

# FREE-MAN'S PERSPECTIVE

How Life, Liberty & Sanity Can Win

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## THE 'LITTLE MAN' PROBLEM



One of the greatest and most persistent problems of human society is what we might call the *little man* problem. Generation after generation and society after society have had to accommodate it in one way or another... either that or fail.

The little man issue – whether addressed directly or not – underlies more or less all societal models. And so it is deeply important to understand it and to deal with it sensibly.

The problem with understanding this issue (certainly my impediment to grasping it), is that each person tends to see it from his or her personal angle, usually after running into it and being hurt by it. That, of course, isn't a good base for understanding.

What finally gave me a useful perspective on the little man problem was my recent revelation on primate and

post-primate societies. The little man problem, as it turns out, is a carry-over from primate societies. And it seems that we're able to come to grips with this issue only when we look at it from such a long and broad perspective.

Many people have a significant bias toward seeing themselves as a little man, common man, working stiff, or something along those lines. This is a significant problem, and we will discuss it as we go; but it isn't the primary little man problem I'm addressing. What I want to focus on today is how the little man problem applies on a societal level, and it is this:

How does one find meaning as a little man?

Again, I don't think anyone should see themselves as "little person." That's not only selling one's self short, it's simply false; any human with even a basic level of health is a machine built for working wonders. Still, that's not our point.

That fact is that a huge number of people do feel like a little person, and even find refuge in that designation. Taken together they can shift, and even control, how the larger world turns. A society (and I'm using *society* as "a group of people living by a set of ideas that they pass on to the next generation") that doesn't give the "little people" a way to secure meaning is in jeopardy. Some person or group who can provide those people with meaning will soon enough be able to undermine or take over that society. That's not always a bad thing, of course, but it most certainly can be, as we saw all too well in 20th century socialism.

And so this is a crucial question, and one we should be sure to address as we move forward.

As noted above, we ultimately want people to understand that they're not little, but this is a deep and old problem, and one that will not be fixed in a moment. We also have to be sure that the little person can find meaning in his and her own way, and grow out of their mistaken self-designation in his or her own way.

Just to elaborate the point a bit, here's how Eric Hoffer saw this problem in the early 1960s:

In an adequate social order, the untalented should be able to acquire a sense of usefulness and of growth without interfering with the development of talent around them.

Now let's go back to the roots of this thing.

## **Alphas, Betas, Beta-Doms And Gammas**

As we noted in FMP #107, the primate model of life is the dominance hierarchy, with the large males lording it over the older females and younger males, the older females abusing the younger females, younger males slapping around the juveniles, and so on. That's not a completely fair characterization – there are complications and exceptions – but it serves as a general description.

More than that, this model has continued into human societies, with the few ruling the many as the central organizational model, even into our time. And so it's understandable that so many people have organized their expectations around it. But it goes far deeper than that, resting upon two pre-programmed operations of our brains:

1. As we also noted in FMP #107, we have inherited brain circuits (or routines) that recognize status almost instantly, unconsciously and automatically. The determination is made by our brains, unbidden, in some forty milliseconds; faster than purposeful thought could produce it.
2. Our ordered thought involves our conscious minds bouncing ideas off our unconscious mind, to see how it feels about the new idea. Here's how neuroscientist Robert Sapolsky characterized the process:

The frontal cortex runs "as if" experiments on gut feelings--"How would I feel if this outcome occurred?"--and makes choices with the answer in mind.

So, then, we have a subconscious mind that is automatically focused on relative status, and a conscious mind that runs it's new ideas past that same subconscious, to see how it feels about them. The dominance assumption, then, rests upon deep and old roots.

Old and deep roots are an issue, to be sure, but they are hardly an unsolvable problem; if they were, none of us would escape it and we would, in fact, still be apes or something very much like them. We've already solved all sorts of old, deep problems.

Every society of some endurance must accommodate its little man problem. But before we go through some historical solutions, we should understand that in humans the dominance problem is far more nuanced than in apes. Rather than featuring just dominants and submissives (alphas and betas), human life features major variants such as beta-doms and gammas. Here are brief explanations of those last two terms:

A *beta-dom* (my own terminology) is a person who lives mainly as a beta – taking orders from superiors and carefully obeying – but who also, in one sphere or another, gets to play the role of the dominant, often vigorously. The classic example is the quiet lady who becomes a tyrant once ensconced as the president of the Condo Board.

A *gamma* is a person who wishes to step out of the dominance hierarchy, making decisions for him- or herself, working to get what they want out of life rather than following the usual script, and being uninterested in exerting dominance over others.

And, of course, there are many permutations of all the above. Humans are exceptional in that they see themselves as members of multiple hierarchies at the same time. And in this we see a first model of the little man finding meaning: by being a big man in one narrow niche. This is a great advantage of pluralistic societies, because in them, a hundred types of meaning can be gathered, independently of the ruling hierarchy.

Now let's look at some historical solutions to the little man problem.

## **Accommodation Through History**

As we noted earlier, each successful society has developed some way for the little man to find meaning within it. We'll have to generalize quite a bit here (all history is generalization), but I think not unfairly.

## **The Pre-Sumerian Kings**

You can see FMP #24 for more detail, but the pre-Sumerian kings (typified by the legendary Nimrod/Ninus) were simply thugs, presiding over bands of thugs. They don't seem to have been concerned with the feelings of those they plundered. Their rulership was limited and didn't endure, even though the model came and went over many years.

## **The Sumerian Empire**

The Sumerians came up with the first major model of incorporating the little man into their system. They did this with their religion, which gave everyone a crucial part in serving to the gods, their temples and their representatives (who collected their sacrifices). Each harvest, armies of little men brought grain and livestock to the few important men to be counted, to get a receipt for their sacrifice to the gods, and to see the ever-so-impressive temples.

The Sumerian model lasted a solid 2,000 years (with the usual mayhem from time to time) and was exported to Egypt, where it ran from roughly 3000 BC to the time of the Caesars, another 2,000 year run.

## **Classical Civilization**

Neither Greece nor Rome cultivated little men in their early years. The people who would have been little men in other eras were given different paths to follow. (We're discussing males only at this point; both cultures, but Greece especially, considered women to be creatures of the house and not a lot more.)

In Greece and Rome, the little men divided between slaves and slave-holders. Anyone who inherited land could and did gather slaves. More importantly, the entire machinery of the state would make sure your slaves couldn't and wouldn't run away from you. This model held for 400 or 500 years in Rome, until the workers in the cities (non-citizens and non-slaves at the same time) became a large class of little men with little meaning in their lives.

Rome tried to adapt, of course, and grudgingly gave these people citizenship, but they were never given much more meaning than that. The food and entertainment thrown at them didn't satisfy their meaning deficit and so it wasn't an enduring solution. Soon enough Rome disintegrated, as the old men decried the loss of Roman virtues.

Virtues tend to evaporate from lives with no legitimate meaning.

## **Western Civilization**

Our Western civilization was forged from Judeo-Christian principles and Northern European purposefulness. The "barbarians" who inherited Western Rome were willful people who first sought to get in on Rome's game and then took over as opportunities arose.

In our Western civilization, any and every little man had a very clear pathway to meaning: By becoming a good Christian. And in the days of our civilization's strength, even the most confirmed little man found meaning in precisely that way. This situation worked very well, providing non-dominant people with multiple paths to meaning and legitimate respect.

## Welfare States

The ruling model of our era, even as it varies from place to place, is the welfare state. This model is doomed to failure for economic and demographic reasons, but more importantly because it fails to provide meaning to anyone but rulers and a few elites.

As regards little people, the welfare state proclaims its love and care for them, while simultaneously depriving them of meaning. Modern man, in fact, has been taught that meaning is a fraud.

The intellectual overlords of our time have majored in deconstructing anything thought to hold meaning, while sucking ever-higher percentages of young people into their doctrines. (Also indebting them for life.) As a result, vast numbers of people in the West see little more than food, sex and entertainment as the good life.

As in Rome, masses of people with no hold on meaning will be a problem, no matter how much food and entertainment are thrown at them. The most meaning the modern little person gets is via social media, where they can get some clicks and latch on to the politician or 'celebrity' de jour... while training the computer systems of the elite to control them better and better.

On top of that, fatherhood and motherhood – forms of meaning available to everyone – have been deconstructed. It is now standard for comedies to feature a bumbling, oafish father. Seldom is a noble man to be seen in any modern entertainment, save as a bloody fighter or a comic book hero. Motherhood is similarly scorned as low class. It has become a thing young women must excuse and defend themselves for pursuing.

This, then, is a setup for something else to come through and sweep people away. And unless the welfare state elites can lock people into their system – controlling more or less every public voice everywhere – this model will fail.

## Our Opportunity

The quote at the top of our web site is "It is in our power to begin the world over again," which was written by Thomas Paine at the height of the American revolution in 1776. And the fact that the modern welfare state has deprived nearly everyone of meaning gives us a serious advantage in that new beginning... an advantage I think we should recognize.

Now, before I get into utilizing our advantage, it's supremely important to be clear on one point:

We're not doing this to champion a cause, to be right, to justify ourselves or even to save the world; we pay attention to these things because we love our neighbors. We want to sow goodness into them and into the world.

We must remember that *we don't know what's best for anyone we find ourselves talking to.* (We have difficulty figuring out what's best for ourselves!) But we do know that people need meaning. Furthermore we know things that give legitimate meaning and are pleased to pass them along. Our job is to bless the world, and seeing gaps like the lack of meaning for "little people" is merely a recognition of where help is sorely needed.

Nothing we do is going to be perfect – as I've said many times, we don't even know what

“perfect” would look like – but we do know that we can bring benefit to other humans. And so our job is to do precisely that, and let them integrate everything into their own lives, or not. We have no *ism* to sell.

Okay, trusting that I’ve made that clear, let’s continue:

The meaning gap we’ve been discussing is filled in two primary ways:

1. The little people must find paths to meaning in their lives, right where they are, and without having to take heroic leaps.
2. They must also be informed that seeing themselves as little was an error... that they are much more than that, and that the people who made use of their little person image were the worst forms of criminals.

Let’s start with finding meaning right where they are, and list the clearest opportunities:

- Families. Every healthy human (and all the more so now, with fertility medicine) is able to become a parent, and the vast majority of them are inclined that way. Parenthood, as anyone who has jumped into it knows, is both terribly difficult and terribly rewarding, which is a perfect setup for meaning. Even the confirmed little person can find meaning and long-term pride/satisfaction in having raised children. No one should be pressured into this, of course, but people shouldn’t be chased away from it either. By championing parenthood, we keep a primary doorway to meaning open, as well as differentiating ourselves from the top-down, homogeneous culture that is presently engulfing the West.
- Pluralism. By this I mean *chosen* micro-societies like neighborhood clubs, choral groups, local sports teams and events, film nights, and so on. Meaning forms itself in such groups, separated from the authorized and the large. Anything that is small enough for self-organization (people pitching in) becomes a parallel channel for meaning. And it’s interesting to see that just such things pop up where a mainline culture isn’t overwhelming. Here’s what Alexis de Tocqueville wrote of 1830s America:

Americans of all ages, all stations of life, and all types of disposition are forever forming associations.

Older American cities used to be (and still are to some extent) built of neighborhoods, each of those neighborhoods having an independent and distinct character. Whatever difficulties are sometimes associated with this (the Irish versus the Italians and so on), each neighborhood provided opportunities for people to find meaning. People were known in each neighborhood as being “our” grocer, repairman, and the like. And because they were “ours,” there was a great deal of meaning attached.

In my opinion, setting up new and small associations of a hundred types would be an excellent idea. Such clubs provide little slices of a humane existence separate from the top-down culture.

One other thing is worth pointing out here: A large percentage of people, once they have experienced being the “big one” in one group or another, will come to understand how pointless and wasteful the big man position really is. That understanding is a major milestone, and the more people who can pass it, the better.

- Home schooling and independent learning. As we've covered other times, the monolithic culture of our time rests very substantially on government school systems, which are to a very serious extent indoctrination centers. There are opportunities here for thousands or millions of people to add meaning to their lives. And little people have been almost forced into this recently.
- Grasping responsibility. We covered this in PS #14, and it remains a crucial issue. Meaning must be real... it must be earned. And responsibility is a primary route to meaning. Many people of the present era fear responsibility because they are unclear on what may be a blamable offense, but by grasping responsibility we also grasp credit for handling it well; and that is deeply meaningful. We should encourage this.
- Decentralization. I like to say that Bitcoin is a gateway drug. Many people have come to it because of its massive increase in value, but after some time they realize its true value: That it is a decentralization of both money and trust, and an example of decentralization as a valid concept, working in the real world. Once people see that, the horizons of their minds expand.

Decentralization and *ad hoc* organization are traditional human models – more or less all healthy families operate this way – but we haven't believed they were scalable beyond that point. Seeing that they are yields a significant measure of meaning. Bringing a confirmed 'little person' to a Bitcoin Meetup can make a significant difference to them.

- Non-corporate business. Corporations remove will (the active will of individuals) from people we actually interact with, siphoning it off to a headquarters far away. There are a few exceptions, of course (and there could be many more), but it is the willful and beneficial interaction between individuals that generates meaning. The mega-corporate model tends to leach that away from us. The more we can move back to dealing with willful individuals and away from remotely decreed choices, the more meaning will be built in people's lives.
- Walking away from politics and social media. For reasons we've covered many times, politics is a wrench thrown into our internal gears and Facebook is a chute leading to Matrix pods.
- Self-driven charity. Freedom-seeking people of our time have been less than exemplary in delivering help to the suffering, and the cause is obvious: The welfare state has perennially robbed us in the name of compassion, polluting our view of charity. And so, while our hesitance is understandable, we need to get over it.

(Another problem is that the welfare state has stripped us of more or less all surplus. We'll have to work past that too.)

We have to get back to charity, but on a personal level, not through giant organizations. And that requires local coordination, through either networks of friends, local groups like Bitcoin meetups or the Parallel Polis movements of Eastern Europe.

Remember, please, how crucial this was in the cultural changeover from Rome to Christian Europe. It was a primary factor – maybe *the* primary factor – in the transfer of allegiance. Here's the emperor Julian complaining about it:

Atheism [Christianity] has been specially advanced through the loving service rendered to strangers, and through their care for the burial of the dead. It is a scandal that there is not a single Jew who is a beggar, and that the godless Galileans [Christians] care not only for their own poor but for ours as well; while those who belong to us look in vain for the help that we should render them.

- Religion. Religions can be a bit difficult in that they improve their tenets very slowly, which creates problems for those of us who like to be precise. This is less so for religions that see scriptures as less literal and more figurative, but it can still be an issue. A darker problem is that religions are often attacked, and very often maliciously; so much so that believers tend to hide their beliefs. This is something that we can help with, by standing up for those who are assaulted in this way. They have every right to their beliefs, and to speak them without fear.

Religions, especially of the Judeo-Christian variety, have played a crucial role in Western history, and it would be useful to have them back (hopefully a bit updated). Firstly, they provide a separate point of reference for interpreting events, which is essential. Without this, everything in the swamp is viewed only from within. Secondly, religion focuses on building good people, not merely filling bellies. One way or another, we need these two things very badly; and religions have long traditions of providing them.

To these items we could add others, such as art that focuses on meaning and attaining it. From music to sculpture, there are white fields ready to harvest, and those of us with such abilities should consider stepping in.

What we want, in the end, is a new culture that provides actual meaning... earned meaning... to all who wish to join it.

## **Breaking The Image of Domination**

Humanity has been operating in a hybrid way, partly as primates and partly as higher beings. We're generally moving away from primate ways, but some of those influences keep pulling us back in. That has been an irritation to those of us striving for liberty and growth, but it's strongly intimidating to people struggling with little man feelings. And so, for our own sakes and theirs we need to crash the assumptions of dominance, and perhaps to make a show of doing so.

This most critical old limit to burn through is the assumption that dominants and their ways are eternal. Once that's broken through well enough and often enough, the rest should be only a matter of time. And to be clear:

The actions of the dominants (slapping in the case of apes or political prosecutions in our times) are not nearly as important as the assumptions people hold about them: that they'll always be there and that we must arrange our lives around that eternal condition.

One primary way to do this is to teach moral clarity. Please see FMP #79 for a proper explanation, but the "golden rule" morality that arises from our very structure is not only superior to the ways of the dominants (like the laws of the nations), but is a fundamentally different model.

Moral clarity never has been generated by the edicts of the powerful, and never will be. That model will always generate confusion because it is antithetic to our structure. The position of the dominator simply cannot fit into the morality that is intrinsic to us. This is why long, convoluted and complex justifications are necessary for courses in ethics.



Once we remove the position of the dominator, morality clears up.

And moral clarity, once we begin to feel it, cleanses us and improves us. I can't prove this or even describe it completely, but however much people attain moral clarity, that's how much the image of the eternal dominator will drain out of them.

Another useful image-destruction regards war. Here again some of us hesitate for historical reasons, specifically because the anti-war activists of our youths were aggressive socialists. But again, we need to get over it. The socialists were simply liars, themselves supporting plenty of military aggression. We have to stop treating them as serious people, even in our recollections.

Wars are primate-driven events. "Chimpanzees," as a respected evolutionary scientist noted, "live in a permanent state of latent war." And as he went on to say, this proclivity transferred over to human dominators:

Alliances of chiefdoms gradually turned into states that were in a semi-permanent state of war with each other.

Regardless of the fact that defensive violence may sometimes be necessary, war remains a dominator-driven enterprise, and the fact that wars have been endless under the reign of dominators condemns them in no uncertain terms.

Furthermore we can see that the peer-to-peer human model tends to negate war. Perhaps no better example of this is to be found than the Christmas Truce of 1914. (Alas, we lack space to give it its due in this issue.)

There's a lot more to say here, but we've at least gone through some of the key points. One last and crucial point is this:

We need to believe deeply – to assume – that we play the central role in our own destiny. We must maintain, in any number of ways, that we happen to the world, rather than the world happening to us.

Attitudes and expectations tend to be contagious. By embodying this attitude, and by expecting others to embody it, we spread it through the world.

We are primaries rather than derivatives. We have as much right to act in the world as anyone else. That doesn't mean that our actions will initially be any better than those of others, but if we care about the rightness of our actions and work to improve them, we'll soon be far better than those who don't particularly care about their rightness, only about their position.

The primate characteristics of our status quo system have been enforced upon us all. (It couldn't survive otherwise.) And none have suffered more from this than those who see themselves as "little people." We need to see that and to do something about it.

For the sake of the future, we need to move past the present, repressed age.

We must learn to be, without apology.

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See you next month.

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