

## THE EMPOWERING NATURE OF THE LIBERATING ARTS

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Thank you Dean May. I don't think you can appreciate what a true privilege it is for me to be introduced by you as you preside over your last Honors Day as Dean of the College. Thank you for your service.

President Anderson, Regents and friends of the college, parents, respected faculty and staff colleagues, and, most importantly, beloved students I am delighted to be with you on this meaningful occasion.

Today I want to reflect on several ideas that I see as central to who we are at St. Olaf, ideas enlivened and given focus by my work in Norway. But my reflections actually begin in Japan with a memorable experience.

I remember the event so clearly. My wife, Carol and I had set off to climb Mt. Fuji. The first day's climb was pretty easy, at least until evening when it got cold and the altitude began to affect me. We slept for a few hours in one of the huts high up on the mountainside and rose around 3:00 a.m. to continue the climb. It's essential to be at the peak of Fuji when the sun rises.

We emerged from our hut into the blackness of the early morning. I could see a trail of little lights winding up the mountainside. It was the small lanterns of the other climbers. The only sound, other than the soft tinkling of the bells on our walking sticks, was the occasional exclamation—*Gambate Kudasai*—as climbers encouraged one another onwards. *Gambate Kudasai*—persevere, keep trying, do your best.

We're here today because you students have persevered, tried so hard, and done your best. Some of you—the seniors—have reached the summit; the rest of you are well on your way to that point.

Your faculty mentors, this group of amazingly dedicated and gifted scholar/teachers, take great satisfaction from your success. We are here at this college because of our belief in the power of an integrated, interdisciplinary, inquiry-based education.

Each of us is a specialist and we are always thrilled and honored when one of you chooses to pursue your education in our chosen field. We are passionately committed to our disciplines; we'll argue and even fight to give them their proper places in the college's priorities. But, even more importantly, we recognize that our approach through the college's general education curriculum and liberal arts training is what does the most to mold you for lives after 'the Hill.'

These colleagues of mine could have devoted their professional careers to research, writing, and performance at any of the country's numerous research universities. Many have spent time at such places. But, all of us came to St. Olaf because we believe in its mission and the value of the liberal arts, what I'm calling today the liberating arts.

Liberating--to set free from anything that restrains or confines, to release. Liberation emancipates and empowers.

I've spent most of my scholarly energy these last three or four years investigating an 18<sup>th</sup> century Norwegian lay preacher. Hans Nielsen Hauge's name is known to many Norwegian-Americans because he revitalized Norwegian Lutheranism and many immigrants from Norway were influenced by his thinking. Although fascinated by Hauge's theology, my interest in Hauge is not because of his religious reform efforts. As an economist, my interest is in his entrepreneurial activity and the impact he had on the Norwegian economy.

Most Norwegian-Americans, and many contemporary Norwegians, look askance at me when I talk about Hauge the entrepreneur. It's not a part of his legacy that is well understood. Certainly his religious ideas were important, so disruptive to the state church that the Danish government (Norway was under the control of the Danish king) imprisoned him for almost ten years. Hauge walked the Norwegian countryside, especially the Western part of the country, preaching God's word and liberating his followers through economic self-determination.

What has intrigued me about Hauge is how he funded his religious activities. Hauge, the son of a peasant farmer, started upwards of 30 businesses and inspired countless others. Even today dozens, perhaps scores, of Norwegian businesses can trace their origins to Hauge and his followers. It was his revolutionary economic thinking as much as his challenge to religious orthodoxy that got him in trouble with the established power structure.

Hauge—not unlike a German religious reformer who is well known in these halls—believed he was called by God to inspire change. Hauge felt that the way he could best bring his followers to a new understanding of God's love was to demonstrate to them that they too were called and with this calling they had the abilities to create for themselves new lives.

Norway's economy in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century had yet to be touched by the industrial revolution that was energizing Britain and the heartland of Europe. Although not a poor country, its economy was fragile, dependent on the natural resources of timber, fish, and the produce of the land. Hauge modeled for his followers a way of life that liberated them from the vicissitudes of weather, the uncertainty of fishing conditions off the western coast, and the constraints of an authoritarian government that kept people tied to the land and hindered economic freedom.

Hauge started businesses that made things, he challenged his followers to take responsibility for their own well being by eschewing alcoholism in favor of investment, employing women and giving them leadership roles, and insisting that everyone receive a fair wage. After starting these businesses, businesses such as salt works, brick factories, paper mills, shipping operations, and several trading companies, he put his followers in charge of the operations, showing his confidence in their ability to achieve and succeed.

Economic theory tells us something, though not much, about entrepreneurial activity, but it's a concept that has intrigued noteworthy economists like Joseph Schumpeter who called entrepreneurs heroic innovators. Hauge was an innovator of heroic proportions. What is it about Hauge's entrepreneurial activities that made such a difference for so many and have relevance even today?

Observers of entrepreneurial activity—historically and today—draw heavily on psychology and the notion of personal agency to explain what motivates entrepreneurs. Personal agency represents a person's belief about the extent to which he or she can exert causal power over what happens in life. It comprises two cognitive elements—belief in the locus of control and belief in self-efficacy. The more individuals believe that desired economic outcomes are contingent upon actions rather than outside forces such as luck (i.e., the more internal their locus of control) and the more certain they are that they have the personal capabilities to carry out successfully the relevant actions (i.e., the greater their perceived self-efficacy), the more open they are to opportunities, the more inclined they are to take risks and the more eager they are to launch new endeavors.

Hauge empowered his followers by making them believe that as God's people they were called to a better life for themselves and their neighbors and he showed them how to escape poverty through his entrepreneurial activities. Hauge convinced his followers to believe in themselves, he showed them that the locus of control in their lives was internal not external, he helped them believe that they had the capabilities to be successful. Essentially Hauge liberated them from the constraints of a smothering political/economic system by empowering them, giving them a means to take control of their own lives.

Estimates suggest that at the height of his activity, just before he was imprisoned in 1804, this one man was responsible for generating as much as 2% of investment activity in Norway. Extrapolating that to the current U.S. economy would mean one person generating \$36 billion of investment activity. Rather impressive.

What motivated this individual? Of course there was his belief that he was called by God. In addition though was a conviction that by focused effort, learning by doing, and instilling in people the belief in themselves all could achieve for themselves a better life, a fulfilling life. Hauge modeled for his followers how to add value in economic activity. With that came greater well-being. And, as many have noted, the achievement of economic freedom soon led to the desire for political freedom as well. Hauge truly gave life to the call *Fram! Fram!*

In a sense your St. Olaf education approximates the education of Hauge's followers. You have been challenged, not the least by a constraining economic environment, but also empowered and shown how to add value to society.

Your professors know you have the abilities—and I say abilities rather than skills which are much more narrowly technical in nature—because we've seen the power of the liberal arts in honing these abilities, sharpening your decision-making, provoking your thinking, and encouraging your collaborative energies. What we've worked hard to develop are opportunities, on campus and off, that allow you to apply your abilities, to expand the scope of your involvement, to live your learning. We've encouraged a variety of applied learning opportunities because we know life is not linear. You need—in fact you have—the flexibility, adaptability and the wherewithal to excel in any number of career choices. But as important, perhaps more important, than the actual experiences you have in collaborative research, internships, study abroad, is the confidence you gain from these activities.

Just as Hauge empowered his followers by giving them the knowledge, experience and confidence to escape from the constraints of stifling establishment, and just as he demonstrated to them how to add value to the economy and society, you have been empowered by the liberating arts, freed to achieve. You have the abilities and the confidence to face economic reality, to adapt to changing conditions--to persevere, keep trying and do your best. *Gambatte Kudasai.*