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Review of Private Means, Public Ends: Voluntarism vs. Coercion, Edited by J. Wilson Mixon, Jr.

Fred Foldvary

most successful entrepreneurs of the late twentieth century. (An entrepreneur, we find out, who raised some of his seed capital through poker winnings in college.)

Gates's book is a highly readable, informative, and non-technical installment in a long line of recent volumes regarding computers, telecommunications, and the future of technology.

From the outset, Gates exhibits a clear preference for private economic actions over government. He dislikes the metaphor of the "information superhighway" to describe the unfolding developments in the information economy. He worries about the implication that a "highway" should be built by government, an option Gates considers "a major mistake."

Gates also recognizes that emphasis on information infrastructure and government could turn the highway into a costly white elephant. In contrast, markets emphasize "applications." Indeed, Gates prefers the phrase "the ultimate market."

Gates argues persuasively that government also should not get involved in trying to set some kind of compatibility standards for the emerging information market. Gates observes that de facto standards "are supported by the marketplace rather than by law, they are chosen for the right reasons and replaced when something truly better shows up—the way the compact disc has almost replaced the vinyl record." Later, Gates sagaciously declares: "The range of uncertainties about the information highway is very large, but the marketplace will design an appropriate system."

Being involved firsthand, Gates naturally is an optimist regarding the revolution in information technology—a nice antidote to today's many neo-Luddite economic and social prognosticators. Gates writes favorably of the mix between free markets and information technology advancements: "Capitalism, demonstrably the greatest of the constructed economic systems, has in the past decade clearly proved its advantages over the alternative systems. The information highway will magnify those advantages. . . . Adam Smith would be pleased. More important, consumers everywhere will enjoy the benefits."

In the end, entrepreneurs lie at the center of the capitalist economy as the sources of creativity, innovation, and invention. Gates correctly notes: "Entrepreneurship will play a major role in shaping the development of the information highway, the same way it shaped the personal-computer business." And he grasps the full benefits of entrepreneurship as well: "The good news is that people learn from both the successes and the failures, and the net result is rapid progress."

As for government, Gates offers sound advice: "deregulate communications." □

Mr. Keating serves as chief economist with the Small Business Survival Foundation.

Private Means, Public Ends: Voluntarism vs. Coercion

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Do you have friends who are socialists? Show them Robert Zimmerman's chapter, "New York's War Against the Vans" in *Private Means, Public Ends*. Zimmerman shows private enterprise efficiently providing much-needed transportation, while the city transit police block passenger pickup, issue summonses, and otherwise harass van operators and passengers. If government is needed to provide such public goods, why does government keep blocking private services?

The essays in *Private Means, Public Ends* demonstrate how private efforts have effectively provided public goods. This collection of mostly recent articles reprinted from *The Freeman* will challenge those who doubt the workability of free markets and buttress the thinking of those already oriented to liberty with excellent examples. Case after case, nicely combining stories with analysis, shows voluntary and market means as more effective than government, despite state barriers and imposed costs.

The introduction by Professor Mixon begins with the metaphor of free human action as a wildflower field, in contrast to the potted plants of state institutions. If wildflowers disappear and all we see are flowers in pots, who can imagine the breathtaking beauty of the wild field—nature's spontaneous order?

Henry Hazlitt's classic critique of central planning provides a cogent starting point. Why do good folks oppose peaceful and honest voluntary exchange? They believe that free markets produce too many wrong goods and not enough right goods. Hazlitt points out that the private sector is voluntary, and the government's "public" sector is coercive. The subsequent essays demonstrate that the voluntary sector does indeed provide for those "right" goods the public wants.

The next section of the book deals with language, art, and communication. John Finneran's

"Tale of Two Dictionaries" contrasts the French Academy's clumsy committee-produced dictionary with the elegant English dictionary created by the individual genius of Samuel Johnson. Johnson's motivation due to private financing sped the work along while yet allowing scope for his personal creativity.

One of the "right" goods allegedly required of government is promotion of the arts. But what kind of "good" is that "twisted, rusted iron pipe" that William Allen and William Dickneider depict in "Art and Representative Government"? They note that privately financed art has long flourished without government subsidies. Art can be useful, as Barbara Dodsworth informs us in "Art and Commerce." Historically, art has always been commercial and applied, with much "fine art" produced under sponsor direction.

But what about bad "art," such as billboards? Lawrence Person's "In Praise of Billboards" notes the useful information signs provide. If ugliness is to be banned, it not only violates property rights, but, taken to its logical conclusion, would lead to banning ugly cars—or people! The author notes also that the First Amendment does not distinguish between commercial and personal speech.

Government police power has extended even into the kosher food market, as Jacob Sullum describes in "Kosher Cops." He notes that the conditions that invite fraud have led to a private system of consumer protection by religious authorities. God has help enough.

This section is rounded out with chapters by Ray Keating and Clint Bolick on communications. Keating notes that the convergence of various media reduces the rationale for regulation. Bolick shows how free speech fostered communications technology.

Section III, on a "caring society," gives examples of how health, education, and welfare are promoted without coercion. Hannah Lapp describes her personal experience with home schooling, which government officials tried to stifle despite its effectiveness.

Scott Payne's "School with a Money-Back Guarantee" is an eye-opener. It describes HOPE Academy in Lansing, Michigan, inspired by Marva Collins's school in Chicago. If the kindergartner can't read by year's end, HOPE parents get their money back. The Academy uses phonics for reading and emphasizes proper conduct, and the cost is much less than what government spends.

What about the poor? John Fargo spins a yarn in "Charity in the Land of Individualism" of how the "rugged individuals" of the corn belt went all out to help a fellow farmer, even a rather shiftless one, demonstrating how "true charity lies deep within the fertile soil of authentic individualism."

Daniel Bazikian, reviewing *The Tragedy of American Compassion* by Marvin Olasky, shows how earlier American charity, influenced by biblical themes, strengthened affiliations, bonded donor and recipient, distinguished among needs, discerned fraud, employed for responsibility, and fulfilled spiritual needs. Contrast this with today's "give me" welfare mentality! Gerald Wisz in "Ending Welfare as They Knew It" describes how the Broadway Presbyterian Church in New York City teaches responsibility.

The proposition that only government can provide a social safety net is refuted by John Chodes's chapter on the "friendly societies," which pooled members' savings to provide health care and insurance for unemployment and old age. David Beito's chapter shows how fraternal societies hired "lodge doctors" at affordable rates, a practice killed by the medical establishment.

Section IV examines the "bases of a dynamic economy." Richard Sylla recalls the era of private, unregulated bankers in the United States, while Richard Timberlake writes on the private money that was used in coal-mining communities. Even policing can be adequately provided privately, as shown by Nicholas Elliott.

Markets have also provided transportation, as illustrated by William Irvine on trains and Daniel Klein on the private turnpikes and plank roads built in nineteenth-century America, later usurped by government. New York City's subways operated privately until 1940; is it surprising that with government operation, service deteriorated while charges went up? Henry Hazlitt called this "Socialism, U.S. Style."

Environmentalists often misunderstand how markets protect wildlife and habitat, so John Kell's refreshing essay shows how environmentalists who voluntarily compensate ranchers who lose animals to wild predators are indeed "A Species Worth Preserving."

The epilogue of the book is freedom as the *sine qua non,* the indispensable requirement. Ross Korves asks "What Makes a Market?" A market is voluntary exchange, and "markets develop spontaneously as people interact." This anthology shows how the freedom to act does indeed, in practice, provide for our social wants, if only we have the liberty to do so. □

Dr. Foldvary is the author of Public Goods and Private Communities: The Market Provision of Social Services *(Edward Elgar, 1994).*