



McGill
University

Foundations & Philosophy of Science Unit

1983.10.17

Dear Mr Forman

I am overwhelmed by your many and varied gifts, as well as by your generous treatment of my ontology in your METAPHYSICS OF LIBERTY. We are listening to the tapes, I have started to look at some of the xerox copies, and have read all of your dissertation. The only dissonance in the whole symphony was Ayn Rand's awfully vulgar stuff. I suspect you added it as a pinch of snuff.

You would be overrating me if you were to believe that I am capable of saying anything interesting or important about your very novel way of putting together questions of ontology, economics, and law. So, let me concentrate only on a few *sidé* points.

1. P. 68. You object to my postulate that there are only finitely many general substantial properties. How would you know if there were infinitely many? After all, we can get to know only a finite number of them. Moreover, so far in our scientific experience the postulate has been confirmed. Of course, if we had some (very indirect) evidence for an infinity of general properties, we would give up Postulate 2.3 and all of its consequences--as befits a scientific ontology. Moreover you make the objection with tongue in cheek, as you admit yourself that, being finite beings, we are limited to considering only finitely many properties and, therefore, classifications.

2. P. 69. I like your slogan "epistemological ~~reductionism~~, sí; ontological reductionism, no". However, I qualify the former in Vol. 6, Ch. 10, Sect. 3.1.: most reductions are partial rather than full. (Incidentally, the publisher has forced me to split the volume on general epistemology and methodology into two, namely current Vols. 5 and 6. So, the work will have a total of 8 vols. Also by the way, Vols. 5 and 6 are just out.)

3. P. 77. Simon's mechanistic and reductionistic world view is *prima facie* attractive but it collapses on second thought. First, it is corpuscularistic: he does not know of fields. Second, it postulates that the components of a stable system are themselves stable. Counterexample: the neutrons, which are stable in most atoms (e.g. in the helium atom), "live" only a few minutes when free (i.e. outside atoms).

4. P. 81, and also earlier: Jaynes's conjecture on the very recent emergence of deliberate action seems to me crazy. If the Greeks imputed their gods deliberate action, and blamed them for whatever they did themselves, is this not sufficient indication that they were conversant with the concept?

Pp. 89. I agree with your criticism that adequacy of knowledge, correct evaluation, and compulsion "come" in degrees. I am still dissatisfied with my previous theories of partial truth (Vol. 20) and of value.

Pp. 110-111. On the mode of existence of constructs, in particular math. concepts, see my Scientific Materialism (Reidel 1981) and Ch. 1 of my forthcoming Vol. 7 (dealing with the phil. of sci. & tech.). It is possibly the toughest of all philosophical problems. The Platonic solution is the best provided math. be detached from the rest. But one's ontology of constructs should jibe with his ontology of chairs, etc. And science makes no room for autonomously existing ideas, e.g. for Platonic triangles outside geometry, or for geometry outside brains. What you cannot do is to interpolate a layer of constructs into the level system of concrete reality (p. 112).

P. 113 The "empirically-oriented West"? What more empirically minded than the Chinese? What more contemptuous of experience than the typical mathematical economist and the typical political economist in the West? The trouble with the Chinese is their general contempt for theory; the trouble with the West is their ready acceptance of myth (religious, political, economical, etc.). The greatest contribution of the West (starting with classical Greece) may yet be seen as the creation of abstract thought, in particular math, and democracy.

P. 115 Are there totalitarian social contracts? Is not totalitarianism based on force and obedience--sometimes quite willing obedience, as is the case with Cuba nowadays?

P. 114 From your quotations of Buchanan's it seems to me that he is not an all-out axiological individualist, and that he might be persuaded to adopt a systemic viewpoint: (a) no valuation apart from individuals: every valuation is a process occurring in an individual brain; (b) the more knowledgeable an individual the greater the variety of kinds of thing he can evaluate--among the things he does evaluate are his own social groups as systems, not as mere collections of individuals; (c) certain items acquire or lose their value because of their place in society--e.g. dollar bills are useless to the shipwrecked, snowplows to the Nicaraguans.

122 I enjoyed your digs at utility theorists (of which I used to be an enthusiastic advocate and occasional practitioner). You should devote a whole chapter (or article or book) to an objective criticism of subjectivistic utility theory. (I still hope to be able to construct an objectivistic one.)

123 Not sure that the religious impulse is exclusively human. I guess my dog regards me as an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnisciffling supercanine being. He seems always to be expecting some miracle from me. And he worships me.

General observations: (a) your English is beautiful; (b) you have a tendency to stray from the point, which I find enjoyable because it makes for lighter reading, but which may offend people in a rush to learn "what matters"; (c) you should elucidate the notion(s) of liberty rather than take it (then) for granted. I am free from the terrors of religion; I am free to pursue my own interests; Americans are (often) free to dissent but not always free to work; Cubans are free to work (and overwork!) but not to dissent; I may enjoy cultural and political freedom but not economic freedom--or conversely, and so on and so forth. Since there are many kinds of liberty, there are also many kinds of libertarianism. Thus Hayek continues to support entrepreneurial freedom but has come to praise Pinochet's regime for ensuring it, so he has ceased to be a political liberal. The Scandinavian socialdemocrats attempt to ensure all freedoms except the economic freedom (to exploit), which they curtail--rightly so in my view.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to read your paper, which I enjoyed. Now I must go back to my Vol. 7.

