# The "Digital Divide" is Not a Problem in Need of Rectifying

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ABSTRACT. An oft heard complaint is that there is a digital divide: that some racial, ethnic and gender groupings have more than their fair share of access to computers than others. Commentators who articulate this perspective offer as solutions to this problem the subsidization of such technology for those who are supposedly underprivileged in it. The present paper denies that there is any such problem in need of rectification.

KEY WORDS: coercion, computers, digital divide, egalitarianism, Internet

## 1. The "digital divide" is not a problem in need of rectifying

There has long been a subterranean political economic philosophy which informs much public policy debate, at least from the left side of the aisle. This is the view that in the good society, e.g., if the forces of capitalism, or evil, or discrimination, or prejudice[1] could ever be fully counteracted, then all groups of people would be equally represented in all conceivable walks of life: professions, callings, jobs, degrees, admissions to college, rates of success, etc. That is, the number of blacks, women, homosexuals, handicapped people, Indians, etc., in medicine, law, plumbing, carpentry, the professorate, on the judicial bench, in Congress, etc., would be proportionate the their numbers in the overall population.[2] If Jews are 2% of the population, Irish 5%, and blacks 12%, for example, then these numbers would be perfectly reflected in all human endeavors. If they are not, this is compelling evidence of injustice, or at least of something untoward. There is nothing more galling to advocates of this thesis than the for them all too prevalent fact that such proportionality is virtually never attained.

That is to say, the sonum bonum for such pundits is that males and females, whites and blacks, members of different religions and ethnic groups, rich and poor, able bodied and handicapped, old and young, etc., all attain proportional representation as doctors, lawyers, mathematicians, chess champions, scholars, inventors and other high prestige occupations. When this does not occur, there is a great wailing and gnashing of teeth, coupled with complaints of unfairness, greed, exploitation and systematic discrimination. For advocates of this type of social order, this is what would naturally occur but for the interference of malevolent forces.

There has been no one who has done more to refute these claims than Thomas Sowell. He has shown in case after case[3] that sub groups of humanity have different tastes and predilections, that without any chicanery or foul play, different samples of the population have widely disparate goals and ambitions and accomplishments.

Spearheading the latest foray into proportionality are the minions of computers and information processors. Trumpeting a so-called "digital divide," one representative of this school of thought characterizes it as a "problem"[4] that interest in computers is not evenly spread

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throughout society, and offers a myriad of "solutions"[5] to this non existent problem.[6] I shall treat Friedman (2000) as a springboard to a critical analysis. I shall show that this article, not atypical of the genre, commits not only the fallacy of proportionality, but combines it as well with special pleading, egocentrism and economic illiteracy.

## 2. Special pleading

Take special pleading first. Ever since at least the days of Adam Smith, it has been known that people in business, the professions, the guilds, etc., have an incentive to promote public policies which enhance their own wealth, even at the greater expense of the public weal. Stated Smith:

> People of the same trade seldom meet together, even for merriment and diversion, but the conversation ends in a conspiracy against the public, or in some contrivance to raise prices. It is impossible indeed to prevent such meetings, by any law which either could be executed, or would be consistent with liberty and justice. But though the law cannot hinder people of the same trade from sometimes assembling together, it ought to do nothing to facilitate such assemblies; much less to render them necessary.[7]

As applied to the business of computers, Weber opines: "In our offices, schools and even our homes, it often seems that computer people are forever trying to drag the rest of us along with them into the wired future."[8]

The screed under consideration is no exception to this rule. According to Friedman, not only is it a "problem" that some people are less involved with computers than others, and not only does the "solution" to this problem consist of encouraging everyone and his uncle to become involved with this technology, but there is an actual "*duty* on the part of the computer-haves toward the computer-have-nots"[9] to rectify this sad situation. Further, to add insult to injury, there is "a corresponding duty on the part of the un-endowed to help themselves in this area."[10] In other words, a hermit, or a poet, or a Luddite is no longer free to go about his business, unoppressed by digital technologies. Absolute strangers have a duty to introduce him to the wonder of high technology information systems, whether they wish to do so or not, kicking and screaming in protest if they resist (it is their *duty*, and thus an obligation is imposed upon them). Nor does the target of all this busy body-ness have a right to resist; he, too, has a correlative duty to cooperate in what amounts to a sort of mental rape.[11]

Can it be objected that the main function of guilds was to prevent entry[12] to restrict competition from other skilled artisans?[13] In contrast, those seeking to impose dot.coms upon the rest of us risk little in this regard. The great technologically unwashed are hardly likely to serve as rival suppliers, which might well if it occurred diminish the earnings capacity of extant practitioners. Rather, they will merely be added to the demand for their services, which will have the opposite effect of raising their compensation and prerequisites.

Yes, we must concede that the form of special pleading in the present case does not follow that of the medieval guilds. But it is still special pleading: not, to be sure, to shift the supply curve to the left, but instead to shift the demand curve to the right. But either way, the well being of those in the profession is enhanced, under what can only be counted as misdirection.

## 3. Proportionality

Next, consider proportionality. Friedman errs in this matter as well. He defines the digital divide as "the unevenness of access to the Internet or perhaps to differences in groups in computer ownership levels . . . it also refers to a disparity in awareness and use of computers between two or more societies as well as between groups within a single society."[14] But this is a paradigm case of the proportionality fallacy. Of course people will differ as to their interests, desires, characteristics, capabilities, etc. But this occurs with just about everything under the sun; it is by no means limited to computers. As such there is simply no need to explain, let alone correct, so primordial a fact. Nevertheless, this author explores several "causes" of this phenomenon.

### 3.1. *Economic disparity*

The rich have a greater affinity for the Internet than do the poor, it turns out, amazingly enough. But so does this apply to yachts, grand pianos and Mercedes automobiles.[15] Does this mean there is a "divide" with regard to all such luxury goods? That it is the duty of the wealthy to make these products available to the impecunious, and for the latter to accept them? This would appear to be the logical implication of his analysis. Why has no one ever brought up the "yacht divide" replete with an analysis of why this is wrong, and a plan for addressing this obviously unjust state of affairs?

Friedman ventures that "another common barrier to digital participation is a lack of self confidence."[16] This appears to be a rather dubious proposition, given the availability of a very strong competing hypothesis, one with far more general explanatory power, in that it accounts for a "divide" not only in computer technology, but also in mathematics, physics, chemistry, engineering, chess, philosophy, economics, and numerous other intellectual pursuits. I refer, of course, to I.Q. It seems almost obvious that intelligence levels[17] would be highly correlated with computer literacy, as it is with these other essentially mental activities. That such a hypothesis is not even considered in this literature surely calls into question its seriousness.

### 3.2. *National disparity*

Friedman's second source of disparity is national origin. He bewails the fact that "there are more Internet users in New York City than in the entire continent of Africa."[18] But there are more bananas grown in Costa Rica than in all of the U.S. There are more fish caught by Iceland than in all of (the rest of) Europe. There is more wiener schnitzel in Germany and Austria than in the entire remainder of the world. There are more chopsticks used in Japan than in the entire continent of South America. There are more kangaroos in Australia than in all of Asia. Why are not the "divides" engendered by these facts a "problem" crying out for a "solution?" Why should we as egalitarian proportionalists be concerned only with computer access? What about access to bananas, fish, wiener schnitzel, chopsticks and kangaroos? Yes, money can of course be earned in, on and through the Internet, but fortunes can and have been amassed in some of these other industries as well. In any case, in economic equilibrium profits are equal in all endeavors,[19] and dot.coms are certainly no exception to this rule.

There is at least one country, however, which has taken the Friedman hypothesis to heart. This is Canada. That nation's Prime Minister, Jean Chretien, in his Throne Speech of January 2001, announced the creation of a four-year plan[20] which is aimed at the goal of making Canada "the most connected nation in the world."[21] This was followed up by a February 13, 2001 account issued by the Conference Board of Canada which bemoaned the fact that this country was suffering an "Internet gap" with the U.S. According to a spokesman for this institution, "We must keep pace with the U.S. – our major trading partner and biggest competitor. Otherwise we risk being overtaken by countries like Sweden and Finland."[22] Well, presumably a computer race is better than an arms race, but not every country can be number one in this or any other competition. The point is, though, why do it, and if it is good to do, why not do it with any other good or service produced by the economy? Surely, we could have competitions to see who has the most (on a per capita basis) bananas, fish, wiener schnitzel, chopsticks and kangaroos. When the matter is put in these terms the race seems ludicrous. Yet it is no different for computers.

### 3.3. *Regions in the U.S.*

The next "divide" to catch the baleful glance of our author is that between regions of the U.S. It would appear that rural North Carolina is particularly under "privileged" when it comes to computers, and that, therefore, steps should be taken to alleviate this problem.

But there is nary a cattle ranch to be found anywhere within the vast environs of Rhode Island, no citrus grows in Maine, Utah boasts of

only paltry rice crops if any at all, Idaho has no gambling establishments, in no state other than Nevada can legalized prostitution be found, New York has hogged up a vastly disproportionate share of the banking, jewelry and organized stock exchange industries, you can't go two miles in Massachusetts without passing an institution of higher learning, Connecticut has no slaughterhouses, California's potato crop is picayune, and North Dakota has no professional baseball, football nor even basketball franchises, not a single solitary one. Needless to say, "divides" galore abound, in view of these unseemly facts, which are but the tip of the iceberg. Where oh where are the authors for whom these situations are problems? Where are solutions to these egregious injustices to be found?

Why and in what way does the "digital divide" across states differ from the "divides" as pertain to cattle ranching, citrus, rice, gambling, prostitution, banking, jewelry, stock exchanges, education, slaughterhouses, potatoes, athletic leagues, etc., such that the former is a problem in need of rectification, and the latter is not? One would be very hard put indeed to discern a relevant difference between them.

### 3.4. *Gender*

Females, in the view of Friedman, get the short end of the computer stick vis a vis males. He cites Pfleeger in support of this thesis who mentions: ". . . a precipitous decline in the women's enrollment in computer science since 1984."[23] Why oh why this terrible tragedy? It has to do with a poor "sense of self worth of all females as . . . women have been relegated to lesser roles in the arts, literature, the media, scholarship, and now we can add technology."[24] This is compounded, in Friedman's view, by the fact that "women who internalize this view of themselves are not good candidates for the rigors of contributing to technology, which requires a high degree of self esteem."[25]

There is so much wrong with this analysis it is difficult to know where to begin a refutation. Let us begin with the fact that there is a wealth of empirical evidence showing that women do not at all "get the short end of the stick" in the market in general; the glass ceiling is a myth, as is the claim that there is a "pay gap" which mitigates against women. True, the average female earns less than the average male, but this is due almost entirely to the fact that marriage, with its unequal sharing of household and child rearing burdens,[26] reduces the earnings of the wife and enhances those of the husband. And not only do numerous empirical examinations[27] attest to this fact; as well, economic theory points in the same direction: wages tend to equal marginal productivity rates, and on the assumption that males and females on average are equally productive it would be a non equilibrium situation where the earnings of one were higher than that of the other. For example, if average productivity of men and women were $10 per hour, and the former earned $10 while the latter earned $7 (wages consonant with the so called pay "gap") then employers would seek to hire women, and fire men, since they could only in this way maximize profits. When the statistics are corrected for this phenomenon, that is, when the pay of never married men and women is compared, there is virtually no difference between them.[28]

Then there is the fact that women are already "becoming a virtual force to be reckoned with,"[29] without any additional, and artificial, government programs to this end. As it happens, middle aged women are the fastest growing segment of the population now introducing themselves to the wired world.[30]

Another grievous error committed by this perspective is the assumption that confidence, or serenity or self-esteem is at all responsible for, or even positively correlated with, success in intellectual pursuits. If anything, almost the very opposite is the case. For example, tests of the self esteem[31] levels, and the accomplishments in mathematics of high school students have shown time and time again that those who are the most confident exhibit the least skills in this regard, and those with the most self esteem acquit themselves the poorest.[32]

Further, if it is a problem that fewer women than men are to be found hunched over, peering into a screen, then it is equally a difficulty what

prevails in dozens of other arenas where the men outnumber women. And what about this reverse situation? How shall we address the iniquity that females predominate in nursing, social work, grade school teaching, prostitution, libraries, stewardesses and manicurists? Is this fair? To ask this question is to answer it, from the proportionality perspective, at least if its adherents were logically consistent: it is an injustice crying out to the heavens for redress. But where are Friedman and his ilk when to comes to this crucial task? Nowhere to be found.

### 3.5. *Race*

Friedman purports to be making a serious attempt to discern the causes of the digital divide. One of the hypotheses he mentions is race. When this characteristic is designated as a possible explanation for the disparity in attachment to computers between whites and blacks, thanks to recent work in IQ differences between the races,[33] it is intellectually dishonest to totally ignore this issue. Yet, ignore it he does, on the curious ground that this makes "mean racists respectable."[34] States Friedman: "The present paper undertakes to steer clear of the mines in this contentious minefield by concentrating on geographic or class arenas where certain races predominate; thus no pronouncements will be made concerning innate abilities to do computing or the like."[35]

But this simply will not do. If this is a real cause of the "problem," and a "solution" is seriously desired, then how can a coherent account totally ignore a causal antecedent?[36] If it is really true that members of certain races are for the most part incapable of grasping the niceties of computer operation,[37] then what becomes of the much vaunted "duty" of possessors of this technique to inculcate it amongst the non possessors, and a reciprocal "duty"[38] of the latter to suffer through this process? It is surely a basic premise of moral philosophy that "ought implies can." It is thus highly problematical to contend that people ought to do things of which they are incapable. Similarly, it is also dubious to require of other people (e.g., the computer "haves") that they teach others things of which the latter are incapable of learning. Surely it is part of the burden of proof of those who contend there is a digital divide which ought to be solved to at least address this issue. Friedman not only fails to acquit himself in this regard, but attempts to make it into a positive virtue that he does not do so.

### 3.6. *Culture*

Culture, too, can have a differential impact on computer use. According to Twist,[39] the culture of some ethnic groups is less conducive to the wired world than is that of others. However, this would be the occasion for surprise, or for disappointment, only for those slavishly devoted to the proportionality hypothesis.

Computer usage is hardly the only thing which varies across different cultures. The same may be said for bocci, blintzes, badminton, borscht, Bach, barbeque and beer, just to limit ourselves to things which begin with the second letter of the alphabet. According to the "logic" of the "divide" hypothesis, these divergences, too, represent a challenge which ought to be met with vigorous opposition. To put matters in this way, however, only underscores even the more the reductio ad absurdum elements of this ideological initiative.

Parenthetically, Friedman reports without demur Saunders' claim that Russia has not taken to the electronic world because its "population was hostile to American values, particularly consumerism, which would have driven the expansion of the Internet and e-commerce – hence the digital divide between Russia and the West."[40]

Nothing could be further from the truth. The Russians are completely open to American values such as consumerism. This is evidenced by the alacrity with which they purchase American products such as jeans, McDonald's hamburgers, and video discs. As well, their flocking to our shores as immigrants further attests to these values. What is lacking in the former U.S.S.R. is not consumerism, but rather the values which make this possible in the first place: free enterprise, private property rights, and laissez faire

capitalism. These, it would appear, have been bleached out of them by their tragic 70 year experience with Communism.[41]

### 3.7. *Language*

Last but perhaps not least there is the matter of linguistics. The English language, presumably, has been "privileged" in the world inhabited by nerds, since those who invented it,[42] spoke and wrote in this mode to the exclusion of all others. How inconsiderate!

But Americans are far from being the only violators of propriety in this regard. The bible was originally written, horrors!, in Hebrew. This disenfranchised all other language groups. Those who wanted to avail themselves of the wisdom contained therein were forced to hire translators, surely an unfair burden. Similarly, most operas are written in Italian (how gross and unfair!). Singers and audiences have been forced to "get used to" this, or become relegated to spending their entertainment dollars in other directions. How unconscionable. The Japanese and Koreans have been inconsiderate enough to couch their martial arts (Karate and Tae Kwan Do) in (wait for it) Japanese and Korean, of all things. Surely this is intolerable. People in other countries who have wanted to take up these arts have been brutalized into learning these languages.

If the use of English on the world wide web is a "problem" in need of a "solution," then the same applies in these other cases as well. Friedman himself, however, admits that "even the attempt to render the Internet more international by allowing domain names consisting of non-English characters presents a technical problem affecting the stability of the Internet."[43] But why allow this to stop us? Do not we have a "duty" to bring the Internet to the great unwashed? Why allow a risk to the very system at issue to deflect us from this moral mission? A duty is precisely that sort of thing which requires that we take risks of this sort.

On a more serious note, there is no earthly reason why English speakers should kow tow to those who cannot understand this language. If other people wish to benefit from our web, they are free to learn our language, or hire translators. This is what is done for American movies and songs, amongst the most popular in the world. There is no compelling reason why the "digital divide," subcategory language, should justify any change in this practice.

## 4. Economic illiteracy

What are the "solutions" to this "problem" offered by Friedman, and why and in what way do these indicate a lack of economic sophistication on the part of this author? First, what are the solutions? They are as follows:

- involve hitherto uninterested persons in research with computers
- provide a supportive environment
- show that computer activity need not be boring
- show the fun of problem solving
- use games as an entree to the digital world, especially for the very young
- establish a network of centers where the members of the digitally disenfranchised can work with other group members to "research, design and prototype new technologies."[44]

These initiatives are problematic from an economic perspective because they are incompatible with specialization and the division of labor, two of the most basic foundations in all of the dismal science.

The point is, if you specialize in computers, and I in fishing, then we can mutually benefit from trade with one another. Each of us, as specialists, can take advantage of the economies of scale in training. Practice might not make perfect, but it certainly improves performance. It is not for nothing that the concert pianist and the heart surgeon rehearse, drill and exercise, until their skills are finely honed. But only specialization makes such practice possible. To eschew this is to become "a jack of all trades, a master of none." Lack of focus is hardly a recipe for economic growth and development.[45] But the cart must be put after the horse: if we take Friedman's advice and abandon the division of

labor, we will be poorer than otherwise we need be, and will not have more but fewer electronic communications webs.

I now consider, and reject, a series of objections which might be offered as against the thesis herein being put forard.

## 5. Objection 1: advice?

Can an objection be made in Friedman's behalf that his "solutions" are only advice, and that as such, they are part and parcel of the market? that in effect, this counsel constitutes Friedman's own specialization within the free enterprise system; that the division of labor stretches so far as to include advice giving, and thus it would be untoward, for the critic who favors capitalism, to object to Friedman himself availing himself of this system. The point is, if people voluntarily decide to pass up the benefits of specialization in favor of the psychic income values obtainable from embarking upon several different vocations or avocations (computer use included), there is nothing in economics that can say them nay, from the perspective of efficiency.[46] To put this in another way, just as the economic actor and only he can maximize satisfaction from determining, as a consumer, the allocation between goods, or between saving and consumption, or, as a member of the factor market between labor and leisure, so, too, does this apply to the location along the specialization-non specialization continuum. For most if not all people the road to economic success lies strongly in the direction of specialization. It is the rare world class athlete, or physicist, or musician, or economist, or computer programmer who can afford to dilute his efforts by taking on other, irrelevant, tasks.[47] It is the rare leading violinist who can make do with fewer than eight hours a day of practice – which leaves scant time or energy for pecking away at a computer keyboard.

But suppose there were a very good musician who got by on only four hours per day of tickling the ivory or bowing away, and spent a like amount of time on web surfing. He may well not achieve the pinnacle in either of these directions that he might otherwise have, had he focused on only one of them. On the other hand, perhaps, he will do even better this way; e.g., he could better avoid boredom or burnout. However, even if we stipulate for the sake of argument that going off in both of these directions at the same time will not achieve either professional goal as fully as he could have attained in either one of them through specialization, still, if it is a voluntary choice, the economist must perforce conclude that he gained more than he lost – otherwise, at least in the ex ante sense, he would not have made this decision.[48]

So which is it? Is Friedman merely giving advice, in which case his statements are as integral a part of the market as any other human action, or is he egging on the state apparatus to coerce people in the direction of computer literacy, in which case he cannot resort to this objection?

A moment's consideration will incline the disinterested observer in the latter direction. First, as we have seen, Friedman sees overcoming the so called digital divide as a duty, not as a good deed, or a benevolent act; for him this duty is incumbent not only on the computer haves but also on the have nots. To say that I have a duty or an obligation to do X, or to suffer that it be done to me, is tantamount to claiming that force may be utilized against me if I shirk or refrain. E.g., if I have a *duty* to fight in Viet Nam, the person who compels me to do so is not a criminal. If I have an *obligation* to refrain from murdering you, and I renege on it, then you may properly use force (in self defense) to recall me to my proper role.[49]

On the other hand, there is such a thing as moral obligation, not the legal obligation we have so far been discussing. I have a moral obligation to be nice to my spouse, children, parents, but if I fail to live up to this, there is no one rash enough to assert that the force of law may properly be used against me. In his discussion of duty and obligation, Friedman vouchsafes us no answer as to which type he is advocating.

Happily, however, for the clarity of his exposition, he explicitly welcomed the following state of affairs: "In February 2000, the administration proposed $2 billion in tax incentives and $380

million in funding over the next ten years for programs aimed at alleviating access concerns. Some of those programs will provide low-cost telephone and Internet access to rural and impoverished areas."[50] This should be considered definitive as to whether there is a moral or a legal obligation in play in this regard. Taxes are compulsory levies. There is no denying that.[51] As such, it is clear that Friedman's claim is not part of the market. Rather, it is a threat against the person and property of all those who are forced, ultimately at the point of a gun, to promote the computer industry.

## 6. Objection 2: consumer, not producer

There is a second objection which might be employed by a defender of Friedman against the present critique. In this view, Friedman is not really attacking specialization. He is not asking that those who are presently computer illiterate to become anything like experts in this field.[52] Instead, Friedman is calling for pretty much everyone in the world to become a reasonably intelligent consumer of the products of this industry. But given this more precise rendition of his thesis, the charge of attempting to torpedo the division of labor must be rejected.

This seemingly plausible defense of Friedman will not withstand scrutiny. There are two difficulties with it. First, within the factor market, this objection at best calls into question the strength of the disparagement of economic insights on the one hand, and the coerciveness of it on the other. Yes, forcing people against their will to be part time members of the computer industry instead of full timers is less destructive of the Adam Smithian notion, but it is still a violation of it for all that.

Second, specialization and the division of labor occur not only in production but in consumption as well. If people are forced to extend their leisure time activities so as to include one more task, e.g., going on line, this must of necessity come at the cost of foregoing something in which they were already engaged in, but which they valued more. In this case, we have no warrant whatsoever to conclude that this is a change for the better ex ante. Very much the reverse is the case: given that people were free to engage in computer intensive acts before Friedman's program could be implemented, but chose not to do so, we can only conclude that a forced march in this direction will *lower* their utility. There is such a thing as subjective alternative costs[53] after all, and by their very decisions the non computer literate world had demonstrated or revealed that they enjoyed these options available to them more highly than the world wide web.

Alternatively, more time spent on computers must mean less time allotted to other recreational pursuits, without dropping any of them. Here we have the paradigm case of less than the optimal amount (as freely chosen by the economic actor) of specialization in leisure activities. I used to have three hobbies. Now, thanks to Friedman, I have four; the other three plus computers. I am now less specialized than before, and thus forced into a less optimal position.

## 7. Objection 3: paternalism

Can it be objected that a few minutes spent on computers each day would be better for those forced to do so even though they explicitly reject this course of action? Once we open this particular can of worms all of welfare economics disappears, in that this mode of analysis takes people's decisions as a definitive given. Banish that insight and we are at sea without a rudder. Anything goes. I claim that all of you out there would really be better off if you purchased more of my published books, instead of spending your money in your present incompetent ways. On what basis could this ludicrous claim be rejected, once we jettison uncoerced individual choice? Once again we call upon Adam Smith to provide us with words of wisdom on this subject:

> The statesman who should attempt to direct private people in what manner they ought to employ their capitals, would not only load himself with a most unnecessary attention, but assume an authority which could safely be trusted, not only to no single person, but to no council or senate whatever, and

which would nowhere be so dangerous as in the hands of a many who had folly and presumption enough to fancy himself fit to exercise it.[55]

## 8. Objection 4: indirect coercion

Here is one last possible objection which might be used by Friedman against the criticism herein leveled against him. He does not at all advocate that anyone be dragged off, kicking and screaming if need be, to a computer console, and then forced to interact with it in a proper manner. Rather, he is counseling that more of people's hard earned money be taken away from them against their will, and then that these funds be used, in effect, to bribe them into taking a more computer literate path than they otherwise would have pursued. So, no, no one would be compelled to play with a computer, in this Friedmanite world.

But indirectly, they would be. If I draft you into the army to fight in Viet Nam, I compel you directly. But suppose I do not. Instead, I enact a new tax, the proceeds of which are to go toward hiring a voluntary military. You still do not agree to join my army. So I keep raising this tax higher and higher, to truly punitive levels if need be, and I keep offering you a higher and higher salary to fight – until you finally give in and enlist. I may not have compelled you directly, but I still did force you to do something against your will. As much could be said for the robber who holds a gun to your head and shouts: "Your money or your life." He never directly robs you. He does not put his hand in your pocket. Instead, *you* reach into your pants for your wallet, and *you* give the money in it to him. This is indirect, not direct, compulsion. But it is every bit as compulsory.

Take another case. On many college campuses, certain student organizations, usually those oriented toward socialism, or left wing environmentalism, or black, feminist or gay "studies," dominate expenditures for outside speakers. Those on the other side, Christian, libertarian and conservative clubs, are all but frozen out. Is it possible to assert that the former have violated the free speech rights of the latter? This is certainly not true, at least directly. Right wing student clubs are typically[56] free to engage in speech on their own account. But it is true, indirectly, in that the compulsory student fees[57] are used by one group of students to help articulate views which are anathema to another.

Support for this contention is garnered from a recent law case in this regard. Reports Young:

> A federal judge on Friday struck down the University of Wisconsin's newly revised system for distributing mandatory student fees to campus groups, arguing that the system is still unconstitutional. The university had modified the system in response to earlier court rulings that it violated the First Amendment by potentially denying funds to some groups based on their viewpoints.
>
> Judge John C. Shabaz of U.S. District Court had ordered the university late last year to change the mandatory-fee system, which he said gave student governments "unbridled discretion in the allocation of segregated university fees." He added that such discretion made it possible for student groups to be denied funds based on their viewpoints, violating their First Amendment rights to free speech.
>
> Over the past few months, the university had made extensive changes to try to comply with the court order. It created an appeals process for student groups that believed that they had been unfairly denied support, it and added a requirement that students leaders take an oath to be viewpoint-neutral.
>
> But Judge Shabaz ruled that the changes were not enough to remove possible bias by student-government leaders who distribute the funds.
>
> "Despite defendant's efforts, the measures undertaken fail to address the central constitutional defect in the segregated fee program," he wrote. "The level of the student government's discretion is unchanged. . . . Determining funding eligibility remains a discretionary exercise."[58]

## 9. Conclusion

It is time to conclude. The Friedman paper is an exercise in ego-centrism. Its forces are very powerful. Many is the businessman who has said, "I favor the free enterprise system. But you have to understand that in *my* industry we have special problems which require a subsidy, or governmental protection." Or, "My industry makes

contributions to society that very few people appreciate. Were they but aware of these benefits, they would undoubtedly avail themselves of them. Therefore, we need a special tax or a program to acquaint the masses with these gains to them. We are doing this out of charitable motives."

An actual case in point illustrating these sentiments was the butter manufacturer's opposition to the colonization of margarine, which would make this latter product more salable.[59] Some, perhaps even many of the farmers and dairyists actually believed they were acting in the public interest.[60]

But the free society simply cannot tolerate one group of people using force to compel others to do its bidding. For whatever purpose. No matter what the motives of the former. Conceded, it is extremely tempting to force people to learn to surf the web, "for their own good." It cannot be denied that computers have many and large scale benefits. We must be even the more vigilant, then, to see through the economic and moral fallacies that underlay programs to shove computer literacy down the throats of innocent people. We must reject the conclusion that there is any meaningful "digital divide"; that even could this somehow be proven, that it would constitute a "problem"; and even if, somehow, it was considered such, that the "solution" would not involve the initiation of violence against those who were innocent of such uninvited border crossings. Let us leave people alone to decide upon their own Internet participation.

## Appendix 1

TABLE A.1.
Racial and ethnic composition of professional athletic employment (in %)[61]

| | | White | Black | Hispanic | Other |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total population | | 73 | 12 | 11 | 4 |
| NBA | Players | 20 | 79 | 0 | 0 |
| | General managers | 72 | 28 | 0 | 0 |
| | Coaches | 67 | 33 | 0 | 0 |
| | Staff | 77 | 17 | 2 | 3 |
| NFL | Players | 31 | 66 | 1 | 0 |
| | General managers | 83 | 17 | 0 | 0 |
| | Coaches | 75 | 24 | 1 | 0 |
| | Staff | 80 | 15 | 3 | 2 |

## Notes

[1] These all function virtually as synonyms amongst advocates of this perspective.

[2] This sentiment, curiously enough, has never been applied to professional sports such as basketball and football. In those cases, the facts are as depicted in Appendix 1. It is interesting that most commentators complain that the number of black coaches falls way below the proportion of black players, instead of that black players are vastly over represented compared to their percentage of the overall population. Were the proportionality thesis to be applied to this case, black players could only comprise about 12% of the NBA and the NFL. Those presently employed in these capacities over that cut off point would have to be fired.

[3] Sowell, T.: 1995, *The Vision of the Annointed* (Basic Books, New York); Sowell, T.: 1975, *Race and Economics* (Longman, New York); Sowell, T.: 1976, *Patterns of Black Excellence* (Ethics and Public Policy Center, Washington D.C.); Sowell, T.: 1981, *Pink and Brown People* (The Hoover Institution Press, San Francisco); Sowell, T.: 1981, *Ethnic America* (Basic Books, New York); Sowell, T.: 1982, '*Weber* and *Bakke* and the Presuppositions of "Affirmative

Action"', in W. Block and M. Walker (eds.), *Discrimination, Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity* (The Fraser Institute, Vancouver); Sowell, T.: 1983, *The Economics and Politics of Race: An International Perspective* (Morrow, New York); Sowell, T.: 1984, *Civil Rights: Rhetoric or Reality* (William Morrow, New York); Sowell, T.: 1987, *A Conflict of Visions: Ideological Origins of Political Struggles* (William Morrow, New York); Sowell, T.: 1988, 'Preferential Policies', in A. Anderson and D. L. Bark (eds.), *Thinking about America: The United States in the 1990s* (The Hoover Institution Press, San Francisco); Sowell, T.: 1993, *Inside American Education: The Decline, the Deception, the Dogmas* (The Free Press, New York); Sowell, T.: 1994, *Race and Culture: A World View* (Basic Books, New York).

[4] Friedman, W. H.: 2001, 'The Digital Divide', p. 1.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Even former President Clinton has gotten into the act. See Clinton, B.: 2001, 'President Clinton Takes "Digital Divide" Tour to Rural North Carolina', http://www9.cnn.com/2000/ALLPOLITICS/stories/04/27/digital.divide/index/html, April 8.

[7] Smith, A.: 1776/1979, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, Book I, Chapter X (Liberty Fund, Indianapolis, IN).

[8] Weber, T. E.: 2001, 'E-world: "Scalable" Ballot Fraud: Why One Tech Maven Fears Computer Voting', *The Wall Street Journal*, p. B1, March 19.

[9] Friedman: 2001, p. 9, emphasis added by present author.

[10] Friedman: 2001, p. 10.

[11] See the movie "Clockwork Orange."

[12] Hamowy, R.: 1984, *Canadian Medicine: A Study in Restricted Entry* (The Fraser Institute, Vancouver).

[13] A similar case took place in the margarine butter wars. See on this Miller, P.: 1989, 'Public Choice at the Dawn of the Special Interest State: The Story of Butter and Margarine', 77 CALIFORNIA L. REV. 83–131.

[14] Friedman: 2001, p. 1.

[15] Friedman: 2001, p. 4, asserts that the poor are "underprivileged." But this implies that the rich owe their success not to hard or smart work, or even to luck, but rather to legal "privileges" that have been awarded to them from which the poor have been excluded. No doubt this is true in some cases (the examples of Lynden Baines Johnson and Ross Perot come to mind in this regard – on the former, see Caro, R. A.: 2001, *Years of Lyndon Johnson: The Path to Power*; Caro, R. A.: 1991, *Means of Ascent: The Years of Lyndon Johnson*. Vol. 2; see on the latter, Jelen, T. G. (ed.), *Ross for Boss: The Perot Phenomena and Beyond*. Suny Series in the Presidency). But to use the word "underprivileged" to depict those in poverty is to state categorically that this is a general rule, if not a necessary condition of nature. Surely, there is not. People such as Henry Ford and Bill Gates owe their large fortunes not to "privileges" but to hard work and an ability to bring to consumers goods and services they value at low prices.

[16] Friedman: 2001, p. 4.

[17] See on this Levin, M.: 1977, *Why Race Matters* (Praeger, Westport, CT); Levin, M.: 1982, 'Is Racial Discrimination Special?' *Policy Review* **22** (Fall), 85–95; Levin, M.: 1996, 'Why Race Matters: A Preview', *The Journal of Libertarian Studies* **12**(2) (Fall), 287–312; Herrnstein, R. J. and C. Murray: 1994, *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life* (The Free Press, New York); Rushton, J. P.: 1996, 'Brain Size and Cognitive Ability: Correlations with Age, Sex, Social Class and Race', *Psychonomic Bulletin and Review* **3**(1), 21–36; Rushton, J. P. and R. T. Osborne: 1995, 'Genetic and Environmental Contributions to Cranial Capacity Estimated in Black and White Adolescents', *Intelligence* **20**, 1–13; Rushton, J. P.: 1991, 'Reply to Wilerman on Mongoloid-caucasoid Differences in Brain Size', *Intelligence* **15**, 365–367; Rushton, J. P., 'The Reality of Racial Differences: A Rejoinder with New Evidence', *Personality and Individual Differences* **9**, 1035–1040; Jensen, A. R.: 1969, 'How Much Can We Boost IQ and Scholastic Achievement?' *Harvard Educational Review* **39**(1), 1–123; Jensen, A. R.: 1972, *Genetics and Education* (Harper and Row, New York); Seligman, D.: 1992, *A Question of Intelligence* (Birch Lane, New York).

[18] Friedman: 2001, p. 5.

[19] And equal to zero.

[20] Five year plans, presumably, have too negative a connotation.

[21] Grace, K. M.: 2001, 'Internet for All: Chretien is Determined to Make Canada the Most "Connected" Country in the World', *The Report*, March 19, p. 12.

[22] Ibid., p. 12.

[23] Pfleeger, S. et al.: 2001, 'Increasing the Enrollment of Women in Computer Science', *SIGCSE Bulletin*; 'Inroads Paving the Way Towards Excellence in Computing Eduction', in *32nd SIGCSE Technical Symposium on Computer Science Education*. Conference Proceedings, Feb 21–25, pp. 386–387, cited in Friedman (2001).

[24] Friedman: 2001, p. 6.

[25] Friedman: 2001, p. 6.

[26] Something voluntarily agreed upon by both marriage partners.

[27] A recent claim as to discrimination against women, which charges that their abilities had been impugned, comes from the M.I.T. biology department. But one indication that this is bogus is the fact that this university, which prides itself on scientific research and an empirical perspective, has refused to release the supposed study on the basis of which the finding of denigration was made. An independent study, conducted by the Virginia-based Independent Women's Forum "found that older male biologists at MIT had markedly stronger publication records than female peers at comparable stages of their careers." See Smallwood, S.: 2001, 'Report questions MIT's study on treatment of female professors', *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 16, p. A17.

[28] See on this Sowell, footnote 3, supra; Williams, W. E.: 1982, *The State Against Blacks* (McGraw-Hill, New York); Williams, W.: 1982, 'On Discrimination, Prejudice, Racial Income Differentials, and Affirmative Action', in W. Block and M. Walker (eds.), *Discrimination. Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity* (The Fraser Institute, Vancouver); Block, W.: 1992, 'Discrimination: An Interdisciplinary Analysis', *The Journal of Business Ethics* **11**, 241–254; Whitehead, R., W. Block and L. Hardin: 1999, 'Gender Equity in Athletics: Should We Adopt a Non-discriminatory Model?' *The University of Toledo Law Review* **30**(2) (Winter), 223–249; Block, W. and W. E. Williams: 1981, 'Male-female Earnings Differentials: A Critical Reappraisal', *The Journal of Labor Research* **11**(2) (Fall), 385–388; Block, W.: 1982, 'Economic Intervention, Discrimination, and Unforeseen Consequences', in W. Block and M. A. Walker (eds.), *Discrimination, Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity* (The Fraser Institute, Vancouver), pp. 101–125; Whitehead, R. and W. Block: 1999, 'Mandatory Student Fees: Forcing Some to Pay for the Free Speech of Others', *Whittier Law Review* **20**(4), 759–781; Block, W.: 1998, 'Compromising the Uncompromisable: Discrimination', *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* **57**(2) (April), 223–237.

[29] See Pilieci, V.: 2001, 'Women Quickly Getting Net Savvy, Survey Finds: They're Closing the Gap on Male Counterparts', *Vancouver Sun* (February 20), p. D14.

[30] See ibid.

[31] For a general critique of the benefits of this characteristic, see Edelstein, M.: 1997, *Three Minute Therapy: Change Your Thinking Change Your Life* (Glenbridge, Lakewood, CO); Seligman, D.: 1987, 'The Esteem Team', *Fortune* (November 14), p. 134; Ellis, A.: 1971, *Growth through Reason, Science and Behavior Books* (Palo Alto, CA); Ellis, A.: 1973, *Humanistic Psychology: the Rational Emotive Approach* (The Julian Press, New York).

[32] Ibid.

[33] See Note 17, supra.

[34] Friedman (2001), p. 6, citing Muir, D. E.: 2000, in J. Entine, *Why Black Athletes Dominate Sports and Why We Are Afraid to Talk about It* (Public Affairs, New York), p. 276.

[35] Friedman (2001), p. 6.

[36] Says Levin (1977) in this regard (paraphrase): "It is as if Jones is suing Smith for damages for his broken leg, and every time Smith asks that Jones' leg be inspected, he refuses."

[37] I make no such claim here.

[38] See Notes 9 and 10, supra.

[39] Twist, K.: 4/8/2001, "Digital divide network." http://www.DigitalDivideNetwork.org/content-beat.adp.

[40] Saunders, P.: "Why globalization didn't rescue Russia." http://www.policyieview.com:80/feb01/saunders.html.

[41] See on this Hayek, F. A.: 1954, *Capitalism and the Historians*, ed. (essays by T. S. Ashton, L. M. Hacker, W. H. Hutt, and B. de Jouvenel) (The University of Chicago Press, Chicago); Hayek, F. A.: 1948, 'Socialist Calculation I, II, and III', *Individualism and Economic Order* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago); Hoppe, H.-H.: 1989, *A Theory of Socialism and Capitalism* (Kluwer, Boston); Mises, L. von: 1981, *Socialism* (Liberty Fund, Indianapolis (1969)); Mises, L. von: 1972, *The Anticapitalist Mentality* (Libertarian Press, South Holland, IL); Mises, L. von: 1963, *Human Action* (Regnery, Chicago); Boettke, P. J.: 1993, *Perestroika Failed: The Politics and Economics of Socialist Transformation* (Routledge, London); Boettke, P. J.: 1990, *The Political Economy of Soviet Socialism: the Formative Years, 1918–1928* (Kluwer, Boston); Boettke, P. J. (ed.): 1994, *The Collapse of Development Planning* (New York University Press, New York); Boettke, P. J.: 1994, 'The Reform Trap in Politics and Economics in the Former Communist Economies', *Journal des Economistes et des Etudes Humaines* **V**(2/3) (June/September), 267–293; Boettke, P. J. and G. Anderson: 1993, 'Perestroika and Public Choice: The Economics of Autocratic Succession in a Rent Seeking Society', *Public Choice* **75**(2) (February), 101–118; Boettke, P. J. and G. Anderson: 1997, 'Soviet Venality: The USSR as a Mercantilist State', *Public Choice*.

[42] *Not* Al Gore!

[43] Friedman: 2001, p. 9.

[44] Friedman: 2001, p. 10.

[45] Which, paradoxically even Friedman concedes, will enhance computer utilization.

[46] See Rizzo, M. J.: 1980, 'The Mirage of Efficiency', *Hofstra Law Review* **8**, 641–658; see also Rothbard: 1979, 'Comment: The Myth of Efficiency', in M. J. Rizzo (ed.), *Time. Uncertaintly and Disequilibrium* (Lexington Books, Lexington, MA), pp. 91–96.

[47] Grand masters in chess often relax by taking walks, or playing tennis; but this is subservient to, not a substitute for, their main interest.

[48] Mises, L. von: 1949, 1963, 1966, *Human Action* (Regnery, Chicago); Rothbard, M. N.: 1997, 'Toward a Reconstruction of Utility and Welfare Economics', *The Logic of Action: Method, Money and the Austrian School I* (Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, U.K.), pp. 211–254.

[49] For the libertarian philosophy upon which such claims are based, see Anderson, T. and P. J. Hill: 1979, 'An American Experiment in Anarchy-capitalism: The Not So Wild, Wild West', *Journal of Libertarian Studies* **3**(1), 9–29; Barnett, R. E.: 1998, *The Structure of Liberty: Justice and the Rule of Law* (Clarendon Press, Oxford); Benson, B. L.: 1989, 'Enforcement of Private Property Rights in Primitive Societies: Law Without Government', *The Journal of Libertarian Studies* **IX**(1) (Winter), 1–26; Benson, B. L.: 1989, 'The Spontaneous Evolution of Commercial Law', *Southern Economic Journal* **55**, 644–661; Benson, B. L.: 1990, *The Enterprise of Law: Justice without the State* (Pacific Research Institute for Public Policy, San Francisco); Cuzán, A. G.: 1979, 'Do We Ever Really Get Out of Anarchy?' *Journal of Libertarian Studies* **3**(2) (Summer); De Jasay, A.: 1985, *The State* (Basil Blackwell, Oxford); Friedman, D.: 1989, *The Machinery of Freedom: Guide to a Radical Capitalism* (Open Court, La Salle, IL), 2nd edn.; Friedman, D.: 1979, 'Private Creation and Enforcement of Law: A Historical Case', *Journal of Legal Studies* **8**, 399–415; Hoppe, H.-H.: 1989, *A Theory of Socialism and Capitalism: Economics, Politics and Ethics* (Kluwer, Boston); Hoppe, H.-H.: 1993, *The Economics and Ethics of Private Property: Studies in Political Economy and Philosophy* (Kluwer, Boston); Hoppe, H.-H.: 1998–1999, 'The Private Production of Defense', *Journal of Libertarian Studies* **14**(1) (Winter), 27–52; Hummel, J. R.: 1990, 'National Goods Versus Public Goods: Defense, Disarmament, and Free Riders', 4 *Rev. Austrian Econ.* 88; Morriss, A. P.: 1998, 'Miners, Vigilantes and Cattlemen: Overcoming Free Rider Problems in the Private Provision of Law', *Land and Water Law Review* **XXXIII**(2), 581–696; Peden, J. R.: 1977, 'Property Rights in Celtic Irish Law', *The Journal of Libertarian Studies* **1**(2) (Spring), 81–96; Rothbard, M. N.: 1978, *For a New Liberty* (Macmillan, New York); Rothbard, M. N.: 1982, *The Ethics of Liberty* (Humanities Press, Atlantic Highlands, N.J.); Rothbard, M. N.: 1978, 'Society Without a State', in J. R. Pennock and J. W. Chapman (eds.), *Anarchism: Nomos XIX* (New York University Press, New York), pp. 191–207; Rothbard, M. N.: 1993, *Man, Economy and State* (Mises Institute, Auburn AL); Skoble, A. J.: 1995, 'The Anarchism Controversy', in T. Machan and D. Rasmussen (eds.), *Liberty for the 21st Century: Essays in Contemporary Libertarian Thought* (Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham MD), pp. 77–96; Sechrest, L. J.: 1999, 'Rand, Anarchy, and Taxes', *The Journal of Ayn Rand Studies* **I**(1) (Fall), 87–105; Spooner, L.: 1966, *No Treason* (Larkspur, Colorado (1870)); Stringham, E.: 1998–1999, 'Justice Without Government', *Journal of Libertarian Studies* **14**(1) (Winter), 53–77; Tinsley, P.: 1998–1999, 'With Liberty and Justice for All: A Case for Private Police', *Journal of Libertarian Studies* **14**(1) (Winter), 95–100; Tannehill, M. and L.: 1984, *The Market for Liberty* (Laissez Faire Books, New York); Woolridge, W. C.: 1970, *Uncle Sam the Monopoly Man* (Arlington House, New Rochelle, N.Y.).

[50] Friedman: 2001, p. 11.

[51] If you don't believe this, try not paying and see what happens to you. For more on this see Beito, D. T.: 1989, *Taxpayers in Revolt: Tax Resistance during the Great Depression* (University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, NC); Block, W.: 1998, 'Taxes and the Structure of Production', *Journal of Public Finance and Public Choice* **XVII**(2–3), 145–159; Block, W.: 1993, 'Canadian Public Finance Texts Cannot Justify Government Taxation: A Critique of Auld and Miller, Musgrave, Musgrave and Bird, McCready, and Wolf', *Canadian Public Administration* **36**(2) (Fall), 225–262; Block, W.: 1992, 'Comment on McCready and Maloney on Wealth Taxation', *Canadian Public Administration* **35**(4) (Winter), 542–548; Block, W.: 1989, 'The Justification of Taxation in the Public Finance Literature: An Unorthodox View', *Journal of Public Finance and Public Choice* **3** (Fall), 141–158; Block, W. and M. A. Walker (eds.): 1984, *Taxation: An International Perspective* (The Fraser Institute, Vancouver); Gordon, D.: 1994, 'Justice and Redistributive Taxation: James Buchanan vs. Ludwig von Mises', *The Review of Austrian Economics* **8**(1), 117–131; Herbener, J.: 1988, 'Austrian Methodology: The Preferred Tax Type', *Review of Austrian Economics* **2**, 97–111; Hoppe, H.-H.: 1992, 'The Economics and Sociology of Taxation', in L. Rockwell (ed.), *Taxation:*

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[52] In terms of self seeking and imposing guild-like restrictions on entry, this would be counterproductive. The last thing that present practitioners in this occupation need, if they are to protect their income positions, are competitors; rather, they would wish to enhance the demand for their services, precisely the point at issue.

[53] Buchanan, J. M. and G. F. Thirlby: 1981, *L.S.E. Essays on Cost* (New York University Press, New York); Buchanan, J. M.: 1969, Cost and Choice: An Inquiry into Economic Theory (Markham, Chicago); Mises, L. von: 1949, 1963, 1966, *Human Action* (Regnery, Chicago); Rothbard, M. N.: 1993, *Man, Economy and State* (Ludwig von Mises Institute, Auburn AL).

[54] *The Wealth of Nations*. Book IV, Chapter II, see Note 7, supra.

[55] See also Mill, J. S.: 1986 [1859], *On Liberty* (Prometheus, N.Y.), p. zxzx.

[56] We abstract from cases where left wing radical groups engage in physical intimidation, threatening pickets, burning of leaflets, etc.

[57] We abstract from the fact that no one forces conservative students to attend these universities in the first place. For more on this see Whitehead, R. and W. Block: 1999, 'Mandatory Student Fees: Forcing Some to Pay for the Free Speech of Others', *Whittier Law Review* **20**(4), 759–781.

[58] Young, J. R.: 2001, 'Federal Judge Rules that U. of Wisconsin's Revised Fee System is Unconstitutional.' Chronicle of Higher Education's daily news update on the CHE website, titled "Today's News," on Monday, March 19, http://chronicle.com.

[59] Without artificial coloring, margarine appears unattractively greyish.

[60] See on this Miller, P.: 1989, 'Public Choice at the Dawn of the Special Interest state: The Story of Butter and Margarine', 77 CALIFORNIA L. REV. 83–131.

[61] Source: Lynch, M. and R. Henderson: 1998, 'Team Colors', *Reason*, July, 21; cited in Whitehead, R., W. Block and L. Hardin: 1999, 'Gender Equity in Athletics: Should We Adopt a Non-discriminatory Model?' *The University of Toledo Law Review* **30**(2) (Winter), 244.

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