Aphorisms

Economical Cogitations

by Daniel B. Klein

S
ome folks are dissatisfied with free enterprise if it doesn't work perfectly, and satisfied with government if it works at all.

Bribery must stop, you say? Tell it to Schindler.

A
ffirmative action: Countering prejudice by providing a sound reason for it.

W
def the circus of politics is finished, the groundskeeper sweeps the litter into a pile and calls it "the law."

T
he Political Dialectic of Twentieth-Century America: The Conservative believes the government should run education, place a check on vice, fine-tune the economy, promote democracy abroad, and be led by a man in pin stripes. His opponent the Liberal believes the government should run education, place a check on vice, fine-tune the economy, promote democracy abroad, and be led by a man in plaid.

W
hen the anti-capitalist holds profit-hungry business in contempt, he conveniently neglects the fact that business is the paid servant of customers and the served payer of employees.

T
he democratic faith comes in two varieties, the naïve and the sophisticated. The naïve democrat believes that if everyone would just be nice and participate, as in a town meeting, we can make it all work out. The sophisticated democrat recognizes the tender-minded folly of this view and is ready to face the tough truth: we must enlist qualified experts to make it all work out.

T
he dirigiste intellectual takes experience with scribblings about a subject for experience with the subject itself.

I
s it the will to control that gives birth to the pretense of knowing, or is it the will to know that gives birth to the impulse to control?

W
isdom in economics: refined knowledge of the unknowableness of the economy.

T
he dispute between two economists over whether or not the labor market is competitive is usually a dispute over the meaning of competition, just as the dispute between two lovers over whether or not he loves her is usually a dispute over the meaning of love.

S
ome economists are a riddle. On an issue-by-issue basis they are libertarians seven times out of ten, but when you put it all together you get a Clinton supporter. The answer to this riddle is in conjugal consideration.

L
 liberty is like licorice: some people hate it and some people love it.

T
he value of safeguarding a man's right to life against unjust force divided by the value of his life itself equals, on average, three hundred thousand.

T
o work its wonders the principle of individual liberty need not be mythologized, but only upheld. But to be upheld it must be mythologized.

T
he battle is not one between power and justice, nor between unjust power and just power. The battle is between unjust power and less just power.

C
lever leftists miss the point when they contend that individual liberty is "mere" mythology. The point is that it is mythology worth consecrating.

T
he government's war on smoking is getting so outrageous, it is turning smokers into libertarians and libertarians into smokers.

G
ood taste favors laissez faire even for personal activities that show bad taste.

L
aws that prevent the choosing of sin also prevent the choosing of virtue.

I
f we hold groups rather than individuals accountable, we all end up criminals.

M
ay the socialist enter private industry, and the libertarian, government.

Liberty 49