

[10] Friedman Conversation 9-5-04

\*\*\*\*\*

From: Gordon Brown  
To: Milton Friedman  
Subject: Update to Linking Project—9-5-04  
Date: Sunday, September 05, 2004 11:25 AM

Greetings Professor Friedman,

I would like to share with you an update on my project of linking a philosophy of individualism with the concept of a free-market economy. Here is an overview of how I presently organize the task:

- (1) Characterize our discussion and pass by you. (done)
- (2) Identify and resolve any initial linking problems. (presented here)
- (3) Briefly outline significant implications relating to the above resolutions. (in about 2 weeks)
- (4) Outline positions of individualism and a free-market economy, and link the two. (about 3 more weeks)
- (5) Describe several life-type experiences and school curricula that would provide an environment where the concept of individual freedom could flourish and provide a foundation for free market thinking. (about 2 more weeks)

For all five tasks, the conceptual organizing has already been completed. What remains is writing them up so as to avoid being burdensomely detailed or fragmentally incomplete. The following analysis is intended to complete Item 2 above.

#### A Couple of Initial Problems and Their Resolution.

At the start of our meeting, you commented that you did not understand the reasons for my expressions of bafflement. You expressed no discomfort with your having developed a detailed concept of a free-market society without including a basis for embracing individualism or free will. I understood you to say that you had just always believed in

them. In contrast, I have spent most of my life addressing, and mostly agonizing over, the reasons for embracing a concept of free will and a philosophy of individualism. Clearly, most of the world has not and does not embrace either. As I see it, a free-market economy can be admired, but it can be embraced only after the arms of free will and individualism have been developed.

After our meeting, my bafflement morphed into a sense of challenge and focused problem solving. I enjoy this stage more than the bafflement. Over the following few weeks, two problem areas emerged: the idea of causation and the assumption of a physical reality. Having been a long-time reviewer of the 200-year debate on these two topics, I had already made my peace with these two pesky interlopers. On the surface, they appear to tilt toward determinism and, as such, represent a problem to be addressed by those bent toward free will. I will share with you a brief description as to how I have personally dealt with them.

First, as for a belief in “causation,” I understand you to be using the term in its traditional sense—“to bring about” or “to account for the presence of something.” Your distinction that causation is applicable to the immediate level of observation, while free will (or determinism) could still be operating at the big-picture or universal level, seems a little awkward to me. As to the debate on causation, I am personally persuaded by those arguments recommending that the term “causation” be replaced with the term “correlation.”

Supporting this notion, we have David Hume’s argument that in actual experience we perceive not causation, but only sequence. Attributed to Kant, and not dissimilar perhaps to your own view, was, according to Kant as paraphrased by Will Durant, “the apparently contradictory but necessarily true notion that freedom of action must occur along with caused action.” However, as noted by Durant, Kant apparently relegated causation to an *a priori* status as an inherent structure of the mind. I have rarely, if ever, seen merit in *a priori* arguments. Consistent with the thinking of Hume, Bertrand Russell argued that “the reason physics has ceased to look for causes is that, in fact, there are no such things.” In Lincoln Barnett’s [The Universe and Dr. Einstein](#), one can find, in the original version,

the phrase “Quantum physics thus demolishes two pillars of the old science, causality and determinism.” [See about 3 pages into Chapter 4.] That book was personally validated by Einstein himself. As for me, unlike causation, the term and concept of correlation can be grounded in an individual’s human experience and support a freewill perspective.

Second, as for the assumption of a knowable physical reality, I infer from your statements that this also is used in its traditional sense—what you see is what you get. Or, as the Realist may put it, the world we see around us is real and exists substantially as we see it. Here, I find the matter to have been adequately resolved by the British Empiricists (including Locke and Berkeley) arguing that we simply do not have access to the characteristics of an external world as it exists independently of the human perceiver. Similarly, the German mathematician Leibniz argued that “I am able to prove that not only light, color, heat, and the like, but motion, shape, and extension too are mere apparent qualities.” As I see it, all of this adds up to a relative approach to reality—all we can ever know are the products of interacting forces and not the forces themselves. What we have are conscious ideas without access to any external characteristics. This relative perspective supplants a “physical reality” assumption with a “metaphysical reality” (consciousness) assumption as the basic building block for organizing human experience. And, this suits me just fine in my attempt to link individualism to the free market economy.

Summarizing, I am substituting “correlation” and “a metaphysical-reality basis” (consciousness) for causation and a physical-reality basis, respectively. The effect is to tilt the playing field away from determinism and in favor of free will and individualism. I see this approach as complementing and strengthening the free-market theory as I understand it.

Looking forward, in about 2 weeks, I will provide you with another update in which I plan to outline a few implications I see flowing from my handling of the above two concepts.

Please feel free to regard these updates any way you wish. However, while I welcome any comments you wish to make, I would particularly appreciate any comments you may have with regard to problems you may foresee with respect to how my comments apply to a free-market economy.

Sincerely,

Gordon