

## Will Durant (1885 – 1981) and me

Honored, along with Ariel Durant, with the Medal of Freedom, by President Ford in 1977.

Will Durant was a historian of philosophy and civilization, and the author of what to me is the greatest compendium of sustained wisdom I have ever chanced across. He was also an avowed socialist, a communist I would say, though with an escape avenue about ten miles wide. Here is what he says in his dual (with wife Ariel) autobiography when he was eighty-five years old – “I am still a socialist, but with some cautions. I do not relish the control of economic lives by vast corporations [neither do I]. To keep the benefits and check the power of these mastodons I would favor public ownership of natural resources, including the land and all its minerals, fuels, and other subsoil wealth; also of transportation, banking, insurance, and medical and hospital care. [What I mean when I say communist. How that would ‘keep the benefits’ he doesn’t get into. But I would not wish to check the power of those ‘mastodons’ through public ownership of natural resources. I know, and he did too, that public ownership is still human ownership, and very, very few humans could be trusted with such ownership without themselves moving to exert even more control over economic lives than do such vast corporations. See below.]. . . [The escape route] I know that we must appeal to the acquisitive instincts if we are to get men and women to toil, invent, save, and invest. . . . The desire to eliminate struggle and competition – success and failure – from our economic life is an un-Darwinian dream. . . . [Sound like any political leftist today?]”

He continues, “Since government can be despotic – can be more terrible a monster than any corporation – I would insist on a real and active democracy as so necessary to a tolerable socialism that if I cannot have both of these I would make my peace with such a regulated capitalism-plus-welfare-state as we have in the United States today, . . . ” [The problem is that any ‘real and active democracy’ must have an aware and educated-in-depth citizenry (which would then reject socialism), for it to be anything but the play toy of demagogues. “Progressivism” brings instead a brainwashed-into-simpletons citizenry quite intentionally designed to be the play toys of Democrat demagogues.]

I have always found that socialist avowal to be very curious, as his life history revealed that he had long ago made that peace, and his major work, *The Origins of Civilization*, reveals a wisdom so far beyond any political leftist I have ever heard of that such avowal seems to be an exercise in posturing, though I perfectly understand that there was little of that in him. I don’t know; I just leave it as curious.

Throughout his life he kept his nose to the grindstone, working harder to bring in income and create personal wealth than about any leftist in history. He did not look to government handouts but to his own unremitting efforts to acquire what he could call his own. “I was seventy-two years old before I had the spirit to swear off making money, and even then my virtue was prompted by a hypertension spell.” And *The Origins of Civilization*, eleven long volumes, to the production of which he devoted about half of a long life, is, as noted above, to my mind constant and sustained wisdom which is not only unachievable by a leftist today (or any other day) but which would actually be anathema to almost all of them.

In 1932 he and Ariel undertook to acquaint themselves with Russia by traveling across it from east to west. They found a land of fear, in deep chaos that was anything but the worker’s paradise reported by tools such as Walter Duranty. “So we, who had come to Russia singing hymns to the great experiment, were glad to leave the scene of shattered hopes and broken men. . . . Miserable and happy, we fled from paradise.” “My lectures in the fall of 1932 were predominantly on Russia; they won me large audiences and many enemies.”

So it came to be that the day, about thirty-five years ago, when on a whim I slipped Volume I, *Our Oriental History*, from the library shelf and trundled it on home, became the start of a life-changing intellectual understanding. In the intervening years I have bought my own volumes, have read Volume I twice and Volumes II through XI four times each, and have taken extensive notes and quotations from them all.

Weird eh? An avowed socialist being greatly responsible for growing the mind of an airhead into the realization that wisdom lives almost entirely in conservatism. "Progressivism" – the regressive, rejection of wisdom movement.

Here are some quotes from *Origins*, all but the last from the first hundred pages of the entire work. They display an understanding which I do not believe would be acknowledged as such by a single "progressive" unless they could twist and pervert it out of all semblance to his intent. They also demonstrate, particularly the last two, the gentle wit and dry humor that infuses nearly the entire work. (His humor lapses only one time that I recall, and that is in his rejection, as monstrous, of the Calvinist doctrine of predestination.)

"There must be political order, . . . men must feel, by and large, that they need not look for death or taxes at every turn. There must be some unity of language to serve as a medium of mental exchange. Through church, or family, or school, or otherwise, there must be a unifying moral code, some rules of the game of life acknowledged even by those who violate them, and giving to conduct some order and regularity, some direction and stimulus." [Sound like any "progressive" today?]

"Why did this primitive communism disappear as men rose to what we, with some partiality, call civilization? Sumner believed that communism proved unbiological, a handicap in the struggle for existence; that it gave insufficient stimulus to inventiveness, industry and thrift; and that the failure to reward the more able, and punish the less able, made for a leveling of capacity which was hostile to growth or to successful competition with other groups. Loskiel reported some Indian tribes of the northeast as "so lazy that they plant nothing themselves, but rely entirely upon the expectation that others will not refuse to share their produce with them. Since the industrious thus enjoy no more of the fruits of their labor than the idle, they plant less every year." . . . Communism brought a certain security to all who survived the diseases and accidents due to the poverty and ignorance of primitive society; but it did not lift them out of that poverty." [Is that the understanding of any Socialist/Communist today? Or ever?]

"We must not conclude that morals are worthless because they differ according to time and place, and that it would be wise to show our historic learning by at once discarding the moral customs of our group. A little anthropology is a dangerous thing. . . this does not prove the worthlessness of morals; it only shows in what varied ways social order has been preserved. Social order is none the less necessary; the game must still have rules in order to be played; men must know what to expect of one another in the ordinary circumstances of life. Hence the unanimity with which the members of a society practice its moral code is quite as important as the contents of that code. Our heroic rejection of the customs and morals of our tribe, upon our adolescent discovery of their relativity, betrays the immaturity of our minds; given another decade and we begin to understand that there may be more wisdom in the moral code of the group - the formulated experience of generations of the race - than can be explained in a college course. [Emphasis mine.] Sooner or later the disturbing realization comes to us that even that which we cannot understand may be true. The institutions, conventions, customs and laws that make up the complex structure of a society are the work of a hundred centuries and a billion minds; and one mind must not expect to comprehend them in one lifetime, much less in twenty years. We are warranted in concluding that morals are relative, and indispensable." [Sound like any social parasite of leftist academia today?]

"To transmute greed into thrift, violence into argument, murder into litigation, and suicide into philosophy has been part of the task of civilization. It was a great advance when the strong consented to eat the weak by due process of law."

"If a man needs a religion to conduct himself properly in the world," said Ninon [de Lenclos], "it is a sign that he has either a limited mind or a corrupt heart." She might thence have concluded to the almost universal necessity of religion; instead she slipped into prostitution at the age of fifteen (1635)."

[These quotes actually go with the second Durant quotation above. I put them here so as not to interrupt the sense of his writing style.]

Socialism is a philosophy of failure, the creed of ignorance, and the gospel of envy; its inherent virtue is the equal sharing of misery. Winston Churchill [Churchill was wrong in regard to 'equal sharing'.] To wit:

The Russian proletarians who were to have been made rich, fat and happy by the triumph of the Marxian gospel are still eating herring and black bread and getting \$7 cash a month, but their saviors are riding about in imported cars, sleeping with perfumed women and living in steam-heated flats. If it be true, as the American Communists allege, that 10% of the American people own 90% of the national wealth, then it is equally true that 5% of the Russians eat 95% of the caviar and drink 100% of the champagne. H. L. Mencken

[A good part of the reason that so many of The Great Brainwashed have collapsed into sweaty, lustful embrace of socialism is that they all think they will be part of the 5%. They are not interested in equally sharing your misery; they are interested in directing and enforcing it.]