POLLUTION AS MORAL COERCION: CULTURE, RISK PERCEPTION, AND LIBERTARIAN VALUES

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What is pollution? According to Peter H. Aranson, "Public policy regards as pollution any man-made or naturally occurring substance (for example, smoke or sewage) or condition (for example, noise, heat, or radiation) that is believed to threaten human health or economic welfare . . ."[1] Evidently, pollution is a bad and not a good thing. Alas, bad things happen all the time. There are forms of government and ways of life that make it their explicit purpose to guard individuals against misfortune. The "social insurance state" and the "welfare state" are but a few of the prominent designations of regimes that attempt to guard their members against misfortune. Libertarianism, I take it, is not one of them. So long as individuals are able to try again, and there are no legal limits on transactions, failure serves a positive purpose. It cleanses the system. Without failure on the part of some participants there can be no success, no allocation of resources to higher order uses, no consumer sovereignty. For if there can be no individual failure, there can be no switching of resources away from activities that are unprofitable. Failure is more important then success in that it leaves the way open to try new and better combinations that meet more widespread preferences.

Pollution is a problem for libertarians because some people exer-

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Cato Journal, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Spring 1982).

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[1] Peter H. Aranson, "Pollution Control: The Case for Competition," in *Instead of Regulation: Alternatives to Federal Regulatory Agencies*, Robert W. Poole, Jr., ed. (Lexington, Mass: D.C. Heath and Co., 1982), pp. 339-393.

cise power over others without these others being able to fight back effectively. Pollution appears to violate the norm of reciprocity. Market mechanisms do not provide reciprocity because there is no way in which the costs imposed on the polluted can be transferred to the polluter. And the polluter lacks incentive to bear his part of the burden because he is not part of the same market as the polluted. This is the classic dilemma of externalities in which costs are imposed on people who cannot be compensated. How can externalities be internalized, the common question is, so that power is exercised reciprocally rather than unilaterally?

Government regulation to make the polluter pay is unsatisfactory because it violates libertarian principles. Restraints on individuals grow larger rather than smaller. Someone who has no part in a transaction makes decisions for other people who do. Coercion replaces cooperation. Information on preferences and opportunities is diminished instead of expanded. Far better from the libertarian point of view to invent new rules about property that would lead polluter and polluted to make arrangements satisfactory to each other, satisfactory in the sense that there is no alternative arrangement, discoverable at reasonable cost, that would be better for both parties. Thus the debate is framed in the mold of institutional economics, with one side saying that a proposed rule will internalize externalities and the other responding that the parties will not actually get together in the manner suggested.

Here it is useful to summarize the libertarian position in Aranson's paper, by far the best recent exposition:

> . . . in our hypothetical marketplace, no dissatisfaction is brought about by exchange and production external to those who are doing the exchanging and producing. That is, there are no externalities. If this were not so, we could not necessarily guarantee that the price system is efficient.
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> Consumption and production do create externalities, however. Indeed the world is full of them. Excessive levels of externalities in general, and inefficient levels of pollution in particular, occur because government has failed to construct an adequate property rights system.[2]
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> . . . The litany of externality abatement — the belief that the presence of externalities calls for an automatic governmental response . . . is flawed for several reasons. First, the effects of externalities and externality abatement are commonly ambiguous, so that reducing a particular externality may increase one person's welfare and diminish another's. Second, the presence of or

[2] Ibid., p. 347.

> potential for externalities often provides an excuse for politically motivated coercive health or income redistributions. Third, the cost of governmental externality reduction sometimes exceeds the cost of governmental inaction. Fourth, externalities may be acceptable to those who bear them, as evidenced by prior agreement. Fifth, voluntary action may overcome certain externality problems. Sixth, where property rights are established in the presence of low transactions costs, government action beyond enforcing contracts, protecting private property, and assessing damages is at best superfluous. In sum, the presumed self-evident truth that government must regulate human action to suppress externalities seems neither self-evident nor, in many instances, true.[3]
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> . . . Any attempt to restructure environmental decisionmaking must take cognizance not merely of the theoretical limitations on the justification for governmental action but also of the very real political failures that emerge in our current regime. Furthermore, clean air and water are scarce resources, and many people seek to apply them to competing, incompatible uses. Accordingly, seldom will a particular person be completely satisfied with an environmental-quality program, nor does a perfect program or political arrangement exist. The best we can hope for, as with any other area of social life, is policy that allocates resources to their highest-valued use.[4]

The libertarian solution, in short, is to perfect property relations so there will be no uncompensated pollution.

In this paper I shall argue that acceptance of the probability of widespread pollution profoundly misunderstands the nature of the libertarian way of life. Properly understood, I contend, libertarianism (unlike other modes of social organization) knows no pollution. In anthropology, concepts of pollution and taboo are used to defend boundaries (separating one people from another, kosher from nonkosher). If there are no boundaries against transactions — competitive individualism tears down rather than builds up boundaries — there can be no pollution. For the libertarian there are no permanent uncompensated bads, because eventually markets will arise to internalize the external costs. Until that time, it is simply too costly to do anything, and existing uncompensated pollution (bads) must be tolerated in an imperfect world. Once one understands that saying "the environment is polluted" is equivalent to charging that "markets are dirty," the charge that environmental pollution is ubiquitous can be understood for what it is — a fundamental attack on libertarian culture.

[3] Ibid., p. 369.
[4] Ibid., p. 381.

It is well-known that libertarians view pollution as a violation of private property rights, and that pollution is a problem for them because of the high cost of establishing markets under certain circumstances. My argument is that sectarians use the moral overtones of pollution as a blanket criticism of collectivism (which includes hierarchic structures such as the modern corporation) and individualism, both of which reject the sectarians' desire for equality of result. This criticism comes as a response to the internal needs of sectarian social organization. Therefore I will outline the dimensions of various competing cultures so we can see how charges of widespread pollution do or do not justify the shared values and social practices that make up these rival ways of life.

Taking Society for Granted

We moderns tend to take society for granted. The eager curiosity of the Enlightenment about the origins and rationale of different forms of social arrangements has been replaced by resignation. This is understandable, but unfortunate. It is understandable that the large-scale organizations under which most people live and the growing complexity of the technology to which they are subject give the appearance, from sheer weight if nothing else, of inevitability. It is unfortunate that society takes on this quality of "givenness" — an axiom rather than a hypothesis — because it cuts us off from an essential source of self-scrutiny. If society were up for grabs, so to speak, with different forms of social relations competing for our allegiance, people might not view themselves as so passive in organizing their experience.

Why do people get together in societies instead of going it alone? The many answers given over the centuries, from preference (man as a social animal) to necessity (man as a beast of prey) have this much in common — advantage. Mankind is supposed to do better together. Society, whether thought of as regulating conflict, so mankind will not devour its children, or securing cooperation, so others will not be able to devour them, is based on mutual support. Fire, flood, famine, war, disease, luxury, and much else is supposed to be more readily managed by joint, rather than individual, action. Stated positively, increasing the good things of the world, from health to wealth, or negatively decreasing "bads," from poverty to sickness to slavery, are the objectives of social arrangements. Society exists to decrease danger and increase safety. The negative (danger) and the positive (safety) are merged by the calculation of risk — the probability of danger, including the costs of averting it

and the benefits of incurring it. Reformulating the standard answer to the original question, the unsurprising conclusion is that people live in societies in order to reduce their risks.

How, then, do people decide what sorts of risks to take or to avoid? On what basis are certain dangers guarded against and others ignored or relegated to secondary status? By custom or by calculation, mankind copes by playing "follow the leader." Safety is socially learned just as surely as language. Science supposedly has changed all that as imitation gives way to calculation of probabilities. But science cannot say whether it is the variance explained that comforts us or the variance unexplained that should worry us.

Were it possible to calculate risk comprehensively and to agree on a relative ranking of dangers, risk assessment would replace worry about risk. By knowing the risks we face now and into the future, and by assigning them relative rankings, technological choice could overtake social doubt. But can we know?

Coping With the Unknown

If the things of which mankind is collectively ignorant are greater than those of which it has some inkling, the same must be so of the dangers it faces. Objects may be dangerous in ways as yet unsuspected. Should the dangers not yet reveal themselves, they may show up in the more distant future. Apparent dangers, like killer bees, may turn out to be benign because they breed unexpectedly with milder mates. Apparently safe objects — nothing seemed so certainly safe in our youth as asbestos — may turn out to be destructive agents. Mild, harmless substances may combine with others as yet unknown to cause grave damage. Since what is safe today may make us sick tomorrow, even past experience is no certain guide. The opposite also occurs — pesticides believed bad in themselves may increase food productivity sufficiently to improve diets and thus health. There can be no guarantee that the dangers people seek to avoid are the ones that will actually harm them the most. Nor is successful surmounting of danger always a good omen. Success may lead people to relax their guard or deprive them of experience in overcoming adversity. Then the next unexpected danger may do them in.

Complexity is against overall calculability of risk. The number of potential dangers must be infinite; no one can possibly be aware of but a small fraction of the actual (let alone potential) causes of damage. The hundreds of thousands of chemicals about which so

much is said are more than matched by the diversity of the causes of war or the afflictions of poverty or religious and racial strife. Just trying to think of the categories of objects about which a person might be concerned is a major risk. Indeed, mental health might appear to require limiting rather than expanding sources of concern. Since no one can attend to everything, the point is that there has to be some sort of priority established among dangers, or just counting risk objects would leave us all defenseless. How are the risks to which we do pay attention selected?

If whole countries were risk prone or risk averse, investigation would center on what one country's people had in common and on what differentiated them from people in other countries with a different attitude toward risk. Suppose, however, that different people within the same country had different attitudes toward risk regardless of the object. There would be risk-averse and risk-taking people no matter whether the object was impurities in drinking water or crime or unemployment. Research would focus on the characteristics that divided people with positive from people with negative feelings about risk.

There is a third possible distribution of attitudes toward objects of risk, namely, that the same individuals manifest different attitudes toward different objects of risk. Thus, some people are worried about attack by a foreign enemy while others are concerned about nuclear accidents at home. And the same people who would act to ward off air pollution might be unconcerned about the risks of declining national productivity. Instead of studying objects of risks alone or people with shared attitudes by themselves, therefore, the two (attitude and object) would be studied together: What makes some people risk takers on this (and risk avoiders on that) object of interest? Kinds of people (the social aspect) and feelings about danger (the risk aspect) would be joined together.

Risk may be "out there" in the physical world and not "in us" in society. It is possible, of course, that the public perception of risk lies entirely in the objects of attention that have apparently grown more dangerous. Possible, but not probable. All over the Western world, people are deeply divided about various kinds of dangers. Turning to experts is not much help because they also are divided. Now if citizen and expert were agreed that doubts could be left to future disposal by trusted economic and political processes, the difficulty might disappear. Yet it is precisely pervasive mistrust that characterizes processes designed to resolve issues about risk. Are the technologies mistrusted because they are too dangerous or are

they deemed dangerous because the institutions that control them are mistrusted?

It attitudes toward risk were inherent in objects of concern, such as new technologies, it would be impossible to explain why different people disagree so strongly or why dangers that were accepted in the recent past have come under such severe sanction today. Can it be that recent technology disrupts traditional patterns more than the electric light or telephone or automobile or the whole panoply connected with the Industrial Revolution? It makes little sense to argue that it is knowledge available to everyone that causes this person to welcome large technological risks and that one to reject technological risk entirely.

At the elite level of public debate, actors — political parties, interest groups, government officials — do not uniformly attach the same dangers to different objects. People who are most concerned about attack from abroad, for instance, tend not to be as worried about pollution at home. Those who would take strong steps to counter violent crime in the streets are not equally concerned about the effects of inequality of income. Why not?

A first cut at an explanation is that participants who prefer existing social relations (and the political and economic processes supporting them) see danger in external invasion and internal attack on a good way of life. Those people who view current social relations as seriously flawed tend by the same token to reject the economic and social processes that support them. They see violent crime as the consequence of an unjust social order. If they were concerned about crime, it would be of the white collar variety, committed by their social opponents. Indeed, if there were risk from foreign policy, it would stem from the warlike preparations of a corrupt establishment designed to maintain itself in power by creating war scares that also serve to keep down domestic protest.

No doubt events from crime to international incidents are part of the argument in building a persuasive case about what dangers deserve attention. But these facts, partly because there are so many of them, do not carry their own interpretation. Otherwise there would be virtual unanimity on how to interpret them, and that is not so. Rather, the risks and evidence bearing on them are appropriated to preexisting frames of reference. These cultures (or the shared values and practices they justify) order people's perception of danger. Culture connects how different people want to live with their willingness to accept or reject risk. The objects of concern are selected according to whether and to what degree they are

believed to protect a preferred way of life. If values dominate the choice of risk, does that mean there is no place for facts?

Facts and Theories

Danger is not a direct observation of the senses but an inference. Since each individual's experience is severely limited, he must have some framework or theory connecting his observations to conclusions. This theory cannot come from science, for reasons beyond its necessarily limited knowledge and scope. Science is concerned with explanation and prediction, not evaluation. Even in its own realm, science depends on the one thing lacking in the controversy over risk: Agreement on what is to be counted as evidence.

To see is not necessarily to know, for what we see depends on what we want to know. Almost tautologically, "facts" are facts because we treat them as facts, relative to other statements. Appeal to the facts to resolve disputes is possible only when there is *prior* consensus, both as to the implicit conceptual framework (the language of discourse) and the rules of resolution. Though no statement is immune to revision, we must agree to hold some statements stable if we seek reconciliation on the basis of facts. If everything were up for grabs all the time, if fundamental questions were raised with every new experience, progress through incremental adjustment would cease.

What do those organizations whose survival depends on correct calculation — capitalist firms — do about comprehensive calculation? If it were possible to eliminate uncertainty, thus having foreknowledge of the future, everyone (and therefore no one) would be rich. Firms and divisions and product lines, even entire industries (viz. automobiles) would never fail. The name of the game is acting without being able to know the probability or often even the kind of consequences.[5]

It is no exaggeration to say that the main task in theorizing or analyzing or explaining is what to leave out. The power of theory is determined by how much is accounted for by how little. Of all the possible factors that might be involved, only a few can be chosen. Otherwise, the confusion in what is to be understood would merely be mirrored in the theory designed to illuminate its subject. When analysts seek to design policies, they are able to manipulate only a few variables. To do more would leave them unable to follow their own analyses. The purpose of the standard sensitivity analyses is to

[5]Herbert Simon, *Models of Man* (New York: Wiley, 1957).

determine whether their conclusions would be altered by a change in the many assumptions they are required to make in order to keep their analysis manageable. Viewing individuals going through an ordinary day, it is apparent that they cannot base their actions on investigation. Most things have to be taken for granted. The facts to which they pay attention must be severely limited by narrow frames of reference. People, like the man in Dostoevski's *Notes from the Underground* who seeks the cause that lies behind the cause that lies behind other causes, are immobilized.

Something has to be added to make the world intelligible to people. If we cannot know the risks we face, what theory or organizing principle helps us cope? On what bases are decisions made about what to leave out (what risks to ignore) as well as which ones to confront? The single most radical simplifying device is society itself with its institutions and processes dividing tasks and specialties. Cultures post lookouts and give warnings of danger just as assuredly as armies post pickets.

Cultures As Theories

Cultures are theories; they organize experience. If everything is possible, without constraint, there is no need to choose and no way to think, because no act interferes with any other. If nothing is possible, everything being constrained, there is also no way to choose and no point in thinking. In between constraint and possibility, theories tell us what to take for granted (the assumptions) and what to test (the consequences). Dogma — assuming most things — facilitates skepticism — testing a few things.[6] The impossibility theories of science, stating what cannot happen, are mirrored by the shared values of cultures, telling members of society what ought not occur. Physical impossibilities and moral imperatives serve the same purpose, namely, holding sufficient aspects of life constant to permit a narrower range of hypotheses about what works in physical or social life to be tested.

Theories and cultures are resistant to change. At any time there exists evidence that appears to contradict prevailing paradigms of how to organize experience. Resistance to change is essential or meanings would fluctuate so rapidly that no person would know how to behave toward any other. Anyone can undertake a personal experiment by questioning all social forms, asking for evidence of

[6] See the section on "Dogma and Skepticism" in Aaron Wildavsky, *Speaking Truth to Power* (Little, Brown & Co., 1979).

identity, trustworthiness, morality and the like, discovering for himself how rapidly life becomes intolerable. Similarly, turning the physical universe into random events — one day it is this way and another that way — would make the cumulation of knowledge infeasible.

Resistance to change may be overcome. As evidence builds up against theories or cultures do not pay off for adherents, there may be defections. Rival theories or different cultures come into contention. The ways in which people live are being tested in daily life no less than in laboratories.

On the scientific side, for centuries there has been a movement to replace man as the passive receiver of physical laws, imposed on him, as it were, from the outside world of nature, with man as the active organizer of his consciousness. This organizing is done by theories that direct attention to different aspects of reality. Even if these theories succeed for a time in organizing perception of a range of phenomena, there is always the possibility (as Einstein did with Newton) that more powerful theories will replace or subsume them.

Thinking of social relations as grand theories enables us to understand how change takes place. These theories are hypotheses tested by experience as individuals observe day by day whether it makes sense in helping them through life. Evidence plays its part. Information about what works and what does not cumulates. As in scientific activity, of course, there are always experiences that appear to run contrary to the prevailing paradigm. Life (or science) cannot stand still while each and every one is tested. Otherwise there would be no stability. As anomalies accumulate, the individuals involved consider whether other theories or ways of life might be superior. It is not that one fact is true and another false but rather that one theory with its associated facts replaces another.[7] Though individuals are not necessarily experts on cultural theory, they are the only experts on their own lives. As Karl Popper recapitulates his now classic work on *The Logic of Scientific Discovery,*

> All observations (and even more all experiments) are *theory impregnated:* they are interpretations in the light of theories. We observe only what our problems, our biological situation, our interests, our expectations, and our action programmes, make relevant. Just as our observational instruments are based upon

[7]The same sort of discussion may be traced through the large literature surrounding Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolution* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1962). For a view corresponding to my own, see Stephen Toulmin's *Human Understanding* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972).

> theories, so are our very sense organs, without which we cannot observe. . . . Theories come before observation and so they cannot be the results of repeated observations.
>
> The theory of induction by repetition [i.e. experience as sense perception] has thus to be replaced by the theory of the tentative variation of theories or action programmes and their critical testing, by using them in our actions.[8]

Culture is a contract. If the terms are violated, the parties may back out. In the cosmology of the Micmac, a hunting people in eastern Canada in the 1500s, there was presupposed mutual respect between the hunters and the hunted. Who could kill how many of what animal was carefully prescribed. The penalty for violation was the retribution of the spiritual game boss summoned through the shaman. Yet those who came after the first French traders observed the Micmac acquiring pelt upon pelt like a miser hoarding his money. What happened was that smallpox or some disease brought by settlers, thought to be transmitted among animals, virtually exterminated this people. So they broke their cultural contract. Since the animals had broken faith, the Micmac would also declare war, butchering every one in sight, a war made possible by access to more modern technology and the rewards that flowed from the skins.[9]

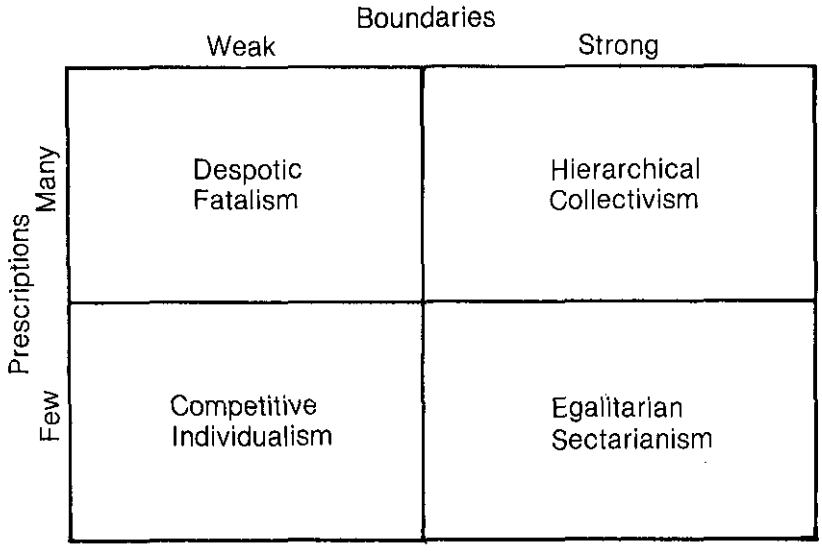
The different forms of social relations (we call cultures) direct their adherents' attention toward certain dangers and away from others. Since it is not possible for any person to know more than a small fraction of the dangers he confronts in the present (let alone in the future), he must proceed according to an attention rejecting and directing framework. This most comprehensive of all social theories — culture itself — organizes perception of the immense areas of uncertainty that necessarily surround the subject of social safety.

What matters to people is how they live with other people. The great questions of social life are "Who am I?" (To what kind of group do I belong?) and "What should I do?" (Are there many or few prescriptions I am expected to obey?). Groups are strong or weak according to whether they have boundaries separating them from others. Decisions are taken either for the group as a whole (strong boundaries) or by individuals or families (weak boundaries).

[8] Karl R. Popper and John C. Eccles, *The Self and Its Brain* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1977), pp. 134-35.

[9] Calvin Martin, *Keepers of the Game: Indian-Animal Relationships and the Fur Trade* (Univ. of California Press: Berkeley & Los Angeles, 1978).

Prescriptions are few or many indicating that the individual internalizes a large or a small number of behavioral norms to which he or she is bound. By combining boundaries with prescriptions, following Mary Douglas,[10] the most general answers to the questions of social life can be combined to produce four different cultures.



Starting with the culture from which libertarianism comes, competitive individualism has few prescriptions and weak boundaries. The only rule is that coercion should be limited to the protection of person and property, justly acquired. Hence, under individualism, individuals are free to pursue their own interests provided they don't interfere with the equal rights of others to do the same. Individualism is a market culture because individuals cooperate via free and, therefore, mutually beneficial exchange. In this culture, based on private property and competition, losses are imposed on those individuals who are unsuccessful in satisfying consumer preferences at least cost. Such individuals will bear the risks of their use of society's scarce resources.

At the opposite end of the cultural spectrum is hierarchical collectivism — strongly bounded groups with many rules. Here hierar-

[10] Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (London: Barrie & Rockliff, 1970); "Cultural Bias," from Occasional Papers of the Royal Anthropological Institute, No. 34 (1978); and Mary Douglas and Aaron Wildavsky, *Risk and Culture,* forthcoming (Univ. of California Press, 1982).

chies divide tasks minutely, each status living by the rules assigned to it. Although hierarchy evidently involves power asymmetry, it is not totalitarian. The "lowerarchs" have rights vis-à-vis those above them who are not allowed to reach down and occupy their space. (The sergeant in John Ford's westerns who, sitting in his own home, kicks out the commanding officer for entering without permission, makes the point.) Concerned with the relations between parts and whole, hierarchies inculcate a sacrificial ethic. (Of course, individualists would regard these sacrifices for the collective as forced.) Personal risks may be undertaken for group gain. Conversely, those who play by the rules may expect the group to cover their losses. In hierarchies, reciprocity consists of a network of obligations, stretching from past to future, each generation honoring the commitments of those who came before and making commitments to be made good by those who come after.

Sectarianism is the usual name for the culture comprised of the small, egalitarian groups that are bounded strongly but have the fewest possible prescriptions. Social organization is to be entirely voluntary without coercion or authority. Risks are taken only for the group, and gains are equally distributed by prior consent. Egalitarianism is emphasized, for this is the only way in which individuals within a collective can relate to one another without authority. Thus reciprocity for egalitarian sectarians consists of relationships in which no one exerts more influence than another.

Finally, a culture of despotic fatalism comes from a combination of weak group boundaries and many personal prescriptions. This is the culture of which it can properly be said that individuals have no control over the rules that run their lives. For fatalists there is no reciprocity, no mutuality, no sharing. Lacking power, fatalists believe either in luck or in submission. The individual does not take risks for himself or for others but because it is his fate.

Let us change this categorical conception to a dynamic view of cultures in contention. The commitment of individuals to a concrete culture depends on its ability to provide satisfaction compared with alternatives. Thus, cultures seek both to differentiate themselves from other ways of life and to demonstrate their superiority. Differentiation requires coherence. Internal social relations should correspond to ideals, and these norms ought to rationalize (justify, make sense out of) the desired structure of social relations.

The struggles between collectivism and sectarianism, hierarchy and equality, are epic-making. Sectarians reject the hated hierarchies of collectivism to the point of separating themselves from

societies tainted with that curse. The forced marches of these sects are famous in world history.

When they remain within a larger, multi-cultural society, sectarians form the perennial critical culture. They exist not to be satisfied. How, otherwise, would they keep their people together without authority? By ceaselessly condemning the world outside, its callousness and coercion, sects stay together, for they fear the ceaseless splits that characterize their culture. According to a sectarian worldview, markets are twice tainted, once because their transactions lead to unequal rewards and again because anything except the right to bid and bargain is negotiable. Collectivism is condemned on its face for its inequalities, whether these mask themselves as expertise (scientists know best) or bigness (multinationals) or just industry, which, in its internal operations, embodies technology.

Competitive individualism abhors controls on voluntary exchange and the resulting distribution of income. What would happen to markets if the gains were collectivized? Worse still, what would happen to incentives if gains (but not losses) had to be redistributed? If individualism is opposed to collectivism, which does not allow equality of opportunity (though it may still honor the rule of law), individualism is even more opposed to sectarianism because it insists on equality of results. What is the point of competition if there can be no winners? How can there be serendipity — new combinations satisfying a wider range of preferences — if there can be no losers? Since hierarchy depends on acknowledging the legitimacy of its relative ranks and individualism depends on the desirability of competition, neither takes kindly to their perennial critics who deny what is most essential for their followers to believe.

Now, what has all this to do with pollution? Everything. When this discussion is done, everything important about pollution will have been said. Only the technical details will be left.

Risk and Pollution as Weapons in the Cultural Wars

People think through actions and objects as well as through categories of scientific thought. It we hear that chemicals are carcinogens and nuclear waste is industrial excrement, that nature is natural, pure and perfect, whereas technology upsets the delicate balance of nature, that sunshine is a disinfectant in politics and sunsets close the curtain on the big bad bureaucracy, that solar energy is close to salvation, these symbols speak to us in strange

tongues. Mastery of nature, including the Biblical injunction for nature to serve man, gives way to subordination. Foods are to be natural (meaning untouched by technology) and man is to be abstemious by not demanding too much. Why is there so much pollution nowadays?

In anthropology the subject of pollution (also called defilement or impurity) is treated as a belief in undesirable qualities transmitted physically. Pollution implies a mechanism of contagion, whether genetic or bacteriological or more mysterious in its workings. When we speak in other contexts of river pollution or air pollution, the physical element is clearly implied. But pollution also carries the idea of moral defect. If it were not morally loaded, it would not be useful in argument. If you want to get your spouse, a local level pollution, say adultery, may be sufficient. If you want to bring down the government, however, a national level pollution, making the highest officials and the most major institutions culpable and accountable, is necessary. Nuclear energy is chosen for opprobrium not because existing evidence indicates it is the most dangerous compared with other sources of energy, quite the opposite (see Bernard Cohen's excellent paper),[11] but because it is most useful for symbolizing opposition to existing social and economic relationships. Dangers may be alleged to be hidden, involuntary, and irreversible. Nuclear plants are massive, thus attacking bigness, and their consequences may affect large numbers of people, thus enhancing accountability. The idea that corporate capital is doing people in, thus implicating the entire establishment, is more plausible in the nuclear field than in any other.

The distinctive character of a pollution situation is that it combines a natural mechanism of dangerous contagion with a moral idea. To recognize pollution means using the idea of dangers inherent in nature as a means of moral coercion. As a result, arguments about new technology may be used as arguments about how the good society should be structured.

Occasional complaints about pollution may have physical causes. Across-the-board condemnation of contamination of nature and people by technology has no direct physical cause. Pollution is being used as a political weapon against individualism and collectivism (hierarchy) by advocates of sectarianism. There is more to it than that, but not much more. Instead of a hopeless counter-factual quest for the material causes of a nonexistent increase in en-

[11] Bernard L. Cohen, "Radiation Pollution and Cancer: Comparative Risks and Proof," *Cato Journal* 2 (Spring 1982): 255-274.

vironmental and human damage, therefore, it is wiser to ask the cultural question: What kind of culture routinely invokes nature and the natural in defense of its own way and in opposition to contrary cultures?

In a culture of competitive individualism, risk is opportunity. Without scarcity there is no competition; without uncertainty, there is no reward. If everything important can be known in advance, central control to assure correct decisions, rather than social interaction to secure agreed outcomes, would be optimal. Serving oneself by serving other people, which is the moral justification of individualism, rewards being given for meeting the most widespread preferences, assumes they cannot be known in advance. Markets are based on a retrospective rationale; were it possible to program interactions in advance, planning would be preferable. Libertarians like markets not because they know in advance how things will turn out but because they don't. It is only by looking backwards and observing that resources were allocated to higher-order uses, satisfying a broader range of consumer preferences, that markets are deemed superior to central planning.

Where fatalists accept risks because there is no alternative, collectivists seek to spread them out. Short-term risks are parceled out according to one's predetermined place in society and long-term risks are willed, so to speak, to future generations. Because they believe that their form of social organization will last, each generation doing its duty to its predecessors and successors, collectivism proceeds according to the principle of "sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." Collectivists are technologically optimistic partly because production has so far been hierarchically organized, but mostly because they expect future generations to correct their mistakes as they have done in regard to those of their predecessors.

Insofar as the risks flowing from technology are concerned, therefore, collectivism and individualism are allied, though for different reasons. Individualists are optimistic because they believe they have a method of social organization that does not require infallible knowledge of an inherently uncertain future. Collectivists are optimistic; either they think they know the secrets of the future or that their successors will. This line of reasoning explains why, on the issue of technology, communists and capitalists are allied.

Sectarians are technological pessimists. They are pessimistic about technology because they are opposed to the social structures for which it stands — hierarchy and competition. They prefer little to big technology for the same reasons they oppose the big organiza-

tions of corporate capitalism to their small collectives. To say this much, however, is only to push the question of risk back to its essential cultural constituents: Why do supporters of sectarianism see catastrophe from technology coming around every corner? How can we explain the sudden sense of impending doom that has swept across our country?

The "Armageddon complex" — the bringing forward of immense future risks into the present, as if there would be no tomorrow — is a direct consequence of the increasing strength of sectarian culture. By now the litany is familiar; the earth is exceeding its carbon budget, oxygen is being depleted, the population is exploding, thermal inversion threatens to burn us to a crisp, or hiding the sun's rays to freeze us to death, on and on. Why all these alarms?

Sects, organized as small egalitarian groups, are perennial outsiders. They are organized against the hierarchy and competition that leads to inequality. They cannot rule, except for brief periods, because they cannot solve the problem of authority. They tend to split, either because they will not acknowledge leaders or the charismatics they prefer tend to drive out rivals. What they can do is criticize the establishment, whether it be collectivism or individualism or some combination thereof. Being small and critical, however, they are often on the defensive. Sectarianism needs a strategy that will keep its members together and will threaten the stronger establishment. With what? With doom. If machines are broken, they can be repaired. If a given technology proves defective, it can be replaced. But if the threat is to human life itself, or to the natural environment that sustains life, incremental adaptation is ruled out. Only radical change toward sectarianism will save the day, indeed, the planet.

Risk is an especially good issue because it is so easy to remain dissatisfied. Proof is extremely difficult, if not impossible. If the hazard does not materialize immediately, it will get you later on. As new knowledge reveals old risks to be negligible, new ones rise to take their place. When the anger against existing institutions is strong enough, no deaths can be considered natural. The only question then, to quote the title of a recent book, is "Who is Poisoning America?"[12]

Sectarianism is not unique in using coercive arguments to keep its adherents in line; all cultures seek conformity even if it is expressd as nonconformism. Collectivism reinforces hierarchy by claiming

[12]You guessed it, the corporations. Ralph Nader, Ronald Brownstein and John Richard, eds., *Who Is Poisoning America?* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1981).

its distinctions are God-given. Individualism would not dream of ordering anyone around; it is just that there is no alternative because money has run out. What makes sectarianism of special interest, however, is its use of pollution (Mother Nature won't allow that!) as a means of moral coercion.

Pollution (from a cultural viewpoint) is a problem only for those cultures that have boundaries to protect. Cultures with soft shells, open to outside influences, know no pollution because they need no guards to protect nonexistent borders. Where life is fate, outsiders make rules for insiders who have no means of self-defense. Individualists make a virtue out of necessity by profiting from the removal of social boundaries. They create new markets where none existed, refusing to accept a priori definitions of permissible transactions other than the consent of the people involved. Individualism conflicts with collectivism exactly on the issue of boundaries as the latter seeks to make its hierarchical division of labor sacrosanct by forbidding bargaining about role and status.

Pollution is a problem for collectivism and for sectarianism because both seek to protect social boundaries, though in regard to different transgressions. These hardshell systems differ according to whether they seek to safeguard innumerable inequalities or a single standard of equality. Hierarchies have so many distinctions to protect that they are forever inventing imaginary dangers about women taking on men's roles or children challenging parents or the wrong sort of people getting married or someone without the allegedly essential qualifications doing a job. Concentrating their concern on a single wall of virtue — equality — sectarians invest breaches of that wall with infinite evil. Somehow the fragile web of nature will be disrupted, leading the entire ecosystem on which life depends to cascade out of control. Only transactions that increase equality, as in John Rawls' formulation of the difference principle,[13] operate in accord with nature, i.e., a culture without distinction. Theirs is not Walt Disney's competitive nature of tooth and claw but some original state of nature before the Great Satans, collectivism and individualism, hierarchy and competition, unfortunately entered the world.

Pollution, big and bad, is a blanket condemnation of soft-shell cultures. Libertarians might share the disavowal of fatalism (Who wants to be subject to rules made by others that they cannot modify?) but they cannot condemn individualism without doing themselves in.

[13]John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 1971).

Am I suggesting that there is no difficulty with physical pollution so libertarians need not pay attention? I am not. I am saying that libertarians should be aware of the destructive implications for their way of life of accepting accusations of across-the-board pollution. Libertarians will want to approach pollution from their own point of view. They should be interested in altering property relationships so as to reduce the power disparities between polluters and the polluted, or, in more familiar terms, to internalize externalities. This rearrangement takes time and cannot be entirely successful. No instrument of policy is good for all purposes; no actions are without their reactions, some of which are bound to be unanticipated.

What, then, should libertarians do about the last remnant of pollution that cannot be eliminated? Adopting the stance that future combinations as yet unknown will eliminate the difficulty, or that future discoveries, encouraged by scientific competition, will find a cure, libertarians may ignore minor, uncompensated pollutions. No market-oriented economist would argue for zero pollution. Alternatively, libertarians could decide that pollution is their blind spot. Since no one can see things whole, every culture being a form of bias, compensatory measures can be taken. A pollution budget could be established, for example, seeking to alleviate uncompensated damages in some sort of priority. By placing a fixed financial limit on attempts to anticipate dangers before they arise, a sectarian solution is avoided, while still allowing efforts to ameliorate those pollutions that get away.

If a pollution budget is a permissible prudential exception allowing governmental action to mitigate pollution, why not go all the way into comparative risk assessment? If risk of pollution by toxic substances could be ranked according to common criteria, the worst ones, which remain uncompensated, could be regulated. An idyllic scene. But one that cannot be accomplished with complete consent. Indeed, if it were possible to agree on comparative criteria for ranking risks, decisions would be preprogrammed, emerging as if untouched by human hands. None of this will receive widespread acceptance.

Stipulation as to the correct criteria or the rules of ranking cannot be agreed upon without giving up the game. If money were used as a medium, or if one death or injury were considered equivalent to another, or if some level of risk (say, smoking a cigarette or eating a charbroiled steak a day) were considered minimal, so as to serve as a lower level below which risks were tolerable, pollution would become a technical and not a political problem. It would only be a

matter of price. Once the criteria can conceivably be met, the issue of risk would no longer stand as a rebuke to the establishment.

Does evidence not matter? Libertarians would not like to think of themselves as people who disregard evidence in favor of ideology, an accusation they are wont to level against their opponents. Can libertarians guarantee there are no unexpected dangers? Of course not. May not a substance that appears benign (like asbestos) later turn out to be harmful? Of all people, libertarians must be among the first to agree to the ubiquity of the unexpected. Why, then cannot the expected, working its will silently through the human system, emerge 20 or 30 years later as a cancerous contamination, wreaking its unspeakable horror upon a surprised citizenry? No one can deny this is possible. No one can deny that the regular relationships on which we build our lives, will not, for reasons we cannot anticipate, fall apart. How, then, can we cope with the unexpected?

In the few areas where we know a great deal, we may directly assess risks, but in most areas we cannot. Since we cannot know the risks we face, the question is, how shall we compensate for our ignorance, by anticipation or by resilience? If the world is coming to an end because of the depredations of individualism, a massive effort to head off destruction may be justified from a sectarian perspective. If one trusts markets to come up with appropriate solutions that no one today envisions, it is better to wait so as to respond resiliently to the unexpected.

Conclusion

A reader of Bernard Cohen's paper, who learns that much more is known about radiation than about most subjects, will understand that if there are deep divisions where mankind is most knowledgeable, there must be more to it than just the data. What is it, I have asked, that people bring to the data? What theory organizes the perceptions of risk? This theory, I have argued, is culture: Our hopes and fears, our sense of danger and safety, depend on our ways of life.

The basic risk-averse arguments are that dangers are hidden, involuntary, and irreversible: People are deliberately kept in the dark; they would not face these risks if they knew about them, and they will suffer death or damage from which they cannot recover. Now a nice society would never do that. Any society "guilty as charged" would be vile. In the past these arguments were countered by their opposites. Who argues that *benefits* are hidden, involuntary, and irreversible? Hidden in that no one sees them for

what they are; involuntary in that no one intends the benefits; and irreversible in that riches will follow if only the rules are obeyed. I refer, of course, to Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations.* Risk taking and risk aversion are forms of social commentary.

But this is not to say that evidence is immaterial. It is not. Evidence can never be conclusive, because there is always more to come. Not one anomaly but many are required before people begin to wonder whether their way of life might need modification. Sometimes certain evidence acquires the force of conviction, which is to say there is widespread agreement. But this conviction and agreement is absent in regard to the question of pollution. Since pollution is a contested concept, Murray Rothbard, writing as a libertarian, comes to the correct conclusion by insisting on stringent standards:

> . . . if air pollution is evident to the senses — either visibly or by emitting a noxious odor — then the pollution is a tort *per se* because it interferes with the possession and use of property by its owner. But the invisible and insensible crossing of another's air boundary — say by radio waves or low-level radiation — cannot be considered aggression because it does not interfere with the owner's use or enjoyment of his person or property. Only if such a boundary crossing commits provable harm — according to principles of strict causality and beyond a reasonable doubt — can it be considered a tort and subject to liability and injunction.[14]

Unless libertarians want to consider themselves as the source of social contamination, pollution cannot be their major problem, as it is for sectarians. Otherwise, libertarians can only answer Geoffrey Vickers' question — "Has Man Become a Cancer?"[15] in the affirmative, adding only that they are the cause.

[14] Murray Rothbard, "Law, Property Rights, and Air Pollution," *Cato Journal* 2 (Spring 1982): 55-99.

[15] Geoffrey Vickers, "Has Man Become a Cancer?," *Town Planning Review* 52 (April 1981): 205-214.

WILDAVSKY ON POLLUTION AS MORAL COERCION: A COMMENT

Manuel S. Klausner

Professor Wildavsky's paper makes a useful and original contribution to the pollution debate, particularly in terms of understanding how pollution is perceived culturally and how it is used politically. He offers key insights into the use of pollution as a means of moral coercion, especially in the area of nuclear energy.

Wildavsky quotes at length from Peter Aranson's chapter in *Instead of Regulation,* which he considers "the best recent exposition" of the libertarian position on pollution. The excerpt from Aranson focuses on "government failure" in addition to the notion of "market failure," and demonstrates why it is mistaken to automatically call for government intervention in the presence of externalities.

Wildavsky's thesis is that libertarians ought not overreact to sweeping allegations of widespread, across-the-board pollution as voiced by members of a culture he labels "egalitarian sectarianism." He effectively shows how "egalitarian sectarians" use the moral overtones of pollution as a political weapon.

Wildavsky's major theme recognizes that pollution is a problem for libertarians and that the libertarian approach is to develop new rules about property. He cautions, however, that pollution cannot be a major problem for libertarians in the sense that it is for sectarians.

But what does Wildavsky mean when he contends: "Properly understood . . . libertarianism . . . knows no pollution"? (p. 307) Obviously, Wildavsky doesn't intend to raise a vision of Ayn Rand standing over tall smokestacks and deeply inhaling. Rather, he explains his contention by observing: "If there are no boundaries

Cato Journal, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Spring 1982).

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against transactions — competitive individualism tears down rather than builds up boundaries — there can be no pollution." Similarly, he implies that, for libertarians, "there are no legal limits on transactions." (p. 305) Wildavsky, however, should be careful not to blur the distinction between voluntary and involuntary transactions. His statements are incomplete (as Wildavsky himself would seem to recognize in other contexts in his paper), because they disregard the significance of consent. The essence of libertarianism is its insistence on permitting consensual transactions, but not legitimizing involuntary transactions.

There is another dimension to Wildavsky's formulation. In contending that libertarianism, "properly understood," knows no pollution and that libertarians should not accept accusations of across-the-board pollution, Wildavsky uses an approach which echoes that of Thomas Szasz. Professor Szasz' thesis that there is no such thing as mental illness — but the notion of disease is used as a strategy in dealing with personal problems — has been a useful tool in helping avoid the mythology and misunderstanding associated with the concept of mental illness.

In a sense, Wildavsky's perspective in this regard is reminiscent of Walter Block's approach turned on its head. In Block's provocative *Defending the Undefendable* (New York: Fleet Press, 1976), he holds out as heroes such people as drug pushers, gypsy cab drivers, slumlords, and litterers. For Block, the litterer is a hero because he litters only in a public area.

Block explains that littering can only take place in a public domain, but never in a private domain — since conduct resembling littering that occurs in the private domain is considered to be garbage, dirt, or waste — but not litter.

Walter Block's general thesis is that there is a moral difference between the initiation of aggression and all other acts which, although they may be displeasing, do not involve aggressive violence, which violates a person's rights. Therefore, Block claims that such people as litterers and drug pushers are scapegoats, or available to attack, but who must be defended in the interests of justice since they engage in voluntary transactions and are nonaggressors.

Just as Walter Block has provided a new perspective on litterers, Wildavsky provides a fresh insight into anti-pollution sects. For Wildavsky, libertarianism knows no pollution, and, in contrast to Block's view of the litterer as heroic, Wildavsky sees the anti-pollution sect — which attacks individualism and the market economy by saying "the environment is polluted" — as an

adversary.

Within the framework of his major theme, Wildavsky offers numerous insights into competing cultures. His description of sectarianism is particularly revealing:

> By ceaselessly condemning the world outside, its callousness and coercion, sects stay together, for they fear the ceaseless splits that characterize their culture. According to a purely voluntary [sectarian] world view, markets are twice tainted, once because their transactions lead to unequal rewards and again because anything except the right to bid and bargain is negotiable. (p. 318)

Wildavsky points out that sectarians make accusations of across-the-board pollution as a blanket condemnation of the culture of competitive individualism and for use as a political weapon. Wildavsky effectively shows that sectarians use pollution as a strategy of doom. Sectarians need the constant cry that pollution threatens human life, and the planet itself, in order to keep their members together — and to threaten the stronger establishment.

Wildavsky's attack on the sectarians is sharp and well aimed:

> What makes sectarianism of special interest . . . is its use of pollution — (Mother Nature won't allow that!) — as a means of moral coercion. (p. 322)

He points out that the "distinctive character of a pollution situation is that it combines a natural mechanism of dangerous contagion with a moral idea." (p. 319)

As Professor Wildavsky suggests, proof is "extremely difficult, if not impossible" in dealing with issues of hazards from pollution. He notes the argument that:

> If the hazard does not materialize immediately, it will get you later on. As new knowledge reveals old risks to be negligible, new ones rise to take their place. When the anger against existing institutions is strong enough, no deaths can be considered natural. (p. 321)

Wildavsky then cogently notes that "the only question left," as posed by Ralph Nader in the title of his recent book, is "Who is Poisoning America?" And what would Nader's answer be? According to Wildavsky, "You guessed it, the corporations." (p. 321)

Wildavsky identifies competitive individualism as the culture from which libertarianism is derived. Beyond Wildavsky's generally useful discussion, I would add the observation that libertarians — from a cultural perspective — could be characterized as forerunners. In this regard, they tend to be open to new ideas, but not

because they are trendy. Rather, libertarians tend to favor ideas for their intrinsic merit.

In his thoughtful description of individualists, he properly describes them as "optimistic," although it would not be philosophically inconsistent for a libertarian to be a "doomsdayer" so long as there is no advocacy of remedies involving the initiation of coercion. Libertarians, however, tend not to heed — and certainly do not need — the doomsday strategy that Professor Wildavsky observes is needed by the sectarians.

Beyond Wildavsky's many valuable insights into the dynamics of competing cultures, there are some discordant notes. For example, in discussing the libertarian approach, Wildavsky overstates the likelihood of developing rules and markets that will fully internalize externalities. Libertarians recognize that the world is full of externalities created by consumption and production. But they would not insist on incurring the disproportionate cost of attempting to abate all such externalities.

Wildavsky suggests that for libertarians "failure [on the part of some market participants] is more important than success in that it leaves the way open to try new and better combinations that meet more widespread preferences." (p. 305) Failure may indeed serve a positive purpose, as observed by Wildavsky, but there is no reason why libertarians should regard failure either as necessary or more important than success. On the contrary, new and better combinations can evolve from today's successes, as well as from today's failures.

In the same vein, why does Wildavsky ask, "What is the point of competition if there can be no winners?" (p. 318) For libertarians, the point is that competition maximizes liberty by expanding options. The process thereby yields both winners and losers, thus allowing for major redistribution of wealth. It is also significant for libertarians that the alternative to competition is coercion. Wildavsky in general seems to take a rather negative approach to the impersonal forces of the market and the results created by what Hayek describes as the "spontaneous collaboration of free men."[1]

In describing why libertarians like markets, Wildavsky states they do so "not because they know in advance how things will turn out but because they don't." (p. 320) Although this aspect is a characteristic of markets, it is imprecise to consider this to be the main attraction of markets to libertarians. Libertarians, above all, have a

[1] Friedrich A. Hayek, "Individualism: True and False," in *Individualism and Economic Order* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1972), p. 7.

moral repugnance against any coercive narrowing of options. It is a secondary attraction that markets are efficient in terms of providing optimum knowledge to decision-makers.

Wildavsky asserts: "It is only by looking backwards and observing that resources were allocated to higher-order uses . . . that markets are deemed superior to central planning." (p. 320) I would add that the benefit of a market system is that it encourages individuals to exercise their foresight. The price and profit system penalizes inefficient uses of resources; market participants therefore have an incentive to consider the *future* consequences of their present uses of resources. Thus, markets are superior for libertarians, but not merely on a "retrospective rationale" as Wildavsky claims.

It is interesting to note that Wildavsky seems to think that planning and libertarianism (free markets) are inconsistent. He writes: ". . . were it possible to program interactions in advance, planning would be preferable [to markets]." (p. 320) He should note, however, that the key difference between libertarianism and central planning is that in the former individuals plan on a consensual basis, while in the latter central planners impose their preferences on the rest of society. Likewise, Wildavsky appears not to understand the spontaneous order of the marketplace, in which the plans of individuals are coordinated via the price mechanism. The issue for libertarians is not whether or not to plan, but who should plan — private parties or the state.

Wildavsky offers a rather curious proposal that libertarians could decide that pollution is their "blind spot" and establish compensatory measures such as a "pollution budget." He goes on to suggest that if a "pollution budget" were permissible, then "why not go all the way into comparative risk assessment?" and regulate the worst uncompensated forms of pollution. (p. 323) These suggestions are ill-considered. Aside from serious libertarian objections to the notion of developing a "blind spot" exception for otherwise illegitimate coercion, the task of determining the criteria for such measures seems futile in a dynamic economy with ever-changing technological developments and risks. As Wildavsky himself recognizes, complete consent could not be had concerning rules for ranking risks; hence, his comment that pollution would thereby become "a technical and not a political problem" (p. 323) is illusory.

Moreover, Wildavsky's proposal for compensatory measures is at odds with the resilient approach he attributes to those who trust "markets to come up with appropriate solutions that no one today

envisions." (p. 324) Indeed, such a proposal seems inherently premised on a sectarian perspective and is antagonistic to Wildavsky's stated views of libertarianism.

Wildavsky comes closer to the mark in endorsing Murray Rothbard's standards for imposing liability for pollution. However, although Rothbard has made a profound contribution with his article, "Law, Property Rights, and Air Pollution," he does not adequately demonstrate the appropriateness of singling out pollution for a "beyond-a-reasonable-doubt" standard of proof as against other torts, and he has yet to establish the basis for insisting on such a strick standard of proof for torts in general. Thus, Wildavsky's endorsement is premature.

The final comment I would offer about Professor Wildavsky's piece is that he overstates the concern that a "sudden sense of impending doom" (p. 321) has swept across the country. Obviously, doomsdayers are alive and well in the United States today. But, in my judgment, they are not nearly so much in fashion today as in the 1970s. Paul Ehrlich and Ralph Nader had a tremendous following in the 1970s. Many college students who were attracted to environmental causes in the '70s found that the technical issues involved were too complex to sustain their interest, and have moved on to other areas of greater personal concern.

There are, however, cross-currents going in both directions. There is concededly an active and outspoken anti-nuclear energy movement today. Yet this seems more than merely a consequence of the culture Wildavsky calls sectarianism. There is a rational fear among nonsectarians of the perils and costs posed by the nuclear arms race, which tends to add to the momentum of the anti-nuclear energy movement. By exploiting these legitimate fears, the anti-nuclear energy forces are able to effectively secure support from many who are not generally of a sectarian bent.

On the whole, Wildavsky has made an extremely useful contribution. To be sure, his discussion needs to focus more precisely on the voluntary aspects of libertarianism and would be strengthened by clarifying his references to libertarian values. By identifying the characteristics of sectarians, however, and their use of the pollution issue as a political weapon, he helps point the way to an effective counterstrategy. Such opponents will never be interested in reasoned debate. Instead, the need is to seize the moral initiative from such groups in making an appeal to those who tend towards an open mind.

Properly understood, libertarianism is a political philosophy,

which values personal liberty and rejects, as immoral, the initiation of force. From a libertarian perspective, human life presents a variety of social and economic problems such as poverty, disease, and pollution. In all of these cases, the libertarian concern is for equality of opportunity rather than the utopian notion of equality of result. As Hayek has observed: "We must face the fact that the preservation of individual freedom is incompatible with a full satisfaction of our views of distributive justice."[2]

Pollution is, after all, a problem for libertarians, but one that calls for the principled application of property rights, and not an overreaction to the cries of those who use pollution as an attack on personal liberty and the free market.

[2]Hayek, p. 22.