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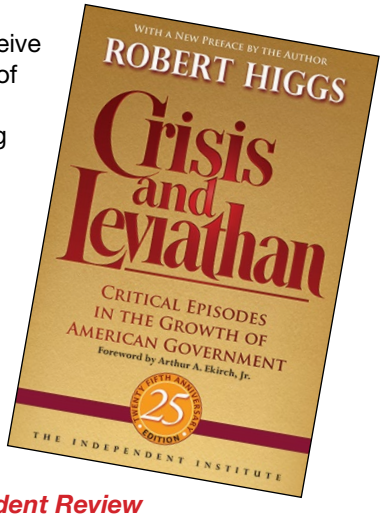

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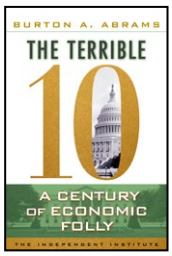
❑ 

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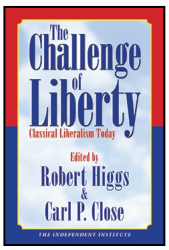
❑ 

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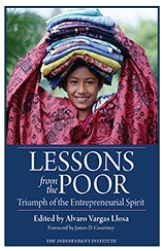
❑ 

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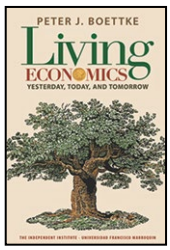
❑ 

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ADVICE

Make Everybody Rich

FREDERICK TURNER

Any inventory of the world's current problem areas probably includes several of the following: war, the environment, education, health, crime, women's rights, unemployment, the oppression of the poor, racism, xenophobia, restrictions on political liberty, the decline of religious spirituality, various crises in the arts, lack of support for scientific research and the space program, and overpopulation.

There is, in fact, a simple and effective solution to all these problems: make everybody in the world rich. Poverty is not just one more head on the hydra, but the hydra itself that grows all the heads. Put a stake in the hydra, and the heads disappear.

The Panacea Is Obvious

The overwhelming evidence is that rich people don't like sending their children off to war, and they will go to extraordinary lengths to avoid doing so. They will take these actions individually, as did the parents of U.S. politicians who pulled strings to keep their kids out of Vietnam, or they will take them collectively, as did the Western nations that hovered nervously around Bosnia, like country club luncheon guests who have discovered a wasp on the cucumber sandwiches. In Kosovo, the rich nations would not let their children get any closer to the sharp end than fifteen thousand feet. A world full of rich people will obviously be too wussy to go to war, so war will die out. The resultant savings in military budgets will make the world richer still.

Rich people like to have a nice, clean, biodiverse environment, and they will go to extreme lengths to get it. They connive so successfully to avoid ecological distress that a whole government agency is devoted to ensuring that pollution sources are not unduly located in poor neighborhoods. But if there are no poor neighborhoods, rich

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people will make very sure that there are no pollution sources. Poor countries today are almost invariably more polluted and environmentally damaged than are rich countries, and the worst-polluted countries are in the old Soviet bloc, where poverty was ideologically privileged. Rich people have historically supported arboretums, national parks, game reserves, gardens, restored wetlands, and zoos. A rich world, out of pure self-interest, will invest in a biologically diverse planetary ecosystem.

In the teeth of principle, adverse public relations, political conviction, and enormous financial cost, rich people will obtain the best education they can for themselves and their children, even if they must abandon the public school system and pay twice. A world full of rich people is a world in which first-rate education will be in such hot demand by folk who can afford to finance it themselves that it will be plentiful, and governments will not need to supply it.

Rich people are notorious for their interest in their health and for the vast sums of money they pay to get and keep it. A world of wealthy valetudinarians will support cutting-edge medical research, first-rate hospitals, and a horde of well-trained and well-paid doctors; and, of course, everybody, as our premise stipulates, will be able to afford it.

Rich people rarely commit crimes, or perhaps it is more accurate to say that their natural human proclivities for criminality are usually thwarted by lack of opportunity and incentive. The reason gated communities are gated is to ensure that one's neighbors are rich and therefore unlikely to steal from or assault their neighbors, having too much to lose themselves. A world of rich people will be a world of police idleness.

Rich people support women's rights for a variety of reasons, the simplest being that because money accumulates and women live seven years longer than men, rich women tend to be richer than rich men and hence more able to assert their rights. Other reasons include the neutralization of male physical strength by the prostheses of wealth and technology, the greater freedom of the rich from reproductive labor (see "overpopulation"), the greater access rich women have to education, and rich men's demand for women who are interesting and present a real challenge. There is a pretty exact match worldwide between the relative wealth of a given nation and the relative extent of women's rights. A rich world is a gender-equal world.

Unemployment will disappear in a universally rich world, not because there will be no people without jobs but because unemployed rich people are not called "unemployed" at all, but "independently wealthy," "idle rich," "parasites," "comfortable," "philanthropists," or "retired." The word *unemployed* will become archaic and comic. In a rich world, workers in less creative and interesting occupations will have to be paid exorbitantly and given grandiose job titles—perhaps derived from the old aristocratic rankings, such as "count" or "marquis," or from the artistic and professional designations of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, such as "maestro," "star," "doctor," "professor," "counsel," and "president"—to keep them at work at all. Creative and interesting jobs probably will be fewer in number than the multitudes of people who will want them, and therefore people might very well pay handsomely to

hold such a job. Readers who already see these trends at work in areas such as publishing, politics, philanthropy, and the arts are probably well ahead of this writer.

Rich people have always been accused of oppressing and exploiting the poor, and the accusation has often been justified. Human nature is as it is, and poor people, after all, often oppress those who are poorer still, as slum-crime statistics demonstrate. The answer to this problem, however, is not to take revenge on the rich or to make everybody poor for spite, but to make sure there are no poor people for rich people to oppress—that is, to make everybody rich.

Rich people are more interested in consuming the cuisine, anthropology, spiritual secrets, and picturesque touristic offerings of the racial or ethnic "Other" than in stringing him up. Genocide, so appealing to poor people, will be counterproductive in a rich world because it will amount to one less cultural tourism venue.

Rich people unfailingly arrange for forms of government that protect them against the government, against each other, and against the poor, and thus provide freedom and security for themselves and other rich people. The Magna Carta was written by a group of rich nobles eager to prevent the king and the commoners from infringing on their freedom to keep and make wealth. The larger the proportion of relatively rich people in a society, the wider the net of free and democratic institutions is cast to ensure that the rich continue to be protected, even if the poor are protected in the process, too. Poor people are bought off by larger grants of freedom and by recruitment into the ranks of the rich. The American Revolution was a revolution of comparatively rich people against the financial demands of the poor as represented by George III's taxation policies. The richest countries today are the most politically enlightened. A world of rich people will be a world of exemplary political freedom and of incorruptible, open, and just public administration. Nobody will want public office for the money, and in fact people will pay well for the privilege of public service—we already see this phenomenon in recent elections. In a rich world, we will have the best government money can buy.

Once the existential demands of poor people and the pleasure-and-status demands of middle-class people are satiated, there is no place for human desire to go but up the Maslovian pyramid of human needs, up toward fulfillment of personal and public ideals, and finally toward the realms of divine enlightenment. Boredom drives rich people toward the complexities and perverse discipline of true virtue and spiritual insight; everything else palls eventually. Dynasty after dynasty in the world's history has spiritualized itself out of the banal realities of political power and ended up communing with the spiritual world and constructing their souls—as did Japanese emperors, Spanish Hapsburgs, Mayan priest-kings, Shakespeare's Henry VI and Prospero, or Prince Gautama the Buddha himself. Wealthy Europe in the Middle Ages bought its way into monasteries; at the beginning of the twentieth century, it sought out Madame Blavatsky, Gurdjieff, Catholic aestheticism, and the Golden Dawn; and today it follows Deep Ecology and the Sufi mystics. Any visitor today to such pilgrimage sites as Santa Fe, New Mexico, or Sedona, Arizona, can find the California

and Texas elite in the process of purging their souls. A rich planet will be an increasingly spiritual and religious one.

What rich people famously spend their money on, especially when that money is old and matured by generations, is art. When everybody is rich, there will be no need for government arts funding. Within the enclaves of the already rich, the Warhols and Johnses and Kiefers—not to mention the Ozawas, Spielbergs, and McCartneys—have already joined the aristocracy.

Rich people have traditionally funded science research, and a world filled with pleasant landscaped environments will be too tame for the wealthy adventurer. Science is an irreducibly uncomfortable occupation, which is why the wealthy seek it out. Like peasants in a field, trust-fund kids grub about in dusty archeological digs. Aristocrats love to abandon their pleasant homes to climb icy and dangerous mountains, or they buy expensive and ingeniously obsolete sailboats and, on the fine edge of boredom and terror, sail around the world. Outer space will be the final frontier for the rich, the ultimate tourist destination, and they will pay for the privilege.

Finally and most decisively of all, being rich is unquestionably the cure for overpopulation. With the exception of a few countries such as China, in which brutal state power is exercised to prevent births, the birthrate is in inverse proportion to income per capita. And the fact that incomes begin to increase before birthrates start to decrease shows clearly that the driving factor in the connection is predominantly the increase in income—though there is also a secondary feedback effect in which low birthrates begin to accelerate the growth of wealth. Demographers are unanimous in noting the connection, and they argue only about the reason for it. Some believe in a direct relationship: that once children are no longer an insurance policy against the poverty of old age, they are less urgently required; or that when contraceptives are affordable, they tend to be used. Other scholars invoke factors that we have already seen are secondary consequences of wealth—for instance, the education of women or the availability of health care leading to lower infant mortality rates, less need to compensate for the uncertainty of infant survival, and a consequent drop in fertility. The chief demographic problem in a rich world will be one already currently faced by wealthy nations such as Germany, Italy, and Japan—how to keep the birth rate high enough to replace the population. The leveling off of population will compound the other beneficial effects of wealth: relaxation of the pressure on health and education services; an older, less crime-prone population; fewer draft-age young men; a higher proportion of people preparing their souls for death; resources freed up for the arts and sciences; a lightening of women's reproductive burdens; greater political maturity; and a softening of the human impact on the environment.

So What Are We Waiting For?

A panacea for almost all of our recognizable present world problems lies right before us, one so simple that though it stares us in the face we do not notice it. Are we really

so blind? To my knowledge, no nation in the world places that solution—make everybody rich—at the top of its public-policy priority list. Some nations, such as Switzerland and Singapore, implicitly adopt that policy, and they are among the richest in the world. The United States itself, during the period of its most vigorous economic expansion, may be said to have been following Calvin Coolidge's maxim that the business of America is business. Maybe the idea is too base and uninspiring to be thought of as the principle behind the high and noble calling of politics; we don't want it to be true, and so we ignore it. Or maybe there are other, less-wholesome reasons why we do not want to adopt that solution. It would be churlish to state the least-attractive reason directly, but an old Russian joke conveys it rather well.

> The czar is separated from his hunting party in the midst of the chase, and a violent storm comes on. He seeks shelter in the cottage of a peasant, who is suspicious and unwilling to let him in. The Little Father of all the Russias pledges before the saints that if he receives shelter, the peasant may come to Moscow at the end of a year and be granted whatever he wishes in recompense.
>
> The year passes, and the czar becomes increasingly anxious. At last he tells his fears to his wisest counselor: "What if the fellow demands my daughter in marriage or my empire itself? I have given my sacred promise." The counselor ponders for three days and returns to his master. His advice puzzles the czar, but the czar trusts his advisor, and when the peasant duly appears at the end of the year, all smiles, the czar welcomes him to the Kremlin. "Ah, my friend," he says, "I have thought often and gratefully of your hospitality; and I am in so generous a frame of mind that I have decided in the spirit of Christian love to add to my gift. Whatever you demand of me, I shall not only grant but give twice over to your next door neighbor."
>
> The peasant's face turns ashen. There is a silence. Finally, in a voice of anguish, he speaks. "Sire, I have decided on my gift." "What is it?" asks the czar. The peasant replies: "Let my left eye be put out."

But perhaps our unwillingness to see our neighbors prosper is not the main reason why we have not made universal wealth our goal. Perhaps our assumption is that the goal is impossible to achieve. How will it be possible for everybody to get rich?

First of all, the world is getting richer anyway. If the average world income per capita at the beginning of the twentieth century was, conservatively, a tenth of what it is now in constant dollars, and the rate of increase continues as it did throughout the twentieth century—despite two world wars and a great depression—the average income for every man, woman, and child on the planet by the end of the twenty-first century will be approximately $66,000. The CIA *World Factbook* for 1999 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1999) estimates the current world purchas-

ing power per capita at approximately $6,600, with an annual growth rate of world domestic product (WDP) of approximately 4 percent, except during occasional recession years, when it drops to approximately 2 percent. The present growth rate of population is approximately 1.3 percent, but it is dropping rapidly. Given an average population growth rate of 1 percent for the coming century (high, by most estimates) and an average WDP growth rate of 3.5 percent, purchasing power per capita by 2100 should rise to almost $80,000 in constant dollars, in good agreement with our previous estimate. Thus, the income of an average four-member family in 2100 will be approximately $320,000, and, given the normal ratio of net worth to income for families at that income level, the average family will be millionaires. Obviously, income disparities will mean that there will be some pauper families, who will have only $100,000 or so to spend each year, and others whose wealth will be unimaginably large to us now.

This rosy future will not just happen by itself. There were in history long periods of economic decline. How will we keep the present progress going? Here it might be wise to study the times and places in which prosperity took huge leaps—for instance, ancient Mesopotamia, classical Greece, Renaissance Italy and Holland, Bismarck's Germany, China under the Han emperors, Meiji Japan, Victorian England, the late-nineteenth-century United States, post–World War II Japan, present-day Hong Kong and Singapore. What one finds is some combination of the following: lowered tariffs; racial and ethnic mixing (or at least vigorous intercultural communication); social and economic encouragement of technological innovation; a relaxation of the human prejudice against commerce and the merchant caste; a huge improvement in communications technology; a relatively free flow of labor, information, capital, technology, ideas, and culture; a rule of law that is consistent and predictable and protects property and contracts; a broad cultural consensus in favor of education and invention; low taxes; an intelligent coinciding of the units of government with the most efficient units of production; and a union of moral discipline with a good appetite for the pleasures of life. Above all, one finds reliable ways in which the older generation can pass on its wealth to the younger and thus facilitate capital formation and long-term, high-risk entrepreneurial investment.

Let's Stop Shooting Ourselves in the Foot

How might public policy be changed if we adopt these objectives for ourselves? If we look at our laws from this perspective, it is remarkable how many of them seem designed to *prevent* people from getting rich; America's present prosperity owes much to the cleverness of its lawyers in evading the intent of those laws. The first thing to do, obviously, will be to repeal many of those laws: get rid of tariffs; stop discouraging miscegenation and cultural mixing; deregulate technology (while increasing the legal power of the public to punish sellers of misrepresented or dangerous products); stop discriminating against business in cultural, political, and legal arenas; lower bar-

riers against immigration and technology transfer; remove barriers against access to property and legal loopholes in property laws; and cut taxes across the board, especially inheritance taxes. Any law designed to stop people from getting richer should be repealed, and any law that will tend to make poor people rich should be enforced.

More subtly, in the postindustrial era, the economies of scale associated with mass production no longer matter much. Once manufactures and information have become vanishingly cheap to produce and therefore are not very profitable or labor intensive, the major form of profitable production in the twenty-first century will be cultural production—the irreducibly labor- and capital-intensive human activities that I call the Charm Industries: tourism, education, entertainment, adventure, religion, sport, fashion, cuisine, personal service, gardening, art, history, movies, ritual, psychotherapy, politics, and the eternal soap opera of relationships. Those industries are subject to diseconomies of scale—that is, they are less effective when pursued by large units of production, such as big nation-states, and more efficient when they take place in small units such as cities, regions, and traditional ethnic areas. Therefore, we should remove the political obstacles to the present trend toward greater regional autonomy in culture, while opening all the technological and economic gates of world communication.

Public policy might also concern itself with the moral discipline, or virtue, of the citizens—of course in ways that do not violate democratic liberty and the imperative need to allow all human value systems to interact profitably with one another. Cultures possessing strong codes of moral behavior and self-restraint—as did republican Rome, Confucian East Asia, Victorian England, and puritan America—can rely on their members to save before they spend, work hard and enjoy it, and look after each other in misfortune, thus increasing the wealth of the society.

Many countries across the world, beginning with Chile, have been privatizing their social security systems. This simple step has two effects: it provides a reliable flow of investment into profitable business and permits all parents to leave some wealth to their children (because we cannot predict the hour and date of our death, natural caution persuades us to overestimate our life expectancy, and so to die before we have spent our savings). In a generation or two, every citizen in such systems will become independently wealthy.

Above all, perhaps, a government wishing to make everybody rich should elevate that principle to the top of its priority list. Simply looking at political choices from that perspective will change every decision made. Instead of trying at huge expense to fix the myriad problems that come from people's not being rich, government can focus on the real issue. Consider a thought experiment: if we take all the money in the national budget except what is necessary to maintain a justice system, government administration, and a national defense, and instead invest it in sound growth funds for every child in the United States, we will be able to make everybody in the country independently wealthy in one generation. Or suppose Franklin D. Roosevelt had instituted a private rather than a public social security system. The money flowing into

that system would have lowered interest rates and restored the capitalization of the corporations damaged by the 1929 crash. Recovery might not have required World War II, and the United States might have led the world economy into peaceful prosperity in the 1940s.* Meanwhile, all those born of American parents would have inherited the remains of their parents' pensions—which, if invested until today, would have made them millionaires.

If government wishes to be activist about its prime directive, rather than simply standing out of the way, it should research means to destroy poor people's jobs and replace them with rich people's jobs, thereby making the poor rich. For instance, it might support research designed to automate all repetitive and burdensome jobs. It might create accrediting infrastructures for all the interesting but poorly paid service jobs, dubbing them arts or professions, and establishing AMA- or ABA-like organizations to protect their interests. Interior decorators, cooks, landscape architects, gardeners, and fashion designers are already on their way to being canonized in this way, joining dancers, potters, moviemakers, mimes, performance artists, photographers, and clowns. Masseurs, perfumiers, adventure-tour guides, martial arts experts, furniture makers, animal breeders and trainers, coiffeurs, auto customizers, cosmeticians, Web page designers, and the like soon will enter their ranks.

In time, the information industries will go the way of manufacturing and farming, becoming so efficient, productive, user-friendly, and competitive that there will be little money to be made in them. Robots, nanotechnology, electronics, and biotechnology will very soon be able to do all the unpleasant work; only pleasant work will be left, and it will command top-dollar wages because nobody will be forced by circumstances to work at all. The world economy will become Martha Stewartized, with all workers seeking occupations that help them to build their souls and refine their taste. Millions of dollars will be made baking the perfect cherry pie, remodeling the perfect loft, sewing the perfect border, composing the perfect cantata of worship, and training the perfect sheepdog.

* ***Editor's note***: For a revisionist view of the relation between World War II and recovery from the Great Depression, see Robert Higgs, "Regime Uncertainty: Why the Great Depression Lasted So Long and Why Prosperity Resumed after the War," *The Independent Review* 1 (spring 1997): 561–90.