Notebook D

Josiah Warren

1840

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Introduction

It is evident that Warren kept a journal throughout his life. Entries rarely reveal details of his family or intimate life, but rather meticulously document his social experiments. He drew upon these notebooks in many of his published works, especially *Practical Details* and *Practical Applications*. Apparently he had a pretty odd system, retaining notebooks over decades. The one surviving document of this type that we have is labeled "D" and contains entries from 1840, 1860, and 1873. It is in the collection of the Working Men's Institute in New Harmony, and was redacted by Ann Caldwell Butler for an MA thesis at Ball State in 1968. Martin says (though how he knows this is a bit of a mystery) that there were notebooks lettered "A" through 'J.' Much of the material is redundant with other work, but I reproduce substantial selections below, using Butler's work as a base, but removing, for example, dozens of exclamation marks. Warren evidently employed his thematic indexing system first in his own notebooks; that feature is not reproduced below. The selections below show underneath the apparently stern inculcation of liberty and responsibility, a remarkable tenderness.

The first chunk is from 1840: it recounts and comments upon Warren's attempts to educate his son George and another boy (both about 13 years old) by equitable principles.

The second selection is from 1860, and largely concerned with free love. It is in the form of a dialogue or "conversational development." I reproduce a piece of it that gives something of a pragmatist view about truth.

The 1873 material gives a crisp summary of Warren on money, and shows that his idealism was undiminished at the time of his passing.

Text

January 29, 1840

With a view to illustrate the foregoing principles and to prove their correctness and to show the fundamental mistakes which society has made in the management of children and the organization of schools, I began, on the 21st of January 1840 a seminary at what we will call No. 1 in New Harmony, where I intend to establish a little world organized and governed according to what I conceive to be the only way in which society can be organized so as to secure individual rights, justice, security, peace, and the means of abundance and enjoyment to all, and to solve the problem of natural liberty co-existent with social order. I shall take notes of interesting illustrations as they occur but shall confine myself entirely to the facts as they take place.

January 21, 1840

This day, commenced labor for labor at No. 1 with only two boys with the view of increasing the number as fast as they can sustain themselves with such aid as I can furnish. These boys

were told that they were now to act entirely at their own responsibility, each to have the whole proceeds of his labor, to do with it just as he chose, and that no power of parents or anyone else was to interfere to compel them either to work or study or anything else, but if that if they did not they would suffer the natural consequences, which a very few words served to explain. G.W.W. are the initials of one [Warren's son George] and E.H. of the other.

In order to preserve individual interests and individual responsibilities it would have been necessary for each to have had distinct premises of his own, but they preferred being in one room together. As it was impracticable to have separate rooms at the present time, they were both in the same room, but they were told that they would probably have some disagreeable consequences from having even so much connected interests. But as these are the arrangements for experimental education, I had no objection to their trying it, and ascertaining by their own experiences some of the consequences.

As they were to act entirely for themselves in all respects they were to pay rent for the room. We now come to the first application of the cost principle. I told them that if they chose they might appoint some third party to ascertain the real cost in wear and tear of the building, and that should be the rent they were to pay me. The proposal to appoint a third party was to convince them that I received no more than an equivalent for the use of the building — in other words that I did not get their property for nothing.

But they left it to me, and they engaged each to pay one dollar per month for the room, which is about eighteen by twenty feet. I now told them as I had before that if they wanted my assistance in any way, whether by advice or instruction I would render it on the principle of labor for labor and if I wanted any of their assistance or labor that I would pay for it in the same manner and that it would be necessary for each of us to set the price per hour which he would expect to receive, and that it was necessary to fix this price before any debt was incurred, so that one could not get power over another's property by setting the price after the receiver had incurred the debt. And as a matter of great convenience too it was recommended not to change the fixed price of time for light and trivial causes, that some pursuits being more disagreeable (or costly) than others it would be reasonable to ask more for the same length of time. And as no one can judge for another how disagreeable any pursuit may be, each must decide the price of his own labor in different pursuits, and that competition would be likely to keep us all within reasonable bounds.

Each then proceeded to fix a price per hour upon his time, which it is understood is to remain until he chooses to change it, of which he is expected to give notice before any debt is incurred.

The boys then proceeded to fix up their benches and tools. They required some advice which I gave at their request. They told me I must charge for my time, but I replied that it was so small an amount that it was best to take no account of it, but that I had already fixed my price high enough to cover any little items like that. E.H. wanted some boards to fix up his bench. I had some to sell. What is the price? he asked.

One dollar per hundred feet original cost at the saw mill. 20 cents per hundred for hauling, 12 cents for stacking up, about two cents for rent of drying room; and 30 cents per hour for the time spent in getting them from the mill; which, altogether, will make them cost $1.50 per hundred, without any interest on money. This their present cost. If I spend time in selecting and measuring them to you this will be added at the rate I have fixed for my time.

After having received the boards the next thing was for him to credit me with them. Here was the first natural introduction to book keeping, which occasion I made us of to prompt both of the boys to learn as they could not proceed without it. They perceived it at once and that night, one

of them went voluntarily with my advice to apply to the best bookkeeper within our knowledge to see if he would give them some lessons!

January 29th [1840]

We were conversing on the subject of toasts or sentiments for a public celebration when G.W.W., aged 13, said if it would be in place or proper for such little ones as he to give a toast, it would be propose that all children should be situated as he was! I do not know how this may strike others but to me coming from a little boy speaking in reference to his school and mode of government under which he was placed, it spoke more than I can find words to express.. It was a boy placed in school, voluntarily acknowledging that he was happy!

January 30 [1840]

G.W.W. said to me, "Father, I wish for you first to measure this board to see how much I must credit you for. Yes, certainly, said I, but you know if you could measure it yourself you would save what you will have to pay me for my time. "I must study arithmetic," said he with great emphasis, lifting up his little hand and bringing it down in a most decisive and resolute manner. And at night without a word being spoken on the subject took a light from the table and was gone so long that, as it was very cold, I was curious to know what he was doing, when after about 15 minutes he came in. He had been hunting up his arithmetic, and it being a stormy night he said he would not go over work tonight but would study arithmetic, And he did, all evening.

In the morning, although it was very cold I called him and asked him if he did not want to get up and study arithmetic. He got up without another call, which is unusual for him, and studied the tables most intensely while breakfast was getting ready. He asked me to take the book and exercise him in the multiplication table and this was all done with a smile upon his countenance, and he would take the book over to his room, and he and E. would exercise when it was too cold for work.

The two boys had agreed on a place for the key of their room, but G. remarked to me that E. had gone away with the key in his pocket promising to be back a certain time but had not, and he had lost an hour at least in consequence of his failure to fulfill his promise; now, says he, E. ought to pay me that hour, shouldn't he? Truly in strict justice I think he should though he may have very good reason to delay, said I, but the best way is not to lay the foundation of such things in having connected interests. You will remember that I told you in the commencement that you would probably discover some objections to having one room in common.

February 3 [1840]

G.W.W. ate no breakfast and was evidently unwell — went to work and remarked that he had done nothing of any consequence all the forenoon. I do not feel as if I could work, said he. Then don't attempt it said I, I would not go to work unless you feel more able.

Comment: Now how could a parent — how could I, with any propriety, risk advising the child not to work when he did not feel like it, if he had not motive for working? If he had been working in my interest, as all children usually do for their parents, I should not have dared to advise him not to work when he did not feel well for fear that he might make that a plea when it was not true. How cruel to feel obliged to be suspicious that his complaint might be a false plea to escape from work — to doubt his account of his own feelings. Perhaps such doubts might prove fatal: fatal at least to his character for truth; for if the child can not inspire belief when he tells the truth, he will not long persevere in the practice.

In a conversation today with a friend, I related the fact that my own boy was sitting by the fire in the morning when it seemed best that he should employ that time in preparing wood for the day. When I said that I should like to have him cut some wood — now here was the point — where should his motive come from to get the wood? We know that the common reply is in his sense of duty. But suppose that this does not move him? What next? fear of the rod, or what?

Perhaps the most desirable motive would be a kind feeling. But suppose he did not feel kindly just then? and besides he might with equal reason say that kind feeling on my part might exempt him from doing what he did not like to do.

Here is the explosion of that subtle mistake which has laid the foundation of so many cruel disappointments in the experiments on communities and other institutions built upon self denial. When we once subscribe to the doctrine it works as much against us as for us; what we gain one way we lose the other and it is nothing but a delusion. The rule of self denial works as much against happiness as for it, and leaves everything just where it finds it, as in the case of the boy getting the wood. If he is required out of kindness to me to get it, by the same principle, kindness towards him, would require me to get it myself. This is all delusory verbiage. The question is still unanswered, where is his motivation rationally to come from to do what I require? Does not the law of his nature which prompts him to pursue his own happiness answer the question? Does it not say that the child should feel that it would result in some benefit to himself? And in conforming our requests to this law, do we not extend the greatest practicable amount of kindness towards him?

Now in conformity to this law of nature I had laid down all the power given me by ignorant legislators over my child, had made him feel sovereign of himself and all the proceeds of his exertions, and he knew that if he got the wood ready I should pay him according to the amount of labor performed. Here was the natural and rational motive brought to bear upon him and he went cheerfully about it.

There was no necessity of violating the "law of love": no force, no violence, not even command was necessary. The impulse was given by the force of natural consequences, of things instead of persons. The child acted as sovereign of himself, taking on the natural consequences of his actions. The action of the law of love is impracticable under the common relative position of parent and child. The principle exhibited here holds good in all our social relations. Our interests must all be individualized and each must assume all the natural consequences of his acts before we can cease to govern each other, and peace and love be realized.

The greatest extent to which we can ever exercise kindness towards others is in assisting them in their pursuit of happiness, in that particular course or manner that he or she may choose. This exhibits the point where the spirit of accommodation can be exercised with advantage until the circumstances which compel us to clash can be removed or abolished.

The organization of society is artificial: an invention, a continuance. The most ingenious person would be likely to succeed best in the invention of any machine, combining a number of elements for the accomplishments of certain objects. But to succeed well the he must know the objects to be accomplished and the principles involved, and he must be able to trace any defect to the proper cause, not alter a wheel when it is a lever that is at fault, nor apply more power to force it forward when the wheels are out of true.

Some parts may be allowed to be a little imperfect without materially affecting the general result, but the laws of nature will not allow some other imperfections. The wheels of a clock must all be present, 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. The addition of ten thousand wheels will not supply the place of the pendulum. They, like the multiplicity of laws in the social state, would only serve to complicate, to perplex and clog the machine. We must have the pendulum, and that pendulum must be in proportion to the other parts, or else although the machine would go, it would not be a clock. It would not measure time, and although a little variation in its length from the true proportion would be to surrender "only a portion" of right, yet at the end of the year the machine for all purposes intended, would be worse than no clock.

Society is the clock; individual liberty is the pendulum.

It is but a hackneyed as well as short sighted objection to unqualified individual liberty that "if each one sets his own limits or no limits to his liberty" what shall prevent his encroachments upon others? The answer is included in the first proposition that each and every individual has this natural right: not some or a few or many but every one. So that is A encroaches on B, how shall this be treated? This is for B to decide because he has a right to sovereignty over his own person and all his own interest. It is an impertinent interference for any one or any set of men to dictate to him how he shall proceed. Different people would act differently under the same circumstances, and they have a right to do so. But perhaps we are troubling ourselves too much about assumed difficulties, for if the personal liberty and the right of property were habitually respected from infancy, we are all too much the creatures of habit, of public opinion, and of example to encroach upon the rights of others wantonly. The fears on this point are derived from the notion of natural depravity.

The past furnishes no fair criterion. Justice has never yet been done in the social state to the individual. We must begin anew, watch the progress, and build according to necessities.

March 20 [1840]

Several interruptions have occurred which took me away from home since last taking notes, but I felt at ease leaving the boys to their own self-government. Why?

Because they could do no harm to any but themselves. They had no access to any one's property, nor any connection with anyone's interests but their own, and they had the proper natural

stimulus to promote their own advancement in having all the proceeds of their exertions. In shorter terms, each was placed in his own natural and proper sphere. On my return I found that they had done all they had to do and were anxious for my return to advise them further.

E. Took his first lesson in shoe making from Mr. V. today. The lesson cost him 3/4 of one cent and his labor amounted to 12 1/2! G. took his first lesson in shoe making this evening of the same person. This lesson cost G. about one cent; he mended a pair of pumps for me and earned 12 1/2 cents. He went immediately after supper voluntarily to take his lesson and pay for it himself out of the proceeds of his own labor, and all with as much hilarity and cheerfulness and interest as boys under common circumstances generally rush into the street to play.

He came home after I was in bed, but was so desirous to show me the results of his first lesson that he came into my room and awoke me, holding up triumphantly the mended shoes.

Comments: It is often remarked, when discussing these subjects, that the pecuniary affairs seem to occupy too important a place, that they are too prominent. That they seem to claim so much attention that children under the influence of such circumstances or even adults would be likely to become mercenary in their habits and feelings.

The reply to this if it were full and ample would occupy volumes. For the present let it be considered that pecuniary affairs are all we have to regulate, that this is the proper and legitimate subject of reform, that all the institutions of society are governed by property relations.

If it were not for property considerations persons would neither be dangerous nor endangered. Personal crimes are not always committed to obtain property, but all violations of personal rights will be found upon analysis to proceed either from a desire to obtain property, or from ignorance which might have been and would long since have been dispelled but that it was perpetuated by interested rulers and law givers, and those who wield the press for profit.

From the writings of Lord Bolingbroke: "I dare not pretend to instruct mankind, and I am not humble enough to write to the public for any other purpose."

"… the abuse philosophers are guilty of when they suffer the mind to rise too fast from particulars, to remote and general axioms."

"I say, that all science, if it be read, must rise from below and from our own level. It cannot descend from above nor from superior systems of being or knowledge."

July 9, 1860

Truth — absolute, pure, unadulterated truth — when brought to bear upon social life, is so transcendently beautiful and beneficent that there is a danger of misapplying our time and means in pursuing any and all truths, because they are truths or because we may possibly find some new truth, although when found, not the least use can be made of it. In this way I think reformers have missed their aim generally. A very intelligent gentleman, one with a large stock of information on things important and unimportant, when I declined going into the pursuit of some unimportant theme, "Don't you think you ought to get all the information you can, on all subjects?" Why no, I do not. If I were to undertake that, I should never make any use of the truths I know already. I know some now that I want to put in practice. When I come to feel the demand for further

information on some particular point I will then thankfully receive it, but even then I should want to go to the one that I might for many reasons prefer as a teacher.

I know of no way to preserve ourselves from this kind of intoxication but to follow the order of our wants, to attend first to things and pursue the supply till we some good reason to stop.

I have spoken of unimportant truths. I mean those whose importance we do not perceive. It may, some time, be thought important to know how many mosquitoes can be generated in a given area of water; what exposure, what temperature etc. are most favorable; how many legs they have and whether always a uniform number: but before I should want to employ my time in the pursuit of such truths I should want to have settled some practical reliable way of procuring food, clothing, shelter, fuel, and heart repose for myself at least if not for the suffering millions of the best men and women on earth.

Voluntary Subordination

[About this entry, though it appears here in the notebook, Butler says that "it is written in blue ink and seems, from the writing, punctuation, and spelling, to have been written in the New Harmony 1840 period."]

Natural liberty or individual sovereignty calls for freedom of choice in all cases, under all circumstances, and at all times. By freedom of choice I mean exemption from the control of other persons in distinction from the natural and irresistible control of circumstances.

All social arrangements should admit of this freedom of choice of every individual and all subordination should be voluntary. 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 choice, but it is not persons that compel this subordination. It is between the control or force of circumstances or necessity, each person being the judge of it, and the control or force of persons or authority that we must draw the great broad line which is to distinguish voluntary from involuntary subordination. The one is in perfect accordance with natural personal liberty which constitutes the chief element of the happiness of human beings and the other violates it and is the chief cause of the Bedlam-like confusion which pervades all ranks and conditions of mankind.

The false step is in laying down any verbal processes which embrace any conditions or applications not distinctly seen and understood beforehand by the entering parties.

Thus in the attempts to organize society men have laid down general rules and indefinite propositions in words as the basis of the social compact which the entering party construed according to his own views, and he is therefore said to exercise his free choice regarding the conditions. But no sooner has he passed the entrance than he has found these verbal rules and laws to contain conditions he knew not of and to be subject to different applications by almost every member of the body. The vote of the majority is the next resort which acts as a power to compel those who differ into involuntary subordination. This is a violation of liberty which appears inevitable under the circumstances. But the circumstances are wrong, are false. The false step is in laying down any verbal processes which embrace conditions or applications not distinctly seen and understood by the entering parties.

In this subtle and unseen mistake has originated those melancholy defeats which have, so far, prevented much improvement in the social condition. But may we not hope that when natural individualities shall be fairly developed, and when the incapacity of language to express these individualities shall be subject to investigation. Our object is happiness, and there is no one element so indispensable to this as conscious liberty, and there is no one source of tyranny in all shapes and degrees, so prolific as that of verbal rules, laws, regulations, dogmas, creeds — religious, political, and moral — which embrace conditions not contemplated by the parties who subscribe to them.

When individual rights shall be clearly appreciated, all rules of social arrangement will be definite; they will express all their conditions and all their applications, or if unavoidably some new application becomes necessary, the subscribing party cannot rightly be bound to sanction or conform to it contrary to his own free choice.

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 and an insane self-importance in those who command, and destruction, disorder, confusion wherever that army is employed. The corrective is voluntary subordination. Every soldier should claim and exercise his free choice in every case in which he was required to act and should refuse to move in every cause but that of the defense of person and property.

The people of Paris, in the "three glorious days of July,"[1] 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 doubt or to pursue different courses without any particular course being marked distinctly out by some individual mind and some particular direction, that their power could not be brought to bear to any effect.

This was so self-evident that they all with one voice on the first suggestion threw themselves under the direction of the youths of the Polytechnic School, and this they did the more safely as they did not pledge themselves to obey any order which their own views and wishes did not sanction. For they were at liberty at any moment even to disobey any orders of the commanders or directors which they might perceive to clash with their objects. But what was the result? It was a straightforward attainment of their object as if by miracle. And they exhibited such an example of rigid self-government from all excesses, and such ready co-operation 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.

Words will not embrace the wide range of destruction, desolation, of terror and suffering brought about by rulers by the means of coercive subordination which they pretend is so necessary for the preservation of order. But it is the principal source of disorder throughout the world: from the annihilation of whole nations at once down to the petty little jars on the domestic hearth.

It has often been asked what would become of the great interests of society if they were not looked after by rulers or law makers. Let the answer be derived from the real condition of all these great interests at the present time, compared with the amount of blood and treasure and suffering which their management has cost the world, and let us ask whether any plan could possibly lead

[1] This refers to the resistance of Paris to the restoration of the monarchy in 1830. It would be lovely to have some remarks of Warren's on the commune of 1871, but these aren't them.

to more injustice, or more confusion, uncertainty and insecurity of person, property, than we, supervising all society. But there is nothing in voluntary subordination that violates the natural liberty of the individual, and the fear that natural liberty would uproot all order is as groundless and as futile as the idea that coercive subordination has benefited mankind.

August 1873. Money

I never know when I have said enough about money. It is the pivot upon which every thing turns, and cannot be too well understood.

I have many times been asked why gold and silver could not be made to answer the true propose of money if they were recognized as the embodiment of so much labor?

There are many objections to this. In the first place, we never can ascertain the labor cost of either of them. Not long ago, it was announced that a man stumbled over a lump of gold that would make three thousand dollars while others had been digging and scratching in the dirt six months and found nothing. What, then, is the labor cost of gold?

"But why not average the labor?" Well now, let us see how that would not work. Five thousand men abandon all useful pursuits here, spend their money and time in going two or three thousand miles to hunt gold.

They are to have a share in the findings whether they find anything or not. Now here is a partnership formed between all the gold hunters whether they hunt or lounge about. This communism would immediately lead to quarrels that could never be settled. But if they were settled and each got an equal share, some would get what they never earned and all the expenses, time, and quarreling would be worse than thrown away. Because a ten dollar piece came to be presented for a barrel of flour on the ground of its having cost as much labor as the flour had, the speculator could say, "it is of no consequence how much either the flour or the gold cost" — a thing is worth what it will bring, and "flour has gone up. I must have fifteen dollars a barrel for it." Now what use would it be to have found out how much labor there was in the gold? No, we must be able to present to the flour man a positive promise for a barrel of flour on demand, and this positive promise must be based on a positive and sufficient responsibility. Paper or parchment is the very best material for such promises, and the cost is next to nothing.

Then again, it must be possible for the flour producer himself to make these promises for his own products. If any others, even governments, are allowed to do it, they can continue the enslavement of the producers. All government issues of money are so many drafts upon labor akin to forgeries or burglary. They get the product of labor by trick, by stealth or else by force of arms like highway robbery: extorting by bodily fear; such are all "legal tender" laws and all statutes forbidding individuals from issuing their own notes. They damn up the natural flow of the river, leaving only a narrow passage for the fish into the net set for them.

No power on earth, no device, should be allowed to intervene between the laborer and his or her products; they should be held sacredly at his or her sovereign control.

Gold, silver, greenbacks, and devices heretofore and now used to intervene and make such confusion that even public writers and veteran leaders do not understand, and even say that the philosophy of money is past finding out.

The difficulty is the simplicity of the solution. We cannot carry mason work, carpenter work, or farm products about the exchange for what we want, and therefore require something that represents these, which we can carry about us, and which, being circulated, will procure for the holder of them what they represent. This is all that is needed in money or a circulating medium.

Any combination or organization which distinguishes a party from the rest of mankind cuts off those sympathies which are the natural and legitimate bond of society and which ought to have no limits. The first step toward counteracting this error will be to constitute every individual its own interpreter of language.

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1840

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