

[26] Friedman Conversation—4-7-05

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From: Gordon Brown  
To: Milton Friedman  
Subject: Closing Synthesis  
Date: Thursday, April 07, 2005 12:17 PM

Dr. Milton Friedman,

Best wishes. As we look forward to wrapping up this particular "conversation," I have in mind two final points. First, as addressed in this communication, I put forth a synthesis of how I see our positions presented over these past several months. The intent of this synthesis, as it has been with my other communications, is to provide a focus point that could be used by others to initiate debate concerning the linking of a free-market economy and individualism—a matter of great interest to me.

In my next (final) communication, after you have had an opportunity to respond to this present one, I will put forth a position statement in which I will advance the notion that a free-market presupposes a belief in individualism; and I will invite you to do the same in reverse—advancing the notion that a belief in individualism can be derived from a free market (or, alternatively, invite you to simply point out critical points that appear to be equivocal or logically inconsistent in my position).

Before beginning my synthesis of our conversation, I would like to comment on the closing statement in your last communication (1-3-05).

You say that "I am afraid that these comments do not get us any closer." I think I know what you mean by "closer"—a sense of increasing agreement or resolution of differences—but my own inclinations have a different emphasis. I see "closeness" as a matter of gaining a sense of understanding as to how another person perceives a given matter.

As for my experience during this conversation, your comments have always given me a sense of greater clarity as to how you perceive the matters raised; and, by my contrasting your positions with my own, you have provided me with a clearer perception of my own positions. My objective in this conversation has been to increase mutual understanding of each other's perspectives, rather than expecting or even seeking agreement. Such an objective has the potentially pragmatic benefit of providing the basis for advocating a public policy that maximizes every individual's freedom to choose. As the song lyrics put it, "you make room for me in your world and I will make room for you in my world." Case in point—while we were discussing determinism (at your home), you affectionately referred to how the room for your home office was determined. "It was predetermined," you said, "by Rose." Such is the reflection of closeness. It is less agreement and more a matter of understanding the perceptions of another and creating an environment that accommodates both. (Here is that underlying theme of "truth" versus "personal

perception"-with truth, we would expect to move towards agreement; while, with personal perceptions, we would expect differences and work toward creating an environment that maximizes the individual freedom to choose by every participant.)

Now, here is my attempt at synthesizing our positions as I see them expressed in our past communications regarding the linking of individualism and a free-market economy:

We have put forth similar perspectives on the following points:

1. We share a preference for a free-market economy and a belief in individualism. From our use of the phrase, I assume we would agree that a basic tenet of the free market is one where the objective is to maximize every individual's freedom to choose with whom or what s/he does business. As for individualism, we have agreed that a basic contention of individualism is that the individual person has dignity as an individual; and, consequently, the individual would have the freedom to choose as an individual.
2. We agree that "individualism" and "determinism" are contrary concepts-to include one is to exclude the other by definition. That is, "individualism" defines the individual as being free to choose; while "determinism" holds that the individual is not free to choose for the reason that individual actions are assumed to be pre-determined.
3. We agree that self interest is the basic determiner of behavior throughout nature.

We have raised different perspectives on the following points:

1. Regarding how "individualism" and the "free market" are linked together:

You see merit in the idea that a free market leads to individualism.

I see merit in the idea that individualism leads to a free market.

2. Regarding the matter of "cause and effect":

You see merit in the traditional idea of "cause and effect."

I see merit in the idea that "cause and effect" is a misnomer in that it is merely a specific example of apparent sequence (correlation).

3. Regarding the objective of science:

You see science as seeking external truth while acknowledging that only approximations of truth are attainable.

I see science as seeking to create an intelligible picture of the unique world created in human experience by the human sensory system.

I welcome any response you would be willing to make regarding the above synthesis.

Sincerely,  
Gordon