THE
KINGDOM
OF
INDIVIDUALS

An Essay on Self-Respect
and Social Obligation

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ALSO BY F. G. BAILEY

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things" and they "renounce payment," thus also renouncing economic rationality. Like Svejk they are sending a message about human dignity both to the authorities and to themselves.

Finally, the workers collude with one another, not only by looking the other way when they see regulations being broken, but also sometimes, to get a "homer" finished, helping each other out on their different machines. Here again, as in the collusion on the American shop floor, disengagement reveals itself as in part a cooperative practice in the context of a moral community.

GUMS AND SCHOLARS

I now shift the scene far away from the factory floor, where people are presented as mostly thinking about how much they can get into their wage packet and how little work they need give in return, to another world that is forever canting about service and duty, where work is styled a privilege. The setting is that same university in Britain, where the "new map of learning" was being followed, and nothing was good that did not depart from the "Germanic" pattern, and only slackers refused to go the extra mile. Quite soon experience dampened enthusiasm, the arteries hardened, reality testing was no longer branded pessimism, and the vibrant tones of those who asked "What fine thing shall we do next?" were replaced, or at least followed, by dourer voices asking "What can we afford to do?" But even into the time of realism, when it was clear that uninhibited brainstorming and mutual shaming to go that extra mile were mostly just talk and certainly no substitute for books in the library or other academic necessities, there survived a morally prescriptive stereotype of what was called the "Good University Man." (The irreverent lost no time in reducing that to its acronym GUM, and also put into circulation another not-inappropriate acronym for the Bad University Man.)

GUMs were not distinguished from the rest of the faculty by the brilliance of their scholarship or the effectiveness of their teaching (everyone, by virtue of belonging to that institution, was ipso facto a fine scholar and an exceptionally devoted and talented teacher). Rather they were characterized first by their total acceptance of the institution's philosophy and second by dedicated service to the management of the institution.

GUMs accepted the philosophy of the new map of learning—they even got together and wrote a book about it (Datcher 1964)—but, paradoxically, the real GUM, while certainly putting the advancement of knowledge well behind the dissemination of wisdom, put in only a little service in the classroom and a lot of service in committee rooms. To spend time and effort making one's name in the world of research and scholarship was to be what about that time began to be called a "free rider." I once heard a dean castigate a young woman (a philosopher widely considered a Good University Person and an inspiring teacher), because she had requested unpaid leave to write a book. There would be opportunity enough for that, he said, if ever she qualified herself for sabbatical leave (for which, as it happened, that university at that time made no provision); meanwhile the continued success of the institution required her continuous presence. Service was a privilege and its own reward; her desire to advance herself showed a regrettable lack of public spirit.

The dean's attitude toward the philosopher and her scholarly ambitions was extreme, and it may have been a hangover from his formative years as an educator. Before dedicating himself relatively late in life to the university, he had been headmaster of a boy's school, an ancient and renowned foundation, which, like most of its peers, taught that character came before brains, and that devotion to the institution itself, and to the nation,
was the highest of virtues. In fact, that is what “virtue” meant, holding one’s own interests second to the interests of the collectivity.

Notice that there are two meanings compounded in the word “institution.” First, the university is an institution in the sense that it is a legally recognized corporation, controlling property, making contracts with its employees and others, both restrained by law and possessing its own coercive sanctions by virtue of its legal standing. Its employees, including faculty members, must live by its regulations and provide it with the services for which they were hired. In return the institution gives them a salary and various other perquisites, and, like the larger society around it, makes possible an ordered, nonchaotic existence, without which life would be intolerable.

The institution that the dean had in mind was not this impersonal legal entity that owns property, makes contracts and provides a framework for ordered interaction, and is in the end nothing more than a formal organization, an instrument for accomplishing certain defined tasks (in this case education and research). The university, as the dean saw it, was not a contractual entity at all, but one that bound in its members by tacit convention or by solemn covenant, or perhaps in a fashion that needed no explicit agreement because they were “of the body.” The university was not an instrument but an end in itself, having a status that was not legal, but moral. The faculty were not just employees, but together they constituted a collectivity, a collegial body, the members of which had obligations toward one another that were founded on the same kind of moral imperative that is supposed to hold together, for example, a group of kin or a fellowship of true-believers. That was the community that GUMs served, and on which BUMs took their “free ride.”

The mark of a GUM, as I said, is that he (or she) stands ready to undertake managerial tasks “beyond the call of duty” and is apparently willing to put his own interests second to those of the university. But that only talks about his purportedly benign attitude; it does not say what in fact he does. What he does is serve on committees and do the work that committee service requires: reading documents, writing position papers, debating, making decisions, and persuading others of the rightness of those decisions. The decisions may be routine: examination boards, space allocation committees, appointment and promotion boards, and so forth. Alternatively they may respond to emergencies: rebellious students, inadequate funds for recreational activities, books stolen from the library, and a thousand other things.

Solving either kind of problem, crisis or routine, constitutes a public service, because all those in the university who enjoy the benefit of a successful solution do so whether they made a contribution to it or not. The good that emerges is not privatizable; those who fail to pay their pound of flesh, in the form of committee service, still get the benefits. This fact is well known, and the cordial contempt that ordinary academics usually feel for assidious committeemen may be tempered with a remark like “Well, someone has to do it, and sooner him than me!”

But why does someone—that is, one of “us”—have to do it? Why should the moral collectivity become involved? Why not leave it to be done by the university in its status of legal entity? The usual answer is that the university as a corporation is managed by professional administrators who are not competent to make decisions about student examinations, or faculty promotions, or other academic matters, and are too remote to understand what is troubling the students or what students need, or why the university would or would not be better off without teachers of philosophy. More important, the administrators are at best only marginally part of the moral collectivity. They are outsiders who do not understand the mysteries of academic life and do not share in its grace. They are not really “of the body.”
conduct in the organization. But, as will become clear, practical disengagement in an academic setting is a much less straightforward affair than it is in the factory, mostly because the idea of money-for-services-rendered is vastly confused in academia by ideas of duty and the question of where duty is owed.

Before I joined the dean’s university, I taught in a pleasant academic enclave located within an institution that was much larger and much older than the dean’s place. It was run by a combination of an iron-bound bureaucracy and a no less rigid ideology. The bureaucracy was gigantic and ubiquitous, all precedents seemingly having long been set. Like all bureaucracies it went in for some mystification of itself (especially of how it in fact worked) and one had access to its favors through the services of administrative vicars. They were a humdrum lot, and obliging, most of them either elderly ladies or retired colonial civil servants, not by any stretch of the imagination like prophets; they kept a low profile. Like the bureaucracy itself, they were taken for granted, beyond ordinary understanding, but certainly not such as to inspire awe, merely a familiar and reassuring part of the landscape.

The bureaucracy functioned very predictably and for the most part effectively at doing what, over the years, it had grown into doing, which was to service the needs of the individual scholar. Everyone, of whatever rank—assistant lecturer, lecturer, senior lecturer, reader, or professor—considered himself unique and exceptional, and gloried in the fact. It was indeed a place where the rhetoric of the dean—service to the institution is all—would have gotten short shrift. (It was also one of the places from which the dean’s university took care to distinguish itself.)

Of course there had to be some service: examination boards, appointment boards, the heads of departments meeting with the director of the institution to divide space and other resources, a committee to run the common room and decide which kind of biscuits should be sold with morning coffee or afternoon tea, the perennial routine of housekeeping that characterizes any such institution. But precedent took care of most matters, because nothing much came up that was new (certainly in comparison with the dean’s university), and the professional administrators in the registrar’s and bursar’s offices made sure that the various facilities, academic and otherwise, were efficiently managed. There were a few GUMs, assiduous committee men; they were not held in high esteem, although it was agreed that they did a lot of work, some of it necessary. The “genuine scholars” rarely volunteered for committee work, and when they did the regular members wished they had stayed away, for most of them had the unfortunate habit of indulging to the full the scholar’s propensity for quibbling over detail, making committee work an intellectual sport rather than an occasion on which to make necessary decisions.

These individual scholars never thought they were shirking their duty and would never have described themselves as Svejks; they would have thought the comparison insulting. But, if I recall some of the behavior I observed (and leave unconsidered for the moment the question of motivation), what they did, and what the institution itself did, seem to have something in common with Svejk.

The institution’s speciality was expertise in foreign languages and cultures of a particular kind: those which were remote, out of the ordinary, and supposedly unfamiliar to mainstream British and European scholarship. Tibetan, Korean, the languages of China, Japanese, dead languages such as Accadian or Sanscrit, the tribal languages of Africa, the languages of contemporary South Asia, Arabic, Georgian, and the less familiar languages of the Soviet Union are representative examples. Those languages, together with the cultures and histories of the people who spoke or had spoken them, represented the institution’s intellectual concentration. The 1939–45 war had