even when less than universal and when impossible of logical justification. What is more, one consensus would appear to be as good as any other, provided only that it avoid internal contradiction. Two prevalent patterns of consensus have been outlined here, the traditional liberal and the neo-liberal respectively. Within if not between them, intelligent discussion can take place. Between them, we must content ourselves with awareness of where the differences lie.

Let us restate our moral, however slight it be. The concept of economic freedom has no clear or unique meaning. There are at least six major areas of disagreement regarding it, and at least two variant schools of thought. The concept cannot then be used

unequivocally, either as fact or as criterion, without some preliminary agreement as to its definition. The terms of this agreement may vary from one discussion to another, just as "the rules of the game" vary with the nature of the game. Within a group which can reach and maintain such a consensus, there is no valid semantic objection to continued use of the freedom concept. Outside of such a group, the term is meaningless. We cannot assume a universal meaning, but we need not resign ourselves to universal disagreement. The concept should neither be swallowed as a platitude nor rejected as a fraud. Rather, as a condition precedent to its use, we should examine the issues involved and assure consensus, however limited, among the discussants. Here as elsewhere in dealing with abstractions, preliminary consensus can be substituted for "weaving" as the basis of fruitful argument. The abstractions need not be discarded because the consensus is limited, even though they are less useful than they would be if it were universal.