The twentieth century has provided an important model of unsuccessful civilizations—the socialist societies. These societies claimed to offer an alternative to historically successful societies—a better alternative. Socialist societies were built on an overwhelming stress on state power and the negation of individual choices. Alongside the system of coercion, the socialist societies claimed to have substituted moral goals for material rewards. People would produce for moral goals what they would not have for material rewards. Of course, reality showed that this is impossible. Moral incentives do not produce material products superior to those produced for material goals.

Return to Liberty, Restoration of Morality

The so-called moral goals were not moral at all. How could they be, if they were based on coercion? Beyond that, if they were based on what is contrary to all we know about human nature. Thus, socialists have always claimed that they are able to transcend human nature to something superior in morality—the New Man, or the New Socialist Man. Yet they have not been any more successful than other utopias. We will not be able to achieve a return to liberty, to a market society, without a restoration of morality. But a special infusion of morality to achieve liberty will be temporary if it is not successful in restoring the market, or liberty.

The complexity of human nature reveals itself in the relationship of morality and liberty. We would prefer to live in an idealized world—a utopia—in which each person is moral solely because that is the right behavior. Sad as it might be, that is not the reality that God has given to us. Humans are not motivated by pure spiritual purposes. Humans are not moral simply because that is the correct behavior. We have seen civilizations continue to decline when no effort was made to reverse the wrong paths that people had chosen. The legacy of the Salamanca schoolmen and their understanding of the link between liberty and morality provide a ready guide to help us avoid the same fate.

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