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Professor Milton Friedman
Hoover Institution
Stanford, CA 94305-6010

Dear Professor Friedman:

After the close of your “Conversation” at the Hoover retreat last week, I asked you how you had arrived at your preference for individual freedom. I understood your response to be that you never really thought about it—you have just always believed in it.

I was with my spouse (Claudia) at the time, and the inquiry was more to us than a question of passing interest. We are educators by trade, Claudia at Long Beach State University and me at Pasadena Community College. With PhDs in educational psychology from the University of Southern California, our primary focus was on child development and research design.

More to the point, beginning in the 1960s and continuing for about 30 years, we spent our weekends, summers, and daily spare time working with youth in the Los Angeles Housing Projects. Thinking of our efforts as fieldwork, our objective was to identify the primary factors influencing the often self-destructive life styles of project youth, and our intent was to design a program that would increase the likelihood of these youth embracing a lifestyle that was more viable.

Over time, we realized that the primary dynamic was that of empowering individuals as individuals. Later, we became familiar with *Free to Choose* and recognized some similarities between our understanding of your theories and our own efforts. However, while we considered your approach as beginning with a preference for individual freedom and looking forward to extend its application

to economic theory; we would describe our approach as also beginning with a preference for individual freedom, but looking backward to identify those experiences giving rise to a preference for individual freedom.

When Claudia and I asked you how you had arrived at a preference for individual freedom, it was with high hopes that your response would be consistent with our formulations developed over 30 years—I know of only 2 or 3 general ways people come to embrace a preference for individual freedom. Such a response would have been somewhat validating and personally gratifying.

At the risk of sounding impious, I would like to ask you for an opportunity for Claudia and me to ask the question again (and a few leading questions) to hear what impromptu reflections come to your mind. We are planning to visit the Hoover Institute within the next few months. The timing of our visit is entirely flexible, so we could accommodate any time and location of your choosing.

Whatever your response, Claudia and I thoroughly enjoyed your “Conversation” and appreciated your candor with us. Whether with us, or others, we hope you will consider linking your free-market arguments with the philosophical arguments giving rise to a preference for individualism.

Sincerely,

Gordon F. Brown

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