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From the March of Mind

Josiah Warren

September 10, 1828

In the late 1820s, Warren published a number of short pieces in the Owenite New Harmony Gazette; they are his earliest extant writings. These texts were discovered and attributed to Warren by Shawn Wilbur. The piece below, from Sep 10, 1828 (vol. 2, Iss. 46, p. 365), shows the direct influence of Owen on Warren, and gives a basic statement of the derivation of political freedom from metaphysical determinism.

The acquisition of any new fact, always produces in my mind a feeling of pleasure, especially when I perceive that it will in any manner promote my future happiness; and the more does it increase my happiness if I can make it subservient to the happiness of others. This will be sufficient apology to the reader for my observations, when it is considered that they are not obtruded upon him as rules for his own conduct, but that they are here placed for his consideration, to be accepted or rejected as his own judgment shall determine.

It is now about three years, since a gentleman by the name of Robert Owen, promulgated in the most unequivocal, and in

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the most public manner, the proposition that “MAN IS THE CREATURE OF THE CIRCUMSTANCES THAT SURROUND HIM,” and he also stated, that “THIS IS A FACT OVER WHICH MAN HAS NO CONTROL.” Although I perceive that my happiness as well as that of all others is deeply involved in the truth or utility of this principle or proposition, I have never seen nor heard any serious or candid attempt to prove it false, either from any one of the governments of the old or new continent, or from any of the teachers of the people, whether speakers or writers, or from any other individual, although Mr. Owen offered five thousand dollars as a reward for any effectual refutation of those statements.

Now, therefore, having examined the statement made by Mr. Owen as far as my own power of comparison will permit, and not being able to discover in it any thing contrary to, or disagreeing with any facts within my knowledge; and having for three years looked in the public prints, and to public teachers, who as guardians of the public good should protect us against imposition, and having seen from them no attempt to prove this proposition untrue, I as one individual am induced to conclude, that Mr. Owen has developed to us a great and important truth.

I shall therefore in future, make this fact, the basis of my judgment and my conduct, as far as my previous erroneous instruction and other circumstances will permit. Being subject to the influence of the circumstances around me, and being liable to be moulded by them, whether true or false, right or wrong, and having nothing to protect me from error and misery, but the knowledge which I may require of these circumstances, and the use I may make of this knowledge, I shall begin to analyze the circumstances around me and learn to distinguish the good from the evil; and as I have heretofore been misled by false instruction and by bad example, I shall claim the free exercise of my own judgment with regard to my own opinions and my own conduct.

I shall do that which I perceive will produce the greatest amount of happiness to myself and others, without any more regard to the examples or habits of others than this rule will point out.

In selecting my companions I shall choose those that are most agreeable to myself. Those who make no attempt to deceive, or mislead me, who make no attempt to take advantage of my ignorance, for their own aggrandizement; but if they deal me fair and equal justice if they be ready to treat me with kindness and my errors with forbearance, if they exhibit no disposition to inflict pain upon me or others but I may feel secure and happy in their company, them will I choose for my companions, whether they be born in the eastern or western states whether their dresses be made of fine or coarse cloth whether in opinion, they be Infidel, Jew, Christian, or Mahometan, or whatever peculiarities they may have which produce no pain to me or others But those who are induced, whether by false instruction, or from other circumstances, to take from me more than fair and equal justice will allow, or to take advantage of my weakness or my ignorance, or to deceive me by my false instruction, whereby I may be led into error, or who are disposed to abridge my freedom in the pursuit of happiness, or who are disposed to inflict pain of mind or body upon me or others, them will I avoid, and will not, dare not trust myself in their company; but will remove if possible out of their reach, whether their dresses be made of fine or coarse cloth whether they be born in the eastern or western states, or upon the new or old continent; or whether in opinion, they be Infidel Jew, Christian or Mahometan, or whatever names, parentage, manners or customs, may be peculiar to them. And this choice will I exercise, without regard to any public or private prejudices, as they are produced by surrounding circumstances and will disappear as real knowledge increases.

In choosing my dress, I shall analyze the various circumstances connected with it, and shall choose that which will

give me more pleasure than pain. If I wish for a dress which costs much pain and labor to obtain, and if I perceive that I can apply my time to more advantage than to the obtaining of such a dress, I shall wear a less costly dress, without any other regard to the examples around me, than regret that I can not please their tastes consistently with my own happiness. And I shall endeavor to examine into, and reason upon all things with which I find myself connected, all shall endeavor to estimate them by their real intrinsic worth, according to the amount of happiness or unhappiness which I find them capable of producing, always reserving freedom to change with increasing knowledge; and no further than this will I be governed by the customs and manners which surround me: as I perceive that some of them are merely the production of the most whimsical and injurious practices of my fellow beings, which have been created by the whimsical and injurious circumstances in which they are placed. J. W.