



“The more complex the society, the more government control we need.”

ARGUED a college president at a recent seminar: “Your free market, private property, limited government theories were all right under the simple conditions of a century or more ago, but surely they are unworkable in today’s complex economy. The more complex the society, the greater is the need for governmental control; that seems axiomatic.”

It is important to expose this oft-heard, plausible, and influential fallacy because it leads directly and logically to socialistic planning. This is how a member of the seminar team answered the college president:

“Let us take the simplest possible situation—just you and I. Next, let us assume that I am as wise as any president of the United States who has held office during your lifetime. With these qualifications in mind, do you honestly think I would be competent to coercively control what you shall invent, discover, or create, what the hours of your labor shall be, what wage you shall receive, what and with whom you shall associate and exchange? Is not my incompetence demonstrably apparent in this simplest of all societies?”

“Now, let us shift from the simple situation to a more complex society—to all the people in this room. What would you think of my competence to coercively control their creative actions? Or, let us contemplate a really complex situation—the 177,000,000 people of this nation. If I were to suggest that I should take over the management of their lives and

their billions of exchanges, you would think me the victim of hallucinations. Is it not obvious that the more complex an economy, the more certainly will governmental control of productive effort exert a retarding influence? Obviously, the more complex our economy, the more we should rely on the miraculous, self-adapting processes of men acting freely. No mind of man nor any combination of minds can even envision, let alone intelligently control, the countless human energy exchanges in a simple society, to say nothing of a complex one.”

It is unlikely that the college president will raise that question again.

While exposing fallacies can be likened to beating out brush fires endlessly, the exercise is nonetheless self-improving as well as useful—in the sense that rear guard actions are useful. Further, one’s ability to expose fallacies—a negative tactic—appears to be a necessary preface to influentially accenting the positive. Unless a person can demonstrate competence at exploding socialistic error, he is not likely to gain wide audiences for his views about the wonders wrought by men who are free.

Of all the errors heard about the “bargaining tables,” or in classrooms, there is not one that cannot be simply explained away. We only need to put our minds to it. FEE seeks to help those who would expose fallacies and accent the merits of freedom. The more who outdo us in rendering this kind of help, the better.

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