

hated paper money as much as the heavy burden of debt. Prominent Virginia creditor Richard Henry Lee echoed George Washington's view: "The vast sums of paper money that have been issued and the consequent depreciation, has well nigh effected an entire transfer of my estate to my tenants. This year Sir, the rents of 4000 acres of fine Land will not buy me 20 barrels of Corn!"

The oppression that Jefferson felt by his inherited debt no doubt shaped his view that the earth belonged to the living. He didn't believe that a previous generation should burden the next with either the slavery of debt or its laws and regulations. Jefferson formulated the idea that a generation lasted 19 years. Thus, Jefferson wrote that, "every constitution . . . and every law, naturally expires at the end of 19 years."

Statists have used these writings to bolster the argument for a living constitution. But Sloan makes it clear that Jefferson's concern was not that future politicians be given the latitude to bind the populace with more and more laws and regulations, but rather that Jefferson feared future generations would be saddled with debt, whether public or private, and the taxes that go along with it. And further, as Sloan writes, "public debts are closely associated with the evils of war: Remove the ability to contract debts that run for generations, Jefferson says, and 'it would bridle the spirit of war.'"

Sloan spends few pages addressing Jefferson's years as president, perhaps because this ground has been thoroughly covered by others. It's important to note that by the end of his first term in 1804, Jefferson had reduced the federal debt by \$12 million. And, with the end of the country's debt in sight, Jefferson began to talk about spending surplus money on "the improvements of roads, canals, rivers, education, and other great foundations of prosperity and union."

The national debt stood at \$57 million in 1809, and Jefferson predicted that his successor, James Madison, would extinguish the debt during his term. Unfortunately the War of 1812 got in the way, and the debt ballooned over \$127 million by the war's end.

Jefferson never lived to see his dream of no government debt fulfilled. Andrew Jackson accomplished the feat in 1836. But the respite was brief. Martin Van Buren, Jackson's successor, resorted to loans the very next year because of deficits caused by the Panic of 1837. The U.S. government has not been out of debt since. □

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## Taking Responsibility: Self-Reliance and the Accountable Life

by Nathaniel Branden

Simon & Schuster • 1996 • 233 pages • \$22.00

Reviewed by Russell Madden

"Responsibility" is a favorite buzzword on the current political scene. Yet even many conservatives have a faulty notion of what the concept actually entails. In his latest book, psychologist Nathaniel Branden sets forth a sound approach to this critical issue. While much of what Branden says will be familiar to readers of his previous books, this volume may bring these ideas to the attention of a wider audience and, perhaps, focus debate on the implications of fully accepting self-responsibility.

For *Freeman* regulars, chapters 2 through 4 and 7 and 8 may be of most interest. In those sections, Branden deals more directly with political and economic issues.

Chapter 2, "Freedom and Responsibility," shows what does and does not fall within one's realm of personal responsibility and what can occur when that boundary is breached. Branden also touches on Marxist determinism, demonstrating its self-contradictory nature and what happens when politics and law fail to reject this erroneous principle.

In Chapter 3, "Self-Reliance and Social Metaphysics," Branden explores the ways in which people come to rely on the judgments of other people rather than their own independent thoughts. While many of these individuals are distressingly obedient to authority, some seek power over others in vain attempts to substitute control over others for the self-control they lack. The most egregious examples of such "social metaphysicians" have been the dictators who have plagued us throughout this century.

Chapter 4, "A Self-Responsible Life," advocates the idea that "we are not entitled to treat other human beings as means to our ends, just as we are not means to their ends." Branden notes that "ours was the first government *ever* to recognize and affirm the inalienable rights of the individual. It upholds . . . the idea that the individual belongs not to the state or the nation or the society, but to him- or herself." Avoiding the initiation of force and respecting individual rights provide "the moral foundation of mutual respect, goodwill, and benevolence" that are the hallmarks of a free and decent society.

The recent emphasis on downsizing and corporate restructuring makes Chapter 7, "Accountability in Organizations," timely. Here Branden explains that fostering self-responsibility in a company must begin at the top of the organizational ladder. But employees should also work to better the company, not simply do the minimum to get by. When a difficulty occurs, workers should take it upon themselves to solve the problem and not just ensure no one blames them.

Finally, Chapter 8, "A Culture of Accountability," recognizes the fact that we must teach consequences, i.e., causes and effects, if we hope to raise a generation able to accept and handle the challenges freedom presents. Capitalism will survive only in a culture of self-responsibility. □

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## The State of Humanity

Edited by Julian L. Simon

Blackwell Publishers • 1995 • 608 pages •  
\$54.95 cloth; \$22.95 paperback

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Reviewed by Walter Block

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If you are one of those persons whose intellectual style can be summarized by the motto "Don't confuse me with the facts," then you won't like this book one bit. On the other hand, if you think that facts, evidence, and history can contribute to our understanding of where mankind has been and where it is likely to go, then *The State of Humanity* is the book for you.

The thesis of this book is that the lot of humanity has been improving in the last few centuries, decades, and years, and that the most likely prospect is for more of the same. This idea should occasion no surprise given the book was edited by Julian Simon. Professor Simon is perhaps the most careful, sophisticated, and productive critic of modern-day Malthusians. Even overshadowing his scholarly output is the bet for \$10,000 he won from Paul (*The Population Bomb*) Ehrlich, over whether resources are becoming more plentiful (yes!) or scarce (no!) relative to our population. The point is that if anything like economic freedom prevails, and the *Ultimate Resource*—man's mind—is thus allowed free rein, this planet can support far more people than presently living.

In order to make this point, Simon marshals the work of no fewer than 58 separate authors. These chapters address six different aspects of

the issue: life, death, and health; standard of living, productivity, and poverty; natural resources; agriculture, food, land, and water; pollution and the environment; and the contribution of public and media opinion to the environmental crisis. To summarize: the infant mortality rate is declining, length of life is increasing, the number of people required to grow food is falling, food and natural resources are becoming more available, at a lower price, the standard of living is improving, pollution is decreasing.

But Simon is no simplistic Pollyanna. Instead, his analysis (and that of his colleagues) is backed up by a veritable gold mine of information. On practically every page there is a chart, or a diagram, either an increasing curve (for good things, e.g., life expectancy), or a decreasing curve (for bad things, e.g., pollution). The overall impression is one of complete, total, and even exhaustive coverage. This book is an encyclopedia of the case against the chicken littles of the world.

Let me give but a few examples, first, to attest to the authors' consummate mastery of this material, and second, to bring aid and comfort to those taken in by the alarmists. In 1490, corn yield was ten bushels per acre; in 1980 it had reached 120. In 1895, some 20 million acre-feet of water was stored in all U.S. reservoirs; in 1985 this number was in excess of 400 million acre-feet. In the year 8000 B.C., life expectancy at birth was about 21 years; this rose to the mid-30s in the sixteenth century, to the 60s in the nineteenth century, and now exceeds 70 years. Free time rose by six hours per week between 1965 and 1985.

As might be expected in such a large work, there are one or two jarring notes to which the hypersensitive reader may object. One author, Robert Nelson, takes pride in the fact that acreage in public parks has been increasing; in my own view, enlarged governmental participation in the economy in any regard is cause for alarm not gratification. But to be fair, Nelson was concerned with access to outdoor recreation, not its ownership.

If you are concerned with improving the livability of the planet, *buy this book!* Mass purchases, true, will mean the death of many trees. But this will just raise the price of pulp, calling forth yet additional supplies. With *The State of Humanity* at hand, you will have the facts of the environmental debate at your command—just about all of them. □

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