Hardly any subject is more difficult to discuss calmly and rationally than that of freedom. Men have suffered so long from a succession of tyrannous rulers, tyrannous priests, tyrannous masters, tyrannous parents, and tyrannous customs that the mere suggestions of freedom raises their hopes, and causes them to clutch eagerly at proposals which they have not adequately examined. Any doctrine, like that of free will, to which the adjective "free" may be applied, gains an initial advantage over its opposite on the strength of its name alone. Freedom is like money, in that its worth to us depends wholly on how it is employed, and if unwisely used its abundance may be more harmful than its lack. Just as men's excessive eagerness to accumulate money springs, at least in part, from the circumstance that most of the time most people have had too little wealth, so their intensity of their desire for freedom reflects their long bondage.

Freedom is primarily a negative concept, signifying the absence of something, as when we say "freedom from fear" or "freedom from want". In the political context, the word implies the absence of oppressive rulers and laws. Thus when a nation or an individual wins freedom, at no matter how great a price of blood and treasure, it really has acquired nothing at all. It has merely swept away obstacles whose removal permits it to create things of great value, if it have sufficient wisdom and patience. Unfortunately, as history abundantly attests, those who have the courage to win liberty do not necessarily have the wisdom to use it well.

The positive idea which corresponds to the negative concept of freedom is that of self-determination or self-guidance. Within every living thing is a formative process which ordinarily will produce a more perfect maturity if uncoerced than if subjected to severe external pressures and restraints. Not that an organism is independent of its environment: quite the contrary, without the continuing support of its environment it can neither live nor grow. If the organism happens to be a human being, it depends on its environment, which in the broadest sense includes its social ambient, not merely for material support but for the very modes of conduct and expression which it needs for a satisfying life. But the manner in which the donations of the environment, whether they be nutrient substance or ideas and modes of conduct, are combined into a more or less coherent pattern depends on the formative process within us, and to carry out this difficult task it requires free play.

Freedom, then, implies self-expression or individualism, the liberty to pursue one's aims and develop one's interests with a minimum of external control. Our impulse to fulfill and complete our lives manifests itself in the most diverse ways, from the pursuit of wealth to the quest of God, from the collection of postage stamps or curios to artistic creation, scientific investigation, and philosophic speculation. Individualism means the liberty to carry on any of these
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activities in the manner which seems best to each individual. It is often assumed that all forms of individualism go together, that the social or political system which gives the individual greatest freedom in one field will do so in other fields, whereas the system which regulates his activity in one sphere will likewise restrict it in others. This assumption requires careful scrutiny.

To pursue this inquiry, it will be useful to distinguish between economic individualism and spiritual individualism. By the former, I understand freedom to pursue economic aims and carry on economic activities with a minimum of control by the state, whether these aims include merely the satisfaction of basic needs of food, clothing and shelter or the amassing of a vast fortune. By spiritual individualism I understand the unimpeded pursuit of those activities which fulfills rather than simply support life, such as the attempt to satisfy our thirst for beauty, our longing for friendship and mutual understanding, our hunger for knowledge, our yearning for harmony with a comprehensive whole. Spiritual individualism implies the free growth and flowering of each human spirit, in conformity with the creative process within it.

The purpose of the present communication is to point out that there is no necessary connection between economic individualism and spiritual individualism, that they should be viewed as independent variables. The soundness of this contention becomes probable as soon as we recall that men are far more uniform in their material needs than in their spiritual and intellectual needs. To maintain health and strength, we all have, with due allowance for diversities of age, occupation, and climate, approximately the same requirements of food and shelter. Diversities in the consumption of material goods spring chiefly from the craving for luxuries and things detrimental to health. On the other hand, we differ immensely in our esthetic and intellectual appetites. The medium which provides the most perfect expression for one mind is valueless to another. One human spirit reaps its richest harvests in the solitude of wild nature, which to another is a dreary wilderness; one is exalted by music, which to another is meaningless noise; and so on indefinitely. The best society is that which enables each of its members to enrich his spirit in the ways determined by its own peculiar constitution.

That economic individualism does not necessarily go hand in hand with spiritual individualism is evident to anyone who contemplates the United States of America in the nineteenth century. The uninhibited scramble for wealth which, in the course of a few generations, ravished the breadth of a continent, was not accompanied by a great intellectual or spiritual efflorescence. The centers of high culture in nineteenth century America were rare and local, chiefly in long-settled New England. To make money was widely considered the highest pursuit of man; those who gave priority to some other objective were viewed askance.

Competition is possible only between those who have certain attributes in common. The longer we contend with another, the more we come to resemble our adversary in various important ways. This is evident whether we contemplate Athens and Sparta during the Peloponnesian War or the United States and Russia in the current "cold war". Similarly, the man who yearns to dedicate himself to the life of the spirit, yet must support himself in a competitive economy, is in spite of himself subtly assimilated to his materialistic neighbors. Hence those who desire above all to develop their mind or spirit often seek an ambient where they are sheltered from economic competition. A large share of the thinking and artistic creation of Medieval Europe was found in the monasteries, where, to be
sure, spiritual individualism was held within narrow bounds by theological dogmatism. In modern times, the spiritual individualist often seeks the university, contenting himself with a modest salary in return for leisure to study and think, rather than throwing himself into the competitive struggle for wealth.

The example of contemporary Russia supports the view that the loss of economic individualism results in the severe curtailment of spiritual individualism. Indeed, the state which completely controls our means of subsistence find it all too easy to control every overt expression of the spirit. On the other hand, that economic individualism is not incompatible with rigorous spiritual coercion is evident from the example of Spain and other countries where the Holy Inquisition prevailed.

It appears, then, that the relation of economic individualism to spiritual individualism depends largely on the aims and values of a society. Spiritual oppression may be just as harsh in countries with a competitive economy as in those where the state controls the production and distribution of wealth. Yet there are reasons for believing that the exclusion of economic individualism, if undertaken with liberal aims, would favor spiritual individualism, at least among people who place spiritual above material values. Certainly there is great need to explore this problem far more thoroughly than has ever been done, and to learn by experience just what measure of economic individualism best comports with the flowering of the human spirit. And since in vast countries with very heterogeneous populations scarcely any innovation can be tried without much coercion by the state, the solution of the problem should ideally be undertaken by small communities held together by a common aspiration.