

Josiah Warren and the Sovereignty of the Individual*

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In a Notebook "D" entry dated January 29, 1840, Josiah Warren gave the plan for his "New Social Arrangements" which would emphasize human freedom. Writing in New Harmony, Indiana, he claimed that his plan was intended to restore the natural liberty of mankind gradually—to render to labor its just reward—and to establish security, peace, and the means of enjoyment to all.¹ His ideal society was to be conducted with a watchful and strict regard to the laws of human nature, particularly its individualities. Warren insisted that these laws teach us that our own happiness depends upon a proper respect for the happiness of others and that therefore we should not make social arrangements which require compulsion or the violation of the natural freedom of any individual.

Further, Warren argued, there must be no arrangements which depend for their success upon agreement on verbal rules or processes for agreements of opinions, tastes or interests. There should be, instead, preservation of the liberty of each person to differ in these and all other respects.

Man should have the liberty to change with his situation. This liberty cannot be exercised in combinations, masses and organized associations which have connected interests and responsibilities. Therefore, persons ought not to form them, but to preserve individual interests, individual responsibility, and individual "executive" (the liberty to make decisions concerning the conduct of one's life). The sovereignty of every individual over his or her person, time and property must be preserved.²

These laws of nature, Warren believed, required individuals to give an equivalent in labor, and in nothing but labor, for labor received. This principle of labor for labor rendered all natural wealth common to all. It rejected all speculation and consequently forbade the buying up of land, provisions, building materials, goods, etc. for the purpose of selling them again at a profit beyond a reward for the labor bestowed.³ Labor for labor rejected interest on money and, consequently, all banks and banking opera-

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tions together with all stock-jobbing and the whole of the present systems of finance and institutions built on money. In turn, it would give to everyone an equal opportunity to acquire knowledge and property and would counteract the natural inequality of mankind. It would give women and children the just reward for their labor.⁴

Labor for labor made it impossible for one portion of the human race to live upon the labor of others without their knowledge and consent, Warren claimed.⁵ The great mistake of all society is the compromise or surrender of the sovereignty of the individual. This must not be. Society must be remodelled without this surrender. The sovereignty of each individual over his own person and property in all cases was the great idea that must work out the problem of happiness.⁶ This was the keystone of Warren's thought.

Conversely, the greatest kindness that one can do to others is to assist them in their happiness, to assist them in taking any particular course or manner that they may choose. When the pursuit of happiness of one conflicts with the pursuit of happiness of another, the conflict may be resolved by a spirit of accommodation which can be exercised until the circumstances which compel the two to clash can be removed or abolished. Warren said that the reduction of conflict is the purpose for which he had created his new social arrangements.⁷

Warren described the organization of society as artificial, invented by man as he would invent a machine. It must necessarily contain a number of elements for the accomplishment of certain purposes just as a machine has elements to accomplish its purposes. However, for humans to succeed in either inventing an organization of society or a machine, they must understand the principles involved and they must be able to trace any defect to its proper cause, "not alter a wheel when it is a lever that is in fault . . . but look into the causes, trace the connections of one thing with another till we come to the fault and there is the point to apply the remedy."⁸

Some parts of society may be allowed to be slightly imperfect without materially affecting the general result, but there are some imperfections that the laws of nature will not allow. As Warren said:

For instance, the wheels of a clock must all be present, the proper number must be there, and they must not vary much from their specified size—a little imperfection may be allowed in the cogs, but very little, or the clock will not go—each wheel might perhaps vary a little from the precise mathematical circle and yet the clock might go, but there are other imperfections which the laws of Nature will not permit—they will not permit the absence of the pendulum, with this imperfection the machine will not go—it would be no clock.⁹

The addition of ten thousand wheels would not take the place of the pendulum. These wheels would be analogous to the multiplicity of laws in our social state which only serve to complicate, to clog the machine. We must have the pendulum, and the pendulum must be in proportion to the other

parts or "although the machine would go, it would not be a clock."¹⁰ It would not measure time accurately, and although "a little variation in its length from the true proportion would be a surrender of 'only a portion' of right, yet at the end of the year the machine for all the purposes intended would be no clock."¹¹

Using the clock analogy, Warren argued that society is the clock; individual liberty is the pendulum. Individuals must not surrender any portion of their liberty permanently. They may surrender a portion of liberty temporarily for a present moment, often with advantage, but if any surrender of individual liberty is made into a principle to be carried into the unknown circumstances of the future, to be applied and put to use by others, individual liberty then becomes as the shortened pendulum, out of proportion, and the longer it runs in this condition, the more it deviates from the right and true state of things.

Society will never attain its goals until it sees the importance of the preservation of individual liberty. Social arrangements may seem in some respects imperfect, like the cogs in the clock; sidewalks may be so narrow that, when two persons happen to meet, it becomes necessary for each person to deviate from the path so that there will be no clash, as much for his own convenience as for that of the other, but this bowing to convenience is no surrender of individual sovereignty, no violation of the individual's freedom of choice. If this were a surrendering rather than a cooperative effort, it would be better to make the sidewalks wider than to admit that when a man enters into society he surrenders a portion of individual liberty.¹²

Individual liberty includes the right of definition, according to Warren. Each person has the right of defining individual liberty insofar as it pertains to his or her time and labor. Warren admitted that the question has been raised that if each person sets his own limits, or no limits, to his liberty, then there will be no deterrent to the individual's encroachments upon others. Warren believed, however, that the answer to this lay in the proposition: Each and every individual has the right of definition. This fact forbids encroachment.

If A encroaches upon B, B's right is violated. How is this circumstance to be treated? The action to be taken is for B to decide, because he has the right to sovereignty over his person and his interests, and it would be an interference in that sovereignty to tell him how he should proceed. Different people would act very differently under the same circumstances, and they would have a perfect right to do so. If the personal rights of liberty for person and property were habitually respected from infancy, humans would all be too much the creatures of habit, of public opinion, and of example, to encroach upon the rights of others wantonly. Given this historical circumstance, no encroachments would be made. "The fears on this point are derived from the notion of natural depravity,"¹³ Warren said.

Since no one can give a definition of natural liberty that would be ap-

proved by everyone, and any attempt at a universal definition would be an encroachment on others' liberty, the only satisfactory solution is the affirmation that each person should define natural liberty for himself. Thus Warren concludes that "individual natural liberty includes the right of its own definition."¹⁴ If the exercise of this right was impractical in the society of Warren's day, what was the problem? Connected interests and connected responsibilities were wrong, and it is here that the remedies should be applied, but not by multiplying laws or inventing new violations of natural right. Such multiplication and inventions will never make the machine succeed. Citizens of American society must let what is right alone and remedy the wrong "or we shall never get a clock."¹⁵ Warren concludes his argument in this fashion:

Suppose the remedy completed—suppose all connections of interest, all connected responsibilities dissolved—suppose each Individual is no wise connected with any other excepting in voluntary and friendly social intercourse—suppose each one absolutely sovereign of himself or herself, time, property interests to such an extent that no power on earth could say to him *thou shalt* and suppose each one's interests and responsibilities so completely separated from all others, that A may do just as he pleases without involving the person, property, or responsibilities of any other one. What objection would there be to A's defining liberty for himself?¹⁶

The business of reform is plain for Warren. If humans can attain individual interests and individual responsibilities, then they shall have attained the goal of the sovereignty of each individual. In order to do this, they must make no arrangements which either directly or indirectly produce connected interests, or property, connected responsibilities or connected executive power. These interests, property, responsibilities, and powers must all be individual. Every individual should hold his or her property separate and distinct and unconnected with that of any other. He should have his separate and distinct responsibilities, unconnected with those responsibilities of any other. Each and every individual should be his or her own executive, unconnected with the executive power of any other.¹⁷

The first prerequisite to carrying out this reform, Warren believed, was to establish definitely what the proper and legitimate interests, responsibilities and executive powers were. What are the rights of the individual? These rights were already stated in the American Declaration of Independence, but the language used was subject to different interpretations by different people and cannot act as a guide to definite social arrangements. It also did not seem to be possible to Warren to combine any sets of words which would not be subjected to the same objection. The individuality of human nature, and the right of everyone to use his individuality, compels individuals to communicate with one another. Having proposed an idea and communicated it to others, the individual must let these others exercise their

free choice and make their own decisions about it. "Each may differ from each." Consequently, Warren insisted that society must not lay down any forms of words whatsoever with the idea of enforcing conformity of opinion. "This is the great fundamental error of all organizations of society."¹⁸

The most important error current in contemporary society, according to Warren, was that "when we enter into society, we surrender a portion of our natural liberty."¹⁹

This is one of the visionary dogmas of Blackstone, a man who wrote in order to reconcile mankind to a monarchical government, who held office under a monarchy, who was paid by a monarchy and who was paid according to what he wrote. There is a subtle sophistry in that dogma which, when it is once admitted, serves as the excuse for the most monstrous violations of the rights of persons and property that the most insatiable tyrants can desire.²⁰

Warren continued his attack on this English interpretation of natural rights theory by posing a not-so-theoretical situation. If a ruler wishes to take the whole property of his subjects and have a conscription to carry on wars of plunder and destruction, he can tell his subjects that, when they enter into society, they surrender a portion of their natural liberty or freedom of choice. Or, in the same manner, if a member of a little neighborhood meeting has the ambition to govern, he can do so by using the same excuse, and his small tyranny will be allowed. Warren challenges this "for the sake of the human race, for the establishment of human rights."²¹

Neither should Americans be deceived by the nineteenth-century emphasis upon equality, according to Warren. Humans must not surrender even a portion of their natural liberty in response to the word equality. This word, "which has so often been a watchword or rallying cry in revolutions that have shaken the world, and that have ended in disappointment and disgust,"²² would have been a valuable and harmless word if each individual had been allowed to interpret or define it for himself. However, equality as interpreted by a vote of the majority or by any power who defines it in regard to an individual's property or happiness, against his own views, "is an act of madness."²³

Warren illustrated the problems inherent in the concept of equality by a reference to his experience in Robert Owen's egalitarian community:

*In the experiments of communities of common property attempted in New Harmony the word assumed a very important position. It was one of the cornerstones of the whole superstructure, but it was a different thing with almost every different person. One applied so as to prescribe the same amount of value to each member for clothing and food leaving him free to choose the kind according [to] taste etc. while another insisted that the word fairly prescribed the same kind, color and make of clothing and insisted on uniformity of dress as one of the most necessary external signs of that equality of condition desirable among men.*²⁴

Nor was that the limit of interpretation. There were others at New Harmony who insisted that all should eat the same kind of food. Equality of labor meant for some that all should take equal turns in each of the different forms of labor, especially the most disagreeable. Others said that equality of labor simply meant equal amounts of time "employed in the service of the connected interest."²⁵ All of these plus many other interpretations of the word were the subjects of contention which destroyed "those social sympathies which was the object of the experiment to establish."²⁶

Warren believed these interpretations equated equality with conformity, and, at New Harmony, "it seemed that difference of opinion, views, tastes and purposes *increased* just in proportion to the demands of conformity."²⁷ There was no way to combat this. Even with the best intentions in the world, those who advocated any type of communism with connected property, interests, and responsibilities were doomed to failure because of the individuality of the persons involved in such an experiment. At New Harmony, Robert Owen had assembled "eight hundred people, mostly selected for their superior intelligence and moral excellence,"²⁸ with the idea of solving the problems of society through a communistic community. Despite the selective group, or perhaps because of it, Warren found the New Harmony experience a failure in achieving social harmony.

We had assured ourselves of our unanimous devotedness to the cause and expected unanimity of thought and action: but instead of this we met diversity of opinions, expedients and counteraction entirely beyond any thing we had just left behind us in common society: and the more we desired and called for "union" the more this diversity seemed to be developed; and instead of that harmonious co-operative we had expected, we found more antagonisms than we had been accustomed to in common life. . . . We differed, we contended and ran ourselves into confusion: our legislative proceedings were just like all others, excepting that we did not come to blows or pistols; because Mr. Owen had shown us that all our thoughts, feelings and actions were the *inevitable effects* of the *causes* that produce them; and that it would be just as rational to punish the fruit of a tree for being what it is, as to punish each other for being what we are: that our true issue is not with each other, but with causes.²⁹

There was no conformity among the opinions of individuals, and even great hopes and aspirations for success could not bring conformity, despite rules, regulations, constitutions and other legislative measures brought to bear upon the New Harmony community. It had been demonstrated to Warren's satisfaction that the individuality of each person did not create and could not create any more than a voluntary cooperation. If each surrendered any portion of his individual right to differ, or allowed his sovereign rights to be infringed upon, it must be his decision and his alone.

Warren then concluded that traditional society "had all the time been right in its individual ownership of property and its *individual* responsi-

bilities.”³⁰ The wrongs in all societies are created because “all societies from a nation to the smallest partnership are more or less communistic.” Any connection of interests and responsibilities and property must be the basis for conflict and discord. “Even two children owning a jackknife together are liable to continual dissatisfaction and disturbance till somebody owns it *individually*.” Warren then asked if disintegration was the answer. Could individuality be the watchword in progress instead of union? “If the enjoyments derived from society are its true bond, what do we want of any other bond?” Why do individuals need restrictions put upon manners or dress or the conduct of their lives? The only true bond of society was that of labor.³¹ Having arrived at that point, Warren analyzed the situation existent among workers:

The greatest advantages derived from civilization—all that distinguish it from primitive or savage life are derived from labor—but they have never been enjoyed by those who perform the labor. The workers are the foundation, soul and substance of civilization but they can scarcely be expected to feel much devotion to that which takes all from them and gives them little or nothing in return.³²

Therefore, Warren reasoned that if society returned individuality to labor, it would return natural liberty to men. Individual sovereignty would be the redeeming principle of the world. This principle begins with the right of the individual to construe words in any manner he wishes when these are applied to his or her person or property or responsibilities.³³ When this happens, words which have been sources of discord, confusion and bloodshed would suddenly become harmless and men could discuss word meanings “disinterestedly and consequently with moderation.”³⁴ Warren listed words evoking passion which would be rendered neutral:

Among these words are Liberty, Morality, Religion, Vice, Virtue, prudence, patriotism, public good, Utility, industry, high station, low station, philosophy, Intelligence etc., all creeds, verbal rules, laws, dogmas, controversial arguments and all other verbal processes.³⁵

The second consideration in reforming societies must be the realization of the differences in people. Individual sovereignty is a right because we have no power to make ourselves like other persons. Warren believed that “the sights, sounds, tastes, and smells, together with the external and internal feelings which each has experienced, constitute the world.”³⁶ These were collected differently and combined differently in each individual. Therefore, each individual was a world by himself or herself and should, “like the different planets of the universe, have his and her sphere to move in sufficiently distinct from others as to be able to pass through life without coming in collision—with each other.”³⁷ Individuals may approach each other in society as each chooses to do so, but they must maintain the liberty to be different.

The third principle to be appreciated, according to Warren, was freedom of choice and voluntary subordination in cooperative enterprises. Natural liberty creates freedom of choice, and by freedom of choice Warren meant an "exemption from the control of other persons in distinction from the natural and irresistible control of circumstances."³⁸ Therefore, all social arrangements must allow freedom of choice of every individual and all social subordination should be voluntary. Warren suggests the following example to illustrate his principle:

As for instance in the performance of a piece of music at a private party, each one who takes a part subordinates himself voluntarily to the lead of one person, the necessity of this is so obvious that it controls the choice, but it is not persons that compel this subordination and here is the distinction.³⁹

Warren predated William Graham Sumner in discriminations between voluntary and involuntary cooperation. The distinction between involuntary and voluntary cooperation was that the force of circumstance or necessity, originating out of each decision made by the individual, was the control for voluntary cooperation; whereas, persons or authority dictated involuntary cooperation. As Warren phrased it, "the one is in perfect accord with a natural personal liberty which constitutes the chief element of the happiness of human beings, the other violates it and is the chief cause of the Bedlam-like confusion which pervades all ranks and conditions of mind."⁴⁰

In order for voluntary cooperation to work, Warren saw the necessity of determining the ground rules carefully. Thus, just as with rules and regulations which may be made from time to time, the situation must be clearly stated so that the individual has control over his right to participate. A rule prohibiting the smoking of cigars in a public room would be definite in its application, and "whoever enters does so in accordance with his own free choice, and knows that, as long as he refrains from smoking cigars, he will be at peace."⁴¹ On the other hand, "if it be made a rule that whoever enters there will be required to contribute to general order and decorum, this would be an indefinite rule and he might think himself hereby elected co-superintendent of the movements of everyone in the room."⁴² Another problem with indefinite rules was the absence of specific instructions. If an individual felt he was under someone else's supervision, he would be anything but comfortable and would never be sure that he had met the indefinite requirements. Warren believed that in many cases it was just such vague and indefinite rules that were the causes of confusion and disorder. Subordination to simple rules of society made by free choice would make life easier and cooperation possible.

There was, however, one institution in society which would be radically changed with individual sovereignty.

The blind and brutal subordination obtained through fear of punishment in the army of a despot whose use of it is the extension of his power, is involuntary or coerced subordination and works nothing but degradation to the subordinates, an insane self importance in those who command, and destruction, disorder, confusion and suffering wherever that army is employed.⁴³

With voluntary subordination, every soldier would claim and exercise his free choice in every case in which he was required to act and "should refuse to move in any cause but that of the defense of person and property."⁴⁴ Warren carried this principle to the point where the individual soldier should be expected to be able to act individually in all cases where common sense sets the only practical course. In *True Civilization* he tells a story of a Scottish regiment. Although the soldiers of this regiment were expected to act only upon orders, the regiment stopped at the bank of the Clyde River without any orders to do so, "rather than walk in and be drowned."⁴⁵ Suddenly the fact that self-preservation had precedence over obedience struck both the men and the officers and "a little storm cloud...arose between men and master." This incident illustrated Warren's conviction that the instinct for self-preservation did not wait to consult "precedents nor interpretations of constitutions, the 'right of rebellion' nor authorities of any kind."⁴⁶ Self-preservation is its own authority.

Warren believed that subordination to another should only be the result of a completely voluntary process. It will always be necessary for someone to organize and direct others in a common cause, but such direction should take the form of counseling and should be subject to discussion by all those involved. Nor did Warren believe that this process would spring to existence without preparation. Lectures could be given preparing people for this type of self-government, "taking as texts the details of the destruction of persons and property going on all around us."⁴⁷ Drill should be given with some orders calculated to be disobeyed because of their potential harm. This would give subordinates practice in breaking old habits and accustom them to "look before they leap or strike."⁴⁸ Then military strength might be developed which would be within self-discipline and not under discipline of others. Warren did not intend, however, that an army was to be a permanent fixture. In the new society it would be necessary only in the transitional phase from the present "confusion and wanton violence to true order and mature civilization."⁴⁹

Voluntary subordination and mutual cooperation could bring about any desired ends. For proof, Warren cited evidence from the French Revolution of 1830.

The people of Paris, in the "three glorious days of July," all impelled by one interest, by common suffering and common sympathy rushed into the streets to put down their oppressors, but it was immediately evident

to all that, while each was left to . . . pursue different courses without any particular course being marked distinctly out . . . their power could not be brought to bear to any effect.⁵⁰

Therefore, they put themselves under the direction of the students of the *Politechnique* School. They did this while at the same time stipulating that they would refuse to obey any order with which they might disagree. What was the result? They attained their object "as if by miracle."⁵¹

They exhibited such an example of rigid self-government from all excesses, and such ready cooperation in the measures and movements announced by their leaders, that it must stand as an everlasting monument in refutation of the false and interested doctrine in favor of coercive subordination and in proof of the safety, the harmlessness and righteousness and the infinite superiority of voluntary subordination.⁵²

Warren next considered the question of what would become of the interests of society if there were no rulers or lawmakers. Warren countered by asking such questioners to look at the condition of society and to see if any plan could work more injustice to mankind than the ones under which it presently operated. There was nothing in voluntary subordination that violated natural liberty, and the idea that giving this freedom would upset all order was as groundless as the statement that coercive subordination has benefited mankind.⁵³

Voluntary subordination, according to Warren, was the only technique enabling the individual to find true liberty and freedom to develop his capabilities and to use his time and energies to their fullest potential. Furthermore, the word liberty was the pivot upon which all the institutions of men have often turned and are still turning, but they are turning only to be transformed again and as often as any new interpretation was given to the word. The only guarantee against revolution and violence and the only security for person and property and for the free pursuit of happiness will be found in each individual's interpreting liberty for himself and herself and for his own individual interests. This individuality of interests would also require an individualism of responsibilities and executives, "the executive always incurring the consequences of its own decisions."⁵⁴ Each individual should make his own decisions realizing that he attains his happiness through pleasure and rewards, or gains unhappiness through pain and punishment. This was the principle of Warren's which says that each acts at his own cost.

In Notebook "D" Warren gives several illustrations of his principle of the sovereignty of the individual. In one of these, from *Modern Times* in July 1860, Warren reported a conversation between W. and S. in detail. (Although no names were given, Warren himself must be W.) S. had asked whether the formula that everyone act at his own cost was not impractical. Warren replied that the principle was impractical at that time because of the connected interests of people in society. If conditions were created wherein

the individual was freed from entanglements with others, then the cost principle would mean that "no society revolutions would be needed—all would be right now if everyone *did* act at his own cost, or the formula would prove itself defective."⁵⁵

Warren continued by means of this example: if you and I own a house together and decide to paint it, it would be as much agreement as one could expect from two people having natural differences of opinion. We may expect to find difference in tastes when we come to decide about the color to be used. I cannot have my way without preventing you from having yours. "Here I must have my way at your cost or you at mine."⁵⁶ If I owned the house individually or you owned it, there would be no difficulty. "We may safely connect ourselves or our affairs only so far as we are sure to coincide—this certainly is found only in the sphere of the *absolutely (and universally) true*." We would not disagree that the house needs painting, because it is a fact proven by universal experience that paint preserves wood. But, we must realize that we need also to preserve the conditions in which it is possible to differ in act as well as in taste and opinion, "without crossing, counteracting or disturbing each other."⁵⁷

- S. "Now, we will take for instance the drunkard. He cannot act at his own cost because he involves his family in destruction and they must for self preservation restrain him."
- W. "Certainly, if they have the means to do so. But what are the means? None have yet been discovered—with all the immense exertion and suffering around us the evil still goes on. Are you not tired of waiting for a remedy?"
- S. "What would you propose as a remedy?"
- W. "A part of the true remedy would be found in the *individuality* of interests as in the case of the house. The wife and children should not depend for their support upon a drunken man. There should *not be a communion of property between them*."⁵⁸

Community of property interests inevitably brings discord and contention. Individuality, on the other hand, will bring a completely different way of life by preventing disturbance, disappointment and defeat.

Warren gives another illustration. "In 1848, an acquaintance suddenly presented himself before me five hundred miles from home, and said, 'You are surprised to see me, but not more than I am surprised at myself.'"⁵⁹ Warren then goes on to describe the man's condition. He had left home; he had left everything but what he wore on his back, money, clothes, horses, farm, everything he owned. He was now throwing himself on the world to begin again. He told Warren his story.

"My wife and I," said he, "were setting out a row of onions in the garden. She remarked that I had set them crooked—I replied, no matter, they were well enough; but she said that as we were foreigners,

the neighbors were all the time criticizing our farming gardening and she wanted everything to look so as to defy their criticisms."⁶⁰

He had replied to his wife that he would not trouble himself merely to silence the neighbors; the spirit of fault finding would always find some excuse, and if *they* did not rise above it, they would be enslaved by it. His wife refused to accept that philosophy and insisted that he straighten the row. He became "a little irritated and made some reply that brought from her an allusion to an old score"⁶¹ between them which really upset him. He replied "with severity" and before he knew what he was doing, he had thrown a piece of wood at her. Alarmed and disgusted by his conduct, as well as at her, he had left home. "This was all in consequence of a communism of interest in a row of onions."⁶²

In another conversation, H. questioned Warren, saying that Warren's individuality seemed to go against the common property idea. Warren replied that indeed, it went exactly in the opposite direction, and that the conservatives had been right in their objections to communism, "or what is commonly called socialism."⁶³

Every shape it has assumed has proposed *more closely connected interests* than what conservatism or common life exhibits, while the solution and the success demanded, requires, as a first step, exactly the opposite process—more *individuality*, disintegration, disentanglement.⁶⁴

Warren went on to say that in any so-called social reform movement there was the necessity of trusting leaders. In the exercise of individuality there is no combination with power over the person or property, and the individual does not face the problems of being mixed indiscriminately with others.⁶⁵ He was concerned that the public, "judging by what they already knew of Reforms looked on this [Warren's] movement as a 'community' or something of the same kind, and judged us altogether by the acts of writings of one or two."⁶⁶ The public must learn that this movement is built on the premise that no one is to be judged by the acts of others. Each person is entitled to the reputation that he earns for himself and no other. Unlike any other reform movement, there can be no partnership or organized reputation, "any more than there would be to an accidental assemblage of the people of all nations."⁶⁷

One difficulty that Warren faced repeatedly was raised by people who objected to the sovereignty of the individual because it would, in their opinion, permit offense to another. He states that the term involves the sovereignty of every individual, not of one individual. "Where the sovereignty of every one is respected, no one can offend another by any of his applications of it."⁶⁸

The street rowdy who delights in setting all order at defiance and offending all surrounding tastes and feeling, may assert that he is carrying out

his sovereignty. This is the sovereignty of one individual while that of many is violated—a regard to the sovereignty of *every* individual is seen in those who are delicately careful not to violate surrounding tastes or feelings, nor unnecessarily to offend even those who may be in the wrong.⁶⁹

This “beautiful trait of manners” was not found in any one single branch of society as now known. It was a characteristic of many of the old nobility and gentry of other countries, of some of the aristocracy or the independent classes of the United States. It was also to be found peculiarly among sailors and often among the very poorest of the poor. “They seem to have a happy faculty of drawing the line on the instant where benevolence ends and self preservation begins.”⁷⁰ While they will suffer no unnecessary offense, they are also careful to give none. This principle, extended to all, “will be found to be not only a substitute for laws but a regulator of social life in thousands of subtle and complicated cases that laws can never regulate nor even reach.”⁷¹

As an example, Warren cited the instance of a man, B_____, who was standing in the middle of a sidewalk in Boston in 1851. He was trying to decide which way to take when three young men came quickly down the sidewalk and pushed him into a brick wall as they passed. Naturally, this annoyed him and his first impulse was to resent it. His next thought was of the sovereignty of the individual which “instantly showed B_____ that it was he who was in fault in not sufficiently regarding the convenience of the young men.”⁷²

Although they were apparently bent on some disturbance it was not for B_____ to sit in judgment on that matter now: whatever their purpose or general character, whether good or bad, they had unquestionable right, to free passage on the sidewalk, where B_____ was unnecessarily obstructing the way. Such was the effect of this reflection upon B_____ that he would have turned and made an apology to the young men had they not been too far distant to admit of it.⁷³

Laws could not have solved this; no policeman would have reprimanded B_____ for standing for a few minutes, and, on the other hand, no law could have prevented the beginning of a conflict if B_____ had acted out his resentment. The interference of the higher law, the sovereignty of the individual, “this internal regulator,” had solved the problem.⁷⁴

If the sovereignty of the individual was used as the one law, regulating all cases, involving every individual on his own responsibility at his own cost, “no one will dispute the immense benefits it would confer.”⁷⁵

In 1854 the city government of New York had had problems with a decision as to whether citizens had the right to decorate their homes with torches or to “illuminate” their homes on February 22, Washington’s birthday. As usual, Warren gave no names, but used the circumstances to prove his point. One of the officers of the law, according to Warren, conversing with

Mr. L., thought that he understood the right of sovereignty. He decided that L. had a right to illuminate his home if he wished. Upon deliberation, Mr. L. decided that it would be an infringement of the right of sovereignty of others if he did this, and "he concluded that he could not illuminate at his own house while his adjoining neighbors would be disturbed by their fears of accidental fire."⁷⁶ He saw that they were in too close connection for the sovereignty of both parties to be carried out, and he could not sit in judgment on the reality of their fears. "Here the officer of the law was without any means of deciding, and finally decided wrong; while the 'Sovereignty of every Individual' wrought a decision of the highest possible order."⁷⁷

Warren insisted that the sovereignty of the individual was possible only where everyone agreed on what was to be done or proposed. Any situation in which connected interests were involved, such as the common schools, could not furnish the opportunity for right to be carried out equally. If one party was satisfied, it violated the right of the other party. "Both and all parties have a right to absolute sovereignty at their own cost whether right or wrong."⁷⁸ "Good and judicious expedients and compromises may be hit upon, but nothing short of the satisfaction of every individual involved is absolutely and harmoniously right."⁷⁹ Collisions on the management of schools were relatively common and were to be expected, given the principles outlined by Warren.

In Y_____ S_____, Indiana, in 1843, there was a beautiful schoolhouse which had been built by the joint contributions of the inhabitants of the village. The contributors met to decide on the choice of a teacher. There was conflict and much discussion. Several meetings were held, "each party insisting on its 'rights,' neither of them knowing that the only thing that was right (i.e., the Sovereignty of every individual) had been rendered impracticable by combining their interests."⁸⁰ They argued, reasoned and debated until reasons, debates and debaters were exhausted. Finally a member of "a church" took off his coat, picked up a club and "would probably have committed manslaughter on the spot had he not been reasonably restrained by those who surrounded him."⁸¹ Someone of the group, seeing that no solution was possible and that another meeting might end in bloodshed, set the schoolhouse on fire that same night and it burned to the ground. "Perhaps no one wished to save it, to prolong disturbances to which they could hope for no peaceful solution."⁸² Warren went on to say that he had held a meeting in the village a few days previous, and if the interested members of the schoolhouse group had come and listened to the principles of individuality, their schoolhouse "might now be standing, and successfully used for the purpose intended."⁸³

Warren stated and restated his conviction that individual sovereignty was the necessary regulator of human relations, but that such sovereignty was completely impossible unless each person's property, responsibilities and persons are "so far separate from others that he can exercise his legi-

timate control over his own without disturbing them.”⁸⁴ Disintegration of society was necessary, until each person became responsible for himself individually. Then there would be no connected interests. Each person would become his own regulator with “no prescription for others *against their choice of laws, rules, regulations, religions, morals, politics, ethics, manners, dress, etiquette modes, fashions, subordination, or in any other manner whatsoever.*”⁸⁵ This, according to Warren, would lead to the most perfect social order ever seen.

NOTES

1. Josiah Warren, notebook “D”, ed. Ann Caldwell Butler, masters thesis, Ball State University, 1968. Warren’s original, handwritten notebook, written between 1840 and 1860 is currently at the Workingmen’s Institute Library, New Harmony, Ind. Most of the material for this article has been drawn from Notebook “D” because it is a source that has never been used to explain and exemplify Warren’s principles of the sovereignty of individual. The same ideas and similar examples may be found in his periodicals and published books.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 31–33.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*, p. 37.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*, p. 41.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 43.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 60–61.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*, p. 62.
22. *Ibid.*
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.*, p. 64.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 65.
26. *Ibid.*
27. Warren, *Periodical Letter* (Charlestown, Mass.), July 1856, p. 55; *idem*, *The Periodical Letter on Principles and Progress* (Boston), September 1856, p. 5.
28. Warren, *Quarterly Letter* (Cliftondale, Mass.), October 1867, p. 2.
29. *Ibid.*
30. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
31. *Ibid.* All quotations in this paragraph are typical of the way Warren writes. He follows his questions with didactic statements. This method produces the very vague generalizations that he wishes to avoid.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
33. Notebook “D”, p. 66.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 68.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 69.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 105.
37. *Ibid.*
38. *Ibid.*, p. 107.
39. *Ibid.*
40. *Ibid.*
41. *Ibid.*, p. 110.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 111.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 112.
44. *Ibid.*
45. Warren, *True Civilization: An Immediate Necessity and the Last Ground of Hope for Mankind* (1863; reprint ed., Princeton, Mass.: Burt Franklin, 1967), p. 130.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 131.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
48. *Ibid.*
49. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
50. Notebook "D", p. 112.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 113.
52. *Ibid.*
53. *Ibid.*, p. 115.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 71.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 73. Modern Times was an anarchist village founded by Josiah Warren and Stephen Pearl Andrews at the site of the present-day Brentwood, N.Y.
56. *Ibid.*, p. 74.
57. *Ibid.*, pp. 74-75.
58. *Ibid.*, p. 75.
59. *Ibid.*, pp. 81-82; *True Civilization*, p. 124.
60. Notebook "D", p. 82.
61. *Ibid.*, p. 83.
62. *Ibid.*
63. *Ibid.*, pp. 83-84.
64. *Ibid.*
65. Warren, *Periodical Letter* (Thompson Post Office), August 1854, p. 19.
66. *Ibid.*
67. *Ibid.*
68. Warren, *Periodical Letter* (Thompson Post Office), July 1854, p. 3.
69. *Ibid.*
70. *Ibid.*
71. *Ibid.*
72. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
73. *Ibid.*
74. *Ibid.*
75. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
76. *Ibid.*
77. *Ibid.*
78. *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.
79. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
80. *Ibid.* See also *True Civilization*, pp. 117-18 for a similar story. It should also be noted that Yellow Springs was, and is, in Ohio, not Indiana.
81. *Periodical Letter* (Thompson Post Office), July 1854, p. 6.
82. *Ibid.*
83. *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.
84. *True Civilization*, p. 150.
85. Notebook "D", p. 120.