

Free Enterprise: The Practical, Moral Basis of American Citizenship

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Historical Background and Practical Considerations

Central. Foundational. Indispensable. These are three of the adjectives that describe how the founding fathers thought of the role of free enterprise in American society.

Historically, to be an American citizen was to have the rare privilege of participating in and enjoying the abundant fruits of free enterprise. Today, free enterprise is poorly understood, openly scorned by a large number of Americans, and widely dismissed as an antiquated relic that should be jettisoned. The anti-globalization protesters of a decade ago, the Occupy Wall Street movement in 2011, and various public protests by labor unions in recent years—all have featured signs and banners proclaiming “kill capitalism”—“capitalism” being the favored contemporary term denoting “free enterprise.” Judging by the ever-expanding size of government and the scope of governmental intervention into myriad areas of economic activity that were historically left to the private sector—farming, energy, education, housing, retirement, health care, insurance, etc.—free enterprise has been in retreat for decades and its very survival appears to be at risk.

Why did America’s founding fathers value free enterprise so highly and deem it the most moral economic order on earth? Let’s start at the beginning and review the ideals and principles of free enterprise as understood and practiced by the founders.

The core value underlying the American Revolution, the American constitutional order, and the American dream itself is the principle of individual liberty. Individual rights and liberty together comprise the central theme of the American republic’s foundational documents—the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States. Although the term “free enterprise” does not appear in those documents, the founders’ belief in the moral rightness and

practical necessity of free enterprise is inherent in the language of those documents. “Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” were declared to be “unalienable,” God-given rights. The property right is implicit in that phrase, because it is absurd to suppose that a person can truly be said to be living in a state of individual liberty if he or she is not even free to choose when, where, and with whom one may exchange goods and services, enter into voluntary contracts, or in any other way engage in peaceful commerce—that is, without peaceful, voluntary enterprise being free from external compulsion.

The linchpin—the defining characteristic—of the free enterprise system is the institution of private property. No private property, no free enterprise, or more precisely, the more that property rights are infringed, the less free is enterprise.

In order to participate in the economic life of a society, secure property rights are the necessary prerequisite. My economics mentor, the late Hans F. Sennholz, preferred to use the phrase “the private property order” instead of “free enterprise” to describe America’s economic system. Dr. Sennholz wanted us all to understand that property rights are *sine qua non*, the practical, institutional basis of free enterprise. Very simply, with private property intact, individuals can engage in free enterprise; to the extent that property rights are abrogated, free enterprise is curtailed.

That American citizens were to enjoy untrammelled property rights is abundantly clear from the language of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. The body of the Constitution enumerates the limited powers of the federal government. Nowhere did the Constitution confer upon government any role in the economic life of Americans other than that of a night watchman guarding against aggression. The government was to serve as an impartial referee, upholding the

laws that protected individual rights, not a participant that would favor some over others and pick economic winners and losers or influence who gets what.

When the Bill of Rights was appended to the Constitution, the official recognition of property rights was made explicit. The Fifth Amendment enshrined the Lockean trio of rights—life, liberty, and property—in the supreme law of the land. It deprived any president, Congress, or even an overwhelming democratic majority of the population of having any authority, power, or justification to take or lay claim to any part of the property of any American citizen, rich or poor. Being an American citizen meant that one’s right to be secure in the ownership, control, or disposition of one’s property was inviolable and unbridgeable—forfeit only in cases where the property owner had criminally trespassed upon the rights of another (i.e., by stealing, injuring, defrauding, or otherwise unjustly violating someone else’s rights of life, liberty, or property), thereby making recompense and restitution necessary for justice to be preserved.

In a passage that now seems prescient, President John Adams expressed the founders’ belief in the centrality of property rights to a free society:

Property is surely a right of mankind as really as liberty. Perhaps, at first, prejudice, habit, shame or fear, principle or religion, would restrain the poor from attacking the rich, and the idle from usurping on the industrious; but the time would not be long before courage and enterprise would come, and pretexts be invented by degrees, to countenance the majority in dividing all the property among them, or at least, in sharing it equally with its present possessors. Debts would be abolished first; taxes laid heavy on the rich, and not at all on the others; and at last a downright equal division of every thing be demanded, and voted....The moment the idea is admitted into society, that property is not as sacred as the laws of God, and that there is not a force of law and public justice to protect it, anarchy and tyranny commence. If “Thou shalt not covet,” and “Thou shalt not steal,” were not commandments of Heaven, they must be made inviolable precepts in every society, before it can be civilized or made free.¹

¹ Charles F. Adams [grandson], *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States: With a Life of the Author, Notes and Illustrations* 10 vols. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1856), 6:8-9 in *The Founders' Constitution*. Available at University of Chicago Web site, <http://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/v1ch16s15.html>.

In a similar vein, President James Madison who, if not precisely “the father of the Constitution” was nevertheless intimately involved in its crafting, reaffirmed the Declaration’s view of the role of government: “Government is instituted to protect property of every sort.... This being the end of government, that alone is a *just* government which *impartially* secures to every man whatever is his *own*. [emphases in original] That is not a just government, nor is property secure under it, where the property which a man has in his personal safety and personal liberty is violated by arbitrary seizures of one class of citizens for the service of the rest.”²

Deep respect for property rights persisted for generations. More than three-quarters of a century after the adoption of the Constitution, President Lincoln affirmed,

Property is the fruit of labor...property is desirable...[it] is a positive good in the world. That some should be rich shows that others may become rich, and hence is just encouragement to industry and enterprise. Let not him who is houseless pull down the house of another; but let him labor diligently and build one for himself, thus by example assuring that his own shall be safe from violence when built.³

Those earlier generations of Americans esteemed property rights not merely for their economic benefits, but because, in a very practical sense, private property undergirds and strengthens other cherished rights. Freedom of religion, for example, is rendered moot in a country where property rights are not secure. In the USSR, where the state owned and controlled all public places, freedom of religion was a practical impossibility, for if the government disapproved of particular religious doctrines, it could deny the use of land or buildings for use by the religion’s adherents. Similarly, freedom of the press is a myth where the government owns the printing presses and newsprint. It is private property that gives teeth and substance to other rights.

² James Madison, *Letters and Other Writings*, vol. 4, quoted in *Free Market Economics: A Basic Reader*, comp. Bettina Bien Greaves (Irvington-on-Hudson, NY: The Foundation for Economic Education, 1975), 20.

³ Ray P. Basler, ed., “Reply to New York Workingmen’s Democratic Republican Association,” *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (n.p., n.d), 7: 259-260.

What responsibilities accompany our fundamental right to property? There are at least three: First, citizens must respect the rights of others by honoring contracts and dealing in good faith (i.e., no cheating, defrauding, swindling, etc.). Second, since nobody has a right to anyone else's property, it is incumbent upon each individual to generate enough income to provide for self and dependents. Third, each healthy adult has the responsibility to find out how to render something of economic value to others in the social division of labor, either in an entrepreneurial capacity or as an employee of someone else's business, as the means to becoming self-supporting.

The Moral Case for Free Enterprise

The founders established a government that would institute and protect private property and free enterprise primarily for moral reasons—they believed that it was the right thing to do, and that the daily practice of free enterprise is more moral than alternative economic systems. Many modern Americans have no familiarity with those reasons, so let's review them now:

1) Just rewards.

Working in a system of free enterprise, individuals receive the full reward for their labors. Each one profits in proportion to his productivity (sort of an economic corollary to the biblical principle, "Whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap."⁴ Nobody else can lay claim (not even the federal government, via taxation) to any portion of the income derived from whatever economic values each individual created. This was consistent with God's justice as set forth in the Bible: "They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat...."⁵

⁴ Galatians 6:7, American Standard Version.

⁵ Isaiah 65:22, King James Version.

The founding generation was aware that some of the earliest English settlers in North America (both the settlers in Jamestown and those in Plymouth Colony) experimented with a communal organization in which all worked in commonly owned fields and all the crops were placed into common storage. In both cases, human nature being what it is, men lost the incentive to work. There were more shirkers than workers, so not enough grain was grown, and the ensuing starvation almost wiped out the entire colonies. Once the respective governors established private property rights—assigning each family its own exclusive plot of land and allowing each to keep all the grain produced on that land—food production soared, the colonies prospered, thrived, and grew, and the most industrious families grew wealthy.⁶ The founding generation adopted this most felicitous economic model—the private property order—that had the advantage of superior justice (i.e., nobody taking from others and each person reaping what he had sown) and superior wealth production.

2) Peaceful cooperation.

Strong property rights mean that all commercial relations are voluntary. Nobody can take possession of another person's property without that person's consent. The only way that anyone can legally gain possession of another person's property is if both persons give their mutual consent to a transaction. Voluntary transactions are “positive sum”—both sides benefit from voluntary economic trades, because each party is only willing to relinquish property in exchange for a property he values more highly.

This system of mutual, reciprocal benefits has both important economic and sociological benefits. On the economic side, the system of private ownership results in goods migrating toward ever-more-highly valued uses, thereby gradually but persistently enriching society. On

⁶ Percy L. Greaves, Jr., “American Communism,” *Free Market Economics: A Basic Reader*, comp. Bettina B. Greaves (Irvington-on-Hudson, NY: The Foundation for Economic Education, 1975), 253-257.

the sociological side, the economic system of voluntary, mutually beneficial exchange is conducive to peaceful cooperation and social harmony. One might not like the personality of the person with whom one exchanges, but the positive economic benefit derived from voluntary exchanges usually outweighs other considerations, and people come to realize that they have more to gain by cooperation than by conflict.

3) "Do unto others."

In a private property order, one increases wealth by delivering economic value to others. Granted, there are other ways to become wealthy—some not harmful to others (e.g., marriage, inheritance, winning the lottery) and others that are harmful, such as fraud (illegal violations of property rights) or government handouts (legal involuntary transfers of wealth)—but in free enterprise systems, the most effective, moral way to get rich is to excel in economic service to others, satisfying large numbers of customers and giving them more value than others against whom one is competing for consumers' money.

To be clear here, we don't want to say that the possession of wealth means that someone is a good person. On the other hand, though, we may affirm that those exceptional individuals who become wealthy by honestly and helpfully serving the legitimate economic needs and wants of others are society's benefactors, not society's enemies. In fact, probably the closest we can come in this world to an economic realization of the Golden Rule is the free enterprise system, since it is set up in such a way that fortunes are made by doing good to and for others.

4) Social mobility.

The free enterprise system has demonstrated its moral superiority by being the first economic system in history to allow industrious, productive citizens not only to make fortunes, but to advance socially. The European societies from which most Americans had emigrated were

characterized by rigid class structures and political systems that were rigged to keep the elite rich and powerful, while the vast majority were denied access to wealth and to cultural, educational, and political opportunities. Free enterprise produced unprecedented social mobility. American society was meritocratic. American citizens could gain stature and prestige through their own accomplishments rather than depending upon accidents of birth as was the pattern in the Old World.

The United States of America became the Land of Opportunity for millions who flocked here from dozens of countries in the Old World. Horatio Alger stories of “rags to riches” epitomized not only the American Dream, but American reality for huge numbers of people. The free enterprise system broke up the stifling and stagnant Old World “status society” model, supplanting social stasis with upward economic and social mobility.

Free enterprise unlocked the doors of progress to the masses. It lowered the cost of goods through mass production and economies of scale, thereby bringing myriad consumer goods within the reach of affordability for the masses. It also made possible opportunities for entrepreneurial ventures that enabled citizens from modest backgrounds to attain enormous financial success. This economically driven social mobility made it possible for an Abraham Lincoln to ascend from humble, impoverished origins to the highest office in the land.

5) Protecting church from government.

In the private property, free enterprise order, charity naturally remained a private decision rather than official public business. As the First Amendment to the Constitution makes plain, the founders desired to thwart any potential intrusion of the federal government into religious matters. They wanted to “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things

that are God's."⁷ Since charity is a part of Christian practice and doctrine, the founders believed that it did not fall under the purview of government. In the direct, succinct words of founding father and fourth president, James Madison, "Charity is no part of the legislative duty of the government."⁸

The founders shared the view of the great moral philosopher, Adam Smith, who had explained in his 1759 treatise, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, that government should not compel deeds of benevolence, because such acts would violate citizens' property rights, thereby undermining justice, "the main pillar of the whole edifice...of human society."⁹ Government's *raison d'être*—in the eyes of Smith, Bastiat, America's founders, et al.—was to enforce the moral law of the Decalogue, telling people what they could NOT do to others. The founders understood law to be negative ("Thou shalt not kill," "Thou shalt not steal," etc.), not positive (i.e, do this or that) because once it becomes accepted that governments start controlling what people do, there is no limit to the expansion of government power and diminution of individual liberty that such power wreaks.

Some would assert that citizens have a responsibility to care for those in their communities who are helpless. The founding generation left such matters to Christian charity and to local jurisdictions. Their property rights being inviolable, Americans could give as much or as little of their property in charity to others as their conscience dictated. They believed that each of us is accountable to God, not to government, for our good works.

⁷ Mark 12:17, English Standard Version.

⁸ James Madison, Speech, House of Representatives, during the debate "On the Memorial of the Relief Committee of Baltimore, for the Relief of St. Domingo Refugees, January 10, 1794" [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/hlaw:@field\(DOCID+@lit\(ed00423\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/hlaw:@field(DOCID+@lit(ed00423))) (accessed December 3, 2012).

⁹ Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Liberty Classics Edition (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1976), 167.

Abandoning our heritage.

The economic system in place today is manifestly far different from the free enterprise system of the founders. The federal government long ago ceased to function merely as an impartial arbiter in the background. It long ago ballooned into a leviathan state intervening in myriad economic activities, tilting the playing field to the advantage of some Americans at the expense of others and picking economic winners and losers. Let's see how subsequent generations of Americans have inverted the moral economic order of the founding generation:

1) Unmerited takings.

No longer can it be said of American citizens, "They shall not plant and another eat." The federal government currently redistributes over two trillion dollars per year from those who produce and earn wealth to those who do not. The rule of law, whereby the property rights of each American citizen used to be equally secure, has been pushed aside for an elaborate system of privileges bestowed by government upon its favored constituencies. Instead of everyone receiving the full reward of their labor and productivity, the government confiscates (taxes) a portion of their income and redistributes it to special interests. Essentially, millions of Americans are compelled to render uncompensated labor for the benefit of others—a practice that is rightly defined as economic slavery.

Here, opponents of free enterprise will decry corporate bailouts and other favors to business interests, denouncing such practices as "crony capitalism." Those of us who understand and believe in free enterprise unite with anti-capitalist critics in denouncing the transfer of wealth from middle-income Americans to favored businesses. Tea Partiers and Occupy Wall Streeters agree that such transfers of wealth are unjust. We part company, however, from the anti-capitalists when they condemn capitalism for such unjust deeds, for genuine capitalism

countenances no such favors. What the anti-capitalist left fails to understand is that the very bailouts they denounce are not the practice of capitalism, but the antithesis of capitalism, the very repudiation of private property-based free enterprise. What the left calls “crony capitalism” is all cronyism (corrupt, unjust—an essentially criminal violation of property rights) and not the practice of free enterprise. Although they don’t realize it, they are not protesting capitalism, but rather, the absence of capitalism. We need to enlist them to join us in giving capitalism a try and rejecting the counterfeit “capitalism” that we both abhor.

By the way, we should mention here that, historically, the federal government first encroached on property rights and whittled away at the precept that each should reap only what he himself sows in the 19th century by granting special favors to politically connected businesses in the form of protective tariffs and federal subsidies. It was only in the 20th century that the government started to redistribute money to needy individuals. While it is easier to sympathize with government helping the poor rather than moneyed business interests, both types of redistribution violate property rights. The morally proper reform would have been for the government to refrain from granting corporate welfare. Instead, as the spirit of majority-rule democracy gradually infected our constitutional republic, we compounded the moral fault of redistributing wealth by democratizing redistribution, thereby greatly increasing the practice. That is how we arrived at today’s perilous predicament in which approximately half of all Americans receive money taken from their fellow citizens by the government.

2) Sowing the seeds of conflict.

When the government takes the property of some people to give it to others, those transfers of wealth are involuntary rather than voluntary, and such transactions are no longer mutually beneficial (positive sum) but instead are, at best, zero sum, with one person’s gain

constituting another's loss. Government transfers of property inject a poison into our polity.¹⁰ It causes citizens to regard others as threats to their livelihood. It arrays citizens' economic self-interest against each other rather than aligning self-interest with the interests of others as free enterprise does. Most of us would resent it if our neighbors sneaked into our homes and took some of our property, and as the comprehension sinks in that lots of other Americans are helping themselves to our property by employing government as their agent of redistribution, politics will breed increasing friction and antagonism between us.

Frederic Bastiat (1801-1850) lucidly diagnosed this use of government to place a veneer of civilization and legitimacy on governmental transfers of wealth by dubbing the process "legal plunder." In his eloquent words, we can identify "legal plunder" thusly: "See if the law takes from some persons what belongs to them, and gives it to other persons to whom it does not belong. See if the law benefits one citizen at the expense of another by doing what the citizen himself cannot do without committing a crime."¹¹ As America's founders so clearly understood, the forcible redistribution of property does not suddenly become morally defensible if a majority of congressmen vote for it. We are playing with fire. How long can social harmony last when more and more citizens are grasping for more and more of their fellow citizens' property?

3) Disincentivizing production.

The free market ethos whereby one profits in return for rendering economic service unto others gives way under government redistribution of property to a harsh reality in which some persons profit by taking instead of giving. In voluntary economic exchanges, both sides profit, and therefore, social wealth increases, however minutely. With compulsory transfers of wealth,

¹⁰ American Thinker Web site, www.americanthinker.com/2012/02/the_poison_in_our_polity.html.

¹¹ Frederic Bastiat, *The Law*, trans. Dean Russell (Irvington-on-Hudson NY: The Foundation for Economic Education, 1950), 21.

one side profits, but the other side sustains economic losses. This is the economic equivalent of treading water, because no new net value is created.

Bastiat describes this demoralized ethos as “stupid greed.” He observes the truism that a human being can sustain himself either by the fruit of his own labor (“the origin of property”) or by the fruit of the labor of others (“the origin of plunder”). “Now since man is naturally inclined to avoid pain—and since labor is pain itself—it follows that men will resort to plunder whenever plunder is easier than work.”¹² Here we see the danger of democracy that our founding fathers warned us about, for many today find it is easier to vote for a politician who is willing to give one income than to earn it. Ancient Rome fell after a majority of Romans succumbed to the temptation of “stupid greed.” A society in which the unproductive outnumber, subjugate, and ultimately crush their productive fellows is not only guilty of the moral perversity of punishing society’s benefactors instead of valuing them, but is also on the path to self-destruction.

4) The new-old elitism.

Opponents of free enterprise often claim that they will replace capitalism with a more just society, but the progressive socialist model they propose is actually a retrograde step that would reverse the marvelous upward mobility that free enterprise fosters. In a free market system, one’s fortune grows from serving consumers. When the state commandeers economic activity, prospering depends on how well one serves the state, which, in everyday practice, often means that one attains success by one’s political connections. That is the way things worked in the pre-capitalistic social orders of feudalism and mercantilism where those in power rigged the political system so as to pick the economic winners and losers, while excluding and oppressing the majority of the people.

¹² Bastiat, *Law*, 10.

Socialism represents a return to pre-capitalist social stratification, because socialism inevitably divides society into an elite minority—the economic planner-rulers—and the mass of people who serve as the worker bees in the socialist hive. The social strata under socialism solidify into a two-tiered society very reminiscent of feudalism and mercantilism—a small, powerful, privileged elite and everyone else. Indeed, socialism, in practice, develops along the lines described by George Orwell in *Animal Farm*, with all animals being equal, except that some are more equal than others.

5) Unkind charity.

Today, in the name of charity, the government routinely violates property rights. If a democratic majority in government decides that certain individuals or businesses need or deserve financial assistance, they elevate that putative need above other citizens' formerly unalienable property rights. Americans, who have always been free to give however much of their property to whatever charitable ends they desired, have adopted a system of false charity, of being generous with other people's money—a counterfeit of the Christian model of charity illustrated by the parable of the good Samaritan.¹³

This insidious process was neatly summarized by the early American sociologist, William Graham Sumner, in 1883: "The type and formula of most schemes of philanthropy or humanitarianism is this: A and B put their heads together to decide what C shall be made to do for D."¹⁴ Sumner called C "the Forgotten Man"—the productive member of society whose property is plundered by a majority that has decided that someone else's need or want is more important than C's rights.

¹³ Cf. Mark W. Hendrickson, "Christian Charity: Social Justice and the Good Samaritan," The Center for Vision & Values, March 31, 2010, Vision & Values Web site, www.visionandvalues.org/2010/03/christian-charity-social-justice-and-the-good-samaritan/.

¹⁴ William Graham Sumner, *What Social Classes Owe to Each Other* (Caldwell, ID: Claxton, 1978), 107.

Today, the line of separation between church and state has been blurred, if not obliterated. A political majority acts in the role of a priesthood, judging whose rights are honored and whose are sacrificed to the good of the other (usually dishonestly referred to as “the good of the whole”). There is no ethical principle anywhere that quantifies the extent to which the property rights of the C’s of America should be abrogated, so the process degenerates into a democratic power play of who can line up the most votes. The unpleasant result is an ongoing bitter squabble in which recipients of government handouts, rather than expressing any gratitude to their benefactors, criticize, scold, and despise their benefactors (“those greedy rich people”) for the property that they still retain. So disrespected are property rights today that millions of Americans firmly believe that they are entitled to as much of the property of relatively wealthy Americans as they want. The outcome of this degradation and erosion of property rights is the distant, gargantuan, impersonal, secular, inefficient, and essentially bankrupt welfare/handout/bailout bureaucratic state in Washington.

What next?

Clearly, a profound and profoundly significant transformation has occurred. Enterprise in America has become progressively less free as we have progressively whittled away at property rights. A detailed explanation of why and how this change came about lies beyond the scope of this paper,¹⁵ but undeniably there has been a gradual shift in Americans’ moral standards of right and wrong. There also has been an intellectual shift. A majority of those who might be thought of as society’s thought leaders—university professors, journalists, clerics, teachers, etc.—have rejected free enterprise. Caught up in the excitement (and perhaps the hubris) of a scientific age that offers the beguiling temptation to believe that “the best and the brightest” human beings can

¹⁵ A partial answer may be found in my paper “The Progressive Road to Serfdom” that was presented at the Center for Vision & Values Conference in April, 2010.

solve all of mankind's problems and achieve a utopian world without lack or risk, or in which individuals' inherent differences can be erased and replaced by a blissful state of approximate material equality, intellectuals have devised and propagated new, "post-American" values, beliefs, and ideologies that have debased property rights and crippled free enterprise. Politicians, understanding George Bernard Shaw's insight that the government that robs Peter to pay Paul can always count on the support of Paul, have eagerly adopted various anti-property theories and implemented policies that have progressively supplanted free enterprise with government programs and directives. Finally, a great share of the blame for the departure from free enterprise must be borne by those who have prospered from free enterprise, but who haven't explained its principles and practicality to younger generations.

Another intriguing factor is what I call "the paradox of prosperity." Since the dawn of the Age of Capitalism in the late 18th century, it seems that the opposition to free enterprise has increased in proportion with a rise in standards of living. The historian Bertrand de Jouvenel noted this irony decades ago, commenting that "the fall from favor" of profit-seeking capitalist entrepreneurs "coincide[d] with an increase in his social usefulness."¹⁶ Indeed, early capitalists found ways to mass-produce wealth, raising millions from abject poverty and short life expectancies to ever-more affluence accompanied by increased longevity.

In the most recent generations, free enterprise, despite having been hobbled by myriad government interventions, has succeeded in lifting the average American to a standard of living that would have been the envy of any of the powerful and wealthy Old World monarchs of a century ago. How odd it is, then, to see this spectacularly productive economic system be the target of virulent vilification and the intense loathing of many of the very people who owe their

¹⁶ Bertrand de Jouvenel, "The Treatment of Capitalism by Continental Intellectuals," in *Capitalism and the Historians*, ed. F.A Hayek (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, First Phoenix Edition, 1963), 109.

comfortable lives to it. Perhaps human beings “can’t stand prosperity” as they saying goes. Why else would so many of those blessed by free enterprise call for its extinction?

We have forsaken our founders’ free enterprise system for a mixed economy. Now we have a government that picks economic winners and losers, has an insatiable appetite for the property of American citizens, and has accumulated an unfathomably large debt burden that can only lead to wrenching economic consequences.

We are in the process of learning the hard way that abandoning moral principles brings punishment. As a result of having compromised property rights (and in doing so, defying God’s commandments), we are poorer in several fundamental ways: We are less wealthy; our economy is struggling under enormous governmental burdens; our society is being riven into opposing political factions and feuding classes to such an extent that many former friends can no longer talk to each other; and we have a leviathan government which saddles us with unconscionable debt, oppressive regulations, and a mortally wounded currency. In addition, we are less free—all this the bitter fruit for having forsaken the founders’ moral-political order and disrespecting man’s God-given property rights.

We have been progressively killing the goose that has laid the golden egg of American prosperity. Will we follow Rome and other democracies down the path to bankruptcy, self-destruction, decay, and disintegration? Or will America once again show the world how exceptional she is? Will we become the first country to pull back from the edge of the abyss and pull out of democracy’s fiscal death spiral? Will we reject legal plunder and reaffirm property rights as the practical and moral basis for our polity? Will we reclaim our honor and virtue by accepting the responsibility to earn our own keep in this world? Will we reclaim our national heritage, restore the full majesty and dignity of American citizenship, and once again become a

free people, living in obedience to God's commandments? These questions encapsulate the great challenge that confronts us today.