Chapter 8 — Cooperation: Its Two Kinds

We have seen that there are two ways or modes in which cooperation increases productive power. If we ask how cooperation is itself brought about, we see that there is in this also a distinction, and that cooperation is of essentially two different kinds. The line of distinction as to what I have called the *ways* of cooperation, and have in the last chapter considered, is as to the method of action or how of accomplishment; the line of distinction as to what I shall call the *kinds* of cooperation, and am about in this chapter to consider, is as to the method of union or how of initiative.

There is one kind of cooperation, proceeding as it were from without, which results from the conscious direction of a controlling will to a definite end. This we may call directed or conscious cooperation. There is another kind of cooperation, proceeding as it were from within, which results from a correlation in the actions of independent wills, each seeking but its own immediate purpose, and careless, if not indeed ignorant, of the general result. This we may call spontaneous or unconscious cooperation.

The movement of a great army is a good type of directed cooperation. Here the actions of many individuals are subordinated to and directed by one conscious will, becoming, as it were, its body and executing its thought. The providing of a great city with all the manifold things which are constantly needed by its inhabitants is a good type of spontaneous cooperation. This kind of cooperation is far wider, far finer, far more strongly and delicately organized, than the kind of cooperation involved in the movements of an army, yet it is brought about not by subordination to the direction of one conscious will, which knows the general result at which it aims; but by the correlation of actions originating in many independent wills, each aiming at its own small purpose without thought of the general result.

The one kind of cooperation seems to have its analogue in those related movements of our body which we are able consciously to direct. The other kind of cooperation seems to have its analogue in the correlation of the innumerable movements, of which we are unconscious, that maintain the bodily frame — motions which in their complexity, delicacy and precision far transcend our powers of conscious direction, yet by whose perfect adjustment to each other and to the purpose of the whole keep the human body in life and vigor.

Much of the cooperation of man in producing social effects is of the nature of that by which a ship is sailed. It involves the delegation to individuals of the power of arranging and directing what others shall do, thus securing for the general action the advantages of one managing and correlating intelligence. But while cooperation of this kind is indispensable to producing certain results by conjoint action, it is helpless or all but helpless to bring about certain other results involving a longer series and more complicated and delicate actions and adjustments.

To illustrate: a bird structurally is a machine as a ship is a machine, which the conscious will of the bird, controlling certain voluntary movements, causes to rise or fall, to sweep in this direction or in that, to be carried at the gale or to tack in its teeth, in short to execute all the movements of which this bird machine is capable. But the conscious will that controls the voluntary motions of the bird, the intelligence that is the captain of this aerial craft, will not account for the machine itself; for its consummate arrangements and adjustments and adaptations. These transcend not only the intelligence of the bird, but also the highest human intelligence. The union of lightness with strength, of rigidity with flexibility, of grace with power; the appropriateness of material, the connection and relation of parts, the economies of space and energy and function, the applications of what are to us the most complex and

recondite of physical laws, make the bird, as a machine, far superior to the best and highest machines of man's construction.

Savages must at times ponder over the mystery of the egg — for to them as to us it would be an insoluble mystery. But it is the ship, not the bird, that would most excite their wonder and admiration, for the savage would see in the ship as soon as he came close to it, not a thing that grew, but a thing that was made — a higher expression of the same power which he himself exercises in his own rude constructions. He would see in it, when he came to look closely, but a vastly greater and better canoe. Since a larger canoe than one man can build may be built by the same man if he can unite the exertions of others in cutting, rolling, hewing and hollowing a great log, so it would seem to our savage that it was in this way that the ship of civilization was built. And the admiration which the ship would excite in him would be an admiration of the men who sailed it, whom he naturally would take to be the men who built it, or at least the men who could build it. The superiority of the ship to the rude canoes with which he was familiar he would attribute to superiority of their personal qualities — their greater knowledge and skill and power. They would indeed seem to him at first as very gods.

Yet the savage would be wrong. The superiority of the ship does not indicate the superiority of individual men. If driven ashore with the loss of their ship and all its contents, these men would be more helpless than so many of his own people, and would find it more difficult to make even a canoe. Even if they had saved tools and stores, it would only be after long toil that they could succeed in building some rude, small craft unfitted for long voyage and rough weather, and not in any respect comparable with their ship. For a modern ship is more akin to a growth than a direct construction — in that as between the kind of cooperation required for its production and that which suffices for that of a canoe, there is a difference

which suggests something not altogether unlike the difference between a work of nature and a work of man.

The cooperation required in the making of a large canoe or in the sailing of a ship is exceedingly simple as compared to that involved in the construction and equipment of a well-found, first-class ship. The actual putting together, according to the plans of the naval architect, of the separate parts and materials which compose such a ship, would require, after they had been assembled, some directed cooperation. But if cooperation of this kind could suffice for even putting the parts together after they had been made and assembled, how could it suffice for making those various parts from the forms in which nature offers their material, and assembling them in the place where they were to be put together?

Consider the timbers, the planks, the spars; the iron and steel of various kinds and forms; the copper, the brass, the bolts, screws, spikes, chains; the ropes, of steel and hemp and cotton; the canvas of various textures; the blocks and winches and windlasses; the pumps, the boats, the sextants, the chronometers, the spy-glasses and patent logs, the barometers and thermometers, charts, nautical almanacs, rockets and colored lights; food, clothing, tools, medicines and furniture, and all the various things, which it would be tiresome fully to specify, that go into the construction and furnishing of a first-class sailing ship of modern type. Directed cooperation never did, and I do not think in the nature of things ever could, make and assemble such a variety of products, involving as many of them do the use of costly machinery and consummate skill, and the existence of subsidiary products and processes.

When the shipbuilder receives an order for such a ship as this he does not send men out into the forest, he does not direct some to mine iron ore, and others copper ore, and others lead ore, and others still to dig the coal with which these ores are to be smelted, and the

fire-clay for this melting-vessel; some to plant hemp, and some to plant cotton, and others to breed silkworms; some to make glass, others to kill beasts for their hides and tallow, some to get pitch and rosin, oil, paint, paper, felt and mercury. Nor does he attempt to direct to the manifold operations by which these raw materials are to be brought into the required forms and combinations, and assembled in the place where the ship is to be built. Such a task would transcend the wisdom and power of a Solomon. What he does is to avail himself of the resources of a high civilization, for without that he would be helpless, and to make use for his purposes of the unconscious cooperation by which, without any general direction, the efforts of many men, working in many different places and in occupations which cover almost the whole field of minutely diversified industry, each animated solely by the effort to obtain the satisfaction of his personal desires in what to him is the easiest way, have brought together the materials and productions needed for the putting together of such a ship.

A modern ship, like a modern railway, is a product of modern civilization; of that correlation of individual efforts in which what we call civilization essentially consists; of that unconscious cooperation which does not come by personal direction, as it were from without, but grows, as it were from within, by the relation of the efforts of individuals, each seeking the satisfaction of individual desires. A mere master of men, though he might command the services of billions, could not make such a ship unless in a civilization prepared for it. A Pharaoh that built pyramids, a Ghengis Khan who raised mounds of skulls, an Alexander, a Caesar, or even a Henry VIII could not do it.

The kind of cooperation which I have illustrated by the tacking of a ship is a very simple matter. It could be readily taught. But that kind of cooperation which is involved in the making of such a ship is

a much deeper and more complex matter. It is beyond the power of conscious direction to order or bring about. It can no more be advanced or improved by any exertion of the power of directing the conscious actions of men than the conscious will of the individual can add a cubit to his stature. The only thing that conscious direction can do to aid it is to let it alone; to give it freedom to grow, leaving men free to seek the gratification of their own desires in the ways that to them seem best. To attempt to apply that kind of cooperation which requires direction from without to the work proper for that kind of cooperation which requires direction from within, is like asking the carpenter who can build a chicken-house to build a chicken also.

This is the fatal defect of all forms of socialism — the reason of the fact, which all observation shows, that any attempt to carry conscious regulation and direction beyond the narrow sphere of social life in which it is necessary, inevitably works injury, hindering even what it is intended to help.

It is only in independent action that the full powers of man may be utilized. The subordination of one human will to another human will, while it may in certain ways secure unity of action, must always where intelligence is needed, involve loss of productive power. This we see exemplified in slavery and where governments have undertaken (as is the tendency of all government) unduly to limit the freedom of the individual. But where unity of effort, or rather combination of effort, can be secured while leaving full freedom to the individual, the whole of productive power may still be utilized and the result be immeasurably greater.

Imagine such an aggregation of men in which it was attempted to secure, by the external direction involved in socialistic theories, that division of labor which grows up naturally in society where men are left free. For the intelligent direction thus required an indi-

vidual man or individual men must be selected, for even if there be angels and archangels in the world that is invisible to us, they are not at our command.

Taking no note of the difficulties which universal experience shows always to attend the choice of the depositaries of power, and ignoring the inevitable tendency to tyranny and oppression — even if the very wisest and best of men were selected for such purposes — simply consider the task that would be put upon them in the ordering and supervision of the almost infinitely complex and constantly changing relations involved in a civilized community. The task transcends the power of human intelligence at its very highest. It is evidently as much beyond the ability of conscious direction as is the correlation of the processes that maintain the human body in health and vigor.

This mind of ours, this conscious intelligence that perceives, compares, judges and wills, wondrous and far-reaching as are its powers, is like the eye that may look to far-off suns and milky ways, but cannot see its own mechanism. This body of ours in which our mind is encased, this infinitely complex and delicate machine through which we become conscious of the external world, exists only by virtue of unconscious intelligence which works while conscious intelligence rests; which is on guard while it sleeps; which wills without its concurrence and plans without its contriving, of which it has almost no direct knowledge and over which it has almost no direct control.

And so it is with the spontaneous, unconscious cooperation of individuals which, going on in the industrial body, conjoins individual efforts in the production of wealth, to the enormous increase in productive power, and distributes the product among the units of which it is composed. To ascertain the nature and laws of such cooperation is the primary province of political economy.