

[13] Friedman Conversation 9-20-04

From: Gordon Brown
To: Milton Friedman
Subject: Brief Response to One of Your Comments
Date: Monday, September 20, 2004 8:42 PM

Professor Friedman,

I enjoyed reading your comments (9-20-04). I have a brief response to one of the items that I would like to share with you now while it is timely. Also, to do so now will assist in preparing the context for my Step #4, which I am now drafting.

The item of interest I am referring to is cited in your Smith's invisible hand quote. As for this quote, I find useful, for my purposes, the approach of using self interest as a primary, conceptual building block; and I find useful the proposition that if everyone were to act with self interest, without vetting it through some social agenda, the anticipated result would be a most effective economic situation for everyone.

However, that "invisible hand" rubs me the wrong way. I just do not see its contribution to the issues at hand, while I do see its potential to invite mischief by those of ill will. It is by way of metaphor that I attempt to clarify my point.

Consider the cells of the body. Often I have wondered how two cells can divide and come to produce the variety of cell structures found in the human body.

When looking for a conceptual explanation, what tends to make sense to me is that each cell acts solely in its own self interest without any consideration whatsoever to the end product. Now, at this point, I do not see the usefulness of proposing the existence of some external, invisible force guiding the cell division toward the end product. On the other hand, what does seem reasonable to me is that within each cell is the capacity and inclination to interact in such a way so as to bring about the fully developed human

organism. That is, it is within each individual cell—and its potential to interact with other cells in various environments—that we will eventually find the potentials for cell differentiation leading to an effectively functioning human organism.

Well, I have made my point—I feel better—and I am ready to get back to my Step #4. I have enjoyed thinking about and responding to Smith's quotation. As an aside, let me say something about myself: I enjoy focusing on differences and find that it is with the dynamics of dealing with differences that I find my greatest resource for maximizing my own personal growth and maturity. In this context, I would consider it helpful if you would let me know if you feel I have been remiss in failing to acknowledge my appreciation and understanding of similarities on a given issue. While I seem inclined to gravitate toward differences, I do recognize that to do so would inevitably lead to a distortion of my own position. It just occurred to me that perhaps the individual cells do the same thing—they are genetically inclined to maximize their potential for differentiation when interacting with their immediate environment, at least when they are young. Well, enough on that topic.

Professor Friedman, it appears that I may be getting back to you as soon as one week with Step #4—particularly if I do not try to be overly cautious in my wording. As we become more aware of each other's conceptual patterns, and believe something constructive could be taking place, we may find it mutually acceptable to tolerate periods of simply not understanding what assumptions the other is relying upon and be prepared to examine apparent discrepancies for a reasonable period of time.

Gordon

P.S. The "bold print" works very well for me.