

### Part XIV

**Skeptic:** Frankly, there is something about your “perfect” world that is disturbing to me. Your premise is that if we all subordinate our subjective goals to serve the Divine purpose in creation, we shall have a messianic utopia on our hands. But if mass servitude is the only way to achieve perfection, maybe it isn't worth the price. I, for one, would not surrender my freedom for the sake of perfection.

**Believer:** I don't think that we are talking about the same Moshiach. You're envisioning this Orwellian dictator with an army of thought police to enforce his ultra-orthodox brand of morality. But as I said earlier in our discussion, the era of Moshiach is a time in which everyone recognizes the true purpose of his existence and chooses to devote himself to its realization. When we speak of Moshiach as a king and humanity as his subjects, we are referring to higher sort of “subjugation” than is implied by the common usage of the word. This is not “subjugation” in the terms of an imperfect today, in which the individual is forced to yield before a higher authority, but subjugation in the ultimate sense of the word: when a person acknowledges the limits of his currently defined self and chooses to surrender them to the vision of a greater truth.

**Skeptic:** I still object to the very notion of “subjugation”, whether it is achieved by coercion, brainwashing, or the persuasive force of a charismatic leader with a vision of a “greater truth.” The suppression of the freedom of the human spirit is always a negative thing, even if it is for the sake of some higher ideal.

**Believer:** First of all, a little bit of humility never hurt anyone. A wise man knows his limits as well as his strengths, knows when to exercise his “freedom of spirit” and when to submit to that which is greater than himself. Do you know how the great Talmudic sage, Rabbi Akiva, survived a shipwreck? “To each wave that approached me,” he later told, “I bent my head.”

**Skeptic:** Well, I don't accept that way of thinking---at least not as a basis upon which to conduct my life. Fight those waves, I say, fight them, even if they threaten to drown you...

**Believer:** So as far as you're concerned, our world, as it is today, is just fine. We enjoy the freedom to do practically whatever we choose...

**Skeptic:** You and I are fortunate enough to enjoy such freedom, but remember that despite the encouraging developments of the last few years, religious and racial prejudices are still the cause of much suffering across the globe. Furthermore, also in the so-called “free world” there is much injustice. Even as we extol the principles of equality and pluralism, we discriminate, in many subtle as well as in more overt ways, against those whose lifestyle or skin color is distasteful to us. I am certainly not satisfied with the present state of society. I, too, dream of a better world. But my vision of the ideal is not a world that is governed by theocratic absolutes. I would like to see a world community that tolerates differing and even contradictory definitions of the truth, allowing each individual or group to find fulfillment and self-realization in the manner that they themselves define it.

**Believer:** What about the individual who “defines self-fulfillment” as the pleasure of sexually molesting small children? Or the cult whose “alternate lifestyle” includes inducing its members to mass suicide? Do they, too, have a place in your pluralistic ideal?

**Skeptic:** Unlike you, I do not claim that my ideal is perfect. It has many flaws and inconsistencies, both in theory and in practice. Obviously, there is a need for certain curbs on individual freedoms, lest society disintegrate to total anarchy.

**Believer:** “Certain curbs” you say. But how many?

**Skeptic:** The bare minimum. I won't deny it---ultimately, freedom has a price. If you respect the validity of differing views on how to define good and evil, certain injustices and abuses (rather, I should

say, certain things which I define as injustices and abuses) will occur. But I still prefer this to your "perfect" world, which I would find oppressive and quite boring.

**Believer:** You speak of the "price that you are willing to pay" as if it is you who is paying the price. Here you are, basking in the comfort of a society which enjoys a standard of living that is among the highest on earth, zealously upholding the unalienable right of man to act as a selfish animal. If a person chooses to find "self-fulfillment" by surrendering to his basest instincts, it is his sacred privilege to do so. If the greed of men and nations causes hunger and destitution to untold millions, it is but a small price to pay in order to make the world more interesting...

**Skeptic:** As I already said, in my view there are no absolutes, including the freedom of self determination. If self-interest results in grain rotting in the fields while people die of starvation, than obviously something is very wrong. For pluralism to work, humanity must reach a consensus in which a certain balance is struck between individual freedoms and social responsibility. Obviously, we still have a long way to go before we reach this ideal. But in my view, this is the type of world we ought to strive for, not one of totalitarian goodness and one-dimensional perfection.