

THE RULE OF THE ROAD

A. G. Gardiner

ALFRED GEORGE GARDINER (1865 -1946), widely known under his pen-name of 'Alpha of the Plough', was one of the most delightful essayists of modern times. He was the Editor of the Daily News from 1902 to 1921. His essays combine ideas and emotions with beauty of form and 'remind us of pleasant things, sunshine and mirth, laughter and mirth. His collections of essays include Pebbles on the Shore, Windfalls and Many Furrows. In this essay, he points out in an easy and thought-provoking manner what constitutes true liberty.

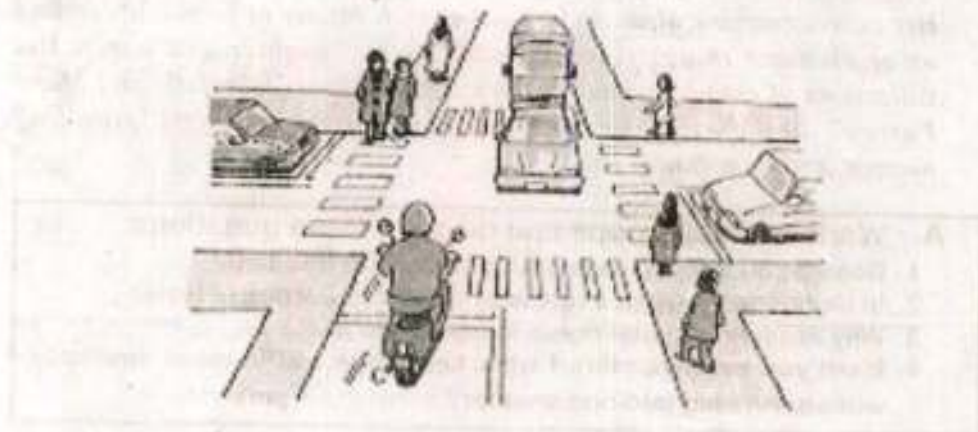
A. Work in small groups and discuss these questions:

1. Does democracy have anything to do with freedom?
2. In democracy citizen's role is of utmost importance. How?
3. Why are fundamental rights important to us?
4. Have you ever wondered what keeps the traffic move smoothly without running into one another?

THE RULE OF THE ROAD

1. A stout old lady was walking with her basket down the middle of a street in Petrograd to the great confusion of the traffic and with no small peril to herself. It was pointed out to her that the pavement was the place for foot passengers, but she replied, "I'm going to walk where I like. We've got liberty now." It did not occur to the dear old lady that if liberty entitled the foot passenger to walk down the middle of the road it also entitled the cab-driver to drive on the pavement, and that the end of such liberty would be universal chaos. Everybody would be getting in everybody else's way and nobody would get anywhere. Individual liberty would have become social anarchy.

2. There is a danger of the world getting liberty-drunk in these days like the old lady with the basket and it is just as well to remind ourselves of what the rule of the road means. It means that in order that the liberties of all may be preserved the liberties of everybody must be curtailed. When the policeman, say, at **Piccadilly Circus** steps into the middle of the road and puts out his hand, he is the symbol not of tyranny, but of liberty. You may think so. You may, being in a hurry and seeing your motor-car stopped by this **insolence of office**, feel that your liberty has been violated. How dare this fellow interfere with your free use of the public highway? Then, if you are a reasonable person,



you will reflect that if he did not interfere with you he would interfere with no one, and the result would be you would never cross Piccadilly Circus at all. You have submitted to a curtailment of private liberty in order that you may enjoy a social order which makes your liberty a reality.

3. Liberty is not a personal affair only, but a social contract. It is an adjustment of interests. In matters which do not touch anybody else's liberty of course, I may be as free as I like. If I choose to go down **the Strand** in addressing gown, with long hair and bare feet, who shall say me nay? You have liberty to laugh at me, but I have the liberty to be indifferent to you. And if I have fancy for dyeing my hair, or waxing my moustache (which heaven forbid), or wearing

a tall hat, a frock-coat and sandals, or going to bed late or getting up early, I shall follow my **fancy** and ask no man's permission.

4. In all these and a thousand other details you and I please ourselves and ask no one's leave. We have a whole kingdom, in which we rule alone, can do what we choose, be wise or ridiculous, harshly or easy, conventional or odd. But directly we step out of that kingdom, our personal liberty of action is restricted by other people's liberty. I might like to practise on the **trombone** from midnight till three in the morning. If I went on to the top of **Halvelly** to do it I could please myself but if I do it out in the streets the neighbours will remind me that my liberty to blow the trombone must interfere with their liberty to sleep in quiet. There are a lot of people in the world and I have to accommodate my liberty to their liberties.
5. We are all liable to forget this and, unfortunately, we are much more conscious of the imperfections of others in this respect than of our own.

B.1. Answer the following questions briefly :

1. Why did the old lady refuse to walk on the pavement?
2. How did she cause a chaos?
3. How has the author defined liberty?
4. 'You have submitted to a curtailment of private liberty in order that you may enjoy a social order which makes your liberty a reality? What does the author mean?
5. What is the 'danger' the author is referring to in paragraph 2?
6. How is liberty a social contract?

6. I got into a railway carriage at a country station the other morning and settled down for what the schoolboys would call an hour's 'swot' at a **Blue-book**. I was not reading for pleasure. The truth is that I never do read Blue-books for pleasure. I read them for the very humble purpose of turning an honest penny out of them. Now, if you are reading a book for pleasure it doesn't matter what is going on around you.
7. But when you are reading a thing as a task you need reasonable quiet, and that is what I didn't get, for at the next station in came a couple of men, one of whom talked to his friend for the rest of the journey in a loud and **pompous**

voice. As I wrestled with clauses and sections, his voice rose like a gale, and his family history, the deeds of his sons in war, and his criticisms of the generals and the politicians submerged my poor attempts to hang on to my job. I shut up the Blue-book, looked out of the window, and listened wearily while the voice thundered on with themes like these: "Now what the French ought to have done ...", "The mistake the Germans made ...", "If only **Asquith** had ..." you know the sort stuff. I had it all before, oh, so often. It was like a **barrel-organ** groaning out some uninteresting song of long ago.

8. If I had asked him to be good enough to talk in a lower tone I dare to say he would have thought I was a very rude fellow. It did not occur to him that anybody could have anything better to do than to listen to him, and I have no doubt he left the carriage convinced that everybody in it had, thanks to him, had a very illuminating journey. A reasonable consideration for the rights or feelings of others is the foundation of social conduct.
9. I believe that the rights of small people and quiet people are as important to preserve as the rights of small nationalities. When I hear the aggressive bullying horn which some motorist deliberately use, I confess that I feel something boiling up in me which is very like what I felt **when Germany came trampling like a bully over Belgium**. By what right, my dear sir, do you go along our highway uttering that hideous curse on all who impede your path? Cannot you announce your coming like a gentleman? Cannot you take your turn?
10. And there is the more harmless person who has bought a very blatant gramophone, and on Sunday afternoon sets the things going, opens the windows and fills the street with '**Keep the home fires burning**' or some similar **banality**. What are the right limits of social behaviour in a matter of this sort? Let us take the trombone as an illustration again. **Hazlitt** said that a man who wanted to learn that fearsome instrument was entitled to learn it in his house, even though he was a nuisance to his neighbours, but it was his business to make the nuisance as slight as possible. He must practise in the attic, and shut the window. He had no right to sit in his front room, open the window, and blow his noise into his neighbours' ears with the maximum of violence. And so with the gramophone. If you like the gramophone you are entitled to have it,

but you are interfering with the liberties of your neighbours if you don't do what you can to limit the noise to your own household. Your neighbours may not like 'Keep the home fires burning'. They may prefer to have their Sunday afternoon undisturbed, and it is as great an **impertinence** for you wilfully to trespass on their peace as it would be to go, unasked, into their gardens and trample their flower-beds.

11. I suppose the fact is that we can be neither **complete anarchists** nor **complete socialists** in this complex world – or rather we must be a judicious mixture of both. We have both liberties to preserve – our individual liberty and our social liberty.
12. It is in the small matters of conduct, in the observance of the rule of the road, that we pass judgement upon ourselves, and declare that we are civilised or uncivilised. The great moments of heroism and sacrifice are rare. It is the little habits of commonplace intercourse that make up the great sum of life and sweeten or make bitter the **journey**. I hope my friend in the railway carriage will reflect on this. Then he will not cease, I am sure, to explain to his neighbour where the **French** went wrong and where the **Germans** went ditto; but he will do it in a way that will permit me to read my Blue- book undisturbed.

B.2. Answer the following questions briefly :

1. Are the rights of the people less important than the rights of the nations?
2. Why couldn't the author read his book during his rail journey?
3. What does the author want to convey through the illustration of a trombone?
4. What two types of reading does the author refer to? How are they different?
5. List the actions for which we "ask no one's leave".

GLOSSARY AND NOTES

Petrograd: a city in Russia, renamed Leningrad after Russian Revolution (1917)

We've got liberty now: a reference to the Revolution which ended the despotic rule of the czars in Russia and ushered in a period of freedom

Piccadilly Circus: a very busy centre in London where a number of roads meet

Insolence of office: the rude behaviour of an officer, (here) the policeman

the Strand: a fashionable street in London with a number of hotels, theatres and shops

fancy (n): likes

trombone: a musical instrument

Helvellyn: a mountain peak in Wales

swot: hard work

Blue-book: book containing an official report

pompous (adj): pretentious

Asquith: a reference to Lord Oxford (1852- 1928), a British statesman and writer

Barrel-organ: a kind of musical instrument

When Germany... Belgium: a reference to the German attack on Belgium in 1914 which resulted in the Great War of 1914 -18. The point of reference here is Germany had trampled upon the rights of others.

'Keep the home fires burning': a popular song during the War

banality (n): commonplace, uninteresting

Hazlitt: William Hazlitt (1778 -1830), famous English essayist and critic

impertinence (n): disrespect, impoliteness

complete anarchists ... socialists: anarchists believe in total freedom from government control and restraint whereas socialists have their faith in a well-ordered social organisation

Journey: symbol of the journey of life

French: citizen of France

German: citizen of Germany

C. 1. LONG ANSWER QUESTIONS

1. What does the rule of the road mean? Give examples to show how necessary it is to preserve order in society.
2. Who, according to A.G. Gardiner, is a civilized man?
3. Unchecked personal liberty would lead to social anarchy. Elaborate giving examples.
4. "Our personal liberty of action is restricted by other people's liberty." How? Give three examples.
5. How can we enjoy personal liberty and also respect the liberty of our neighbours? Give examples.
6. A reasonable consideration for the rights or feelings of others is the foundation of social conduct. How?

C. 2. GROUP DISCUSSION

Discuss the following in **groups** or **pairs**:

- a. What makes life a pleasant experience: the awareness of one's rights or consciousness of one's duties?
- b. Little knowledge is a dangerous thing.

C. 3. COMPOSITION

Write a paragraph in about 100 words on each of the following.

- Duties of a citizen
- Role of police in civil society

D. WORD STUDY**D.1. Dictionary Use**

Ex. 1. Correct the spelling of the following words:

petrogard	neighore	sacrifise	curteled
preserv	iluminating	imped	rediculus
judicous	gramphone		

Ex. 2. Look up a dictionary and write two meanings of the following words – the one in which it is used in the lesson and the other which is more common

foot	general	right	complete	conduct
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D.2. Word-formation

Read the following sentence carefully:

*It is an **adjustment** of interest.*

In the above sentence, '**adjustment**' which is an abstract noun has been derived from '**adjust**' which is a verb. More words can be derived from '**adjust**', such as:

adjust	adjusted	adjusting	adjustment	adjustable
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Ex. Write as many words derived from the following verbs as possible in the same way.

permit	ridicule	restrict	interfere	accommodate
criticise	behave	suppose	judge	

D.3. Word-meaning

Find from the lesson words the meanings of which have been given on the left hand side. The last part of each word is given on the right hand side.

state of being free	rty
go down under the surface	erge
a musical instrument	bone
being rude and not showing respect	nce
person living near another	bour

Ex. 2. Fill in the blanks with suitable words given below:

violence mistake peace curse purpose

- (i) Children make while learning.
- (ii) Imperialism is a danger for world
- (iii) Environment pollution is a for us.
- (iv) Explain the of vocational education.
- (v) Gandhiji was against

D. 4. Phrases

Ex.1. Read the lesson carefully and find out the sentences in which the following phrases have been used. Then use them in sentences of your own.

get in hang on settle down
step out remind of conscious of

E. GRAMMAR

Read the following sentences carefully:

- a. *If I went on to the top of Helvelly to do it I could please myself but if I do it out in the streets the neighbours will remind me that my liberty to blow the trombone must interfere with their liberty to sleep in quiet.*
- b. *If I had asked him to be good enough to talk in a lower tone I dare to say he would have thought I was a rude fellow.*

Ex.1. Mark the different structures of 'If-clause' in the sentences above and complete the following sentences:

- (i) If Saumya laboured hard, she
- (ii) If I were a bird, I
- (iii) If Manish had informed me in time, I
- (iv) If it rains today, the farmers
- (v) If the Indian cricketers had shown greater application, India
- (vi) If Nikhat read it carefully, she

F. ACTIVITY

Ex. 1. Look at the examples carefully and fill in the blanks accordingly.

Country	Language	People
Germany	German	the German
France	French	the French
_____	Chinese	the Chinese
Belgium	_____	the Belgian
_____	Japanese	the Japanese
_____	Italian	the Italian
_____	_____	the Russian
_____	Spanish	the Spanish
_____	Turkish	the Turk
_____	Mongolian	the Mongol

Ex.2. Read the lesson carefully and make notes using abbreviations where necessary. Can you suggest another title?

Notes

1. Heading

1.1. Subheading

1.2.

1.3.

1.4.

Use at least four headings

Main idea

