

[21] Friedman Conversation—12-6-04

From: Gordon Brown  
To: Milton Friedman  
Subject: Looking Forward 12-06-04  
Date: Monday, December 06, 2004 8:45 PM

Dr. Friedman,

I thank you for your comments during the last six months. Over this time, I have developed an increasing sense of interest in the connection between a philosophy of individualism and the assumptions underlying a free-market economy. While I continue to welcome any additional comments you may wish to make, I would also like to open the discussion to anyone interested in this link between individualism and the free market.

As I see it, our "conversation" can serve as a beginning point for additional dialogue. Claudia and I can piggyback this objective onto a project we have already begun. As I mentioned in a previous communication, Claudia and I are in the process of constructing a web-site ([schoolofcommunication.org](http://schoolofcommunication.org)) for the purpose of establishing a clearing house for addressing the topic of individualism. We are planning on including classical research such as that associated with the study of perception and historical arguments such as those advanced by the empiricists. To include our conversation (yours and mine) over these several months could serve as an invitation and beginning point for others to address the philosophy-economy link.

I would particularly like to hear any comments you would wish to make regarding my opening this discussion to others that may be interested.

With the above in mind, this would seem to be an appropriate time for me to outline our respective positions, as I see them, regarding the individualism and free-market connection. Reviewing our communications, one can see points where we agree and points where we differ; and, there are logical consequences that can be seen to flow from each. As I see it, while our areas of agreement are fundamental, the areas of differences are significant enough to offer the opportunity for a constructive and engaging dialogue.

#### **WHERE WE AGREE:**

1. **Individualism**—We both subscribe to it, and it has been a primary focus during my life.
2. **Free Market**—We both subscribe to it, and it has been a primary focus during your life.

3. We both see **the principle of self interest** as the primary force underlying individual action.

4. We both see **individualism as providing the conceptual foundation for the free market**; individual freedom is the goal and a free market is the means.

### **WHERE WE DIFFER:**

1. You believe that free-market dynamics will give rise to individualism; I reverse the process.

2. You believe in a knowable external universe; I believe in an unknowable external universe.

3. You are able to believe in the traditional university mission of "searching for and disseminating the truth," as exemplified in the sciences. I do not so believe. For me, scientific approaches are limited to describing a world of personal experience. Relationships, and only relationships, are knowable-as put forth by the 18th Century empiricists, and currently referenced by the term "relativity." As I see it, mankind is in a position of experiencing how he responds to an external world but lacking the ability to experience that external world as it exists independently of his own perceptual characteristics.

4. I am able to believe in a theistic approach to human experience. You do not find this approach useful.

### **Consequences:**

1. While we both agree on the importance of a philosophy of individualism and the practice of the free market, our recommendations would be in opposite directions when trying to link the two. I would teach the reasonableness of individualism and hypothesize that, to the degree I am successful, a free-market economy and educational system would naturally follow. You, as I understand your position, would attempt to establish a free-market economy and educational system; and you would hypothesize that, to the degree you were successful, this environment would give rise to the expression of individualism.

2. To fulfill a sense of meaning for one's life, you would have the comfort of knowing that you are involved in the significant task of advancing the cause of truth for mankind. For me, my satisfaction would be in believing that I have, to a significant degree, chosen my own world of experience by the relationships I have chosen to pursue. If an individual pursuit includes a theist orientation, as it does in my case, so much more to be said for the potential significance.

Sincerely,

Gordon