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**CITY OF GODS: THE RATIONALIZATION OF SPIRITUAL THOUGHT IN AMERICA  
AND THE EROSION OF THE FOUNDATIONS OF DEMOCRATIC LIBERALISM**

**by**

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**written under the direction of**

**DANIEL TICHENOR**

**and approved by**

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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This project focuses on the potential for American liberalism to enable the undermining of its own political foundations. Further, this project investigates the role that different approaches to knowledge, religious and otherwise, play in the formation of political knowledge that may exploit this instability in the American democratic project. Many Americans assume a salutary influence on the part of religion on American political life. I argue that the assumption of this benefit without regard to religion's specific effect on political knowledge formation may exacerbate the ability of various sorts of belief to destabilize political democracy in America. Insofar as that is the case, an ironic tension develops in the American system of liberalism whereby the liberty enacted by American politics enables and may even encourage the development of approaches to political knowledge that eats away at the political premises upon which the liberty that allowed the development of said beliefs was in the first place premised. To conclude, I consider what lessons this insight holds for our beliefs, for liberty, and if the insight does not itself suggest an appropriate approach to political democracy.

To this end, I first develop an understanding of Locke's theory of liberalism and the role for religion therein. Next, I explain how the liberal political system of the American founding deviates from Locke's theorized system and what potential that holds for the role of religion in an historical developmental context. To further such an investigation, I look at the operation of American democracy and the function of religion as observed and theorized by Tocqueville, and then consider the subsequent theological developments in mainline American Protestantism growing out of the Second Great Awakening. By looking at the social Darwinists and the Social Gospel movement, I then illustrate how new epistemological developments in American thought, as manifested by the cross-pollination and melding of scientific rationality and normative spiritual thinking, come to validate a new ontological conception of the individual's relationship to society. Finally, I consider the ramifications of the acceptability in American public discourse of a rationally individuated spiritual approach to the world for democratic politics.

## **DEDICATION**

In memory of  
Wilson Carey McWilliams  
whose spirit guides these pages.

We will never recover his loss,  
though happily he teaches us we will yet endure  
for democracy teaches us we need not heroes and saviors  
when we have friends and loved ones, if only  
we find the courage to allow it.

P.S. Hi Mom!

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

No apology is needed for following the learned custom of placing attractive scraps of literature at the heads of our chapters. It has been truly observed by Wagner that such headings, with their vague suggestions of the matter which is to follow them, pleasantly inflame the reader's interest without wholly satisfying his curiosity, and we will hope that it may be found to be so in the present case.

Mark Twain and Charles D. Warner, *The Gilded Age: A Tale of Today*<sup>1</sup>

I believe, or at least I assume, that the roots of this project go back further than I know. My first articulation of the frame for this dissertation, though, I recall as a question I asked Carey McWilliams at a talk he gave at the Eagleton Institute of Politics shortly after I began graduate studies at Rutgers University in the Fall of 2000. I do not remember all the details of the talk, but I do remember the gist of the question it inspired me to ask him, which concerned the idea that, if Americans have come to believe things that lead to the erosion of democracy's foundations, does that mean we are headed for a crisis? His response, one of my favorite memories of Carey, was to boom, "Good Heavens, Jim! I'm a Calvinist! Of *course* I think we're headed towards a crisis!" The specific nexus of religion and knowledge in this humorous reply to a question about American liberal democracy did not occur to me as critical to any treatment I would give the subject until much later. And by later, I mean about two minutes before my composing this thought.

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<sup>1</sup> Twain, Mark and Charles Dudley Warner. "The Gilded Age: A Tale of Today." In *Mark Twain: The Gilded Age and Other Novels*. Edited by Hamlin L. Hill. (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 2002). 3

The more proximate impetus behind this dissertation came from a presentation I made in a small seminar on Religion in Politics in the Spring of 2002, specifically, on April 15<sup>th</sup>, which anyone who knew Carey will understand to be an important and special day for him. My presentation concerned the benefits many individuals seemed to believe they gained from certain forms of spiritual thought, particularly instrumental benefits towards their effectiveness in social life. I recall Carey being intrigued by the presentation and going out of his way to tell me he thought it was very good. In retrospect, I expect he understood what I was looking at far better than did I. I certainly know that I had no idea what I was getting myself involved in. Arguably, if I had, I would have found something else to write about and finished my tenure—or lack thereof—at Rutgers quite some time earlier.

Though such may be considered critical turning points in the life of this dissertation, the investigations contained within have fostered within me a greater appreciation of the scope of influences on me, on my life, and my thought than can be expressed here in such limited form. I must first thank the Rutgers Political Science Department for the support and resources necessary for this project. I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to Dan Tichenor for agreeing to oversee the final guidance of this project after Carey passed away, but also for immeasurable support, both intellectual and emotional, in his enthusiasm for the project and for sharing his knowledge and wisdom as well. I owe a debt of thanks to my other committee members as well: to Gordon Schochet for helping me to understand the British tradition of liberty and for his own ongoing contempt for authority which offered an antagonistic counterpart to Carey's influence in a way that made him a sort of oracle that I could count on to

present the opposite of what Carey might have believed about the moral nature of freedom, thus proving himself a reliable guide twice over; to Dennis Bathory for his attention to detail and his pushing me in the theoretical dimensions of the project by his greater expectations for me when I would have gladly laid down a lesser project as well-enough done; to Jim Morone for his boundless intellectual energy as source of inspiration, and for his participation in a conversation that I stumbled into unknowingly, a fact of which I only learned later; and to Andrew Murphy, though he came to the project later, whose keen eye gave me the final confidence that I could navigate these intellectual waters safely.

I feel blessed not just for the support and guidance of my committee members, formidable minds all, but for the magnificent education I have received at the hands of so many able minds for so long. Steve Bronner, Milton Heumann, Michael Shafer, Susan Lawrence, Dan Kelemen and Jane Junn all helped me along in their own ways, offering me the disparate tools to make a project such as mine possible for a young graduate student grasping at altogether too many things. I am indebted to Amherst College as well, not just for its collection of scholars—people such as Professors Hadley Arkes, Austin Sarat, Thomas Dumm, Lawrence Douglas, Steven Rivkin, Martha Umphrey, Dan Barbezat, Janet Gytso, Bill Zimmerman, Tom Smith and Jan Dizard, many of whom might be surprised that I remember them well enough to add to this list, but who have shaped me profoundly, each and all—but also for its steadfast mission towards the development of its students, for which I thank especially Dean Ben Lieber for his role.

In this vein, I feel my real education—the formal portion anyway—began at The Roxbury Latin School under the tutelage of such wonderful educators as Mr. Kerner, Mr.



Brennan, Doc Dower, Mr. Rea, Mr. Ligon, Mr. Conn, Ms. Melvoin, Mr. Sugg, Mr. Guerra, Mr. Russell and Mr. Ward for their dedication and patience, even to an ungrateful wretch who cannot now remember most of their first names without resort to his google-brain. The lessons were tough and not always enjoyable, in the classroom and out, but oftentimes that is what is needed.

The path of my education has been aided and made all the more gratifying by friends and colleagues who have been kindly enough to count me among their friends. Eric Antanitus and Greg Noonan have been there for as long as I've been worth knowing, and longer than that still, and Seno and Newell have long been lurking in the wings as well. Michael Schwartz, Rudolph Magyar, Cecilio Rosario, Adalberto Taveras, Alicia Kahn, Amelia Klein, Niambi Person and Jess Bruder spring happily to mind as just a few of a cohort of wonderful friends from college that have proved far more than I might have imagined I would deserve before my arrival. My good fortune has continued in graduate school, happily through the careful attention to both the thought within this work and to the author, by the attentions of so many, but I must here offer special gratitude to Kate Bedford, Geoff Kurtz, Jason Delo, Meredith Staples, Eric Boehme, Carolyn Craig, Brian Stipelman, Lexie Hoerl, Aaron Keck, Brian Graf, Kristy King, Sarah Tangen and Josh Beale. Thank you not just for the support and affection you have extended to me, but for allowing me the honor and privilege of participating in your lives.

My family, of course, deserves much credit that I have come this far. Even though I know that they largely think my efforts are a curious choice at best—my sister Elizabeth and my brother Edward especially, but also a range of grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, my grand cohort known within the family as “all the nieces and

nephews” who, with a few notable exceptions, think that it is “neat” that I do what I do, but fundamentally strange—they have supported me the entire way without question and a faith in me that has come from I know not where. Flawed as I am, that which might be considered good in me is made possibly only because of all of them.

In many ways this dissertation should be dedicated to all of these people, though I am as yet constrained by a conservatism and sense of tradition that prevents me from doing so. I would that they know that this dedication, at least, is dedicated to them all—this would be true even were I to deny it, as, though the errors be my own, the parts of me that come from them necessarily inhabit this work.

This dissertation is dedicated, as noted, to W. Carey McWilliams and his memory. My qualifications to even begin to say why are dubious at best. His influence on me has been profound—that much I know—and his patience in leading me to better conclusions, to better places, and, hopefully, towards some modicum of being a better person is incalculable by any measure of which I am aware.

Finally, this dissertation is dedicated also and at last to my mother, Lois, and my father, Richard, and his memory. That I am my father’s son is something that has been widely acknowledged and for which I could not be more grateful or proud. So too is this the case with my mother, counterpoint and corrective as the best in loving relationships are, to my dad and to me. My mother has the further distinction of putting up with far more from me than anyone else, and far more still that I ought to have any reason to demand, much less expect.

I wondered initially if it were appropriate to dedicate this dissertation to more than one. But I could not help but think that Carey would have laughed at such

hesitation. The Latin root of dedication, of course, means “to give,” and such is not the kind of gift which diminishes with giving. Rather, if I have learned anything of value from this process, it is by giving that our very humanity expands and grows, offering greater blessings to cherish and share. I thank you all.

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**INTRODUCTION: FOR GOD AND COUNTRY**  
**Religion and Politics in American Liberal Republican**  
**Democratic Practice**

Not even Americans, subjected unto a Christian prince, are to be punished either in body or goods, for not embracing our faith and worship. If they are persuaded that they please God in observing the rites of their own country, and that they shall obtain happiness by that means, they are to be left unto God and themselves.

John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*<sup>2</sup>

**Learning Liberty**

The purpose of this project is to investigate the extent to which American democratic liberalism may allow, or even encourage, the development of beliefs that undermine the very political foundations of liberalism itself, and to what extent, if any, modes of religious and spiritual thought may exacerbate this phenomenon. From the origins of the theory of political liberalism as proposed by John Locke and across Tocqueville's famous observations on the need to moderate the freedom of the democratic soul in America, many thinkers have expressed concern as to the dangers that individual liberty may pose to society with respect to the potential for free individuals to cause disruption in civil society. In consideration of this concern, many theorists have discussed the potential for religion to serve as a kind of corrective to this disruptive potential, asserting that the search for moral truth within at least the Abrahamic religious tradition will have a salutary effect upon the religious believer, rendering her state of freedom not only not dangerous to, but even productive for the good of society. Others, though, have suggested that religion may have a problematic relationship with democracy, the very basis of our political liberty, insofar as religious faith may motivate

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<sup>2</sup> Locke, John. *A Letter Concerning Toleration*. Ed. Ian Shapiro. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003). 237

people to seek to enact their religiously motivated political preferences without regard for democratic procedures. Beyond such disagreement on the part of democratic theorists, however, Americans themselves have long expressed the belief that religiously informed values are vital to health of American society and its attendant politics. Such an effect on the part of religion, however, ought not to be assumed, as while religious belief, at least in the Western tradition, may be faith in God, the practice of religion is a human endeavor and, as such, may often prove an inappropriate object of faith. To understand the real impact of America's experience of religious and spiritual belief on American politics, then, requires first an understanding of American democratic liberalism in the context of the theory as proposed by Locke, as modified in its Madisonian incarnation, and as observed by Tocqueville, as well as the situation and of religion therein. Then, once such an understanding has been established, it will become necessary to undertake an historical investigation into the sorts of belief systems that have developed in America and how they have influenced the political attitudes and positions of the people within that system. Ultimately, I will argue that America's experience with religion has allowed—and even encouraged—the development of beliefs that undermine the political foundations of democratic politics in America. Specifically, although not all Americans adhere to such beliefs, American political discourse accepts as legitimate, under the sanction of religious or spiritual validation, beliefs concerning the deficiency or lack of fitness of the holders of dissenting viewpoints to participate in democratic politics. To this end, I will demonstrate how certain approaches to knowledge that are relevant to politics, both religious and otherwise, some seemingly idiosyncratic while others more mainstream, can be seen to embody a more generally accepted conception of the

relationship between the individual and society that undermines the democratic basis upon which our liberalism, including our freedom of belief, rests.

First, an understanding of Locke's theory of liberalism must be developed along with the function within it which Locke understood for religion. I begin with Locke because he in large part initiated the project of modern liberalism, so it is critical to understand not only why he believed individual liberty to be justified but also how he believed it would work in terms of its efficacy and its safety as a political system. The American founding did not, of course, enact Locke's system *per se*.<sup>3</sup> Locke's theory, though, can be considered on the one hand as the point of departure such that the Americans could believe that the founding of a liberal system was both feasible and right. On the other hand, Locke's liberal system may be taken as an important juxtaposition and point of reference for understanding how the American experience has deviated from Locke's vision as well as for clarifying the problems, if not impossibility, for contemporary theorists who would urge a "return" to a role for religion in our democracy more like that envisioned by Locke. In effect, once we understand how Locke thought political liberalism would work, we can then look to American liberalism to see how it differed from Locke's proposed system and how this new incarnation might be expected to work or not work on its own terms.

Locke departed from his historical predecessors by contending that individual liberty, as distinguished from the liberty of a people, was not only not necessarily a threat to society but actually would serve the common good; liberalism would be consistent with republicanism. Rather than requiring an overarching and potentially overbearing coercive force, society could be held together properly by people pursuing their self-

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<sup>3</sup> Not any more than it did Herbert Spencer's *Social Statics*.



interest insofar as they recognized the gains of social living. Certainly, inconveniences to social life and its attendant systems of exchange existed, and from that state of affairs Locke derived the mandates to engage politics. Yet these politics, as per above, need not be all controlling precisely because people could understand how best to pursue that which is good, both for themselves and for the public interest with which their personal good happily coincided.

In this context, personal morality would not need to be controlled but in fact, according to Locke, such control would actually interfere with the development of a virtuous citizenry. Observing the social strife and attendant political instability over matters of religion, Locke urged a policy of toleration. Far from exacerbating conflict over matters of religion by allowing for dissenting religious practices, Locke held that toleration would enable the civil peace that insistence on the established church so clearly had failed to create. In response to the argument that allowing such dissent would fail to safeguard against the predations of the morally destitute, Locke argued that toleration, in allowing the free pursuit of religion, better effected the moral purposes of religion by allowing the individuals of society to come to a clearer understanding of the moral authority that ought to guide their behavior in the realm of freedom. In this sense, liberty would not be disruptive of civil peace by fostering malefactors but would rather enable the development of a more sincerely virtuous populous that would both bolster civil peace and promote the common good through their beneficent ways.

Such a system whereby religion becomes a buttress to the common good that is activated by liberty differs in certain significant respects from the system developed in the American founding. In the American system of political liberalism, no such

purposive moral function was attributed to liberty. Rather, far from being the freedom to pursue some divinely authoritative good, liberty meant the freedom to do as one wished. The task for the founders, then, was to construct a political system such that, first, the freedom enacted therein did not threaten the system, i.e. liberty would be safe with respect to the system of government, and second, the system would not itself illegitimately infringe upon the liberty of the people, or, rather, individual persons, which may be another matter entirely.

In such a liberal system, religion may well perform the salutary function envisioned by Locke, but it by no means must. That is to say, while the founders implicitly accepted arguments such as those made by Locke that civil authority must not—indeed, cannot legitimately—govern matters of personal religion, they did not insist upon a conception of freedom that led to religious practice in conformity with the common good. The founders would claim to establish a republic, but their understanding of republicanism was to serve the interests of all by allowing them to live freely rather than to encourage, must less demand, that the people come together in public projects. The common good might still be supported, but this would be a common good understood to emanate from the actions of individuals exercising their freedom as each saw fit rather than from a political decision to develop something in common. Such common projects would still be possible, of course, but were in no way required and, quite possibly, as shall be seen, might be discouraged by the many and myriad developments in American thought allowed by this system.

Critical to assessing the possible functions of religion in the American system of democratic liberalism is the modern realization that religions evolve. Locke's role for

religion was premised upon the adoption of religion of a certain type. Moreover, the types of religion Locke considered assumed within their systems of thought a personal mandate to pursue an understanding of moral authority external to the self; the religious believer would seek to do God's will on earth. The work of Max Weber and subsequent thinkers, however, has demonstrated that religions change over time, often, if not generally, in conformity with other ways of comprehending the world. In this way, the beliefs enshrined within a system of religious thought may adapt over time to shifting understandings about society, economics, politics and even physical or material reality. As such, especially given the freedom to develop as would be found in the relatively thin institutional space of America, religions may not so reliably be taken as fixed guides to objective truth insofar as it will have a tendency to drift as it incorporates within itself new views of the world; the sheer scope of the fragmentation of Christianity into so many sects in America emphasizes the prevalence of this phenomenon.

Thus, to understand the function religion has played in American politics, it becomes necessary to develop an historical understanding of religion's actual function in American political liberalism and its influence on political thought. To this end, I look first to Tocqueville's still famous observations of the functioning of American democracy and his discussion of the role of religion therein. Specifically, Tocqueville's work offers the opportunity to see to what degree religion actually functioned as theorized by Locke and as allowed by the system of the American founders. In other words, I will examine Tocqueville's observations because they offer a glimpse of how the American liberal democratic system, as adapted from Locke's theory, actually functioned in America and what role the various theoretical pieces (e.g. religion, individual freedom, the production

of the common good, etc.) actually played in the period following the system's political enactment; American politics and beliefs have changed greatly over time, so Tocqueville offers us an important insight into the degree to which American politics functioned in conformity with or in deviation from how Locke and Madison respectively envisioned the operation of a liberal system of politics. From there, we may then follow the subsequent developments in what would be considered acceptable forms of spiritually based thought and what sorts of knowledge about the world would thereby be accepted as legitimate within American public discourse. By charting the path of religious development in political thought and examining certain specific manifestations of this thought, I seek to demonstrate that the free space for belief established by the Founders allowed for the development of a conception of the relationship between the individual and the rest of society that differs markedly from that envisioned by Locke and which holds the potential to undermine the premises of American democratic politics. Significantly, and perhaps ironically, this potential erosion of the very political foundations of liberalism that allowed the freedom of belief in the first place can, far from being stymied by religion, occur through the vehicle of religion which Locke, and many theorists since, proffered as the best hope for safeguarding political liberalism.

What Tocqueville actually observed about politics and religion coheres quite well with the theory of Locke's liberal system. Notably, Tocqueville argued that American religion was critical to the functioning of American democracy by virtue of its ability to foster mores appropriate to democratic politics. For Tocqueville, the political system required a certain type of character for people to participate in politics properly and religion, in combination with other American social institutions such as the family and

the ubiquitous voluntarist associations, served to form the moderate character appropriate to an individual who would be at once at liberty and also a participant in democratic politics. By informing people with respect to their own self-interest rightly understood, Tocqueville held that religion checked individual freedom and guided its exercise towards the common good which was understood to be for the benefit of not only all, but of each individual as well.

Tocqueville was acutely aware, however, of the possibility that religion might not be well suited to the continued performance of this function. Tocqueville was especially careful to note that even religion found itself beholden to and required to conform to certain attitudes attendant a free people. That religion would need to follow the lead of other attitudes clearly calls into question its ability to guide these self-same attitudes. Indeed, an examination of the religious experience of the Second Great Awakening of the early nineteenth century, a social phenomenon that occurred during Tocqueville's visit and came to define the direction of much of American religious thought subsequent to that period, exemplifies this tendency of religion to evolve to accommodate other beliefs. Specifically, the nineteenth century exhibited a great increase in the rational individuation of culture in America. The previously dominant Calvinist theology increasingly failed to resonate with a worldview whereby one would seem clearly to benefit one's own situation by the rational pursuit of self-interested ends. Over time, American mainline Protestantism developed an emphasis on the individual as both the means and ends of understanding salvation. Although the purpose of religion with respect to the salvation of individual souls remained unchanged, this purpose would come to be understood increasingly as accomplished through the rational, self-interested pursuits of the

individual as he understood them. In effect, not only did the appropriate choice of means to salvation fall upon the individual in this new religious formulation, but so too did the appropriate approaches to knowledge informing that choice.

In this way, for many Americans, the appropriate locus of knowing moved away from external authoritative criteria and moved into the individual self. By a right connection with God, the individual could claim certainty in what to pursue with her own life and the right means by which to do so; authority remained divine, but it would be accessed by the heart. Thus, an effectively self-referential approach to knowledge, both of ends and means, became considered legitimate on account of this apparently subjective approach being sanctioned as religious in nature. Insofar as that which someone would consider to be an appropriate or plausible political goal or project will be bounded by the kinds of understandings of right and wrong developed within religious faiths, the acceptability of this approach to knowledge ought to have significant ramifications for politics. This impact on Americans politics would in turn be intensified by the folding of scientific knowledge into this epistemic approach that began in the late nineteenth century. Lacking the history of an oppressive church that marked European's experience, Americans felt no need to jettison religious approaches to knowledge in favor of the new scientific rationality born of the Enlightenment. Rather, Americans incorporated this new approach to knowledge into their existing views of the world, allowing for a kind of cross-pollination between scientific rationality and the normative prescriptions of religious belief and the consequent development of amalgamated strains of thought that incorporated each and both.

This combined—not to say conflated—approach of religion and science in alleged concert can be found as emblematic of otherwise seemingly disparate political positions and beliefs. To illustrate how this approach to knowledge, which underscores the underlying conception of the individual as an appropriate locus of knowing, I look to the politics of the social Darwinists of The Gilded Age and the progressive response to these politics of the Social Gospel movement. Despite each claiming the mantle of the betterment of the human race, in terms of political position, these two camps could scarcely be further apart. The disciples of William Graham Sumner (and Herbert Spencer before him) argued for a policy of *laissez-faire* to allow the less fit individuals to fail in competition, thereby producing better individuals to the benefit of the species and, therefore necessarily, the benefit of the common good which they would then produce by their qualitatively superior efforts. The Social Gospellers, on the other hand, in keeping with their lead theologian Walter Rauschenbusch, instead saw society as an organic whole which could be improved by the collective efforts of all to the great benefit and advantage of each. Despite such antagonistic policy prescriptions stemming from such disparate political positions, each movement is marked by an expression of politics that collapses normative and instrumental reasoning in ways emblematic of the cross-pollination of scientific and religious thought accepted as legitimate in American public discourse. Not uninterestingly, each movement seeks to appropriate Darwin's then new theory of evolution—a theory, it should be noted, that is entirely materialistic in scope—to demonstrate the scientific nature of their normative conclusions. Inquiry into each approach to politics shows how, on account of each concluding—erroneously by today's analytic understanding of the different modes of thought—that normative or moral truth

would necessarily have to conform to scientific understandings of reality and, correspondingly, any mode of inquiry into the way the world runs, scientific or otherwise, would necessarily be expected to produce conclusions about normative truth. Despite the apparently different purposes of the approaches to knowledge, on account of a collapsing of the discourses, for many, the knowledge of each system of thought would be expected to cohere.

This is not to claim that all Americans approach knowledge—political, religious, scientific or otherwise—in this manner. Rather, the claim is that such approaches to knowledge are considered, at least implicitly, legitimate in American public discourse and may even be encouraged on account of the demonstrated preference of so many Americans that values, political and otherwise, be religiously informed. To the extent, then, that religion is perhaps uncritically invited by Americans to form the basis for political viewpoints and positions, political knowledge developed by way of this collapsed or amalgamated approach to knowledge will similarly be accepted as a legitimate basis for political views. Yet I will argue that this approach to knowledge is itself a manifestation of a conception of the individual and her relationship to society that may itself be problematic for democratic politics. Specifically, the self-referential approach to knowledge that gives rise to these apparently disparate politics similarly allows the discrediting of individuals who disagree as unfit for democratic participation; in effect, the fact of disagreement becomes itself evidence that the person holding the dissenting viewpoint has an inappropriate relationship to knowledge, to the process of knowing itself, that calls into question the reliability of any views he might hold. To this end, I examine certain specific and allegedly marginal or fringe forms of thought such as



Scientology, the Objectivist philosophy of Ayn Rand, and other related individualistic, therapeutic self-help systems of thought and their problematic ramifications for politics in order to show how, while they might initially appear idiosyncratic, they are in fact similarly products of the aforementioned amalgamated approach to knowledge. To the extent that these seemingly more socially divisive approaches to knowledge may be seen to have arisen from and been facilitated by movements in thought that are fundamentally religious in nature, I call into question an uncritical belief that religion will necessarily serve as a corrective to potential problems in democratic liberalism. This is not, of course, to say that religion cannot serve the republic in whatever form republicanism may be understood to take—even that of people being left to their own devices—but rather that the function of religion in the American liberal system must be examined and understood with respect to its operation on actual political commitments and not as a magic salve that will cure even the most Panglossian of wounds in our society and our politics.

**CHAPTER 1: A DEMOCRACY ON A HILL?**  
**The Functionality of Evolving Religion Within a  
 System of Democratic Liberalism**

Philosophy's quarrel with democracy was that democracy taught men in childhood to be "free," and hence legitimated their private emotions and desires. Democracy failed partly because it did not attempt to develop the awareness of imperfection in knowledge and virtue. The humbling awareness created a bond among those who participated in it and freed them from the tyranny of the emotions. It is vital to remember that Plato saw Sparta, no less than Athens, as in error: Sparta, like so many traditional societies, believed that fraternity can be taught, can be embodied in iron rules of custom and ritual. Sparta constrained men only externally; if Athens encouraged men to seek pleasure, Sparta could not train them to resist it. Neither saw the necessity for desolation, for destroying pride of custom and pride of self as the first step toward instilling a vision of a higher authority which would allow pleasure to take a necessary if lesser place in the scheme of human life.

W. Carey McWilliams, *The Idea of Fraternity in America*<sup>4</sup>

**Introduction: Religious Functionalism in American Liberal Democracy**

A proper understanding of the liberal democratic system, as conceived by the state builders in America, reveals the potential for a significant function for religious belief towards supporting the system. Specifically, the Lockean liberalism that served as the jumping off point for American liberal democracy assumed that a sincere religious faith was critical to moderate what were considered potentially detrimental and even debilitating effects of unchecked individual freedom on the polity; religion worked to prevent liberty from becoming dangerous license. A theory of American politics, then, requires insight into the development of American spirituality; the understandings of the evolution of spiritual systems that attend changes in the social and economic structure of

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<sup>4</sup> McWilliams, W. Carey. *The Idea of Fraternity in America*. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1973). 28

society must be addressed.<sup>5</sup> Such changes result not merely in a difference in stated belief, but are themselves manifestations of a reorientation in fundamental ways of looking at and understanding the world; that is to say, religion is often the vehicle through which changing approaches to knowing one's world and ways of thinking about knowledge itself occur. In the American experience, religious changes often followed the rationalization and individualization of culture first theorized by Max Weber, which have important ramifications for a theory of the republican political goals initially envisioned for the country at the time of the founding and what the role of democracy is in effecting those goals.

That these reformulations of what can be known and how occur through religion create an ironic tension for religious functionalism. That is to say, if religion is taken seriously as having a function within American political institutions, then that function may be expected to change should the approach to knowledge that a religious system represents changes<sup>6</sup>. Moreover, the legitimacy of spiritual belief is often founded upon claims of providing knowledge of fixed truth about the world. Such truths, for the believer, would necessarily inform choices concerning that which is both politically possible and appropriate. In this vein, it becomes critical to develop a theory of what such understandings of epistemological developments over time within religious and spiritual belief mean for the American liberal republic. Specifically, there exists an ironic tension within Lockean liberalism whereby the system validates belief systems that

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<sup>5</sup> Weber, Max. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Translated by T. Parsons. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958); Tawney, R. H. *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*. (London: Hazell, Watson & Voney, Ltd., 1944); Robertson, H. M. J. H. Clapham, ed. *The Rise of Economic Individualism: A Criticism of Max Weber and his School*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1933)

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Berger, Peter L. *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1967)

undermine the very underpinnings of the theoretical system that allowed the freedom of the belief systems in the first place. The forms in which religion and spiritual thinking in America manifests itself depend upon the freedom of religion articulated in American liberalism, which in turn rests upon and emanates from the democratic liberal republic that guarantees said freedom<sup>7</sup>. This freedom, however, may allow the development of approaches to knowledge that allow for the rejection of the very theories upon which the liberalism that allowed and encouraged these developments in thought was in the first place premised.

To be sure, the notion that liberalism may allow the existence of illiberal elements within the polity is not a new observation. The problem becomes much greater, however, when it is understood that the American liberal system may allow, or even, as we shall see, invite the formation of not just political positions that are illiberal, but approaches to knowledge that undermine the very basis of the democracy upon which that liberal system rests. The tension becomes ironic when it is realized that the very types of religious and spiritual thought to which many political theorists turn to safeguard the system may actually serve as the vehicle by which occurs the undermining of American theories of democracy and republicanism. Such an understanding creates problems for more commonly held views of the place of religion in American politics, as with the concerns such as those voiced by Alasdair MacIntyre<sup>8</sup> that America's political woes stem from a drift of our collective morals away from their original religious foundations; such points are rendered moot if we learn that it is the basic spiritual thinking within the mode of religious belief that has set the polity adrift. Rather, we need a new theory of the

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<sup>7</sup> Though this freedom, of course, has its own boundaries.

<sup>8</sup> MacIntyre, Alasdair. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. (Notre Dame: The University of Notre Dame Press, 1984)

interplay between spiritual values and our understanding of American liberalism to more properly interpret what America—and Americans—want from and can achieve through politics. To this end, we must first understand Locke's theory of liberalism which so influenced the American political founding and the role of religion within the liberal system as Locke understood it. Once such a theory is established, we can use it as a point of reference to view the alterations and adaptations of that theory in the American founding and the potential significance of the function of spiritual thought within the American institutional apparatus. From there, we may then consider the ramifications of religion's situation and historical development on American politics, as well as its prospects for the future.

### **Lockean Liberalism: The Freedom to Do Good**

Lockean liberalism, as initially conceived and then adapted for American government, is not best understood as a completely individualistic *laissez-faire* economic system of freedom. Rather, the individual liberty to accumulate property prescribed by Locke functioned to allow greater development of the common good by increasing the value of the resources provided by God. Differing sharply from Hobbes's concerns of a war of all against all, Locke quite differently sees human beings as attracted to living in society with one another. This understanding of people, though still motivated by self-interest, holds that they enjoy living together and more readily perceive the benefit of society:

God having made Man such a Creature, that, in his own Judgment, it was not good for him to be alone, put him under strong Obligations of Necessity,

Convenience, and Inclination to drive him into Society, as well as fitted him with Understanding and Language to continue and enjoy it.<sup>9</sup>

Of course, people still have desires and aversions, which motivate them to work towards their own self-interest. However, Locke does not frame this drive as one of unbridled competition against other humans who are an individual's foes, but rather part of the common endeavor granted by, "God, who hath given the World to Men in common, hath given them reason to make use of it to the best advantage of Life, and convenience,"<sup>10</sup>. People's hedonistic motivations move them to make the most of living in this world, in which each is an executor of the "Law of Nature," "to preserve the rest of Mankind,"<sup>11</sup>, for the greatest enjoyment of all people. To best enjoy this world, though, requires work on the part of the people. This work gives rise to the ownership of private property, as one who works on a part of nature, "hath mixed his Labour with, and joyned to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his Property,"<sup>12</sup>. Moreover, this effort of appropriating property to oneself, which an individual engages in from his or her own self-interested inclination to make a better life, "does not lessen but increase the common stock of mankind,"<sup>13</sup> because, "labour makes the far greatest part of the value of things,"<sup>14</sup>. Thus, the natural desire of people to fulfill their own individual self-interest actually brings about an improved state of affairs for all the individuals in a society.

However, although the benefits from working on nature may accrue to the whole population of the world, an individual still engages in this work first out of self-interest; a

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<sup>9</sup> Locke, John, *Two Treatises of Government*. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1988). 318-319

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 286

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. 271

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 288

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 294

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 296

human being works to improve his or her own life. However, as this work creates property for the individual:

The enjoyment of the property he has in this state is very unsafe, very unsecure. This makes him willing to quit this Condition, which however free, is full of fears and continual dangers... to unite [with others] for the mutual Preservation of their Lives, Liberties and Estates, which I call by the general Name, Property.<sup>15</sup>

If, in the state of nature, each man be executor of the law of nature, then each is also his own judge, which is never understood to be an effective form of dispute resolution among human beings. The lack of security to all which this implies hampers the benefits that accrue to all when people feel certain they may go about their work unhampered, as this work benefits all. The reasonable solution according to Locke, then, is for each individual to resign his right as executor of the law of nature to a common power, a government, which may act as umpire, “to restrain the partiality and violence of Men,”<sup>16</sup>. In this way, “Civil Government is the proper Remedy for the Inconveniences of the State of Nature,”<sup>17</sup>. Thus, a common power enables people to appropriate, enjoy safely, and thereby be more likely to work to increase the value of their own property which furthers the common good for all members of society. Accordingly, “in Governments the Laws regulate the right of property, and the possession of land is determined by positive constitutions,”<sup>18</sup> so that each individual might pursue their own self-interest in a way that benefits every member of the society.

Under this conception of Locke’s of the role of government in human affairs, the people establish government to accomplish more with respect to their self-interest than they could without it. People are reasonably effective in pursuing their own interests

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 350

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. 275-276

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 278

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 302

without government<sup>19</sup>, but by using reason they can create an arrangement that is even more effective at furthering their interests. It is in the effort to improve their lives beyond a certain level, then, that government becomes a necessity. The implication here is that government is an instrument empowered by the people to serve the people for their greater good:

Political Power is that Power which every Man, having in the state of Nature, has given up into the hands of the Society, and therein to the Govenours, whom the Society hath set over itself, with this express or tacit Trust, that it shall be employed for their good, and the preservation of their Property.<sup>20</sup>

The actions of government consequent to its establishment are then valid only to the extent that they fulfill their duty of promoting the interests of the people; in effect, liberalism is justified on account of its effecting of republicanism. In such a formulation, governmental action cannot be considered apart from its purpose of furthering people's aims.

Political power as such is not absolute, but contingent upon promoting the welfare of the people; "The public good is the rule and measure of all law-making. If a thing be not useful to the commonwealth, though it be ever so indifferent, it may not presently be established by law,"<sup>21</sup>. Government arises from the effort of the people to further their own self-interests with the benefit that, under government, the benefit of all can be promoted more effectively than by individuals working on their own. Therefore, there are standards for evaluating what government may do. For example, because the securing of property is held to be necessary to the advancement of the lives of the people, "no Body hath a right to take their substance, or any part of it from them, without their

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<sup>19</sup> Zuckert, Michael P. *Launching Liberalism: On Lockean Political Philosophy*. (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2002). 375

<sup>20</sup> Locke. *Two Treatises of Government*. 381

<sup>21</sup> Locke. *A Letter Concerning Toleration*. 233



own consent; without this, they have no Property at all,”<sup>22</sup>. Indeed, the consent of the governed becomes pivotal, as, “Every Man being, as has been shewed, naturally free, and nothing being able to put him into subjection to any Earthly Power, but only his own Consent,”<sup>23</sup>. A government that attempts to act contrary to the ends consented by people is actually itself in a state of rebellion; a government that attempts to exert force without this consent is at war with the people: “Who shall be Judge whether the Prince or Legislative act contrary to their Trust?... The People shall be Judge,”<sup>24</sup>. Government, given Locke’s understanding of how people pursue their interests, is necessary to advance the welfare and enjoyment of the people beyond a certain point not surmountable without it.

Critical to this theory, then, is the understanding that liberty is largely an instrumental good that is justified on the basis of other ends. Liberty effectively exists, or rather, must be established, to allow for greater possibility and development in the common project. This purpose for liberty depends, therefore, on Locke’s requirement that we understand liberty in its proper conception:

*Absolute liberty, just and true liberty, equal and impartial liberty, is the thing that we stand in need of.* Now, though this has indeed been much talked of, I doubt it has not been much understood; I am sure not at all practised, either by our governors towards the people in general, or by any dissenting parties of the people towards one another.<sup>25</sup>

Historically, the concept of liberty as conceived as individual freedom developed as a necessary counterpart to the notion that individuals were responsible for their own salvation; any restraint on freedom that would undermine the individual’s ability to

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<sup>22</sup> Locke. *Two Treatises of Government*. 360

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. 347

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. 426-427

<sup>25</sup> Locke. *A Letter Concerning Toleration*. 213

pursue his or her own salvation could not possibly be legitimate or contain any real mandate for the believer. As such, liberty is necessary for ideas of justice or morality to have any real meaning; as Hobbes points out:

To this war of every man against every man, this also is consequent: that nothing can be unjust. The notions of right and wrong, justice and injustice, have there no place. Where there is no common power, there is no law; where no law, no injustice.<sup>26</sup>

Without government, individuals live in the realm of simple necessity in following their mandate of self-preservation, and an individual acting under necessity cannot be considered unjust. Liberty becomes vital, then, for any project concerning the moral development of humanity. Certainly, liberty may be pursued by a political system as an ends in itself, as the failure to do so may undermine the actual enactment of freedom. However, the point is clear that the basis for Locke's vision of society remains firmly constrained by higher mandate, as indicated by the conception of humans being, as noted above, "under strong Obligations of Necessity, Convenience, and Inclination to drive him into Society,"<sup>27</sup>.

Thus, while liberty is emphasized in the Lockean system, it is not liberty for its own sake or for the enjoyment of the individual—though such enjoyment will also occur<sup>28</sup>—but rather as a vehicle for other ends.<sup>29</sup> This conception of liberty forms the criteria for evaluating the construction and limits of the Lockean system:

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<sup>26</sup> Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan: Parts One and Two*. (Eaglewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1958). 108

<sup>27</sup> Locke. *Two Treatises of Government*. 318-319

<sup>28</sup> At least, it will if all goes well, notwithstanding the utter misery so many people perpetuate upon their own lives by the exercise of their freedom. Despite such pains, it may still be well argues that liberty is a precondition to achieve a happier state of affairs, even if it includes the potential to at times make a hash of things.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. esp. chapter 5

Law, in its true Notion, is not so much the Limitation as the direction of a free and intelligent Agent to his proper Interest, and prescribes no farther than is for the general Good of those under that Law.<sup>30</sup>

Liberty held value for Locke so long is its exercise supported the common good.

Accordingly, Liberty is good so long as it is confined by the public interest.

### **Knowing (How to Be) Good**

Of course, the regulation of the exercise of freedom that Locke envisions does not necessarily require religion *per se*; it is certainly possible to imagine a state of affairs whereby people subordinate their liberty to the common good for non-theological reasons. Indeed, given the alleged happy confluence of the pursuit of self-interest and the common good, appropriate behavior might be found to come easily to people in a Lockean world, thereby obviating the function of religion in a liberal system.<sup>31</sup> As Michael Zuckert states:

According to Locke, Hobbes is most mistaken in believing that the good of each can be accomplished only through the in principle complete substitution of public will for the private wills of citizens. The demonstration is largely the achievement of his analysis of property, on the one hand, and religion, on the other. The reservation of property and liberty rights beyond anything Hobbes would admit derives from Locke's reanalysis of the role of material conditions in human existence and the insight that privately willed productive activity (labor, profit seeking) does not disrupt but rather knits together society by creating interdependence and wealth. Moreover, in his Letter Concerning Toleration and other places, Locke shows that a privatizing solution to the religious problem, religious toleration, also better serves the cause of rights-securing than does any kind of public solution. Religion is no longer to be the cement of society; the mutual interdependence of the division of labor and the joint subordination to secular but rational authority is, for the most part, to serve the function instead.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid. 305

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Block's discussion of the defeat of self-authorization through education in accepting universal norms and ends. Block, James E. *A Nation of Agents: The American Path to a Modern Self and Society*. (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2002). 155-160

<sup>32</sup> Zuckert. *Launching Liberalism*. 305

In this view, religion's social function is usurped, or, perhaps more accurately, preempted by the normal behavior associated with a liberal economy.

Such a view, however, misunderstands and, perhaps therefore, neglects the conception of religion and its relationship to a proper understanding of human conduct that Locke holds. In many respects, Locke sees religion as not merely a faith in a divine creator, but also as a self-conscious statement of knowledge of how one ought properly to behave. Religion, then, is both epistemological and ontological for Locke: it contains a self-conscious understanding of the nature of the world, how it can be known, and what is known about it.<sup>33</sup> Thus, religion is itself the project of understanding how one should behave in the world—which is a necessary component of Locke's liberal system—given Locke's basic approach to what he termed, “human understanding.”

According to Locke, there are no universal truths or innate principles resident within the human mind.<sup>34</sup> As such, innate principles of the world and how things ought to be cannot be discovered by reason alone. Understanding is, rather, a matter of perception and reason is the human ability to manipulate ideas symbolically. This anti-essentialist position yields the conclusion that moral principles must similarly not be innate, but rather a set of conventional rules that we understand because they are useful. God may, in the final accounting, justify the adoption of certain moral principles, as shall be discussed below, but this fact does not thus make the ideas held by humans innate in any way. What humans consider to be their understanding is the apprehension of ideas through some means of perception and the subsequent manipulation of said ideas through

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. the similarity of this conception to the conception of religion developed by Berger. *The Sacred Canopy*. Also, it should be pointed out further that Berger notes that many belief systems, even allegedly secular ones, may also take on this character of religious belief systems.

<sup>34</sup> Locke, John. *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*. Edited by Peter H. Nidditch. (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1975). Book I

the faculty of reason. As such, truth is not born of an arrangement of ideas as such a truth would be contingent upon the abilities of the individual knower and his or her proficiency at reasoning. Accordingly, even the inability to doubt something cannot be taken as dispositive of a belief being innately true.

Real knowledge for Locke must therefore arise from humanity's experience in nature; that is to say, the knowledge of the nature of things depends upon a person's engaged understanding of the experience of nature. Locke's conception of knowledge of truth, while empirically based in this way, did not demand the radical skepticism of, say, Hume, though. Instead, Locke believed that while there were not innate truths within the human mind, such truths could still be deduced—they just required an engagement with experience to provide the materials from which reason may make further deductions.<sup>35</sup> Thus, for Locke, the belief that understanding comes from the manipulation of concepts in no way suggests the absence of real moral truths external to human thought. While the only truth that men may know intuitively is their own existence, attempts to grasp further the truths of reality must depend upon demonstration, considered to be no less definitive than truth known intuitively.<sup>36</sup> For Locke, the most important of these truths which men can know demonstratively is the existence of God,<sup>37</sup> a truth inherently bound up with the moral nature of the world and focuses the problem of knowledge upon, "Morality and Divinity, those parts of Knowledge that Men are most concern'd to be clear in,"<sup>38</sup>. As Ayers points out:

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<sup>35</sup> Ayers, Michael, *Locke – Volume I: Epistemology*. (London and New York: Routledge, 1991). 14-15

<sup>36</sup> Dunn, John, *Locke*, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1984). 52

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. 77

<sup>38</sup> Locke. *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*. 11(13-14)

There is no doubt that the tone of much of Locke's account of belief is moralistic, sometimes intensely so, but that is also true of some of the things he had to say about knowledge, or rather about our failure to acquire it when it is to be had.<sup>39</sup>

Accordingly, even though right and wrong are not apprehended directly through observation of nature, understanding the nature of reality necessarily entails knowledge of morality and hence, of right conduct. Indeed, as Dunn explains concerning "ideas that shape action":

It is easy to be confused about moral issues since there is no palpable external standard, given by the senses, which men must seek to match and with which their ideas can readily be compared. But the moral ideas which men consider simply *are* the realities about which they are attempting to think. Because there is no gap in this sense between what Locke calls their 'nominal essence' and their 'real essence', ideas about morality can be understood with a clarity which ideas about nature necessarily lack. This is why Locke supposed that morality could be demonstrated, and continued to suppose so long after he had abandoned the attempt to demonstrate it himself.<sup>40</sup>

An objective moral assessment of human conduct is possible because there is an analogous congruency between the physical and ethical realms for Locke; just as the laws of mechanics operate as they do because of how God made matter, substances and such, so to are the laws of nature, as they pertain to ethics, immutable as they emanate from the nature of how God made humans and the world.<sup>41</sup> As Ayers explains the theory:

In the *Essays* it was asserted categorically that the Law of Nature does not depend on an unstable and mutable will, but on the eternal order of things, and it was in this context that moral principles were presented as conditional:

certain duties arise out of necessity and cannot be other than they are. And this is not because... God... could not have created man differently. Rather, the cause is that, since man has been made such as he is, equipped with reason and his other faculties and destined for this mode of life, there necessarily result from his inborn constitutions some definite duties for him, which cannot be other than they are. In fact it seems to follow just as necessarily from the nature of man that, if he is a man, he is bound... to

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<sup>39</sup> Ayers. *Locke – Volume I*. 105 – 106

<sup>40</sup> Dunn. *Locke*. 83

<sup>41</sup> Ayers. *Locke – Volume II*.

observe the law of nature, as it follows from the nature of a triangle that, if it is a triangle, its three angles are equal to two right angles, although perhaps very many men are so lazy and so thoughtless that for want of attention they are ignorant of these truths.

Not only was the analogy with geometry already in this early passage, but we can see a link with Locke's later treatment of the laws of physics. The necessity of the law is hypothetical, but hard: God was free to will what laws he liked in that he was free to create what things he liked, but in creating free and rational beings capable of pleasure and pain he *ipso facto* willed a certain law for those beings; just as, in choosing to create matter, he chose certain necessary laws of motion.<sup>42</sup>

While anything would be possible for God, in establishing the system of what is real, God has simultaneously established the fact of objective standards of moral conduct.<sup>43</sup>

This fact turns the endeavor of human understanding into a purposive project. As Locke puts forth, on account of the nature of reality and its attendant laws, "Our Business here is not to know all things, but those which concern our Conduct,"<sup>44</sup>. Knowledge is itself a moral endeavor inherent within nature; in Dunn's words:

What the state of nature is for him is the condition in which God himself places all men in the world, prior to the lives which they live and the societies which are fashioned by the living of these lives. What it is designed to show is not what men are like but rather what rights and duties they have as the creatures of God.<sup>45</sup>

The specific mechanics of the relationship between ethics and nature, in addition to the relationship between humans and knowledge of these truths necessarily informs Locke's conception of the proper pursuit of religion and its place in politics. For instance, as Ayers notes, "a conviction arrived at early in Locke's life, and natural enough in the circumstances, that dogmatic and arbitrary claims to divinely instilled religious and moral knowledge constitute a danger to political stability and order;"<sup>46</sup>. In effect, both politics

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid. 189-190.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. Part II.

<sup>44</sup> Locke. *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*. 46(31-2)

<sup>45</sup> Dunn. *Locke*. 47

<sup>46</sup> Ayers. *Locke – Volume I*. 13.

and religion would need to conform to right understanding of the nature of the world and, if they so conformed, there ought to be little reason to fear tension between the two and, conversely, such tension might be considered *prima facie* evidence of either politics or religion inappropriately pursued, for, “if each of them would contain itself within its own bounds, the one attending to the worldly welfare of the commonwealth, the other to the salvation of souls, it is impossible that any discord should ever have happened between them,”<sup>47</sup>. This belief of Locke’s solidifies the relationship, between, or, perhaps more accurately, the designated spheres appropriate to, religion and civil governance<sup>48</sup> that gives rise to Locke’s famous call for religious toleration, as, “The one only narrow way which leads to heaven is not better known to the magistrate than to private persons, and therefore I cannot safely take him for my guide, who may probably be as ignorant of the way as myself, and who certainly is less concerned for my salvation than I myself am,”<sup>49</sup>. Moral mandates exist within and emanate from nature itself and not from civil authority—cases where the moral mandate suggests obedience to civil authority notwithstanding. As obedience to God is therefore necessarily prior to the establishment of civil authority which is conducted properly only in conformity to the Laws of Nature, then legitimate civil authority must never interfere with religious obligations on conduct and people’s pursuits thereof:

Whatsoever is not done with that assurance of faith, is neither well in itself, nor can it be acceptable to God. To impose such things, therefore, upon any people, contrary to their own judgment, is, in effect, to command them to offend God; which, considering that the end of all religion is to please him, and that liberty is essentially necessary to that end, appears to be absurd beyond expression.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Locke. *A Letter Concerning Toleration*. 251.

<sup>48</sup> cf. Block. *A Nation of Agents*. 152

<sup>49</sup> Locke. *A Letter Concerning Toleration*. 230

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. 233



Religion thus performs a vital function within Locke's theory of politics and governance. While the notion that people ought to be good may well be tautological in many theories of politics, Locke establishes the means by which that good is pursued as separate from civil authority. Any potential dangers of such apparent freedom from civil authority, though, are stymied (in theory) by the priority of the religious mandate that serves as both the authority for individual behavior as well as for the establishment of political and civil authority. The religious mandate both demands institution of and solves the problems of liberty through its nature as a guide for what to do with liberty thus instituted.

### **A Liberty Bound by Faith**

More specifically, religion solves many of the potential problems of Lockean liberalism by instilling within the individual the notion that there are certain ways that they ought to behave and by allowing them the means to discern what those ways are. As Dunn states for human beings, "Their most fundamental right and duty is to judge how the God who has created them requires them to live in the world which he has also created. His requirement for all men in the state of nature is that they live according to the law of nature,"<sup>51</sup>. In this formulation, liberty is important precisely because it frees people to pursue an understanding of how they ought to live; this liberty invokes a duty, in turn, to learn what other duties we hold.

This duty, of course, raises the question as to how we may best discern what these consequent duties are. Locke believed that by the same use of reason that allowed

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<sup>51</sup> Dunn. *Locke*. 47

humans both, as Ayers puts it, to, “infer the existence of a creator whose will or law it is our duty to obey,”<sup>52</sup> as well as the Laws of Nature themselves:

Yet God had, by the Light of Reason, revealed to all Mankind, who would make use of that Light, that he was Good and Merciful. The same spark of the Divine Nature and Knowledge in Man, which making him a Man, shewed him the Law he was under as a Man; Shewed him also the way of Attoning the merciful, kind, compassionate Author and Father of him and his Being, when he had transgressed that Law. He that made use of this Candle of the Lord, so far as to find what was his Duty; could not miss to find also the way to Reconciliation and Forgiveness, when he had failed of his Duty: Though if he used not his Reason this way; If he put out, or neglected this Light; he might, perhaps, see neither.<sup>53</sup>

However, as Dunn points out, “although Locke was deeply convinced that human beings have the duty to understand this law and both the duty and the capacity to observe its requirements, he was by the early 1680s far from confident of how exactly they held and ought to exercise the capacity to understand it,”<sup>54</sup> especially in light of the problem of differentiating between the necessarily contingent prejudices of their own society and the more fundamental laws derived from nature. This notion of method is critical to understanding the role for and function of religion in Locke’s political philosophy. Although reason can serve as an effective vehicle for apprehending freedoms and duties attendant human life, these same freedoms and duties are determined by the Law of Nature, knowledge of which is fundamentally the province of religion; i.e. authoritative knowledge of the nature of human liberty is religious—hence Locke’s famous proscription against atheism in his theorized society. An atheist might retain the use of reason—although the atheist’s failure to discern the religious nature of reality might hint

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<sup>52</sup> Ayers. *Locke – Volume I*. 14

<sup>53</sup> Locke. “The Reasonableness of Christianity, as Delivered in the Scriptures.” In *John Locke: Writings on Religion*. Edited by Victor Nuovo. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002). 189

<sup>54</sup> Dunn. *Locke*. 47

at defective faculties on the part of the atheist in this regard—but atheism serves as a ground for amoral action without limit.<sup>55</sup>

Lastly, Those are not at all to be tolerated who deny the being of God. Promises, covenants, and oaths, which are the bonds of human society, can have no hold upon an atheist. The taking away of God, though but even in thought, dissolves all. Besides also, those that by their atheism undermine and destroy all religion, can have no pretence of religion whereupon to challenge the privilege of a toleration. As for other practical opinions, though not absolutely free from all error, yet if they do not tend to establish domination over others, or civil impunity to the church in which they are taught, there can be no reason why they should not be tolerated.<sup>56</sup>

Lacking religious authority, the atheist's conception of his or her liberty would be unbounded. As such, insofar as liberty is justified in Locke's system by the individual's pursuit of knowledge of the Laws of Nature and the consequent, "right and duty of each man to seek his own salvation, it is not a right which any atheist can consistently claim,"<sup>57</sup>.

Locke's sense of religion extended, then, far beyond a simple set of proscriptions and requirements—not to say commandments—but to the means of knowing what rule of conduct is right. Man's ability to reason is in fact itself part and parcel of understanding that there is a moral nature and law to the world which can be understood by that same reason:

It was such a Law as the Purity of God's Nature required, and must be the Law of such a Creature as Man, unless God would have made him a Rational Creature, and not required him to have lived by the Law of Reason, but would have countenanced in him Irregularity and Disobedience to that Light which he had; and that Rule, which was suitable to his Nature: Which would have been, to have authorized Disorder, Confusion, and Wickedness in his Creatures. For that this Law was the *Law of Reason*, or as it is called of *Nature*, we shall see by and by: and if Rational Creatures will not live up to the Rule of their Reason, who

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<sup>55</sup> Or, conversely, atheism may be understood as the absence of any grounds for moral action, or at least any necessary mandate thereof.

<sup>56</sup> Locke. *A Letter Concerning Toleration*. 246

<sup>57</sup> Dunn. *Locke*. 58

shall excuse them? If you will admit them to forsake Reason in one point, why not in another? Where will you stop? To disobey God in any part of his Commands (and 'tis he that Commands what Reason does) is direct Rebellion; which if dispensed with in any Point, Government and Order are at an end; And there can be no bounds set to the Lawless Exorbitancy of unconfined men. *The Law therefore was*, as St. Paul tells us, *Rom. VII. 12. holy, just, and good*, and such as it ought, and could not otherwise be.<sup>58</sup>

Reason tells us that we can use reason to figure out how we should live, a possibility manifested by the fact that God's authority is itself reasonable. This approach informed Locke's concern with epistemology in the effort to grasp accurately the rules people ought dutifully to seek. Indeed, his separation of ecclesiastical authority from civil authority and the institution of individual liberty arise not from Locke's distrust of political power *per se*, but rather from that fallibility of humans to grasp their dependence on God and His law; even the commands of the Laws of Nature to develop political bonds in no way imply a blind faith on the part of humans but rather an understanding of the Creator's divine will (and even then, it would seem, faith ought be not blind).<sup>59</sup> Thus, Locke's attempt to identify and understand the various forms of error in the use of human reason can be seen, as Ayers puts it, as, "reflecting both his consuming concern for religious toleration and freedom of thought, and his need to feel that everyone has (or, if not, should be given) enough leisure 'to think of his Soul, and inform himself in matters of Religion' and morality,"<sup>60</sup>; "Praises and Prayer, humbly offered up to the Deity, was the Worship he now demanded; And in these every one was to look after his own Heart, And know that it was that alone which God had regard to, and accepted,"<sup>61</sup>.

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<sup>58</sup> Locke. "The Reasonableness of Christianity." 96

<sup>59</sup> Dunn. *Locke*. 53

<sup>60</sup> Ayers. *Locke – Volume I*. 109

<sup>61</sup> Locke. "The Reasonableness of Christianity." 202

Religion, then, would need to supply the remedy for the defect of human reason. Certainly for Locke, as Ayers points out, “the moral law can be known demonstratively, by the natural light, and that we are free to act on our knowledge without extraordinary grace,”<sup>62</sup>. Given the problems inherent in following the light of reason, though, Locke understood God as having made allowances for human infirmity by way of the law of faith:

This is the Law of that Kingdom, as well as of all Mankind; And that Law by which all Men shall be judged at the last day. Only those who have believed *Jesus* to be the *Messiah*, and have taken him to be their King, with a sincere Endeavour after Righteousness, in obeying his Law, shall have their past sins not imputed to them; And shall have that Faith taken instead of Obedience; Where Frailty and Weakness made them transgress, and sin prevailed after Conversion in those who hunger and thirst after Righteousness (or perfect Obedience) and do not allow themselves in Acts of Disobedience and Rebellion, against the Laws of that Kingdom they are entered into.<sup>63</sup>

Through religious faith, humans have an opportunity for obedience to religious authority even when reason fails to inform with respect to obedience to the moral law. In effect, as Block describes it:

The goal of these discourses is to explain how the truths of liberal agency emerge from natural and religious experience. By means of the two experiential directives operating jointly, “reason,” being “natural *revelation*” that “God has implanted,” and “revelation,” which is “natural *reason* enlarged,” the individual will have self-evident if not innate access to the “*inclinations of the appetite* to good.” These, which “never cease to be the constant springs and motives of all our actions, to which we perpetually feel them strongly impelling us,” will direct them confidently toward the good. These are the very *reconstructive* virtues now returning as “natural tendencies,” the desire of individuals to achieve universal knowledge, moral certainty, and virtuous conduct, to “keep their compacts,” to “endeavor after a better state” and employ their “talents” in “their labours.”<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Ayers. *Locke – Volume II*. 134

<sup>63</sup> Locke. *On the Reasonableness of Christianity*. 174

<sup>64</sup> Block. *A Nation of Agents*. 163

In this vein, Locke understands there to be a kind of symbiotic relationship between reason and revelation; indeed, given his conception of reality, it could hardly be otherwise.

Given the demonstrability of the moral law, Locke preferred reason to revelation and understood that revelation ought be subjected to scrutiny by reason, and while revelation could serve as a corrective to the deficiencies of reason, it could reveal nothing that could not be similarly known through use of reason<sup>65</sup>; “’Tis no diminishing to Revelation, that Reason gives its Suffrage too to the Truths Revelation has discovered. But ’tis our mistake to think, that because Reason confirms them to us, we had the first certain knowledge of them from thence, and in that clear Evidence we now possess them,”<sup>66</sup>. Still, religion becomes absolutely critical for Locke’s liberal system given the uncertainty of success through reliance on reason alone as:

The greatest part of mankind want leisure or capacity for Demonstration; nor can they carry a train of Proofs; which in that way always depend upon for Conviction, and cannot be required to assent to till they see the Demonstration. Wherever they stick, the Teachers are always put upon Proof, and must clear the Doubt by a Thread of coherent deductions from the first Principle, how long, or how intricate soever that be. And you may as soon hope to have all the Day-Labourers and Tradesmen, the Spinsters and Dairy Maids perfect Mathematicians, as to have them perfect in *Ethicks* this way. Hearing plain Commands, is the sure and only course to bring them to Obedience and Practice. The greatest part cannot know, and therefore they must believe. And I ask, whether one coming from Heaven in the Power of God, in full and clear Evidence and Demonstration of Miracles, giving plain and direct Rules of *Morality* and Obedience, be not likelier to enlighten the bulk of Mankind and set them right in their Dudes, and bring them to do them, than by Reasoning with them from general Notions and Principles of Humane Reason? And were all the Duties of Humane Life clearly demonstrated; yet I conclude, when well considered, that Method of teaching men their Duties, would be thought proper only for a few, who had much Leisure, improved Understandings, and were used

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<sup>65</sup> Ayers. *Locke – Volume II*.

<sup>66</sup> Locke. “The Reasonableness of Christianity.” 189

to abstract Reasonings. But the Instruction of the People were best still to be left to the Precepts and Principles of the Gospel.<sup>67</sup>

The pivotal issue here is that reason and religious belief are important for the same reason: each works towards knowledge of the rules of right conduct and the necessity of liberty to pursue said rules. It is for this reason that Locke distinguished the significance of religion as quite distinct from the activities of organized religion:

The business of true religion is quite another thing. It is not instituted in order to the erecting an external pomp, nor to the obtaining of ecclesiastical dominion, nor to the exercising of compulsive force; but to the regulating of men's lives according to the rules of virtue and piety. Whosoever will list himself under the banner of Christ, must, in the first place, and above all things, make war upon his own lusts and vices.<sup>68</sup>

Essentially, religion is about learning how to behave. Not uninterestingly, humans must learn how to behave precisely because they have liberty, and their liberty itself is a product of the religious mandate to pursue the Laws of Nature as set out by God's plan. Thus, as described by Ayers:

The pursuit of happiness is limited or, rather, directed by our conceptions of right and wrong. Where later utilitarians have been inclined to define the 'right' course of action simple as the one with the best foreseeable consequences, Locke proposed a rather less direct connection between 'good' and 'ought'. What is 'right' or 'wrong' is what is in accordance with or contrary to, law. The idea of law involves the idea of a law-maker with the right to legislate and the power to enforce law with punishments and rewards. '*Morally Good and Evil*, then, is only the Conformity or Disagreement of our voluntary Actions to some Law, whereby Good and Evil is drawn on us, from the Will and Power of the Law-maker.'<sup>69</sup>

Humans must be free, and therefore, be they guided there by revelation or reason, they must have—not to say find—religion.

Thus, for Locke, liberty is by no means license to do as an individual sees fit. Rather, liberty is constrained by authoritative beliefs of how the individual ought to

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid. 200

<sup>68</sup> Locke. *A Letter Concerning Toleration*. 215

<sup>69</sup> Ayers. *Locke – Volume II*. 188

behave and what ought to be done. Liberty, by its being embedded in morality, becomes public spirited in character. Real liberty is virtuous and obeys the Law of Nature which, recalling Locke's argument in the *Two Treatises*, requires not just a personal ethic of piety but also drives men into society and demands the erection of legitimate sovereign power. Given Locke's understanding of divine authority, liberty necessarily has a political character, or, more specifically, a republican character insofar as the political exercise of freedom in conformity with the Laws of Nature will lead to the development of a sovereign power designed to effectuate the common good.

It is for this reason that, according to Locke, "the care of souls cannot belong to the civil magistrate,"<sup>70</sup>. First of all, such care is unnecessary when liberty is properly understood and embraced—recall, again, that atheists are excluded because they potentially lack the possibility of this understanding—as individuals may be expected to behave in ways consistent with the common good that is the justification for the authority of the civil magistrate in the first place; religiously speaking, the civil magistrate would have no grounds to demand anything of the individual that the individual would not already hold a mandate and impetus for from a higher authority. Moreover, because Locke claims that, "true and saving religion consists in the inward persuasion of the mind, without which nothing can be acceptable to God. And such is the nature of the understanding, that it cannot be compelled to the belief of any thing by outward force,"<sup>71</sup> intervention by the magistrate in matters of religion might actually undermine the common good. By interfering with the religious nature of liberty, the civil magistrate would stymie the very process through which people discover and bind themselves to the

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<sup>70</sup> Locke. *A Letter Concerning Toleration*. 219

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. 219



moral law which makes their freedom both appropriate for and contributory to the common good. For Locke, this is precisely why the ongoing phenomenon of conflict between church and state is so “unhappy,” a point noted above but which here bears repeating: “if each of them would contain itself within its own bounds, the one attending to the worldly welfare of the commonwealth, the other to the salvation of souls, it is impossible that any discord should ever have happened between them,”<sup>72</sup>. In Locke’s theory of liberalism, then, the notion that liberty is socially dangerous reverses itself; liberty is demanded by, makes possible the pursuit and discovery of, and encourages the adoption of the divine moral authority by which the common good is promoted and, perhaps even made possible in the first place.<sup>73</sup> Politically speaking, the argument for religious toleration could scarcely be more obvious; to eschew toleration, far from safeguarding the polity, is to thwart the very processes by which people might best be expected to become public spirited and establish a sovereign power that is itself legitimate.

### **American Democracy: *Quo Libertate?***

Using Locke’s liberal system of a guide, we may now turn to developing an understanding of the function of religion within American politics by noting first how the American liberal system deviates from that theorized by Locke. The critical focus here is on the conception and character of freedom as envisioned and institutionalized within the American founding. As seen above, freedom was intimately bound up with religious

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid. 251

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Block’s discussion of the development of English protoagency. *A Nation of Agents*. 155-160. Cf. especially, “individuals could think of themselves as agents of their own personalized reason, when in actuality they were conforming to the social and institutional norms of Protestantism and liberalism.” 156

authority in ways that made it political for Locke. In fact, the political justification for liberty stems from true liberty's linking of morality and republican politics. Human beings may properly discern the Laws of Nature that dictate their moral behavior and push them into society and politics to the great benefit of the common good. Moreover, the common good in turn demands a politics that will establish and guarantee this same liberty. Ultimately, liberty and politics (and the moral implications of each) exist in a symbiotic relationship whereby free people will seek to develop political structures into which that liberty may be embedded for the promotion of the common good to the great benefit of each and all.

The American founders—many of them, anyway—saw a far different relationship between liberty and politics. As W. Carey McWilliams points out, “Although the framers appealed to ‘republican’ ideals, they meant ‘republic’ in a special, modern sense. Their real concern was liberty, not republican government, and they set as the ‘first object of government’ the protection of the ‘diversity in the faculties of men,’”<sup>74</sup>. If this be the case, then the founders saw the value of liberty very differently than did Locke, with important ramifications for politics. In Locke's view, government ought to protect liberty to be sure, but in large measure because liberty would promote legitimate politics and its common good ends; politics are intrinsic to the activities of a people who, by virtue of their liberty, follow the divine mandates that drive them into political life.

The common good is similarly invoked in the arguments of the founders, but in ways that give liberty a decidedly different cast. Government is deemed legitimate when it works only for the common good, but it is less a common good formed by people at

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<sup>74</sup> McWilliams, Wilson Carey. “Democracy and the Citizen: Community, Dignity, and the Crisis of Contemporary Politics in America.” In *How Democratic is the Constitution?*, edited by Robert A. Goldwin and William A. Schambra. (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 1980). 86

liberty to follow their sense of a moral authority than one that prevents free people from subverting the government to their own private, selfish ends. The famous checks and balances of the American constitutional system become not merely a restriction on government power over the individual, with which Locke might well approve, but the critical importance of preventing the government from doing that which is not in the common interest stems from fears that individuals influencing the government apparatus cannot be trusted in their moral or republican virtue, as “neither moral nor religious motives can be relied on,”<sup>75</sup>.

For Madison, then, liberty and republican politics would require protection from one another. Lacking a theory of authoritatively guided liberty of the kind conceived by Locke, Madison sought to situate the justification of legitimate political power in structures that do not harm and are not harmed by the maintenance of liberty. Madison identifies liberty as problematic in terms of its tendency to bring about political faction and therefore not politically desirable *per se*, but as a means towards the development of a common good that is in many ways external to politics; his political system is justified not because it enacts the common good directly, but rather because it does not unduly interfere with the liberty of the people. For Madison the political project consequently shifts to how to restrict free people from selfish and tyrannical political interference with the commonwealth:

The inference to which we are brought, is, that the causes of faction cannot be removed; and that relief is only to be sought in the means of controlling its effects... When a majority is included in a faction, the form of popular government on the other hand enables it to sacrifice to its ruling passion or interest, both the public good and the rights of other citizens. To secure the public good, and private rights, against the danger of such a faction, and at the same time

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<sup>75</sup> “Federalist 10.” Hamilton, Alexander. Madison, James. Jay, John. *The Federalist*. Edited by J. R. Pole. (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2005). 51

to preserve the spirit and form of popular government, is then the great object to which our entreaties are directed... Either the existence of the same passion or interest in a majority at the same time, must be prevented; or the majority, having such co-existent passion or interest, must be rendered, by their number and local situation, unable to concert and carry into effect schemes of oppression.<sup>76</sup>

Madison here implicitly anticipates J. S. Mill's future formulation that individual liberty is justified on account of the creative energies it unleashes for the betterment of society<sup>77</sup> and not for any more intrinsic reason that might necessitate investigation of the soul of the free individual.

That Madison explicitly sought to design a system that would not fail even in the hands of less enlightened statesmen underscores the threat of liberty to republican politics. Indeed, as Madison wrote, "if men were angels, no government would be necessary,"<sup>78</sup>; on the contrary, the building of quality government becomes the highest calling for man by the divine precisely because men are likely to seek power to infringe upon the liberty of the people for their own selfish interests. For Locke, insofar as the freedom embraced in the liberal project would entail the freedom to be bad—indeed, to undermine the social contract itself—individuals would need to believe in divine punishment should they sever the bonds of social obligations. The founders, while invoking much of the same language concerning the liberty and the common good, sought not a system that would ensure the goodness of the people but rather would safeguard the liberty of the people even in light<sup>79</sup> of their propensity to be bad.

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<sup>76</sup> Madison, "Federalist 10." 45-46

<sup>77</sup> Mill, John Stuart. *Utilitarianism, On Liberty, Considerations on Representative Government*. Edited by G. Williams. (London: Orion Publishing Group, 1999)

<sup>78</sup> Madison, "Federalist 51." 262. (Some attribute Federalist 51 to Hamilton, but that is a debate for scholars of greater historical skill than me.) Interestingly, as W. Carey McWilliams is fond of pointing out, angels do, in fact, have a government. It is a monarchy. McWilliams. "Democracy and the Citizen." 88

<sup>79</sup> I acknowledge the pun.

The prioritization of the safeguarding of freedom from politics in this way, i.e. by insisting upon the development of a system which will function without depending upon the normative quality of individuals' freedom and its exercise thereof, reveals a very different ontological conception of the individual and society than that found in Locke. Although certainly modern in his emphasis on the individual, liberty, and the justification of republican government—of the commonwealth—in terms of its benefit for the individuals that comprise the people,<sup>80</sup> Locke continues in the classical vein of politics to see even the free individual as morally imbedded in a society and, indeed, a polity, by virtue of the authority that politically protected liberty allows the right minded individual to embrace.

The Madisonian system, however, suggests a different situation of the free individual in relation to politics. In this more modern conception, liberty is not premised upon or justified by the political project but rather is protected from politics by the restraint, through its institutional arrangement, of the government's ability to intrude upon the freedom of the individual. Of special significance is the absence of any expectation or requirement of virtue on the part of the individual; the people are not free because they rightly pursue a right politics as in Locke, but rather they are free because they are left alone, safe from any demands on their conduct, political or otherwise. Such a situation, as McWilliams explains, departs significantly from the classical view of liberty in which politics and virtue are necessarily mixed: "Civic virtue is reemphasized by the consequences of political liberty. Aristotle observed that the democratic stress on political liberty—freedom to participate in public life as part of the whole— suggests a

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<sup>80</sup> Locke. *Two Treatises of Government*. Note especially the radical nature of Locke's argument for legitimate rebellion if the sovereign fails to promote the common good. Book II. Ch. 19.

second form, individual liberty—‘living as one likes’ as though one *were* a whole,”<sup>81</sup>. Though this liberty be salutary, it provides the possibility of mistaking this freedom, in reality a symptom or product of political factors, for the liberty proper that comes with involvement with public affairs<sup>82</sup>, i.e. the democracy, that made the freedom of the people possible. “Democrats ‘say,’ Aristotle commented, that liberty must involve ‘living as you like,’ because slaves do not live as they like. This argument by democrats is evidently fallacious: ‘That which is not slave’ is not an adequate definition of ‘a free person,’”<sup>83</sup>.

In this way, the more contingent freedom becomes prioritized over the more fundamental liberty that made the former possible at all. As McWilliams argues, this results in the political nature of liberty becoming obscured in the face of the more immediate experience of freedom, resulting in a distorted understanding of the appropriate relationship between the individual and the polity where people would foster a free society:

There is a second error in the democratic argument. In ordinary terms no one lives as he “likes.” The slave is not defined by living under a rule but by having no say about that rule. Voicelessness, not restraint is the mark of a slave. This second mistake is possible only because the good citizen, in being ruled, feels he is *doing* as he likes. So he may be. The public-spirited citizen, ruling, acts for the common good; and being ruled is liberating in part since it allows a greater attention to one’s own good. This is especially true if my rulers are no worse than I am, and I expect them to be guided by common principles. Aristotle’s argument suggests that patriotic and law-abiding but unphilosophic citizens come to believe that freedom is “living as one likes,” an error that does little damage so far as they are concerned. Aristotle pointed out, however, that this idea leads to the claim of freedom from any government or, indeed, from any restraint at all. The children of public-spirited citizens, taught the mistaken “second principle” of democracy, become private-regarding individualists. They may accept democracy as a second best substitute (especially since democracy

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<sup>81</sup> McWilliams. “Democracy and the Citizen”. 81

<sup>82</sup> Cf. the Greek: “idiotes.”

<sup>83</sup> Ibid. 81-82

does not ask us to be ruled by anyone in particular) but it will be only that. “In this way,” Aristotle observed guardedly, the second principle “contributes” to a “system of liberty based on equality.” Preferring to be free from all rule, the individualist supports democracy from weakness and lack of spirit, but he is not a democrat. His attitudes will be partisan or even more narrowly concerned with his own interests. If he obtains office, he will not subordinate his private will or interest to the good of the community, since to do so in his eyes would be slavish.<sup>84</sup>

Although in the classical sense, personal freedom was necessarily the product of political involvement, the argument here is that the freedom came to be prized more than the politics that were necessary for its establishment. Indeed, this second face of freedom would entail a freedom from politics, even if such freedom created an ironic tension such that freedom becomes alienated from that which makes it possible. According to McWilliams, it was exactly such freedom that the founders sought to enact: “Their aim was private rather than public freedom; they elevated Aristotle second principle to the first place in political life,”<sup>85</sup>.

The character of the conception of liberty in such a system differs significantly from that understood by Locke in both quality and function. The Madisonian system does not require that people obey moral authority, divine or otherwise, to produce a legitimate system of politics. The political system is legitimate because liberty is safe. To be sure, the political system will have to restrain liberty in many ways, but these restraints are justified by the production of a government that will not impede upon the liberty of the people further than is necessary to safeguard that freedom, a protection that occurs by staying out of the way as much as possible. Thus, though liberty be restrained, it is not a moral restraint on the individual exercise of liberty such that people do right, but a general restraint to ensure that liberty is safe and effective. Absent civil authority

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid. 82

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. 89

derived from the need to make liberty safe both for and from government, there is no further authoritative restraint upon individual liberty.

Again, this conception of freedom deviates radically from more classical notions of a liberty firmly entwined with and embedded in conceptions of authority. In the classical sense, this authoritative nature that governs “true liberty” occurs on account of liberty being necessarily embedded in the polity which necessarily obliterates the possibility of liberty being freedom from all restraint<sup>86</sup>:

Whatever democrats “say,” democracy does not promise “living as one likes.” Its aim is self-rule. Autonomy is possible for human beings only as parts of wholes, in which our “partiality” and the things to which we are “partial” are recognized as secondary, though important. In essential ways politics frees us. In the world of the tribe, most citizens do similar work; in the city, we work at what we do best. In the clan, custom and blood-law regulate life. As a child, I am hopelessly dependent, and I value the rules of custom and kinship, which tell my parents that they must care for me. As I approach adulthood, however, this choiceless automation comes to seem impersonal, if not oppressive. The polis allows me to find friends who choose me (as I choose them) because they like me, not my genealogy. In this sense, the polis is naturally “prior” to the individual, because the human being as an end presumes the polis as a means.<sup>87</sup>

This sort of liberty assumes authority and restraint as intrinsic to the possibility of liberty itself. Political life cannot exist without restraint as the requirement of working with one’s fellows necessarily places limits on the exercise of autonomy. If liberty, even in its second image, is subject to political enactment then liberty is necessarily subject to authoritative restraint. A tension occurs precisely because the two views of liberty are related in one point of view, yet that relationship is rejected as antithetical to liberty by the other. The pivotal nature of this tension struck Tocqueville in his investigations into American democracy where, even in the society that developed subsequent to the

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<sup>86</sup> cf. Dunn’s discussion of Locke’s belief of the need for restraint on men’s appetites to make society even possible. Dunn. *Locke*. 70

<sup>87</sup> McWilliams. “Democracy and the Citizen.” 83.



American founding he saw resonances of the classical view of liberty emanating from the country's pre-liberal legacy, as when he cites John Winthrop's speech:

Concerning liberty, I observe a great mistake in the country about that. There is a twofold liberty, natural (I mean as our nature is now corrupt) and civil or federal. The first is common to man with beasts and other creatures. By this, man, as he stands in relation to man simply, hath liberty to do what he lists; it is a liberty to evil as well as to good. This liberty is incompatible and inconsistent with authority, and cannot endure the least restraint of the most just authority. The exercise and maintaining of this liberty makes men grow more evil, and in time to be worse than brute beasts: omnes sumus licentia deteriores. This is that great enemy of truth and peace, that wild beast, which all the ordinances of God are bent against, to restrain and subdue it. The other kind of liberty I call civil or federal; it may also be termed moral, in reference to the covenant between God and man, in the moral law, and the politic covenants and constitutions, among men themselves. This liberty is the proper end and object of authority, and cannot subsist without it; and it is a liberty to that only which is good, just, and honest. This liberty you are to stand for, with the hazard not only of your goods, but of your lives, if need be. Whatsoever crosseth this, is not authority, but a distemper thereof. This liberty is maintained and exercised in a way of subjection to authority; it is of the same kind of liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free.<sup>88</sup>

Of special relevance here is Winthrop's belief that the nature of liberty cannot help but affect the moral development of the individual. If the nature of the freedom experienced by an individual necessarily shapes the person's character, then there can in reality be no such thing as freedom absent normative assessment; a person free from moral authority will become a moral degenerate and can be expected to exercise their freedom in accordance with their morally degenerate character. In this view, freedom from authority does not only allow an individual to behave badly, but in fact all but ensures that the person will behave badly by virtue of the development of bad character that such freedom fosters.

These bad folk would not be a problem for Madison's system, of course, as his only concern was with constructing a system that was effective even when the people

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<sup>88</sup> Tocqueville, Alexis de. *Democracy in America*. Edited by Phillips Bradley. Translated by Henry Reeve. (New York: Everyman's Library, 1994). 42-43

were free without regard to the normative characteristics of the people at liberty. The concern for the classical view of liberty, of course, is that by not regarding the character of the freedom guaranteed, the system actually promotes the evil from which it would safeguard itself by failing to incorporate notions of appropriate normative restraint. A more classical political view, as that espoused by McWilliams, believes instead that restraint is inherent within any meaningful concept of liberty insofar as it is inherent within the politics that makes that liberty real:

In summary, democracy claims to be a regime characterized by liberty, but it depends on restraint. It requires citizens who are willing to sacrifice for the common good and, correspondingly, a restraint of the passions. Even those concepts that educate the passions gently, like the small state and relative economic equality, require restraint on private desires. Democracy depends on some knowledge of the limits of personal liberty and human nature. It hopes that citizens will see the law and nature not as confining prisons in which the self is trapped, but as boundaries which delineate the self. Put another way, democracy aims at the governance of body by soul. That aim is audacious. In the best of us, the body's obedience is imperfect; democracy is not a government by the best. Citizens cannot be assumed to have the Faith of saints or the reason of philosophers. Democracies rely on true opinion, rather than knowledge, and on piety, rather than revelation. These lesser excellences, nevertheless, depend on the greater. Ordinary citizens need the example of the best human beings in order to imitate, as part of the exacting regimen of civic education, the reverence for law and nature which, in the best, emanates from freedom of the spirit.<sup>89</sup>

Of course, this vision of the individual constitutes ontologically a very different situation for the individual *vis à vis* society—and, therefore, politics—than that perceived by the framers of the Constitution. Here, the individual, as conceived of as separate from the social and political structures in which he or she developed, is at best a misleading abstraction, for even the most excellent human being, “would recognize his debt to the city and know that his freedom involves obligations. Moreover, the most fully self-ruled

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<sup>89</sup> McWilliams. “Democracy and the Citizen.” 85-86

men realize that the thing they rule, the self, is not something they make. My nature sets the limits to my rule,”<sup>90</sup>.

In this way, ontologically speaking, the individual can only be understood by way of an understanding of the polity in which the individual came into being and of which she is a part. This social nature of the individual is critical for understanding Locke’s system of liberalism as, obviously, the ramifications of liberty for an individual will depend upon what the individual is. Block characterizes this issue in Locke as very explicitly developing a theory of the nature of the individual:

With parental authority and its conduct internalized, the individual self is effectively renaturalized. Locke, who has shaped an individual “so contrary to unguided Nature,” continually fashioning its “whole outward Demeanor,” signals its success by confidently redefining the socialized self as the authentic self. Authenticity he now distinguishes from hypocrisy, the individual with “natural Coherences” from one with “counterfeit Carriage, and dissembled Out-side.” The former, a triumph of educational artifice, has “Habits woven into the very Principles of Nature.”<sup>91</sup>

Locke, naturally, would say that he did not bring this situation about or invent the theory so much as discover it, the theory being mere description, conventional though it may be, of the way of the world. The key point to realize here, though, is that this ontological conception of the individual as embedded in the polity suggests the related epistemological necessity of authority which we find in Locke’s system. In other words, the nature of the human being entails a related way of understanding that nature on the part of the individual. In Locke’s understanding, it becomes incumbent upon the individual to learn about his relationship to the polity of which he is necessarily a part in order to understand his duties and opportunities—that is to say, how he ought to behave

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid. 83

<sup>91</sup> Block. *A Nation of Agents*. 175

given this situation. The moral nature of liberty is embedded in the nature of being human.

From this state of affairs arises naturally the role of religion within Locke's theory of liberalism. The nature of being suggests appropriate means of knowing that nature, just as different approaches to knowing, i.e. different epistemologies, will offer different kinds of knowledge about its object, in this case, the ontological situation of the individual. For an individual seeking to understand the rights and duties of her situation as product of and participant in a polity, this epistemology will necessarily be normative in texture; the matter at hand concerns that which is ethically appropriate, hence the role for religion in Locke's system. Anticipating more contemporary notions of belief systems by decades, if not centuries, Locke understands that moral epistemologies might be obtained by revelation or reason.<sup>92</sup> Indeed, for Locke, that there would not be different means appropriate to the differing faculties of men is inherent within his understanding of a nature where people are mandated to pursue the knowledge that leads them into the polity that symbiotically demands that individuals pursue said understanding<sup>93</sup>:

God out of the infiniteness of his Mercy, has dealt with Man as a compassionate and tender Father. He gave him Reason, and with it a Law: That could not be otherwise than what Reason should dictate; Unless we should think, that a reasonable Creature, should have an unreasonable Law. But considering the frailty of Man, apt to run into corruption and misery, he promised a Deliverer, whom in his good time he sent; And then declared to all Mankind, that whoever would believe him to be the Saviour promised, and take him now raised from the dead, and constituted the Lord and Judge of all Men, to be their King and Ruler, should be saved. This is a plain intelligible Proposition; And the all-merciful God seems herein to have consulted the poor of this World, and the bulk of Mankind. These are Articles that the labouring and illiterate Man may comprehend. This is a

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<sup>92</sup> See: Berger. *The Sacred Canopy*.

<sup>93</sup> For a discussion of the English origins of the synthesis of liberal voluntarism and adherence to the will of a loving God, see Block. *A Nation of Agents*. 79

Religion suited to vulgar Capacities; And the state of Mankind in this World, destined to labour and travel.<sup>94</sup>

Reason and revelation are each appropriate means of apprehending the authoritative moral laws for the same reasons that the moral laws exist; the laws of conduct are inherent within the nature of human being and are therefore immutable<sup>95</sup>—so long as human beings remain human anyway.<sup>96</sup> As such, correctly employed reason will reach the same conclusions yielded by religion's correct understanding of revelation as they both seek the same unchanging truth.

The individual, as conceived by the apologists of the American Constitution on the other hand, required no such specific epistemological engagement of the normative demands on the individual. This lack of need for understanding moral authority stems from the ontological freedom of the individual. McWilliams, pointing to *Federalist 33*<sup>97</sup>, shows, this ontological conception of the individual when he points us to how the founders thought that liberty could be safely fostered by their political system: "Free government aims to minimize coercion, but the passions can be disciplined without much direct force,"<sup>98</sup>. For a human being that understands himself as intrinsically (a) part of a polity, such minimization of coercion might well be nonsensical as the polity is part of the structure of reality; the notion of less being is as incoherent as being less, and minimizing the demands of politics and government would be tantamount to a reduction of the nature of being itself. People who would seek to avoid the polity, then, may fairly

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<sup>94</sup> Locke. "The Reasonableness of Christianity." 209

<sup>95</sup> It should be here emphasized that while they may be immutable, they are rather formal rules and may take on differing substantive manifestations in different social contexts. The key issues, beginning with the mandates that lead to the formation of a society and polity though, for example, remain unchanged, even as that society may take different forms.

<sup>96</sup> For a wonderful discussion of what it is to be human, see again: Berger. *The Sacred Canopy*. 3 -19

<sup>97</sup> "The reason of man, like man himself, is timid and cautious when left alone; and acquires firmness and confidence, in proportion to the number with which it is associated."

<sup>98</sup> McWilliams. "Democracy and the Citizen." 90

be assumed not to see it as intrinsic to their nature; they understand themselves on different ontological terms. The very project of Madison's constitutional system emanates from and embraces this notion of ontological separateness in its effort to safeguard the liberty of the people from government; the establishment of a government such that the liberty of the people is safe is, in fact, a further ramification of this understanding as the great threat of the liberty of the people is that some part of them might take control of the apparatus of government to infringe upon the general liberty of the people for their own selfish ends. If the liberty of the people is a function of being left free of government intervention, it can hardly be the case that the polity forms the ontological situation of the individual except, perhaps, as a force corrosive of authenticity.

Yet in the Declaration of Independence, the founders, like Locke in his treatises, invoke "the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God,"<sup>99</sup> as the guiding authority in the establishment of the new polity and its subsequent government; the founders cannot be rightly understood to have eschewed all notion of authority with respect to politics.<sup>100</sup> Rather, the authoritative dictates concerning government depart radically from those of Locke on account of the different ontological conceptions of the human being and the epistemological structures through which it is understood. In the classical view, the individual's liberty is highly structured by authority on account of the ontological nature of the human being as part of the polity:

Self-rule requires, then, that I be free to do what is according to nature. No barrier in my environment or in me must stand in the way. To help me toward self-rule, democracy must provide me with an environment that has resources enough to permit me to live in a fully human way. It must educate me so that my soul will

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<sup>99</sup> *The Declaration of Independence*

<sup>100</sup> Unless, of course, they were lying. But that possibility falls outside the scope of the work at hand.

be free to follow nature. For its own health, democracy must try to teach me that human freedom is possible only when I act as a part of a whole and that my good, the good of a part, depends on that of the whole.<sup>101</sup>

Ontologically linked, the individual understands herself as immersed in the authoritative normative structure of the politics and the polity must in turn maintain this structure for its own well-being. When this link is severed, as with the more modern conception of liberty of the founders, the nature of liberty reverses itself; politics can at best create policies that impede the liberty of the individual which is understood to be ontologically prior to the polity. Thus, though Locke and the founders agree upon an authoritative political mandate concerning liberty derived from the Laws of Nature, for the founders this mandate manifests itself as a divine requirement to protect liberty from government; the rights of liberty are not the product of politics and it is, “to secure these rights, [that] Governments are instituted among Men,”<sup>102</sup>. This ontology contains an authoritative political mandate to maintain the liberty of human beings, but the authority stops short of making claims upon the individual with respect to how to approach his or her conduct; that is to say further that there is no epistemological requirement with regard to understanding how to conduct oneself in liberty as there is in Locke’s theory. Those people who voluntarily choose to pursue an understanding of moral virtue might be considered praiseworthy by their fellows, but there is no political requirement that they do so.

### **Losing Religion? Moral Mandates in Political Context**

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<sup>101</sup> McWilliams. “Democracy and Citizen.” 83-84

<sup>102</sup> *The Declaration of Independence*

Such an approach to politics necessarily invokes a very different sort of commitment to the project of politics. In Locke's liberal system, though liberty is emphasized, moral political conduct on the part of the people is implicit in the nature of that liberty. As seen, therefore, Locke can agree with the founders that, '*Absolute liberty, just and true liberty, equal and impartial liberty, is the thing that we stand in need of,*' yet hold that, "though this has indeed been much talked of, I doubt it has not been much understood,"<sup>103</sup>XXXXX. Ontologically embedded in the social fabric, equality and liberty, while apparently simple quantities, take on a rich texture that requires explanation. Lacking this ontological formulation, the framers can refer to the equality of men and the liberty therein derived as "self-evident" truths the grasping of which requires no complicated epistemological approach, religious, rationalistic or otherwise.

As such, the political nature of these authoritative goods is substantially altered in the modern American view. In classical politics, "Both the majority and the minority must regard the principles of civic equality and equal participation more strongly than their partisan creeds and their private interests,"<sup>104</sup>. That is to say, equality is an active principle requiring active commitment. In this sense, political equality is work to be sure, as it will at times require personal sacrifice for the preservation of the polity which protects the principle upon which it, in turn, rests:

Why would a strong minority settle for so little when force might give it so much more? The strong minority bends to majority rule only when it accepts the principle—the political equality of all citizens—from which that rule derives. I can believe that all citizens have an equal share of justice without believing that

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<sup>103</sup> Locke. *A Letter Concerning Toleration*. 213. It is worth noting that statement occurs as his introduction to his readers; in full: "*Absolute liberty, just and true liberty, equal and impartial liberty, is the thing that we stand in need of.* Now, though this has indeed been much talked of, I doubt it has not been much understood; I am sure not at all practised, either by our governors towards the people in general, or by any dissenting parties of the people towards one another."

<sup>104</sup> McWilliams. "Democracy and the Citizen." 81



the majority is always right. You and I can be equal and ignorant when it comes to astrophysics yet I can insist that my opinion is correct no matter how many equally ignorant people share yours.<sup>105</sup>

In contemplating behavior, even the self-interested individual must here consider the impact upon the principle of political equality; to ignore the active maintenance of political equality would be morally irresponsible for one who would hope—not to say demand—that the polity protect her liberty. For with the disappearance of a belief in equality, the requirement of equal liberty would surely vanish and unequal liberty cannot be meaningfully be considered true, a fact upon which the founders and Locke would surely agree.

Such active political engagement, much less commitment, is, perhaps not surprisingly at this point, something that Madison very specifically avoided. McWilliams states, “Madison rejected a system of representation intended to convey confidence, public-spirited support for the common good, in favor of representatives who can provide the consent of a ‘numerous and changeable’ multifactional majority,”<sup>106</sup>. The self-evidence of equality means that the equality is not a political product but an existential fact, one that politics can only abridge:

Political education in an established polity does all that it need or should do when it persuades us to consent. Political participation is quite needless if we are persuaded that government protects our private rights and interests: public spirit, in any strict sense of the term, is *undesirable*. Government is always to some degree oppressive, since we give up to it some of the liberty that is ours by natural right. We ought to surrender such liberty grudgingly and watchfully; whatever civic duties our consent entails, we should perform with an eye to our private liberties. The "consent of the governed" does not require democracy, and it discourages citizenship.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid. 81

<sup>106</sup> Ibid. 93

<sup>107</sup> Ibid. 87

The politics of the American founding, then, lacks a requirement of political commitment or even engagement; other people are a social fact, but a politically annoying one.<sup>108</sup> Commitment to the polity, then, is mundane at best, if not mediocre. Whereas Locke's theory contained authoritative divine command with respect to political engagement, political commitment requires little, if anything, more than a benign acknowledgement of the principle of equality. The founders and Locke can agree that the equality of all men is providential, but the ramifications for political behavior could scarcely be more disparate.

The absence of an ontological mandate for an epistemological engagement of moral authority does not, of course, mean that nobody will undertake such investigations on their own. In fact, the very agnosticism with respect to how individuals ought to understand how they ought to think about how they ought behave—or even if there is any normative reason to think that people ought to behave in one way as opposed to another—underscores the freedom of people to choose their own moral epistemology. The Lockean commitment to religious toleration is therefore retained in the American system, albeit for different reasons. In Locke's view, religious toleration is required because people ought to pursue knowledge of right—indeed, they must, which is why Locke contends that interference with said pursuit, even for religious reasons, is itself blasphemous.<sup>109</sup> Accordingly, religious toleration is enjoyed by the varying sects who

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<sup>108</sup> Even the fact that other people are desirable in ways that add meaning, purpose and value to human lives becomes perceived as an annoyance, as observed every Valentine's Day when autonomy must be sacrificed to preserve the happiness of others of significance and the happy condition of many other dipolar relationships. That people do such a poor job of maintaining peace and happiness in even these smallest of social units, despite the massive media onslaught in television, movies and radio of instructions on how to avoid this annual set of tragedies, may reflect the prevalence of the above set of ontological beliefs which, perhaps ironically, are held by way of instruction by the polity in the face of the overwhelming evidence that the experience of being in a relationship provides.

<sup>109</sup> Dunn. *Locke*. 13

will avoid pursuing government control of religion, “because they can hope for nothing better than what they already enjoy; that is, an equal condition with their fellow-subjects, under a just and moderate government,”<sup>110</sup>. In the American system, it would seem that religion is tolerated because failure to do so would be to impede upon the freedom of the people to behave and to believe as they will so long as it is compatible with the governmental structures that allow the freedom of the people to behave and to believe as they will. Small surprise, then, should be evinced from the observation that to this day, Americans disagree about the meaning of the disparate formulations of free exercise of religion and lack of establishment of religion in the First Amendment to the Constitution and what this means for the place of religion in the public square; ontologically speaking, the social theory upon which Madison’s document is predicated may well allow disagreement and even agnosticism on this issue by the founders themselves.

To take seriously the function of religion in American politics, then, requires an understanding of this specific context of the role of religion in American political thought in addition to its institutional context. In Lockean liberalism, a religious—or at least a quasi-religious—approach to understanding the authoritative constraints and duties attendant liberty was integral to politics itself. As such, the salutary moderating effect of religion on social and political life could be expected as it was an inherent fact of the system. Such influence cannot be taken for granted, however, in the American system that does not depend upon or require that approach, or any other normative epistemology for that matter, to understanding appropriate behavior so long as the approach does not undermine the government—“Do not engage in treason,” is a minimalist political ethic, to say the least. Granted, in theory, Locke did not consider religion necessary *per se*, as

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<sup>110</sup> Locke. *A Letter Concerning Toleration*. 248

reason could discern just as effectively how a free person ought to exercise his liberty. Religion is a realistic necessity, however, given the general failure of people to employ reason, even to the point that it was rejected outright by some persons of religious faith who failed to understand the true and proper nature of their enterprise<sup>111</sup>:

Though the Works of Nature, in every part of them, sufficiently Evidence a Deity; Yet the World made so little use of their Reason, that they saw him not; Where even by the impressions of himself he was easie to be found. Sense and Lust blinded their minds in some; And a careless Inadvertency in others; And fearful Apprehensions in most (who either believed there were, or could not but suspect there might be, Superior unknown Beings) gave them up into the hands of their Priests, to fill their Heads with false Notions of the Deity, and their Worship with foolish Rites, as they pleased: And what Dread or Craft once began, Devotion soon made Sacred, and Religion immutable. In this state of Darkness and Ignorance of the true God, Vice and Superstition held the World. Nor could any help be had or hoped for from *Reason*; which could not be heard, and was judged to have nothing to do in the case: The Priests every where, to secure their Empire, having excluded *Reason* from having any thing to do in Religion. And in the croud of wrong Notions, and invented Rites, the World had almost lost the sight of the One only True God. The Rational and thinking part of Mankind, 'tis true, when they sought after him, found the One, Supream, Invisible God: But if they acknowledged and worshipped him, it was only in their own minds. They kept this Truth locked up in their own breasts as a Secret, nor ever durst venture it amongst the People; much less amongst the Priests, those wary Guardians of their own Creeds and Profitable Inventions. Hence we see that *Reason*, speaking never so clearly to the Wise and Virtuous, had never Authority enough to prevail on the Multitude; and to persuade the Societies of Men, that there was but One God, that alone was to be owned and worshipped.<sup>112</sup>

Reason, for Locke, is insufficient for most people to understand and thereby confine themselves to the standard of right conduct. The necessity of religion to buttress the deficiencies of reason further underscores the necessity that all members of the polity engage in a thought process that addresses these rules; religion becomes vital precisely because it offers an authority for guiding conduct that may be accessible to all.

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<sup>111</sup> For Locke, this must have been an observation of incalculable irony, if not perfidy.

<sup>112</sup> Locke. "The Reasonableness of Christianity." 191-192

Locke's liberal system is thereby predicated on a citizenry of well intentioned people. Though people, imperfect creatures that they are, will inevitably at times fail in obedience, they will at least agree upon the need for a moral authority beyond what persons, even persons of great intellectual capacities, happen to think:

What would this amount to, towards being a steady Rule; A certain transcript of a Law that we are under? Did the saying of *Aristippus*, or *Confutius*, give it an Authority? Was *Zeno* a Lawgiver to Mankind? If not, what he or any other Philosopher delivered, was but a saying of his. Mankind might hearken to it, or reject it, as they pleased; Or as it suited their interest, passions, principles or humours. They were under no Obligation: The Opinion of this or that Philosopher, was of no Authority.<sup>113</sup>

Religion moves people beyond the motives of their own preference and makes them aware of the authority appropriate to a life of liberty.

Yet the American political system not only offers no such theory of moral authority on personal conduct, it implicitly rejects the possibility of such an overarching authority by allowing individuals their freedom in such matters. This system is not characterized by the absence of a normative theory of politics, but the authoritative political norm here is that the government ought to preserve the rights of the people; rights are a normative theory for states, not for assessing individual action. The political freedom from any conception of authority, or even to claim the absence of any such authority, while presumptively agnostic on the matter, is functionally equivalent to the rejection of the notion that any such authority exists to control the individual behavior of individuals. To believe that such authority exists and yet still fail to invoke it implies a lack of belief that the authority is binding, rendering it no authority at all.

It is critical to here note the distinction between the political system imbued with this indifference to the nature of personal moral authority and the notion that such a view

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid. 196

might be held by the American people, which is to say persons. Echoes of the Lockean sentiment concerning morals still abound in the importance Americans place on holding strong moral values while placing far less emphasis on the specific origins of those values, though the strong preference that the values stem from religious origins is retained.<sup>114</sup> Just as Locke did not stipulate that the citizen of a liberal republic has to be Christian—the emphasis on following law in Islam or Hindu, for example, would more than suffice—Alan Wolfe has shown that Americans will tend to accept just about any system of thought that produces the values that define that about which being American is.<sup>115</sup> Effectively, the belief remains that the liberal project works because the religious faiths of the people create a sort of plausibility structure<sup>116</sup> to what the individuals are likely to do with their freedom and, indeed, what they consider the appropriate scope for exercising that liberty. In the language of the discussion above, religion ontologically constrains the political attitudes and behaviors in certain ways that allow the liberal republican system to work to the benefit of the common interest.

Yet this emphasis on having “good values” may itself be symptomatic of the lack of real political commitment to—as distinct from social preference for—moral authority governing individuals. To value a thing is not to require the thing or even demand it. Values are negotiable. If one value is pursued, it is because it is deemed preferable to other values; should something of greater value appear, the former might well—and, in the parlance of competing values, should—be abandoned for the latter. A moral

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<sup>114</sup> Wolfe, Alan. *One Nation After All*. (New York: Viking Penguin, 1998)

<sup>115</sup> See Morone’s *Hellfire Nation* for a thorough discussion the history of how moral values and political demonization have been employed to define who is properly American and consequently to guide policy development. Morone, James A. *Hellfire Nation: The Politics of Sin in American History*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003)

<sup>116</sup> See: Thomas, George M. *Revivalism and Cultural Change: Christianity, Nation Building, and the Market in the Nineteenth-Century United States*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989)

discourse of religious values therefore carries within it a hidden tension, as the values are dictated by an authority considered immutable—religion—yet are themselves negotiable. This view of religious morality further suggests that one may believe in a moral authority and prefer that people consider themselves bound by it, yet not require that they do so, recreating in the people the same tension in the nature of any alleged authority, a tension established by the agnosticism of the government towards the concept of moral authority.

Those who would look to religion to safeguard the republic must therefore consider the character of religious belief in America as well as how people actually consider its dictates in governing their behavior. Obviously, religious toleration exists in America, both enshrined in the government and within the general attitude of the people.<sup>117</sup> Religious toleration, though, only creates the possibility that religion may serve the purposes of moderating the risks and dangers inherent in a freedom and safeguarding the republic from liberty's excesses. Of course, that assumes that such safeguarding is even necessary, which is another matter altogether. For our present purposes, suffice to say that many theorists have and do look to religion to perform this function, echoing Tocqueville's sentiments, as McWilliams notes:

Tocqueville saw several barriers to tyranny of the majority. Religion taught Americans a law beyond the will of the majority and a code of morals at odds with calculations of utility. It commanded love and sacrifice, the moral signs of nobility. Divine monarchy restrained and elevated secular democracy, especially since the loneliest American could seek asylum from the tyranny of the majority at the feet the king.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Though the candidacy for the presidency of Barack Obama has complicated the celebration of a general religious toleration in America. It may well be that the diffusion and fragmentation of contemporary media has allowed less tolerant portions of the American populace to remain obscured from mainstream view. Yet this very fragmentation of media and of audience, i.e. the people, may itself be a product of divisions in what people consider to be a proper American that occur through the vehicle of religion, which will be discussed below.

<sup>118</sup> McWilliams. "Democracy and Citizen." 97-98

It is precisely the nature of religious mandate as non-negotiable that makes the impact of liberty on politics more certain and therefore, by definition, less risky. Even if religiously guided behavior were not morally pure, such behavior would at least be predictable and more manageable with respect to efforts to preserve polity. That religion supplies certainty concerning right behavior would seem to ensure against behavior on the part of the religious adherent that might prove detrimental to the polity, as such harm would necessarily be immoral and antithetical to the classical understanding of religion.

The form of toleration in America, then, by allowing but not requiring or assuming religious endeavors on the part of the people, opens up the possibility that religion will not serve that function as envisioned in the thought of Locke. Religion may even perform other functions with different unanticipated effects given its different locus within the structures of politics and engagement by the people. The key to religion's function in Locke's system was religion's ability to move the individual beyond contemplation of mere preference by conformity to an external and absolute authority.<sup>119</sup> For Locke, this shift towards an external authority makes religious virtue superior even to the wisest contemplation of principles of behavior:

'Tis not enough, that there were up and down scattered sayings of wise Men, conformable to right Reason. The Law of Nature, was the Law of Convenience too: And 'tis no wonder, that those Men of Parts, and studious of Virtue; (Who had occasion to think ;: on any particular part of it) should by meditation light on the right, even from the observable Convenience and beauty of it; Without making out its obligation from the true Principles of the Law of Nature, and foundations of *Morality*. But these incoherent apophthegms of Philosophers, and wise Men; however excellent in themselves, and well intended by them; could never make a Morality, whereof the World could be convinced, could never rise up to the force of a Law that Mankind could with certainty depend on. Whatsoever should thus be universally useful, as a standard to which Men should conform their Manners, must have its Authority either from Reason or Revelation. 'Tis not every Writer of Morals, or Compiler of it from others, that can thereby be

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<sup>119</sup> Dunn. *Locke*. 21, 84



erected into a Law-giver to Mankind; and a dictator of Rules, which are therefore valid, because they are to be found in his Books; under the Authority of this or that Philosopher. He that any one will pretend to set up in this kind, and have his Rules pass for authentique directions; must shew, that either he builds his Doctrine upon Principles of Reason, self-evident in themselves; and deduces all the parts of it from thence by clear and evident demonstration: Or must shew his Commission from Heaven; That he comes with Authority from God to deliver his Will and Commands to the World. In the former way, no body that I know before our Saviour's time, ever did; or went about to give us a *Morality*. 'Tis true there is a *Law of Nature*. But who is there that ever did, or undertook to give it us all entire, as a Law; No more, nor no less, than what was contained in, and had the obligation of that Law? Who, ever made out all the parts of it; Put them together; And shewed the World their obligation? Where was there any such Code, that Mankind might have recourse to, as their unerring Rule, before our Saviour's time? If there was not, 'tis plain, there was need of one to give us such a *Morality*, Such a Law, which might be the sure guide of those who had a desire to go right;<sup>120</sup>

Locke regards reason as generally insufficient to the task of establishing the necessary authority for individual conduct because it might find the right rule but for the wrong reason.<sup>121</sup> In other words, the rule might be discovered and followed because it seems reasonable to do so, and not because it is an absolute and inviolable instruction in and guide to the good inherent within the divinely created structures of reality.

Here again, for Locke, religion supplies the remedy for the defect of reason. If reason always led to correct judgment concerning good, then many of the potential problems attributed to liberty might well be rendered moot. Arguably, however, even then, reason is still not binding on the individual; to assign to reason the status of moral authority is to situate authority within the individual, a clear violation of the maxim acknowledged by Locke that no man ought be judge in his own case.<sup>122</sup> Thus, religion outperforms reason by reorienting the individual's very notion of preference by freeing

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<sup>120</sup> Locke. "The Reasonableness of Christianity." 196

<sup>121</sup> Which, of course, leads to the greatest treason, or so it has been argued.

<sup>122</sup> Locke. *Two Treatises of Government*. Book II. Ch. 5

the individual from having to discriminate between the rule of reason rightly employed and mere preference which is a fallible guide with respect to righteousness.

The alleged congruence between the knowledge attained by the right exercise of reason and religious revelation here becomes a point of great import. Assuming that religion provides knowledge of the good, what is good, what is good to do, and what good behavior is, then the notion that reason, if employed correctly, would yield the same knowledge may be considered tautological. Insofar as reason may be considered of instrumental utility, then religion will necessarily share this character, as Locke points out when he says of divine command, “to shew how much he is in earnest, and expects Obedience to these Laws; He tells them *Luke VI. 3 5*. That if they obey, *Great shall be their REWARD; they shall be called, The Sons of the Highest,*”<sup>123</sup>. Religion will show the individual how to achieve his or her greatest self-interest. If religion concerns knowledge of what is good and how to attain it, then to deny the observation that religion will promote self-interest would be to strain the very definition of good or, conversely, to decree the religion to be by definition false. Unsurprisingly, in Locke’s view even the messiah may be framed for people in self-interested terms, as, when he states that, in addition to the benefits of the received moral law, “To these I must add one advantage more we have by Jesus Christ, and that is the promise of assistance,”<sup>124</sup>. Religion is good, and therefore it is to the advantage of the individual.

Yet this advantage obtained through religion stems from the requirement of conformity to external moral authority; the religious adherent will attempt to pursue the religious mandates without personal discretion. Within the American system of politics

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<sup>123</sup> Locke. “The Reasonableness of Christianity.” 177

<sup>124</sup> Locke. “The Reasonableness of Christianity.” 204

though, the choice of such pursuit is itself discretionary. That is to say, Americans in liberty are not required to seek such authority for the exercise of their freedom. Americans may choose to bind themselves by religion, but if and only if they choose to do so. In this way, adherence to religious law becomes a product of the preference of the individual and divine authority becomes subordinate to the reason of the individual making the choice.

As such, the locus of religion in American liberal thought does not necessarily function to provide a standard of conduct beyond mere personal preference as Locke sought. Religion then, while it will have some function for and within politics so long as people continue to observe it and it informs their views, ought not be expected to perform the same functions as Locke foresaw in his political system. In Locke's system, religion governed a set of commitments, including political commitments, on the part of the members of the society at liberty, not the least of which was a recognition of human equality. In the American system, religion could still provide binding commitments, and a commitment to human equality is clearly stated to be among the premises upon which the justification of the American political enterprise rests, but the recognition of both depends upon the reasoned judgment of the free individual. Nothing in this system requires that religion—or anything else for that matter—play the role of orienting people towards the public good as traditionally understood or to any common political project at all, save, perhaps, the promotion of liberty as freedom from restraint. The very notion of republicanism invoked by the founders takes on a decidedly different cast in such a situation, referring not to a public project pursued through politics, but to the idea that everyone's interests are best served by freedom from any moral authority over their

individual conduct barring the minimal commitment not to destroy the government that allows this freedom. Again, this view is, in fact, a normative position: people ought to be as free as possible from governmental enacted authority. Such a system will necessarily oversee a very different set of political behaviors than the liberal system envisioned by Locke as religion does not play the same role in assuring morally upright behavior or strong political commitments which would be considered themselves divinely enacted moral duties. Thus, while the American system, by way of religious toleration, retains a significant place for religion, merely to hope that religion will perform the salutary functions once assumed is to engage in the kind of “garbled romanticism” that McWilliams saw as associated with the defeat of his older notion of democratic politics.<sup>125</sup> To understand the role of religion in American politics requires a more thorough investigation of its actual function within the American democratic liberal regime.

### **Religious Change: An Evolving Ethos**

Locke’s argument that religion would temper the potential problems of freedom requires a corrective statement; the religion to which Locke understood a reasonable person of his time and place would ascribe would moderate the behavior of the believer to make the believer’s exercise of liberty consistent with the purposes and goals of the common good. However, religion and religious belief are not static phenomena; in today’s parlance, religions evolve. As such, an understanding of religious development in America, given the function religious sentiment plays in informing belief and motivating behavior in a democratic context and in orienting people politically within the

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<sup>125</sup> McWilliams. “Democracy and the Citizen.” 96

liberal system, becomes vital for understanding American liberal democracy. Specifically, the notion that religious belief has changed in America suggests that the impact on the liberal system will have similarly changed, resulting effectively in a different system. To understand the system, then, requires us to understand how religion, broadly speaking, has changed in America. Obviously, such an inquiry will require a certain amount of generalization. For example, Mark Noll recently counted over 400 distinct sects of Christianity alone and, furthermore, demonstrated that the various sects followed very different trajectories in response to the free institutional space they encountered in early America.<sup>126</sup> As such, the point here is not to argue that religious experience in America changed in some homogenous way. Rather, the goal here is to understand how certain specific changes that are accepted as legitimate in the American conception of religious experience might create complications or tensions for American liberal democracy, particularly in informing political views that are deemed legitimate precisely because they stem from sincere religious belief.

Most significant among these changes is the radical injection of Arminian thinking— notions of a human being’s ability to initiate and participate in the process of salvation—into American Protestantism. The Calvinist doctrine that dominated early American Christian thought emphasizes God’s grace in salvation—the foundation of the theory of the “elect”—and the inability of human beings to change their own fate. Related to this is the concept of the “calling” about which Weber makes so much ado.<sup>127</sup> The “calling” or vocation exhorted individuals to undertake their daily work with a sense of divine purpose. Thus, the role one plays in society—one’s job, if you will—becomes a

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<sup>126</sup> Noll, Mark. *The Old Religion in a New World*. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002)

<sup>127</sup> Weber. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*

duty from God and, therefore, an opportunity, albeit a normatively mandated one, to glorify God.<sup>128</sup> For Weber, this sacralization of work leads to the development of modern rationalistic capitalism through the laying down of a divine ethos that gives rise to a spirit—and perhaps a belief system—that allows rationalistic capitalism to develop and flourish.

Weber, of course, acknowledged the difficulties involved in defining the “spirit of capitalism,”<sup>129</sup> Moreover, some commentators of the burgeoning “Weber Thesis Controversy”—a veritable cottage-industry at this point—have pointed out that it is far too simplistic to claim that Calvinism caused capitalism. Weber is better understood as emphasizing the link between the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism rather than the economic system itself.<sup>130</sup> In other words, if we take seriously that people act on their beliefs, it stands to reason that the behaviors contributing to modern capitalism would require beliefs consistent with and contributory to such conduct in economic affairs, a set of beliefs and general “spirit” which Weber identifies in Calvinist thought. While Weber acknowledges that the desire towards increase is not new to puritanical protestant society, he argues that modern rationalized capitalism is a new and different beast altogether, and further:

As far as the influence of the Puritan outlook extended, under all circumstances—and this is, of course, much more important than the mere encouragement of

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<sup>128</sup> Weber to some degree over-emphasizes the relationship of work to divine calling at the expense of all aspects of one’s life in society. Such emphasis may give an inaccurate coloring of an emphasis on the redemptive engagement of the individual to change his or her own life at the expense of a more thorough understanding of the socially conservative aspect of this doctrine. See Robertson. *The Rise of Economic Individualism*. “The Puritan Doctrine of the ‘Calling.’” 1-33

<sup>129</sup> Weber devotes all of Chapter 2 of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. 47-78

<sup>130</sup> See: Little, David. *Religion, Order, and Law: A Study in Pre-Revolutionary England*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1969); Green, Robert W. “Protestantism, Capitalism, and Social Science: The Weber Thesis Controversy.” In *The Weber Thesis Controversy*, edited by R. W. Green. (Lexington, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1973)

capital accumulation—it favoured the development of a rational bourgeois economic life; it was the most important, and above all the only consistent influence in the development of that life.<sup>131</sup>

To this day, those looking for the villain that brought about the dislocations and problems of modern capitalism find it in a puritanical and potentially repressive religious theology, direct from central casting.

In hindsight—20-20 as always (allegedly)—Weber’s insight ought to be properly considered more as an historical correlation—a correlation of somewhat narrow historical placement, in fact. The problem with focusing upon and searching for the causal theory is that it undermines the more valuable insights of Weber’s genius into the relationship between religion, economics and society. Weber developed a social theory whereby a developing religion held a set of mores that seemed to justify the new operations of the system of modern rational organization of the capitalistic enterprise. Any jump to causality seems much more problematic once we see further into the scope of history, vision we may well gain from standing on Weber’s formidable shoulders.

Weber keenly seized upon the notion of calling as an able vehicle for capitalist enterprise. That one would go about their business with a heightened sense of diligence<sup>132</sup> when demanded to do so by God rather than mere expediency nearly goes without saying. So the calling becomes integral to being a good puritan. As Weber states, “[a] man without a calling thus lacks the systematic, methodical character which is, as we have seen, demanded by worldly asceticism,”<sup>133</sup>. Insofar as religious life is important, so is that calling. However, Weber’s identification of the function of the calling may be time-bound. That is to say, he looked at what the calling appeared to be at

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<sup>131</sup> Weber. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. 174

<sup>132</sup> Not to say “enthusiasm” or even “zeal.”

<sup>133</sup> Ibid. 161

a certain point in time—particularly England during the rise of its perhaps not so coincidental capitalist explosion—and did not consider its previous origins. Others have argued that the “calling” is better understood as a justification for the maintenance of the medieval order in the wake of the disruptive forces of schism during and after the Reformation and the rejection of traditional ecclesiastical authority. As Robertson states:

Nothing could be further from the truth than to suppose that the ‘calling’ was an invitation to amass and continue to amass great riches. It was an invitation to live the orderly and settled life ordained for one by God, and to perform all the duties pertaining to it.<sup>134</sup>

In this sense, the “calling” calls upon everyone to go about doing that which they are supposed to be doing in the preordained realm. Far from exhorting people to engage in the radically transformative operations attendant modern capitalism, “[i]f it encouraged industry, it did so to a much smaller degree than it discouraged covetousness and ambition—the ambition which made men break out of their ‘calling,’”<sup>135</sup>.

These differing conceptions of the calling would appear to derive from different views of the calling at different points of history.<sup>136</sup> The failure to grasp the historical contingency of the protestant “calling” may stem from Weber’s method which is sociologically impressive if perhaps lacking in modern historical insight. In effect, Weber begins with the phenomenon which he wishes to understand psychologically (i.e. modern rationalistic capitalism) and works backwards through the historical setting to a

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<sup>134</sup> Robertson. “The Rise of Economic Individualism.” 11

<sup>135</sup> Ibid. 14

<sup>136</sup> It is a problem of historical scholarship with respect to religion to so often forget that religious doctrine changes radically. This problem is likely rooted in, or at least related to, the fact that adherents of religious movements, especially at the times of the most radical transformations, so often insist in the traditional roots of their practice. This invocation of tradition, if taken at face value, masks the fact of possible radical innovation and reconstruction taking place within the theology and practice of the movement. See esp. George. *Revivalism and Cultural Change*, 12-14; Niebuhr, H. Richard, *The Kingdom of God in America*, (NY: Harper & Row, 1937). 164-198



practicing mindset.<sup>137</sup> Weber first concludes that modern capitalism appears in the Occident and not the Orient, and therefore must be a product of something in the Occident.<sup>138</sup> Weber goes on to observe where capitalism seemed the most successful, and examined the psychic underpinning of the world-view held in those regions at that time. What he found was Puritanism and identified the ethos of the calling as the culprit. Given this sociological treatment, he failed to distinguish the religious practice from its situational and adaptive context within economic society. As Robertson writes:

Owing to his unhistorical treatment he has not noticed the change in the conception of the “calling” from an antidote against covetous ambition to a comfortable doctrine suitable for a commercial people. He has treated the doctrine as having been the same for all time; and the adherent of the school of “economic determinism” may be excused if he criticizes Weber for neglecting the converse study of the influence of capitalism on the Protestant Ethic.<sup>139</sup>

This failure to consider the possibility of mutual influence in historical inter-development between the religious practices of Calvinism in a specific locale and the local economic practices are considered in Tawney’s introduction to Weber’s *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* when he writes:

It is the temptation of one who expounds a new and fruitful idea to use it as a key to unlock all doors, and to explain by reference to a single principle phenomena which are, in reality, the result of several converging causes.<sup>140</sup>

The impressiveness and importance of Weber’s discovery do not detract from the conclusion that he may have believed he found more than he ought.

The significance of an understanding of dynamic change in religious thought in tandem with economic and social changes can scarcely be more significant for a view of

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<sup>137</sup> Weber. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Introduction. 13-25

<sup>138</sup> A quick scan of Weber’s discussion suggests that Weber, despite his own attitudes concerning the problems of modern capitalism, held some very simplistic ideas about the differences between Western and Eastern thought suggestive of an authentic case of Western-centric bias so often decried today.

<sup>139</sup> Robertson. “The Rise of Economic Individualism.” 15

<sup>140</sup> Tawney. *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*. 7

politics that assumes the influence of religion. Of pivotal importance for the Lockean liberal system is the potential for identification of the pursuit of private ends with the development of the common good. As Protestantism developed, the worldly success of the individual increasingly served as a proxy for understanding the person's intrinsic goodness which, on its own, would be obviously very difficult to measure. In a sense, the religious mission to do good in this world remains.<sup>141</sup> However, insofar as pursuit of one's own interests became increasingly sanctified as a proxy for measuring the extent to which one was doing God's will, if we continue to take as given that God's will is for the common good, then it must be concluded that pursuit of individual success is in the interest of the common good. That religion is not mandated but a matter of reasoned choice would only be expected to exacerbate this self-serving tendency as religions existing in such a free space would, according to Peter Berger, be expected to market themselves to the discriminating preferences of the religious consumer<sup>142</sup>, a phenomenon in turn exacerbated by secularization, the seeds of which may be contained within the Western religious tradition itself.<sup>143</sup> Perhaps paradoxically, given the above developed understanding of Lockean liberalism, there is a divine mandate to pursue one's own personal interests; self-serving behavior becomes sanctified on the basis of God's will that all people pursue the common good.

In this way, religion becomes a vehicle through which the Lockean justification for liberty allows for beliefs that undermine its own basis. Liberty is necessary for people to pursue the divine mandate in the common good. In this conception, liberty and

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<sup>141</sup> The pervasiveness of this sense is perhaps underscored by the spell-checker's exhortation to change the word "good" to "well" in this sentence.

<sup>142</sup> Berger. *The Sacred Canopy*. 131-140

<sup>143</sup> Ibid. 110

religion are indelibly linked, as liberty makes it possible to pursue religious ends, while religion makes it possible that free individuals—i.e. individuals at liberty—will behave properly with their freedom. A change in religious belief, then, changes the very idea of what freedom is for, or more precisely, the content of the ideas of what one ought to do with freedom; the idea of towards what ends a free individual ought to direct his or her actions becomes altered.

In the American experience, this alteration manifested itself as a justification to look inward to one's own life and interests rather than to consider the broader interests of society or the polity at large. In this way, people are justified on religious grounds in believing that they need not consider the public good in terms of a common political project—save the institutionalization of liberty itself—in the exercise of their own freedom, a belief which lies in fairly direct violation of the initial theoretical justification for that freedom, at least as developed by Locke. This tension is nominally resolved by believing—again, on religious grounds—that the pursuit of individually selected ends is most consistent with the common good. While Locke's theory of property as vital for the benefit of the common good certainly involves individuals pursuing their own ends by virtue of the greater creation of value of the process, the theory operates on the assumption that people would properly select good ends based upon their religious convictions; religion would guide the choices of the individuals in conformity with an authority that demanded a certain kind of political participation. With the reorientation within the religious ontology in America, the causation is nearly the opposite: whatever the individual wishes to pursue is assumed to be divinely ordained as, assuming the individual is choosing that which they understand to be in their self-interest, it must be

good. Thus, rather than serving as a guide for the proper use of freedom, religion becomes the justification for whatever a person might freely choose to pursue. Religious good becomes self-referential and freedom therefore effectively becomes an end in itself rather than the instrument of the greater good.<sup>144</sup>

Such a development has obvious implications for what will be considered acceptable political goals in American politics. Indeed, this altered conception of liberty completely reconfigures the concept of republicanism in America. Far from the virtues of public service and duty endorsed by the more classical conception of republicanism, republican value in this view devolves into atomistic individualism.<sup>145</sup> A person ought still to be good, of course, but what is good is pursuing one's own economic self-interest; there exist little or no ethical grounds for telling people anything that they ought to do with their lives beyond that which they already apprehend. Perhaps most fascinating about this turn of events from a theoretical perspective is how this radical change occurred through the vehicle of religious belief which is generally understood by believers to be the holder of immutable truths. In fact, it would seem that religion, again ironically, remains fixed with respect to the most formal of truths—that one should be good, for example—while actually facilitating a mutability to the content of those truths—What is it to be good?—suggesting a truth inflexible at any given point in time, but dynamic and flexible across historical time.

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<sup>144</sup> It must again be noted that the religious ontology assumes that this *will* work out for the common good. However, looking to the texture of the religious development, this seems largely a *post facto* justification to reconcile the radical deviation from the religious purposes of freedom, i.e. unrestrained freedom must serve the public good because it was already decided that that was the kind of freedom God willed for human beings.

<sup>145</sup> It is worth here noting, for reasons that should become clear, that the term “individualism” was first coined—or, perhaps, as Dennis Bathory has suggested, discovered—by Alexis de Tocqueville through his observations of American democracy.

Again, there are strong normative defenses of a system that allows each to determine what to do with their own freedom, many of which are not dissimilar to even the Lockean defense of religious toleration. As per above, Hobbes tells us that there is no sense in speaking of morality when people have not the liberty to make choices to make the concept meaningful.<sup>146</sup> To believe, though, that the requirement of authoritative religion in Locke's liberal system can be replaced by the reality of free choice with respect to conduct, normative or otherwise, without any change in the operation of the system as a whole is to assume that which must be demonstrated. Such an assumption does not take seriously the notion that religion, which is to say a self-conscious statement on the part of the believer concerning the ontology and appropriate epistemology of both the empirical and normative dimensions of human life, will influence conduct and the very mores that Tocqueville, as shall be seen, identified as the foundation of American political life. Indeed, as McWilliams proffers:

In many ways, American political history can be read as a conflict between the institutional design of the Constitution, reflecting the framers' "new science," and public mores, habits, and beliefs. Alexis de Tocqueville gave his opinion that the "manners of the Americans" were the "real cause" of our ability to maintain democratic government. However, George Clinton was correct: "Opinion and manners are mutable," especially given the "progress of commercial society"; in the long run, the government "assimilates the manners and opinions of the community to it." Clinton's observation suggests an amendment to Tocqueville: The manners of the Americans are more important than the laws, but, in the end the laws transform manners in their own image.<sup>147</sup>

Any change to how people approach the beliefs that form their mores or, more precisely, any change in the structures within which people develop these beliefs, will necessarily have important implications for politics.

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<sup>146</sup> Hobbes. *Leviathan*. Ch. 13

<sup>147</sup> McWilliams. "Democracy and the Citizen." 95-96

### **Reason, Revelation, and an American Belief System**

Subordinating religion to reason by way of making it a function of free choice alters the fundamental relationship between the two that Locke initially theorized for his liberal system. While Locke believed that reason properly executed would yield a product the same as proper religious belief, the fact of this congruence depended upon the fixed truth of revelation. Reason, then, could assess revelation at best, but never deny it. The loss of a requirement of religion meant that the free choice to follow religion would demand that religion conform to the reason of the individual for its validity. Such a process would make individual reason legitimated, indeed, sanctified by religious faith. In effect, the product of human reason becomes non-falsifiable, at least from the point of view of the individual holding whatever beliefs developed through this process. With this intermixing of reason and religion comes, as shall be seen, a strange dynamic whereby reasoning ought to be good for the soul, and spiritual thinking out to be useful; that is to say, insofar as reason and religion each pursue knowledge of truth, truth must necessarily then be that which is useful to the individual—truth effects self-interest.

Perhaps one of the greatest embodiments of this sentiment comes in Benjamin Franklin, the very man whom Weber identified as the greatest manifestation of the Puritan “calling” in capitalist thinking. Though Franklin offers great exhortation and instruction on the propriety and usefulness of appearing always economical and efficient, the emphasis must remain upon the connection between propriety and usefulness. However, while Weber did well to note the link between piety and economy in Franklin’s work<sup>148</sup>, he fails to see that Franklin does not unify them in his thought so much as demonstrate the usefulness of each to the other. In his autobiography where he describes

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<sup>148</sup> Weber. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. esp. 48-56

his decision to use a rational design to attain moral perfection<sup>149</sup>, Franklin discloses his conclusion that:

Though certain actions might not be bad because they were forbidden by [Revelation], or good because it commanded them, yet probably those actions might be forbidden because they were bad for us, or commanded because they were beneficial to us.<sup>150</sup>

This formulation on the part of Franklin cannot be seen merely as an understanding of religious belief to mandate rational behavior, for the religious mandate contains the Arminian aspect of what working for oneself can accomplish with respect to the religious structure; certainly this is not plain Calvinism but something that developed—evolved, if you will—from that belief system. Weber sought to understand Franklin through an appreciation of the religious mandate to rational capitalistic behavior and said behavior manifesting the divine calling. Franklin, however, is well aware of the utility of the religious mandate for the individual, which does not fit well with the implied ontology of Weber's analysis.

To be fair to Weber, he may also not have been aware that Franklin often speaks tongue in cheek. Franklin's autobiography is actually a very elaborate lie—he was a womanizer and often a drunk—and may better be regarded as an aesthetic demonstration of his point of the utility of the appearance of protestant virtue. Indeed, the book becomes a sort of explanation of the application of scientific reason to the development of the place of piety in his socio-economic milieu; that his method becomes thereby justified by his success in life only underscores the underlying issue of the relationship between religious piety, rationalized thinking and worldly success. Of even greater

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<sup>149</sup> Franklin, Benjamin. *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*. (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1996). 67

<sup>150</sup> Ibid. 44

significance in this vein is his description of the relationship between the individual and the public good:

That while a party is carrying on a general design, each man his particular private interest in view... That few in public affairs act from a meer view of the good of their country, whatever they may pretend; and, tho' their actings bring real good to their country, yet men primarily considered that their own and their country's interest was united, and did not act from a principle of benevolence.<sup>151</sup>

Franklin, then, in his treatise on the relationship between piety and economics highlights the dissonance between the alleged religious virtues and the real worldly activities of his fellow Americans. An understanding of religious evolution, though, leads us to expect that a new reformation will need to occur to realign the beliefs of what is considered acceptable behavior, morally speaking, and the realities of life in American society. It is precisely such a reformation that the revivalism of the Second Great Awakening entailed and to which, in the hopes of furthering our understanding of the true impact of religious belief in American democratic politics, we now turn.

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid. 73



## **CHAPTER 2: GOD ELECTS THOSE WHO ELECT THEMSELVES**

### **A Reorientation of Religious Functionalism for American Democracy in the Second Great Awakening**

The old idea of American Christians as a chosen people who had been called to a special task was turned into the notion of a chosen nation especially favored. In Lyman Beecher, as in Cotton Mather before him, we have seen how this tendency came to expression. As the nineteenth century went on the note of divine favoritism was increasingly sounded. Christianity, democracy, Americanism, the English language and culture, the growth of industry and science, American institutions—these are all confounded and confused. The contemplation of their own righteousness filled Americans with such lofty and enthusiastic sentiments that they readily identified it with the righteousness of God.

H. Richard Niebuhr, *Kingdom of God in America*<sup>152</sup>

### **The Individualistic Ethic and the Purpose of Government: A Reorientation**

Drawing upon Weber's sociological work on the relationship between ontology and material practice within the individual in society, as described above, some ontologies or world views will tend to resonate with worldly practice more than others; this certainly was the case with revival religion and a world characterized by effective individuation. Such similarity of structures, whereby one might be understood to function consistently in principle—not to say *feel* more consistent—with another is known in sociology as “isomorphism.” In this terminology, Weber's crucial discovery lies in the importance of isomorphism between religious belief and economic reality. While the claim that a set of religious beliefs will cause a new economic reality may overstep the appropriate boundaries of an investigation into social development, religion does play an important function insofar as it manifests itself as the vehicle for an

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<sup>152</sup> Niebuhr. *The Kingdom of God in America*. 179.

ontological adjustment to render new economic and social realities valid and legitimate. The perception of effective individuation—the manifested relevance of individual agency in real world outcomes—attendant the increasing market penetration experienced in early nineteenth-century America gave rise to dissonance between religious belief and the perceived possibilities of the individual in economic society. The reality of the individual as a locus of personal success and achievement could hardly be discounted, so reconciliation between belief and reality required an ontological reorientation of the individual's understanding of his or her place in the world. This reconciliation occurred through the vehicle of religion in the revivalism of the Second Great Awakening. Theoretically speaking, as the new economic realities of the industrial age reorganized American culture, so too would a new rationalization of the authority structures of capitalism and the state be required; for many Americans, this new ontological formulation restructured culture around an “inner-worldly practical rationality” providing, in effect, an almost metaphysical foundation for increasing levels of rationalization of culture.<sup>153</sup>

Intriguingly, this new epistemological nexus between American political and religious thought, while intrinsically linked to market capitalism, deviates radically from the Calvinism that Weber saw as the underpinning of modern capitalism. As shall be seen, the American religious reconceptualizations allowing acceptance and, indeed, promotion, of American capitalism bear little resemblance to the Weberian cultural seeds of capitalism. This observation underscores the necessity for understanding the concurrent development of thought and political and social activity to understand fully the implications of each and both. To begin such an inquiry into the development of

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<sup>153</sup> Thomas. *Revivalism and Cultural Change*. 22

religious thought in America, it seems appropriate to begin with the rise of revivalistic religion that marks and drives the deviation not only from Weber's vision of capitalist development, but also from Tocqueville's view of religion in America and its function for political life. The revivalism that grew out of the Second Great Awakening poses a stark contrast to the Calvinism that permeated American religious life before it, stemming from the much heralded (First) Great Awakening. The method of the revivals appeared similar to those of the First Great Awakening, and the obvious emphasis on the place of religion in social life cannot be missed.<sup>154</sup> However, the essentials of the religious sentiment expressed in these revivals deviate markedly from the Calvinist doctrine promoted by the First Great Awakening<sup>155</sup>, a departure constitutive of changes in the religious experience and understanding of the individual that have important ramifications for political and social life in America.

Specifically, changes in American religious thought in the nineteenth-century altered accepted notions of knowledge and authority. In keeping with the prevailing Jacksonian spirit of rejecting elitism and authority, movements sprung up all over America to reconsider, and in many cases, recapture<sup>156</sup> for the people the authority to make claims about fundamental truths absent the top down guidance of clergy or the stifling aspects of orthodoxy and doctrine. Unlike the intellectual experience attributed to

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<sup>154</sup> Of interesting note here is the claim of American religious historian Joseph A. Conforti that the First Great Awakening is actually a construction invented by the activists of the Second Great Awakening to establish a traditional basis for their new method of resolving conflicts in religious thought. See: Conforti, Joseph A. *Jonathan Edwards: Religious Tradition and American Culture*. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1995)

<sup>155</sup> Despite the Calvinist rhetoric, the social impact of the First Great Awakening (if there were such a thing, in deference to Conforti's thesis) set the stage for the fragmentation of religious authority and spiritual Arminianism that characterizes the Second Great Awakening. Indeed, the two awakenings are arguably really just parts of a single movement in thought that was merely punctuated by the American Revolution.

<sup>156</sup> Though whether or not "the people" had truly previously held such standing remains debated and debatable, the invocation of fidelity to a nobler more pristine past, bearing with it the language of restoring the rightful political traditions of the republic have great currency in American political discourse, perhaps in no small part owing to the nation's religious and, subsequently, political jeremiadic tradition.

Europe, reason did not displace religious thinking in the American Enlightenment but rather became a tool, among others, for understanding one's world. Within this context, in a period of religious reorientation whereby the individual becomes the locus of understanding the world, as was the case during the Second Great Awakening, different approaches to knowledge may be combined in a sort of amalgamated world view. The combination of the different strains of thought, strains which might reasonably be seen as analytically distinct types, led to the generation of new conceptions of what an individual might claim to know and how the degree of certainty of the knowledge could be properly established. Such new bases for knowledge—new approaches to “knowing” itself—necessarily affect political knowledge, both in terms of political ends and of appropriate means; scientific rationality and normative truth may become inextricably bound together with pervasive effects on what an individual might consider to be an appropriate political choice.

None of this is to say that the political views of all Americans are religiously motivated, or that there exists an “American mindset”<sup>157</sup> with a distorted sense of the scientific method. However, insofar as religiously based value systems are accepted in American political discourse—and, indeed, often encouraged<sup>158</sup>—then such amalgamated political arguments tend also towards acceptance by American democracy. The acceptance of such arguments becomes critically important to understand insofar as their acceptance in turn affects the political outcomes of American democracy.

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<sup>157</sup> Not to say, God help us, an American Zeitgeist.

<sup>158</sup> Consideration of the Presidential campaign of 2004, particularly John Kerry's decision to begin attending mass, shows the resonance of this view to this day. The discussions of Barack Obama's religion—both the controversy surrounding his Church's black theology and whether he has been truthful about his Christian faith—underscore the significance placed on the relationship between one's religion and what it means really to know who somebody is.

Comprehension of many of the seemingly odd, idiosyncratic, or even allegedly irrational outcomes of American politics might be improved by considering the acceptance of political epistemology that makes not the fine distinctions of knowledge between the scientific and the religious or the normative and the empirical in consideration of the political good that might be obvious to purported specialists.<sup>159</sup> To demonstrate this phenomenon, I shall first consider the function of religion in American democracy observed by Tocqueville in the early nineteenth-century with an eye to the specific mechanics of the relationship between the belief system and democracy in order to consider how changes in said beliefs might alter the operation of American democracy. Next, I shall describe the historical experience of some of the transformations of American Christianity during the Second Great Awakening with an emphasis on the epistemological shifts within the belief systems during the period. Following that, the implications of said epistemological shifts and the ultimate reorientation of the individual in society as an acceptable locus of knowing about the world will be explained; significantly, such movement alters the boundaries of what might be considered politically plausible, necessarily altering the political viability of different political goals. In this way, I hope to demonstrate how the impact on the underlying epistemological foundations of religious belief attendant the drastic social reorganizations of the nineteenth-century has led to an individuation of knowledge itself that has allowed for a kind of fusion between normative and empirical thinking which, in turn, affects acceptable arguments about specific political goods, and even who's opinion might be considered relevant in such matters.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> E.g. scientists and philosophers.

<sup>160</sup> Specific political manifestations of this impact shall then be explored in subsequent chapters.

### **Tocqueville's America and the Function of Religion for Political Life**

Religion's function as both basis and protector of American democracy deeply impressed Tocqueville during his much heralded visit. Though he stopped short of embracing the desirability of such an arrangement—such a role for religion would be “heretical” to the French thinkers of the time<sup>161</sup>—Tocqueville nevertheless saw potential lessons in the way religion functioned to defend against political devolution towards tyranny. Tocqueville speculated that religious sway over the souls of people might perhaps be all the more necessary when people are free, as when he famously observed:

Religion in America takes no direct part in the government of society, but it must be regarded as the first of their political institutions; for if it does not impart a taste for freedom, it facilitates the use of it. Indeed, it is in this same point of view that the inhabitants of the United States themselves look upon religious belief. I do not know whether all Americans have a sincere faith in their religion—for who can search the human heart?—but I am certain that they hold it to be indispensable to the maintenance of republican institutions. This opinion is not peculiar to a class of citizens or to a party, but it belongs to the whole nation and to every rank of society.<sup>162</sup>

In a sense, Tocqueville can be understood to have written *Democracy in America* to teach democratic statesmen and moralists how to make religion serve democracy in an increasingly secular age that put more traditional conceptions of authority into question and disarray.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Strout, Cushing. 1980. "Tocqueville and the Republican Religion: Revisiting the Visitor". *Political Theory* 8 (1):9-26. 11

<sup>162</sup> Tocqueville. *Democracy in America*. Volume I. 304-305

<sup>163</sup> Kessler, Sanford. *Tocqueville's Civil Religion: American Christianity and the Prospects for Freedom*. (NY: State University of New York Press, 1994). 18

Tocqueville was struck by the democratic tenor of the country that seemed to permeate all things, emanating from the basic equality seemingly recognized by all<sup>164</sup>; “The social condition of the Americans is eminently democratic; this was its character at the foundation of the colonies, and it is still more strongly marked at the present day,”<sup>165</sup>. To Tocqueville, whether such equality would prove to be a good thing for human kind was of secondary importance to its apparent historical inevitability, an inevitability that he perceived as part of a divine plan and largely exempt from normative assessment on his part anyway:

The gradual development of the principle of equality is, therefore, a providential fact. It has all the chief characteristics of such a fact: it is universal, it is lasting, it constantly eludes all human interference, and all events as well as all men contribute to its progress.<sup>166</sup>

The pervasiveness of such a principle that characterized the Jacksonian age obviously posed important complications for notions of authority; in a situation of equality, many of the traditional reasons regarding why one person ought to obey another fall away. For Tocqueville, such social condition would necessarily form the foundation for politics as, “once established, it may justly be considered as itself the source of almost all the laws, the usages, and the ideas which regulate the conduct of nations: whatever it does not produce, it modifies,”<sup>167</sup>. The relatively thin institutional space in which political life in America, in combination with the general distrust of authority of the age—a distrust surely enabled by that same institutional thinness—meant that if there were to be any perceived limits on notions of what the people ought to do with their freedom, they would

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<sup>164</sup> The distinction between everyone actually believing in this equality as opposed to Tocqueville observing that everyone seemed to do so is important, but for the present purposes it suffices to say that it appeared to Tocqueville that equality was a universally accepted fact.

<sup>165</sup> Tocqueville. *Democracy in America*. Volume I. 46

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.* 6

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.* 46

have to come from elsewhere than the political sphere. Therefore, as Tocqueville viewed the state of affairs:

Religion is much more necessary in the republic which they set forth in glowing colors than in the monarchy which they attack; it is more needed in democratic republics than in any others. How is it possible that society should escape destruction if the moral tie is not strengthened in proportion as the political tie is relaxed? And what can be done with a people who are their own masters if they are not submissive to the Deity?<sup>168</sup>

To be a democracy, the people would have to be just that: a people. Lacking the tradition of static social place and the traditional authoritative structures that dictated said places that characterized Europe, the Americans would need something else to bind them and define them as a people. Tocqueville is clear very early that he understands this role to be played by religion, noting that, “The reader will undoubtedly have remarked the preamble of these enactments: in America religion is the road to knowledge, and the observance of the divine laws leads man to civil freedom,”<sup>169</sup>. Equality problematizes civil authority, but so long as the nature of equality in America is understood to be an equality under God, then the defect of civil authority may be easily remedied by recognition of the divine authority from which the equality of all humans under God flows<sup>170</sup>.

The providential nature of equality therefore creates an authoritative mandate for democratic politics:

If the men of our time should be convinced, by attentive observation and sincere reflection, that the gradual and progressive development of social equality is at once the past and the future of their history, this discovery alone would confer upon the change the sacred character of a divine decree. To attempt to check democracy would be in that case to resist the will of God; and the nations would

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<sup>168</sup> Tocqueville. *Democracy in America*. Volume I. 307

<sup>169</sup> Ibid. 6

<sup>170</sup> Recall also Tocqueville’s reference to John Winthrop concerning his speech on true liberty, as noted in the previous chapter.



then be constrained to make the best of the social lot awarded to them by Providence.<sup>171</sup>

To be more precise, the authoritative mandate requires the rejection of any form of politics that would fail to recognize the equality of the people, thus giving democracy alone the sanction of the divine among political systems. However, though God clearly favors democracy, the very nature of democracy as government by the people implies that the politics, even though they be divinely mandated, depend ultimately upon human effort; politics is a function of work, choice, and judgment on the part of humans.<sup>172</sup>

The political form this equality would take, be it despotic or democratic, ultimately then becomes the product of human effort and, therefore, design. The egalitarian character of American society would not, in Tocqueville's mind, inevitably manifest itself as democracy. Tocqueville believed that while, "There is, in fact, a manly and lawful passion for equality that incites men to wish all to be powerful and honored," that, "tends to elevate the humble to the rank of the great," there, "exists also in the human heart a depraved taste for equality, which impels the weak to attempt to lower the powerful to their own level and reduces men to prefer equality in slavery to inequality with freedom,"<sup>173</sup>. The political impetus arising from conditions of equality is not salutary of necessity; "From the same social position, then, nations may derive one or the other of two great political results; these results are extremely different from each other, but they both proceed from the same cause,"<sup>174</sup>. In point of fact, far from the inevitability of a glorious future for American politics, Tocqueville feared the possibility of a continuance of the abuses of history merely taking on a new guise:

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid. 7

<sup>172</sup> Or instinct on the part of bees, but I digress.

<sup>173</sup> Tocqueville. *Democracy in America*. Volume I. 53

<sup>174</sup> Ibid. 8

If the absolute power of a majority were to be substituted by democratic nations for all the different powers that checked or retarded overmuch the energy of individual minds, the evil would only have changed character. Men would not have found the means of independent life; they would simply have discovered (no easy task) a new physiognomy of servitude. There is, and I cannot repeat it too often, there is here matter for profound reflection to those who look on freedom of thought as a holy thing and who hate not only the despot, but despotism. For myself, when I feel the hand of power lie heavy on my brow, I care but little to know who oppresses me; and I am not the more disposed to pass beneath the yoke because it is held out to me by the arms of a million men.<sup>175</sup>

Whether American governance would advance towards the benevolent or devolve towards the despotic would depend upon the direction to which the American people channeled the energies of their enthusiasm for equality.

This direction would in turn depend upon the tendencies of the people, or rather, of the individuals living in the circumstances of equality. The varying directions that Tocqueville thinks a politics born of equality can take derives from what Tocqueville understands to be the influence the state of equality has on a human being, as when he states, “In the principle of equality I very clearly discern two tendencies; one leading the mind of every man to untried thoughts, the other prohibiting him from thinking at all,”<sup>176</sup>. Thus the problem facing this new human project emerges from the fact that the democratic soul brought about by equality is, left to its own devices, fundamentally unstable. This instability may lend itself towards different types of propensities for the democratic soul; Tocqueville sees the democratic soul, according to Joshua Mitchell, who takes Tocqueville very seriously as a religious thinker in the Augustinian vein, as having tendencies towards withdrawn atomistic individuality and, conversely, towards overly energetic outwards activity:

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<sup>175</sup> Tocqueville. *Democracy in America*. Volume II. 11-12

<sup>176</sup> Ibid. 11

Tocqueville understood that human beings are not, essentially, rational maximizers; nor are they agencies of a dialectic of history that will lead to the New Kingdom. Rather, they are beings capable of moderation provided that certain institutional mechanisms are in place to assist them; they are, as well, beings capable of bearing the responsibilities of living in a history the contours of which are defined by the movement toward equality. In this history humankind has been granted the opportunity either to live freely or amid servility. We may freely choose—at least for a time.<sup>177</sup>

Insofar as politics manifests from the mores of a people and the mores, in turn, from the social condition, these social tendencies have political consequences for the fate of democracy. With respect to the perils of an immoderate democracy, Tocqueville is quite clear:

I am convinced, however, that anarchy is not the principal evil that democratic ages have to fear, but the least. For the principle of equality begets two tendencies: the one leads men straight to independence and may suddenly drive them into anarchy; the other conducts them by a longer, more secret, but more certain road to servitude. Nations readily discern the former tendency and are prepared to resist it; they are led away by the latter, without perceiving its drift; hence it is peculiarly important to point it out.<sup>178</sup>

The individual in democracy might tend either towards the centripetal or the centrifugal, allowing the individual to become complacent within the system on the one hand or antagonistic to the very system that enacted his liberty on the other.

### **Guiding the Soul to Democracy**

Liberty conceived as independence, then, is to be feared according to Tocqueville as unfettered freedom might make the individual a slave to his own passions:

Materialism, among all nations, is a dangerous disease of the human mind; but it is more especially to be dreaded among a democratic people because it readily amalgamates with that vice which is most familiar to the heart under such circumstances. Democracy encourages a taste for physical gratification; this taste,

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<sup>177</sup> Mitchell, Joshua. *The Fragility of Freedom: Tocqueville on Religion, Democracy, and the American Future*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995). xi

<sup>178</sup> Tocqueville. *Democracy in America*. Volume II. 288

if it become excessive, soon disposes men to believe that all is matter only; and materialism, in its turn, hurries them on with mad impatience to these same delights; such is the fatal circle within which democratic nations are driven round. It were well that they should see the danger and hold back.<sup>179</sup>

A successful democracy, then, requires proper institutions to moderate the democratic soul which, if left to its own devices, might become totally immersed in its pursuits to the point that, though it “would not corrupt,” could still “enervate, the soul and noiselessly unbend its springs of action,”<sup>180</sup> to the detriment of the political life needed to sustain virtuous democracy.

It is politically vital for Tocqueville, then, to draw the democratic soul out of itself. The importance of religion is its function in limiting and moderating that outward movement and activity:

The chief concern of religion is to purify, to regulate, and to restrain the excessive and exclusive taste for well-being that men feel in periods of equality; but it would be an error to attempt to overcome it completely or to eradicate it. Men cannot be cured of the love of riches, but they may be persuaded to enrich themselves by none but honest means.<sup>181</sup>

Tocqueville is quite clear that religion is not meant to make human beings something different from what they are—a belief system that would deny the appetites altogether is inappropriate to human life—but to temper the drive with which humans pursue their desires. Both the workings of the market and the so often celebrated civil society, manifested and maintained by the voluntarist organizations discussed in Tocqueville, cannot effectively order American society without individuals properly developed for the project. Hence, the project requires institutions to develop the democratic soul necessary to its purposes: politics to draw the soul out of the centripetal effects of too much

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid. 145

<sup>180</sup> Ibid. 133

<sup>181</sup> Ibid. 26

individualism; religion and the family to attenuate the destabilizing effects of too much motion and engagement with the public sphere.<sup>182</sup> Religion here stands as one of the pivotal resources available to develop the properly civic minded individual because:

The greatest advantage of religion is to inspire diametrically contrary principles. There is no religion that does not place the object of man's desires above and beyond the treasures of earth and that does not naturally raise his soul to regions far above those of the senses. Nor is there any which does not impose on man some duties towards his kind and thus draw him at times from the contemplation of himself. This is found in the most false and dangerous religions.<sup>183</sup>

Interestingly, this function of religion rests not upon its truth or falsity, but upon the function it plays in molding an individual fit for democracy, as:

Most religions are only general, simple, and practical means of teaching men the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. That is the greatest benefit which a democratic people derives from its belief, and hence belief is more necessary to such a people than to all others. When, therefore, any religion has struck its roots deep into a democracy, beware that you do not disturb it; but rather watch it carefully, as the most precious bequest of aristocratic ages. Do not seek to supersede the old religious opinions of men by new ones, lest in the passage from one faith to another, the soul being left for a while stripped of all belief, the love of physical gratifications should grow upon it and fill it wholly.<sup>184</sup>

With individuals properly developed for Tocqueville's model, the social associations which Tocqueville describes assume a pivotal role in allowing democratic souls an area of activity that draws them outside of themselves, a place where they can recognize their interdependence while staving off declension into highly centralized government which may otherwise occur by way of the effort to preserve a pervasive state of equality, a "solution" to the equality "problem" that can all too easily result in despotism. Only the proper set of institutions—political, religious and familial—can establish the appropriate

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<sup>182</sup> Mitchell. *The Fragility of Freedom*. 7

<sup>183</sup> Tocqueville. *Democracy in America*. Volume II. 22

<sup>184</sup> Ibid. 26

space for moderate social activity that will allow democracy to function effectively and maintain a well ordered civil society.

One need not share such an Augustinian conception of the instability of rationality in an immoderate self as Mitchell describes<sup>185</sup> to understand Tocqueville as a strong religious functionalist who took seriously the utility religion provided for democracy. Freedom can be dangerous; freedom in the new social context of equality then found in America may be even more dangerous given the uncertainty of authority in the new social alignments.<sup>186</sup> The point for Tocqueville's purposes is to understand what authority will be operative within the new situation:

A principle of authority must then always occur, under all circumstances, in some part or other of the moral and intellectual world. Its place is variable, but a place it necessarily has. The independence of individual minds may be greater or it may be less; it cannot be unbounded. Thus the question is, not to know whether any intellectual authority exists in an age of democracy, but simply where it resides and by what standard it is to be measured.<sup>187</sup>

The weakening of traditional authority, as Tocqueville understands it, will not result in a general decline of authority over the people, but rather a shift towards other forms. For democracy to run smoothly in such a system, as with Locke's understanding of liberalism<sup>188</sup>, there need be some mechanism to dispose the members of society to behave appropriately, a task for which religion seemed well suited; whether they be correct or not, according to Tocqueville, American republicans, "set a high value upon morality, respect religious belief, and acknowledge the existence of rights. They profess to think

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<sup>185</sup> Mitchell. *The Fragility of Freedom*. 5

<sup>186</sup> Hatch, Nathan O. *The Democratization of American Christianity*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989). 22

<sup>187</sup> Tocqueville. *Democracy in America*. Volume II. 9

<sup>188</sup> Dunn. *Locke*. 46; Block. *Nation of Agents*. 157

that a people ought to be moral, religious, and temperate in proportion as it is free,”<sup>189</sup>. Again, the role played by religion here hinges less upon gaining access to truthful answers to questions of life so much as the answers being authoritative, which is to say, settled:

The first object and one of the principal advantages of religion is to furnish to each of these fundamental questions a solution that is at once clear, precise, intelligible, and lasting, to the mass of mankind. There are religions that are false and very absurd, but it may be affirmed that any religion which remains within the circle I have just traced, without pretending to go beyond it (as many religions have attempted to do, for the purpose of restraining on every side the free movement of the human mind ), imposes a salutary restraint on the intellect; and it must be admitted that, if it does not save men in another world, it is at least very conducive to their happiness and their greatness in this.<sup>190</sup>

Ultimately, democracy’s success would hinge upon the cultivation of the proper mores of the people, and, as Mitchell puts it, “[r]eligion is considered the guardian of mores, and mores are regarded as the guarantee of the laws and the pledge for the maintenance of freedom itself,”<sup>191</sup>. Thus could Tocqueville say that religion’s indirect influence on American politics was even more profound than its direct effects, as, “it never instructs the Americans more fully in the art of being free than when it says nothing of freedom,”<sup>192</sup>.

In this way, religion functions to place limits on what the members of society might do, or rather, think it appropriate to do, with their freedom. Certainly, the people are free politically, but that freedom is circumscribed by epistemological limits, limits derived from religious faith, as to what is acceptable:

In the United States the influence of religion is not confined to the manners, but it extends to the intelligence of the people. Among the Anglo-Americans some

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<sup>189</sup> Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*. Volume I. 416

<sup>190</sup> Tocqueville. *Democracy in America*. Volume II. 21

<sup>191</sup> Mitchell. *The Fragility of Freedom*. 26

<sup>192</sup> Tocqueville. *Democracy in America*. Volume I. 303

profess the doctrines of Christianity from a sincere belief in them, and others do the same because they fear to be suspected of unbelief. Christianity, therefore, reigns without obstacle, by universal consent; the consequence is, as I have before observed, that every principle of the moral world is fixed and determinate, although the political world is abandoned to the debates and the experiments of men. Thus the human mind is never left to wander over a boundless field; and whatever may be its pretensions, it is checked from time to time by barriers that it cannot surmount. Before it can innovate, certain primary principles are laid down, and the boldest conceptions are subjected to certain forms which retard and stop their completion.<sup>193</sup>

Religion governs behavior from the position of authority that speaks directly to the minds of men, instructing them in what is and is not allowable conduct. As Sanford Kessler explains:

The nerve of this argument is that only religion can foster the mores needed to insure that free institutions function properly. These include the character-strengthening virtues which indirectly guard freedom as well as certain beliefs regarding the sanctity of rights which protect freedom directly. Religion, according to this argument, also gives freedom a positive dimension reminding us of our social duties and our spiritual needs. Finally, it teaches that the poor, the marginal, and the vulnerable require protection and respect.<sup>194</sup>

According to Tocqueville, “When there is no longer any principle of authority in religion any more than in politics, men are speedily frightened at the aspect of this unbounded independence,”<sup>195</sup>. Broadly speaking, Tocqueville rejects the notion that human beings can be completely free in the abstract sense of freedom not just from restraint but from any notion of authority. As he explicitly states:

For my own part, I doubt whether man can ever support at the same time complete religious independence and entire political freedom. And I am inclined to think that if faith be wanting in him, he must be subject; and if he be free, he must believe.<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Ibid. 304

<sup>194</sup> Kessler. *Tocqueville's Civil Religion*. 14

<sup>195</sup> Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*. Volume II. 21

<sup>196</sup> Ibid. 22



If some form of authority be necessary in this way, then any weakening of its civil manifestations would have to be accompanied by a related strengthening of adherence to religious authority.<sup>197</sup> Such boundaries of good conduct established by a belief system appropriate to a free and equal people would promote the healthy civil society necessary for democracy to flourish.<sup>198</sup>

### **God Helps the Democrats Who Help Themselves**

America, then, with its free institutions and a populace having “admitted the principal doctrines of the Christian religion without inquiry,”<sup>199</sup> offered great promise and possibilities for democracy absent from Europe on account of differing historical experiences with class and religion. Specifically, America did not experience the same form of the Enlightenment as did Europe, in large part because Americans did not feel the stifling institutional effects of the (well-)established church in a tight institutional space. Rather than feeling the need to divest themselves of religion altogether to free themselves from the social constraints of the church, as did Europe, Americans could understand the rational impulse of the time as a directive to reclaim religion from paternalistic authority.<sup>200</sup> In Europe, on the other hand, the spirit of the times called for a rejection of what was understood as an instrument of social control for the narrow gain of the elite few without any loftier purpose. The flourishing of democracy, then, would be the

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<sup>197</sup> Or, as Bob Dylan would later write, “You’re gonna have to serve somebody.” Dylan, Bob. “Gotta Serve Somebody.” *Slow Train Coming*. Special Rider Music, 1979.

<sup>198</sup> In a sense, this argument runs analogously—and perhaps not coincidentally—with an understanding of Adam Smith’s work in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) which, invoking the necessity of “sympathy” as the basis of a functional society, may be seen as the larger context within which the “pursuit of self-interest” of his more celebrated *Wealth of Nations* (1776) would function.

<sup>199</sup> Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*. Volume II. 6

<sup>200</sup> See especially Noll for a thorough description of the history of religion in America. Noll. *The Old Religion in a New World*

remedy for both the problems of aristocracy and institutional Christianity, necessitating a turn away from both.<sup>201</sup> Such a move held great peril if, as Tocqueville believed, “Men cannot abandon their religious faith without a kind of aberration of intellect and a sort of violent distortion of their true nature,”<sup>202</sup>. Yet the severing of the institutional link between the civil and the religious allows for the independent development of the virtues of the various spheres; only through the ousting of religion from the political forum could the virtue of Christianity be rescued to serve a role in buttressing democratic practice. As such, Tocqueville saw great possibilities for American democracy by virtue of this peculiar historical circumstance so potentially favorable to the precise mix of institutions necessary for effective democratic government.

Religious sentiment in America, then, is essentially not a separate phenomenon from American politics, nor is one epiphenomenal to the other. The point here is not the importance of devout religious belief for its own sake; in Kessler’s view, “Tocqueville was convinced that good democratic citizenship depended more on teaching people that ‘individual interest is linked to that of country’ than on widespread religious belief,”<sup>203</sup>. Indeed, if personal preference and the common good were to meet in happy coincidence, then liberty would hold little if any danger for things of political concern. In the effort to avoid, when at all possible, any tension between liberty and polity, Tocqueville said with respect to the Americans:

They therefore content themselves with inquiring whether the personal advantage of each member of the community does not consist in working for the good of all; and when they have hit upon some point on which private interest and public interest meet and amalgamate, they are eager to bring it into notice. Observations of this kind are gradually multiplied; what was only a single remark becomes a

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<sup>201</sup> Mitchell. *The Fragility of Freedom*. 14

<sup>202</sup> Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*. Volume I. 310

<sup>203</sup> Kessler. *Tocqueville's Civil Religion*. 157

general principle, and it is held as a truth that man serves himself in serving his fellow creatures and that his private interest is to do good.<sup>204</sup>

The operations of civic virtue may be expected, even assumed, on the part of Americans because the promotion of such occurs by way of doing what they wanted to do anyway, even absent reference to the common good or the political ramifications of their acts. Civic virtue and personal preference are essentially observationally equivalent; it may not be clear if the individual undertakes her conduct for the one reason or the other and, in a larger sense, it does not matter as the outcome is the same.

In this way public and private goods and individual and social inclinations are combined in Tocqueville's famous acknowledgement of the principle of "self-interest rightly understood":

The Americans, on the other hand, are fond of explaining almost all the actions of their lives by the principle of self-interest rightly understood; they show with complacency how an enlightened regard for themselves constantly prompts them to assist one another and inclines them willingly to sacrifice a portion of their time and property to the welfare of the state.<sup>205</sup>

The principle of self-interest rightly understood would seem to obviate the development of moral virtue or public spiritedness as the commonweal benefits from individual agents who seek to promote public purposes for their own ends. People may debate the other benefits of the elevation of the individual spirit, but it is unnecessary to public purposes if the will to promote said purposes arises spontaneously in the minds of the citizens.

The principle of self-interest rightly understood is not a lofty one, but it is clear and sure. It does not aim at mighty objects, but it attains without excessive exertion all those at which it aims. As it lies within the reach of all capacities, everyone can without difficulty learn and retain it. By its admirable conformity to human weaknesses it easily obtains great dominion; nor is that dominion

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<sup>204</sup> Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*. Volume II. 121

<sup>205</sup> Ibid. 122

precarious, since the principle checks one personal interest by another, and uses, to direct the passions, the very same instrument that excites them.<sup>206</sup>

No subordination or suppression of desires or appetites of the individual would be required, as, “No one abjures the exercise of his reason and free will, but everyone exerts that reason and will to promote a common undertaking,”<sup>207</sup>.

Given the priority in importance of people understanding that their individual interests are linked to that of their country and their fellows that Kessler identifies, the issue of authority—and therefore, of religion—would seem of at best secondary importance. If people think that even their more selfish interests are best served by the promotion of the public interest, then no additional authoritative constructions are required to bring their actions into conformity with the commonweal. The problem of obedience would seem to drop out altogether:

Why, then, does he obey society, and what are the natural limits of this obedience? Every individual is always supposed to be as well informed, as virtuous, and as strong as any of his fellow citizens. He obeys society, not because he is inferior to those who conduct it or because he is less capable than any other of governing himself, but because he acknowledges the utility of an association with his fellow men and he knows that no such association can exist without a regulating force.<sup>208</sup>

In Lockean terms, reason would here be sufficient to curb the potential problems of individualistic liberty without requiring religion to repair its defects if, “A man comprehends the influence which the well-being of his country has upon his own; he is aware that the laws permit him to contribute to that prosperity, and he labors to promote it, first because it benefits him, and secondly because it is in part his own work,”<sup>209</sup>. Note that, again, there is no denial of the self-interested nature of human kind in this

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<sup>206</sup> Ibid. 122-123

<sup>207</sup> Tocqueville. *Democracy in America*. Volume I. 198

<sup>208</sup> Ibid. 64

<sup>209</sup> Ibid. 242

formulation: “They therefore do not deny that every man may follow his own interest, but they endeavor to prove that it is the interest of every man to be virtuous,”<sup>210</sup>. The point is that the naturalness of the pursuit of self-interest need not be subordinated if acts of virtue coincide identically with those of self-interest when said interest be rightly understood, thereby giving even “selfishness” an “enlightened” character.<sup>211</sup>

It is important to note, however, that Tocqueville indicates not only the possibility of the coincidence of private and public interest but further emphasizes that its practice entails a kind of civic education in and of itself:

The principle of self-interest rightly understood produces no great acts of self-sacrifice, but it suggests daily small acts of self-denial. By itself it cannot suffice to make a man virtuous; but it disciplines a number of persons in habits of regularity, temperance, moderation, foresight, self-command; and if it does not lead men straight to virtue by the will, it gradually draws them in that direction by their habits.<sup>212</sup>

Thus, one of the advantages of the principle of pursuing self-interest rightly understood is that while its practice may not require a sense of obedience in its performance, yet it still functions to train the individual in a kind of obedience of self-rule. The focus for Tocqueville remains on the development of the mores suitable for democracy and to subordinate oneself to the principle of self-interest rightly understood, while self-interested, is still to bind oneself to a certain way of life; the fact that people do it because they think it is of some benefit to them does not make the principle thereby less authoritative:

After the general idea of virtue, I know no higher principle than that of right; or rather these two ideas are united in one. The idea of right is simply that of virtue introduced into the political world. It was the idea of right that enabled men to define anarchy and tyranny, and that taught them how to be independent without

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<sup>210</sup> Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*. Volume II. 122

<sup>211</sup> Ibid. 123

<sup>212</sup> Ibid. 123

arrogance and to obey without servility. The man who submits to violence is debased by his compliance; but when he submits to that right of authority which he acknowledges in a fellow creature, he rises in some measure above the person who gives the command. There are no great men without virtue; and there are no great nations—it may almost be added, there would be no society—without respect for right; for what is a union of rational and intelligent beings who are held together only by the bond of force?<sup>213</sup>

Rather than making it less authoritative, Tocqueville implicitly stresses the utility of authority, not just because of the utility of the acts performed in deference to authority but also for the respect for right that it inculcates. As with the observations on religion noted above—that religion is understood to be good implies that it is advantageous—so too is the utility of authority important beyond the execution of a single command. It is not surprising, then, that Tocqueville observes that, “If such a man believes in the religion that he professes, it will cost him but little to submit to the restrictions it may impose. Reason herself counsels him to do so, and habits already formed make it easy,”<sup>214</sup>.

Authority and politics form a critical nexus here for the individual. As stated, authority might at first blush seem antithetical to the pervasive sense of equality felt by Americans. As Tocqueville points out though, “On the other hand, in a state where the citizens are all practically equal, it becomes difficult for them to preserve their independence against the aggressions of power. No one among them being strong enough to engage in the struggle alone with advantage, nothing but a general combination can protect their liberty,”<sup>215</sup>. Even though the Americans prize the liberty that is their right by its derivation from the premise of equality, this right may still be properly understood to require political enactment and defense thereof;

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<sup>213</sup> Tocqueville. *Democracy in America*. Volume I. 244

<sup>214</sup> Tocqueville. *Democracy in America*. Volume II. 126

<sup>215</sup> Tocqueville. *Democracy in America*. Volume I. 53

All this is not in contradiction to what I have said before on the subject of individualism. The two things are so far from combating each other that I can see how they agree. Equality of condition, while it makes men feel their independence, shows them their own weakness: they are free, but exposed to a thousand accidents; and experience soon teaches them that although they do not habitually require the assistance of others, a time almost always comes when they cannot do without it.<sup>216</sup>

Realization of the weakness of the individual outside of politics—that “In ages of equality every man naturally stands alone,”<sup>217</sup>—explains why Tocqueville would believe that a free person would still “obey society,”<sup>218</sup> as per above. By the rule of self-interest rightly understood, according to Tocqueville, a man may obey society where, “He is a subject in all that concerns the duties of citizens to each other,” and yet:

he is free and responsible to God alone, for all that concerns himself. Hence arises the maxim, that everyone is the best and sole judge of his own private interest, and that society has no right to control a man's actions unless they are prejudicial to the common weal or unless the common weal demands his help. This doctrine is universally admitted in the United States.<sup>219</sup>

Each individual is at liberty to conduct oneself as he or she sees fit. That the individual might freely judge that his or her self-interest is best promoted by participation in a political project that protects that liberty—even if participation requires adherence to a rule outside of the self—poses no contradiction when it is considered that the very condition of equality that gave rise to the right of freedom imperils the individual outside of politics.

In effect the principle of self-interest rightly understood recreates Locke's<sup>220</sup> mandate to enter politics, a mandate emanating from the natural condition of humanity as

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<sup>216</sup> Tocqueville. *Democracy in America*. Volume II. 175

<sup>217</sup> Ibid. 324

<sup>218</sup> Tocqueville. *Democracy in America*. Volume I. 64

<sup>219</sup> Ibid. 64-65

<sup>220</sup> And, for that matter Hobbes's, although they differ with respect to the emergence of the notion of “right.”

at liberty. As with Tocqueville, Locke does not see a contradiction between freedom and submission to rules of conduct:

Mankind, who are and must be allowed to pursue their Happiness; Nay, cannot be hindred; Could not but think themselves excused from a strict observation of Rules, which appeared so little to consist with their chief End, Happiness; Whilst they kept them from the enjoyments of the Life; And they had little evidence and security of another.<sup>221</sup>

Liberty effectively implies certain obligations in such formulations. In order to be effective, freedom to pursue self-interest still requires—whether one agrees with what Tocqueville may imply by his terms about external moral authority—a right understanding of that interest; the statement may well be true by definition.<sup>222</sup> Therefore freedom, as with Locke, becomes a political mandate for the religious reasons fostered by and constitutive of that self-same liberty:

Religion perceives that civil liberty affords a noble exercise to the faculties of man and that the political world is a field prepared by the Creator for the efforts of mind. Free and powerful in its own sphere, satisfied with the place reserved for it, religion never more surely establishes its empire than when it reigns in the hearts of men unsupported by aught beside its native strength.<sup>223</sup>

In this way, legal disestablishment in America provided a foundation of individuals possessing strong moral sentiments for a political system of governance that therefore did not have the responsibility for providing that sentiment, a task for which the founders suspected government was particularly poorly suited.<sup>224</sup>

Legal disestablishment increases the corrective possibilities of religion towards political practice by moving it outside of political control. The freedom, to Tocqueville

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<sup>221</sup> Locke. “The reasonableness of Christianity.” 202

<sup>222</sup> For many, the issue that to pursue self-interest requires a right understanding of that self-interest even for oneself raises fundamental questions about the ability of the self to know what it wants in authentic fashion that will not be addressed by the author in this work nor, hopefully, ever.

<sup>223</sup> Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*. Volume I. 44

<sup>224</sup> See, for example, Madison. “Federalist 10”



sensible in the very air of America, came bound part and parcel with the religious nature of the citizenry. Locke, of course, endorsed religious toleration precisely because of the essential role that freedom played in religious pursuits, as:

Whatsoever is not done with that assurance of faith, is neither well in itself, nor can it be acceptable to God. To impose such things, therefore, upon any people, contrary to their own judgment, is, in effect, to command them to offend God; which, considering that the end of all religion is to please him, and that liberty is essentially necessary to that end, appears to be absurd beyond expression.<sup>225</sup>

So too did Tocqueville discern in American life the part that the civil freedoms of religion played in support of religion—a part which he claims surprised him as he found it unexpected to see that a people free of constraint would seek religion of their own volition:

To each of these men I expressed my astonishment and explained my doubts. I found that they differed upon matters of detail alone, and that they all attributed the peaceful dominion of religion in their country mainly to the separation of church and state. I do not hesitate to affirm that during my stay in America I did not meet a single individual, of the clergy or the laity, who was not of the same opinion on this point.<sup>226</sup>

If right knowledge—and knowledge of right—is required for a right understanding of self-interest and religion freely pursued provides such knowledge, then the apparent paradox of a free people engaging in a religiously textured politics becomes quite sensible.<sup>227</sup> Noting the invocation of Christianity on political issues, Cushing Strout puts forth that:

These facts illustrate [Tocqueville's] major point about American society. Its citizens, at first seeming to lack any common ethos except a “refined and intelligent selfishness,” actually looked at religion “from the same point of view,” shared similar ideas about freedom and equality, believed in enlightened self-interest and human perfectibility, and exulted in “an immensely high opinion of themselves.” The result was a novel combination of “two perfectly distinct

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<sup>225</sup> Locke. *A Letter Concerning Toleration*. 233

<sup>226</sup> Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*. Volume I. 308

<sup>227</sup> This conditional nature of this statement is, of course, very important.

elements which elsewhere have often been at war with one another but which in America it was somehow possible to incorporate into each other, forming a marvelous combination” of “*the spirit of religion and the spirit of freedom*.”<sup>228</sup>

In this way, “The Americans combine the notions of Christianity and of liberty so intimately in their minds that it is impossible to make them conceive the one without the other,”<sup>229</sup>.

### **The Tie that Binds?**

Much as in Locke’s liberal theory, the dangers of freedom are mitigated not only by the constraining force of religion on individual behavior, but also through liberty’s promotion of the pursuit of religion. Thus, Tocqueville observes:

The sects that exist in the United States are innumerable. They all differ in respect to the worship which is due to the Creator; but they all agree in respect to the duties which are due from man to man. Each sect adores the Deity in its own peculiar manner, but all sects preach the same moral law in the name of God. If it be of the highest importance to man, as an individual, that his religion should be true, it is not so to society. Society has no future life to hope for or to fear; and provided the citizens profess a religion, the peculiar tenets of that religion are of little importance to its interests. Moreover, all the sects of the United States are comprised within the great unity of Christianity, and Christian morality is everywhere the same.<sup>230</sup>

The ultimate situation that this embrace of religion brings about is one such as Locke would endorse where liberty is not only safe for and from politics—as similarly hoped for by Madison—but is in fact actualized as morally right by its submission to religious authority. According to Tocqueville, rather than eschewing it as a limiting authority that necessarily restricts freedom, “Liberty regards religion as its companion in all its battles and its triumphs, as the cradle of its infancy and the divine source of its claims. It

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<sup>228</sup> Strout. “Tocqueville and the Republican Religion: Revisiting the Visitor.” 14

<sup>229</sup> Tocqueville. *Democracy in America*. Volume I. 306

<sup>230</sup> Ibid. 303

considers religion as the safeguard of morality, and morality as the best security of law and the surest pledge of the duration of freedom,”<sup>231</sup>.

Strout, however, wonders if Tocqueville would alter his view of the function of religion in America should he have seen a different historical slice. To say that religions functioned in a certain salutary way in a certain place and time is not to say that religion can be relied upon always to play this role or indeed, even that it is necessary. As Strout notes:

For Tocqueville American religion, whether civil or denominational, played a moderating role, but he came to America before Methodism and Baptism became the majority churches and before Catholics, Mormons, Jews, blacks, and nonbelievers made their voices heard. Tocqueville thought that democratic people would “laugh at modern prophets” because modern men would find the arbiter of their beliefs within themselves... In any event it was the “born-again” religions of Baptism and Methodism that captured most believers for Christianity. Furthermore, Tocqueville could not see then how much the symbiosis between religion and freedom was going to feel like a short blanket on a large bed during winter when Protestants discovered that celibate American priests promoted their own parochial schools or when Mormons produced their own revelations to autocratic prophets who practiced polygamy. Then it would become apparent how much most Protestants smugly assumed that the family, the public-school, and even the republic were their institutions to which immigrants should be made to conform.<sup>232</sup>

Strout goes on to suggest, accordingly, that the religious dimension of Tocqueville—which he terms the “fifth Tocqueville”—may not be as useful for understanding the operation of American political institutions as other parts of his analysis, such as the investigations into civil associations. Instead, the public associations and institutions such as decentralized administration and a free press might offer more leverage with respect to how we think about our common project; secular “civil religion” and trends in other areas of thought offer more hope for Strout, who concludes that, “[p]olitical

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<sup>231</sup> Ibid. 44

<sup>232</sup> Strout. “Tocqueville and the Republican Religion: Revisiting the Visitor.” 17-18

religions and civic piety have done much to justify Tocqueville's view of history, but neither the color nor the history has been as liberal as Tocqueville's 'new science of politics for a new world,'"<sup>233</sup>. It would seem then, for Strout, that the future of American democracy lies in a tension between the institutions that so many Americans hold dear and those who might not so embrace them, rather than in some general acceptance of religious piety.

However, in coming to this conclusion, Strout, "fails to take seriously enough the 'fifth Tocqueville.'"<sup>234</sup> Tocqueville certainly noted the importance of political practice, as in town meetings, to the training in liberty<sup>235</sup> and emphasized education more generally as the key to the American conception of self-interest.<sup>236</sup> To then claim the obviation of religion, though, is to miss entirely the confluence of religion and education in the pursuit of right knowledge. In Tocqueville's words:

it is by the mandates relating to public education that the original character of American civilization is at once placed in the clearest light. "Whereas," says the law, "Satan, the enemy of mankind, finds his strongest weapons in the ignorance of men, and whereas it is important that the wisdom of our fathers shall not remain buried in their tombs, and whereas the education of children is one of the prime concerns of the state, with the aid of the Lord...." Here follow clauses establishing schools in every township and obliging the inhabitants, under pain of heavy fines, to support them.<sup>237</sup>

To attempt to emphasize the political education as distinct from religious authority in Tocqueville is to fail to understand their inseparability as vehicles of pursuing right knowledge. If religion did, in fact, play such a role in American democracy as Tocqueville observed, then a change in the operation of religious sentiment of the kind

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<sup>233</sup> Strout. "Tocqueville and the Republican Religion: Revisiting the Visitor." 23

<sup>234</sup> Bathory. Dennis. "Tocqueville on Citizenship and Faith: A Response to Cushing Strout." Ibid. 27

<sup>235</sup> Tocqueville. *Democracy in America*. Volume I. 61

<sup>236</sup> Tocqueville. *Democracy in America*. Volume II. 124

<sup>237</sup> Ibid. 41

that Strout notes—and, for that matter, notes that Tocqueville may have foreseen—does not then suggest that some other vehicle for political moderation and liberal politics ought to be, or necessarily will be, found. Rather, the proper question becomes: Given this function of religion in American democracy, what has the impact of the change in American religion been on American politics?

Indeed, as Kessler points out, “Tocqueville was more critical of American Christianity and more pessimistic about its future than is generally recognized,”<sup>238</sup>. The importance of religion’s function for democracy does not mean, for Tocqueville, that religion could maintain its salutary force on the maintenance of the democratic soul indefinitely; Tocqueville had great fears that the secularization of the age would lead those in a state of equality to seek a central authority around which to define their status. Such devolution of political institutions would come about precisely because of the resituating of authority away from the divine and into the realm of unassisted human knowledge:

I have shown in the preceding chapter how equality of conditions leads men to entertain a sort of instinctive incredulity of the supernatural and a very lofty and often exaggerated opinion of human understanding. The men who live at a period of social equality are not therefore easily led to place that intellectual authority to which they bow either beyond or above humanity.<sup>239</sup>

Even though religion be more appropriate to the task of maintaining the social conditions necessary for democracy, Tocqueville already held concerns that the substitution of human understanding was being substituted for obedience to God, noting that, “religion itself holds sway there much less as a doctrine of revelation than as a commonly received

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<sup>238</sup> Kessler. *Tocqueville’s Civil Religion*. 43. Strout does not himself appear to make this mistake, of course, as he takes care to note that “Tocqueville thought that democratic people would ‘laugh at modern prophets’ because modern men would find the arbiter of their beliefs within themselves.” Strout.

“Tocqueville and the Republican Religion: Revisiting the Visitor.” 17

<sup>239</sup> Tocqueville. *Democracy in America*. Volume II. 9

opinion,”<sup>240</sup> and feared that, “faith in public opinion will become for them a species of religion, and the majority its ministering prophet,”<sup>241</sup> a state of affairs he associated with despotism in democratic form through the tyranny of the majority.<sup>242</sup> Given Tocqueville’s aforementioned views on the necessary existence of some conception of authority in human affairs, such epistemological shifts would not be seen by Tocqueville as a reduction in the role of authority but rather as an alteration in the nature of the authority which would necessarily have implications for American politics given the role played by authority therein. Thus, the concerns Strout raises about religious practice in America do not obviate religion for democracy as Tocqueville understood it, but rather underscore the potential for crisis. Even if America is truly God’s country, a proper institutional arrangement would need to be founded by citizens.

The apparent paradox of Tocqueville viewing the American people as at once instinctively religious while also wary of overarching, supra-human understandings may be reconciled by understanding the situation of religion in Madison’s system. Specifically, the transfer of emphasis in religious authority as inherently good in and of itself to its appropriateness for a life of liberty predicated on its usefulness may be seen as symptomatic of religion’s becoming subject to the assessment of human reason in the liberal thought of the American founding. As stated, if religion be true, then it would be expected to be advantageous to the believer as an intrinsic characteristic of it being true religion. Subordinating religion to reason, though, will mean that the perception of legitimacy of a religion will depend upon the reasoned assessment of utility on the part of the rational self-interested individual, an assessment that reaches fruition in the doctrine

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<sup>240</sup> Ibid. 10-11

<sup>241</sup> Ibid. 11

<sup>242</sup> Tocqueville. *Democracy in America*. Volume II. Book 12-16

of self-interest rightly understood of which religion is a part. In this way, duty is undertaken not because it is authoritatively commanded, but rather because, being in the self-interest of the individual as she understands it, the individual prefers to act in that manner for her own welfare:

The lower orders in the United States understand the influence exercised by the general prosperity upon their own welfare; simple as this observation is, it is too rarely made by the people. Besides, they are accustomed to regard this prosperity as the fruit of their own exertions. The citizen looks upon the fortune of the public as his own, and he labors for the good of the state, not merely from a sense of pride or duty, but from what I venture to term cupidity.<sup>243</sup>

A conception of duty predicated upon preference suggests a weaker form of the notion, in keeping with the weaker political commitments and, indeed, public-spiritedness we have seen associated with the Madisonian republic.

### **Help Yourself to Anything with God**

Granted, the individual may continue to understand the duty as necessary, but it is deemed necessary based on the individual's understanding of the state of affairs and the fact that, given said state, the act in question will be advantageous to the individual:

In the United States hardly anybody talks of the beauty of virtue, but they maintain that virtue is useful and prove it every day. The American moralists do not profess that men ought to sacrifice themselves for their fellow creatures because it is noble to make such sacrifices, but they boldly aver that such sacrifices are as necessary to him who imposes them upon himself as to him for whose sake they are made.<sup>244</sup>

While the duty may remain intact as a mandate of sorts, the mandate flows from an epistemologically different understanding of the world than that put forth by Locke. As

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<sup>243</sup> Tocqueville. *Democracy in America*. Volume I. 243

<sup>244</sup> Tocqueville. *Democracy in America*. Volume II. 121-122

Tocqueville points out, “Argument is substituted for faith, and calculation for the impulses of sentiment,”<sup>245</sup>.

Tocqueville does suggest that while Americans, “are fond of explaining almost all the actions of their lives by the principle of self-interest rightly understood,”<sup>246</sup> they may still yet retain more traditional notions of the good in their assistance of their fellows:

In this respect I think they frequently fail to do themselves justice, for in the United States as well as elsewhere people are sometimes seen to give way to those disinterested and spontaneous impulses that are natural to man; but the Americans seldom admit that they yield to emotions of this kind; they are more anxious to do honor to their philosophy than to themselves.<sup>247</sup>

The very fact, though, that this is, in fact, their philosophy and that they, “endeavor to prove that it is the interest of every man to be virtuous,”<sup>248</sup> is itself instructive. That the demonstration here, occurring through argument and not faith, is one of reason reveals that the justification for the rules of conduct—the duties of the individual—is derived not from its status as commanded by God but from rational calculus. It is telling that Tocqueville puts forth that, in a time when, “religious belief is shaken and the divine notion of right is declining, morality is debased and the notion of moral right is therefore fading away,” in order to assert the proper sense of right in the people:

If, in the midst of this general disruption, you do not succeed in connecting the notion of right with that of private interest, which is the only immutable point in the human heart, what means will you have of governing the world except by fear?”<sup>249</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> Tocqueville. *Democracy in America*. Volume I. 246

<sup>246</sup> Tocqueville. *Democracy in America*. Volume II. 122

<sup>247</sup> Ibid. 122

<sup>248</sup> Ibid. 122

<sup>249</sup> Tocqueville. *Democracy in America*. Volume I. 246



For Tocqueville, right is virtue in politics, and political rights themselves offer training in right.<sup>250</sup> In this formulation, then, the foundation for commitment to virtue is considered to be fixed and certain, but not because of its being sourced in divine authority but rather in private interest.

Rather than inculcating an authoritative sense of virtue into the mores of the American people, the religious belief of Americans aligns itself and comes into conformity with what Americans think. Tocqueville himself situates this phenomenon into the political nature of America, suggesting that, “The more the conditions of men are equalized and assimilated to each other, the more important is it for religion, while it carefully abstains from the daily turmoil of secular affairs, not needlessly to run counter to the ideas that generally prevail or to the permanent interests that exist in the mass of the people,”<sup>251</sup>. In this way, self-interest rightly understood becomes a kind of quasi-religion in and of itself. Again, religion will tend necessarily to have the character of serving self-interest by virtue of its relationship to the good; even Locke points to the, “great advantage received by our Saviour, is the great encouragement he brought to a virtuous and pious Life: Great enough to surmount the difficulties and obstacles that lie in the way to it; And reward the pains and hardships of those, who stuck firm to their Duties, and suffered for the Testimony of a good Conscience,”<sup>252</sup>. Religion, in this formulation, is necessary precisely because, as observed above:

Mankind, who are and must be allowed to pursue their Happiness; Nay, cannot be hindered; Could not but think themselves excused from a strict observation of Rules, which appeared so little to consist with their chief End, Happiness; Whilst

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<sup>250</sup> See: Ibid. 244-246

<sup>251</sup> Tocqueville. *Democracy in America*. Volume II. 26

<sup>252</sup> Locke. *A Letter Concerning Toleration*. 202

they kept them from the enjoyments of the Life; And they had little evidence and security of another.<sup>253</sup>

In effect, the Messiah is necessary precisely to bring about a sense of conformity between the obligations of religion and self-interest which otherwise might be lost on people left to their own devices in pursuit of their bliss. Tocqueville, though he been shown to contend that he does not believe this to be the only reason that people adhere to religion and conform to its dictates, points out that, “The founders of almost all religions have held to the same language. The track they point out to man is the same, only the goal is more remote; instead of placing in this world the reward of the sacrifices they impose, they transport it to another,”<sup>254</sup>. Yet this American quasi-religion of religion *as* self-interest rightly understood does not produce this advantage or promotion of self-interest by correcting people’s sense of what that interest in fact is so much as endorse the existing interests as already perceived by the people. Rather than pointing the believer to the good, whatever a person thinks is desirable may automatically be concluded as in his self-interest and worthy of pursuit because his religion tells him that these two qualities must necessarily coincide. It should come as no surprise, then, that “to touch their congregations,” the clergy, in Tocqueville’s words, “always show them how favorable religious opinions are to freedom and public tranquillity; and it is often difficult to ascertain from their discourses whether the principal object of religion is to procure eternal felicity in the other world or prosperity in this,”<sup>255</sup>.

The dependence on promoting the self-interested beliefs of the Americans should thus drive theological formulations of religion, at least for some. Recalling that the

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<sup>253</sup> Locke. “The Reasonableness of Christianity.” 202

<sup>254</sup> Tocqueville. *Democracy in America*. Volume II. 125

<sup>255</sup> Ibid. 127

situation of religion in the liberalism of the American founding allows the possibility that the practice of religion will proceed as Locke theorized but does not and cannot guarantee that it will do so, it must be considered how that religion will function given its evolutionary nature and the imperatives placed upon it by the beliefs of Americans. As Berger theorizes and as the American historical experience of Christianity in the United States shows, the rational pursuit of religion leads people to select the religion that seems sensible to them and, in turn, leads religious “entrepreneurs” to make available new theologies; to survive, a religion would need to attract adherents, and to do so, it would need to resonate with their experience and viewpoints.<sup>256</sup> Obviously, considerations such as tradition and socialization into a faith by family play a role in the determination of what faith, if any, an individual will accept and pursue. Yet religious liberty still allows the individual to reject or accept the faith of his choosing; more traditional notions of religious membership become a mere part of the overall calculation.

Of critical interest, then, for the religious viewpoint in America is the viewpoints that emanate from the condition of human beings in equality to which religion would be reasonably expected to speak. As has been seen, the nature of the polity as emanating from the social condition of the people suggests important ontological ramifications for the conception of the individual. Specifically, as Tocqueville sees it, “Aristocratic nations are naturally too liable to narrow the scope of human perfectibility; democratic nations, to expand it beyond reason,”<sup>257</sup>. Tocqueville understands this belief in infinite perfectibility to arise very directly from the experience of human beings in a situation of political equality:

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<sup>256</sup> See: Berger. *The Sacred Canopy*. 131-140; Hatch. *The Democratization of Christianity*.

<sup>257</sup> Tocqueville. *Democracy in America*. Volume II. 34

In proportion as castes disappear and the classes of society draw together, as manners, customs, and laws vary, because of the tumultuous intercourse of men, as new facts arise, as new truths are brought to light, as ancient opinions are dissipated and others take their place, the image of an ideal but always fugitive perfection presents itself to the human mind. Continual changes are then every instant occurring under the observation of every man; the position of some is rendered worse, and he learns but too well that no people and no individual, however enlightened they may be, can lay claim to infallibility; the condition of others is improved, whence he infers that man is endowed with an indefinite faculty for improvement. His reverses teach him that none have discovered absolute good; his success stimulates him to the never ending pursuit of it. Thus, forever seeking, forever falling to rise again, often disappointed, but not discouraged, he tends unceasingly towards that unmeasured greatness so indistinctly visible at the end of the long track which humanity has yet to tread.<sup>258</sup>

An understanding of religion as a vehicle subject to ontological validation for the reconciling of norms and material experience suggests that, in a situation where religion is subject to rational assessment, religion would need to speak to this new ontological conception of the individual.

The error Strout makes in discounting the significance of religious functionalism in Tocqueville's view of American institutional democracy, then, comes from essentially homogenizing religion and its function in and on society. Clearly, there are different religions and religious behaviors; the concern is the impact, perhaps at times deleterious, that some religions have had on American social and political life. That concern, then, is a more serious consideration of Tocqueville's fifth dimension. As James Block points out:

The replacement of voluntarism for external coercion was not to accentuate individualism but to have it "mitigated" though "commitment to new forms of community," to contain "antinomian license" with "strict adherence to the rigorous terms of... church covenants," mutual; accountability, the new internalized forms of conviction and conduct.<sup>259</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> Ibid. 34

<sup>259</sup> Block. *A Nation of Agents*. 221

Such a view underscores the need not to speculate on what might knit American society together in the place of religion, but rather to understand and trace the actual function that new religious formulations and their effects on citizen behavior will have on the operation of democracy in America.

Arguably, that, as Strout points out, the history has not been as liberal as Tocqueville might have concluded comes as a product of the fact that American religion has changed so dramatically. What Tocqueville might have foreseen for religion in the new world, though, is hinted at in his discussion of the press and majority opinion: “when no opinions are looked upon as certain, men cling to the mere instincts and material interests of their position, which are naturally more tangible, definite, and permanent than any opinions in the world,”<sup>260</sup>. Given a society characterized by uncertain authority and religious views subjected to human judgment, Tocqueville might well have predicted the kind of rational individuation of religious belief which, as we shall see, occurred in America. Furthermore, it must be again emphasized that Tocqueville was aware, and himself concerned, with the different effects different religious viewpoints had for democracy. For example, Tocqueville noted:

If Catholicism predisposes the faithful to obedience, it certainly does not prepare them for inequality; but the contrary may be said of Protestantism, which generally tends to make men independent more than to render them equal. Catholicism is like an absolute monarchy; if the sovereign be removed, all the other classes of society are more equal than in republics.<sup>261</sup>

Because Tocqueville took seriously his belief that the politics that develop out of the social conditions of America may take either lofty or debased form, the nature of the mores of the people—mores inculcated in part by religion—becomes critical to the

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<sup>260</sup> Tocqueville. *Democracy in America*. Volume I. 189

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.* 301

qualities of the politics that will emerge. It is precisely on account of the differing tendencies of different religions that Tocqueville found the religious orientation of Protestants less salutary for democracy than, say, that of Catholics.<sup>262</sup> Richard Niebuhr has similarly observed:

Was not the Catholic critic again right in his judgment that Protestantism stated the alternative erroneously when it offered men the choice between an authoritative church and the religious anarchy of wild sectarianism in which every group and every individual could claim to speak for God?<sup>263</sup>

Given Tocqueville's own awareness of religious distinctions and their impact upon the operation of American democracy, a more nuanced understanding of religion and an historical understanding of how religious thought has developed in America should then yield valuable insights into contemporary American political culture.

Specifically, what the history of American thought reveals is how the common religious project drops out, in a sense, of American political consciousness. Politically speaking, while the language of common good republicanism is retained, many Americans came to see that common good as operating through the individual pursuing his or her own utility rather than through people being driven to work together on projects of common purpose. This change in attitude, perhaps ironically for those who search for a return to a more classical republican form through a return to religion, results largely through developments in religious and quasi-religious or "spiritual" thought. Change in Christian thought in America, much of it quite radical, had begun in the

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<sup>262</sup> Of course, Tocqueville's own Catholic faith may predispose him to find Catholics better suited for providential government. That said, Mitchell offers that, in Tocqueville's theory, "There is, however, a certain disposition that plagues the Protestant soul, one that is absent in the Catholic. To put it baldly, the Protestant is more independent than the Catholic, and consequently more likely to be drawn toward an all-powerful state. The theological pattern of the equality of all under the One (without mediators) habituates the Protestant mind to think in terms of the polarity of utter independence and resolute subservience to the One—in its political form, the state—and to oscillate back and forth between these two poles." Mitchell, *The Fragility of Freedom*. 121

<sup>263</sup> Niebuhr. *The Kingdom of God in America*. 34

decades prior to Tocqueville's visit—change which has since altered the landscape of what is understood to be American Christianity; Tocqueville himself noted that, “Equality begets in man the desire of judging of everything for himself; it gives him in all things a taste for the tangible and the real, a contempt for tradition and for forms,”<sup>264</sup>. This change, involving not only the substance of belief but also a reconceptualization of how such substance is discovered and even how Christianity may understand itself, has reoriented views on the individual and the individual's place in society. More specifically, history has seen a reorientation in how the individual thinks about his or her place in society, with obvious political ramifications. As Tocqueville foretold:

As social conditions become more equal, the number of persons increases who, although they are neither rich nor powerful enough to exercise any great influence over their fellows, have nevertheless acquired or retained sufficient education and fortune to satisfy their own wants. They owe nothing to any man, they expect nothing from any man; they acquire the habit of always considering themselves as standing alone, and they are apt to imagine that their whole destiny is in their own hands.<sup>265</sup>

The historical progression of this ontological shift of the place of the individual has changed the function of religion in the lives of individuals and even the way they think about their religious and spiritual lives. In effect, that forms of thought<sup>266</sup> ought to benefit the individual, rather than some sort of common good, becomes emphasized in the history of American thought and discourse—the social arrangement of institutions becomes a means to the ends of the individual rather than ends in themselves that benefit

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<sup>264</sup> Tocqueville. *Democracy in America*. Volume II. 41

<sup>265</sup> Ibid. 99

<sup>266</sup> My use of the expression “forms of thought” is intentionally robust in its understanding of the myriad ways in which beliefs that inform political behavior may be generated. What I mean by this is that there are many ways of thinking about or approaching phenomena in the world, religion, spirituality, reason, logic, science, etc. Given the increase in such forms of thought, people have effectively developed dispositions to forms of thought, as a concept, in general, though they might not use such abstract terminology. It is precisely the blurring of the differences between various forms of thought that, I will argue, leads to an understanding of some of the peculiarities of American political discourse.

the individual—with important ramifications for democratic politics. This very phenomenon, in fact, framed, to a degree, Tocqueville's purposes: "I HAVE shown how it is that in ages of equality every man seeks for his opinions within himself; I am now to show how it is that in the same ages all his feelings are turned towards himself alone,"<sup>267</sup>. Religious purposes are basically assumed to contribute to the common good without a real engagement of how best that ought to be achieved; whatever individuals "improved" by their religious experiences are doing is assumed to be contributing towards progress to a better world. Certainly, the belief that the common good will be achieved remains, but with a complete rearrangement of the mechanics—the means and the ends—of the interaction between religion and other American institutions. Ultimately the development of religious and spiritual thought along these lines demonstrates—in a sense, can be understood as symptomatic of—the validation of a world-view that re-emphasizes individualism. Yet such world-views depend upon and emanate from a sense of liberty without the constraining framework that made the liberty of the individual desirable and, indeed justifiable, within the liberal system as theorized by Locke which established said liberty in the first place. As such, we must now turn to America's experience of religion and the role it plays in its liberal system as distinct from the function asserted and hoped for by Locke.

### **A Reorientation in Faith: The Second Great Awakening**

While much remains to be learned about the phenomenon that has been termed the Second Great Awakening, it is clear that America experienced an upsurge in religious activity in the early nineteenth-century, especially in the manifestation of the ecstatic

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<sup>267</sup> Ibid. 98



camp-style meeting termed the revival. The word “revival,” though not used early in the movement, denoted a restoration of spirituality believed by many at the time lost in the new America, particularly the frontier and the south. Many orthodox believers had been close to despairing of the loss of religion, while more liberal proponents of religion, such as Thomas Jefferson, hoped that a moderate form of Unitarianism would rise to a place of dominance in America. To the surprise of many, neither of these occurred but instead, a massive upsurge of religiosity began to sweep various parts of the nation. Yet this wave of religiosity must be recognized as relatively distinct from the more traditional worship of the church, and in many cases the revivalists found themselves opposed by the more established churches. While there is much debate about a proper understanding of the causes and effects of these religious movements, what does seem clear is that early accounts claiming that revivals were either a response to the loss of community attendant a newly sprawling population that lacked community and churches or, alternatively, a kind of patch for a new materialistically oriented acquisitiveness attendant the declining normative social controls of such a situation, are grossly inadequate. Such simple views of social causation fail to account for the rich social transformations of the time, both in terms of a reconfiguration of the economic status of the individual within society, and of a general reconceptualization of authority within a new context of social equality; the American religious revival of the time cannot be understood as mere geography and emotion.<sup>268</sup>

First, the new expressions of religion must be situated into a broader social history of the period. As Joyce Appleby explains, anti-elitist Jeffersonian ideas combined with a

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<sup>268</sup> See Boles, John B., *The Great Revival, 1787 – 1805*. (Lexington, KY: The University of Kentucky Press, 1972). 1-11

new social situation after the American Revolution to produce a new view of the individual in the economy.<sup>269</sup> This view motivated the Republican electioneering efforts of the early nineteenth-century to overthrow traditional elitist control. Rather than sustaining the myth of the noble agrarian as the stable ideal of Jeffersonian Republicanism, Appleby emphasizes the role of the creation and propagation of new ideas about equality and freedom that brought about new alliances and which altered American politics. The Jeffersonians believed that Americans had severed the link to their dependence upon the past and could look to a new future with a radical creative hope of reshaping a new world without the oppressive institutions asserted as necessary by the dominant classes of society—the past could be shed safely, and to do so was necessary for the success of the new democratic experiment.<sup>270</sup> Free and independent men could make their own decisions and need not defer to hierarchical elites; class would be irrelevant in this new world. Appleby further points to a newly conceived conception of virtue as the pursuit of self-interest by individuals capable and worthy of making their own political and economic choices (as opposed to a more public focused, classical conception of virtue, where the common good was pursued largely unmediated by a view to the good of the individual; the individual benefited from the pursuit of the good, and not the other way around) as the ideas and beliefs defining a new vision of society that held together the new national Party. Accordingly, the concept of a self-regulating market guided by Adam Smith's invisible hand whereby prosperity was achieved by individuals pursuing their own economic self-interest served as a justification sufficient to eschew the authoritarian and controlling robust government of the past, the mode of

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<sup>269</sup> Appleby, Joyce. *Capitalism and a New Social Order: The Republican Vision of the 1790s*. (NY: New York University Press, 1984)

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.* 79

government advocated by the Federalists. In this way, new understandings of the economy undermined the rationale for elite government control by bolstering the role of individuals pursuing their own self-interest, economically, morally and politically, all in convenient coincidence.

This theme of democratization, argues Nathan Hatch, is critical for understanding the development of American Christianity after the Revolution; popular religious movements did more to Christianize America more than anything else before or since.<sup>271</sup> The broader crisis of authority that dominated popular culture before and during the revolution led to a related and analogous struggle for religious authority.<sup>272</sup> Despite the apparent authoritarianism of some of the most notable religious revival movements,<sup>273</sup> the rise in religious entrepreneurs and the receptivity of an anti-clerical message endorsing the independence of religious consciousness and the tying of virtue to the ordinary and common clearly resonated with and mimicked the rhetoric of the Revolution; though perhaps initially conceived as propaganda to motivate a rebellion against Britain, the idea that people ought to be able to think for themselves was being taken seriously by Americans and they were applying the idea in ways not previously imagined.

In this way, the movement of the Second Great Awakening takes on a decisively egalitarian cast as common people and untutored leaders become actors in and agents of religion during, and on account of, the burgeoning debate over the purpose and function of the church in American life. For Hatch, there exist strong continuities between this religious message and the contagious new democratic vocabularies and impulses that

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<sup>271</sup> Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*. 3

<sup>272</sup> Ibid. 22

<sup>273</sup> For example, consider John Smith's Mormon movement, which sought to use centralized authority to enforce equality among men and empower regular working-class people.

were sweeping American popular culture.<sup>274</sup> Of critical importance here is that in America, one need not choose between being radical or loyal to the church; the lack of alliance between the church and government led to common people not throwing off the yoke of the church as unjust imposition but rather claiming the right to interpret truth for themselves as a tool for criticizing arguments for aristocracy and elitism in their many and myriad forms.

This reassertion of the common people as viable and able interpreters of the world brought with it the idea that “regular people” could judge for themselves on matters of divine importance. Moreover, this new disposition towards truth, coming as it did at a time of widespread concern on the part of the religious and the clergy about religious declension in the south, motivated many individuals to go forth and attempt to rekindle the embers of faith in the country. The perception of divine mission of these new religious entrepreneurs led them to take the steps necessary to re-imagine the faith in a way that could bring about a religious movement. As John Boles states:

There was an overwhelming, devastating, oppressive sense of the current failure of Christianity to prosper. The more they became aware of the problem, the more severe it suddenly became. Out of this domineering preoccupation with a mission seemingly gone awry emerged an intense introspection. Anthropologists have shown that quite often when a society’s traditions, ideals, or hopes seem threatened, the severe anxiety results in the susceptibility to what Anthony F.C. Wallace has termed a revitalization movement. These are attempts to “create a more satisfying culture” by purposely reviving real or idealized conditions of the past, especially those traditional customs that appear near extinction. The southern conditions at the end of the eighteenth century and the stance of the concerned clerics make it possible to see what followed as a powerful revitalization movement. It was this very despair, extruded through their belief system, that ultimately produced the intellectual conclusions conducive to a regional revival of startling intensity.<sup>275</sup>

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<sup>274</sup> Ibid. 7

<sup>275</sup> Boles. *The Great Revival, 1787 – 1805*. 23-4

Given the nature of the perceived religious crisis, the motivation of clergy and the new class of itinerant preachers of the time was, first and foremost, to win back—or win anew—new members for the church.<sup>276</sup> This motivation led to the preaching style—and, at times, new sort of “orthodoxy”<sup>277</sup>—that focused on individual conviction to bring about conversion. Thus, religion became highly individualistic and personal, tailored towards achieving conversion and placing any social possibilities for religion or church in a distant secondary position.

This attempt thereby to increase religion in the country—to fight declension—altered the religion itself in important fundamental ways. Explicit decisions to alter theology were not necessarily made by preachers or revivalists, but as the mode of preaching became tailored towards maximizing conversions, combined with the self-selecting nature of so many of the revival preachers, the message itself morphed. The new message had as a goal to speak directly to potential converts, thereby emphasizing the increase of individual Christians rather than any more substantive message of Christian faith; certainly, the goal was a Christianized social order, but insofar as the applied means of preaching was intended to inflame the soul, the communal aspects of the word became subordinated to messages of personal impact.<sup>278</sup> In a sense, the religious message became retrofitted to what the people wanted, or expected, to hear. Orthodox Calvinism would hold little sway to those not trained in logic or theology yet who now considered themselves able judges of a religious message; the debate as to

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<sup>276</sup> The church meaning, broadly, Christian communion; the role of, say, physical architecture, or lack thereof—not to speak of orthodoxy—in fact, could be understood as emblematic of the new shifts in religious approach.

<sup>277</sup> The very concept of an orthodoxy being new is, while paradoxical, a common facet of religious revitalization movements, as the new religious entrepreneurs claim to represent the purer form of worship of the past, even as they recreate the new form that worship will take. See: Niebuhr. *The Kingdom of God in America*; Boles. *The Great Revival, 1787 – 1805*

<sup>278</sup> Boles. *The Great Revival, 1787 – 1805*. 125

whether or not the theology represented elegant logic or abstruse obfuscation mattered little to those who could not make sense of it one way or another. Given the emphasis on conversion, then, such theological niceties and complications were abandoned for a message to which people—individuals—had real and meaningful access. Yet this tactic transformed certain fundamentals of the faith because the message chosen would be that which most resonated with the people, and perhaps tautologically, such would be a message that confirmed that which they already thought they knew. In effect, the religion preached would not be so much a new plan for life, but a retroactive sanctification of that which the people already believed.<sup>279</sup>

Such preaching that spoke to the beliefs of the people lent an eclectic character to the new faiths; even, for example, in the preaching of the relatively theological Lorenzo Dow, Jeffersonian and religious arguments commingled.<sup>280</sup> Confusion led many to pick up the Bible and decide its meaning for themselves and then, once the individual had figured it all out, often tell others of the new-found way—or, as was often the alleged case, the newly recovered way. Perhaps ironically, in this manner, the attempt to avoid religious confusion led to greater and greater individuation and its consequent diffusion of belief; if Calvinism was confusing, the proliferation of people claiming to understand the true, pure faith did not lead to greater certainty through the common acceptance of any given rendition of the divine:

With the cessation of the movement and the turn to institutionalism the aggressive societies become denominations, for that peculiar institution, the American

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<sup>279</sup> Even many of the more orthodox preachers in the conservative churches in the south found themselves retrofitting their orthodoxy to fit the new era of reason sweeping the region; even orthodoxy would have to conform to the new public engagement of rationality. See: Hollifield, E. Brooks. *The Gentlemen Theologians: Americans Theology in Southern Culture 1795-1860*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1978)

<sup>280</sup> Hatch. *The Democratization of American Christianity*. 36

denomination, may be described as a missionary order which has turned to the defensive and lost its consciousness of the invisible catholic church. These orders now confused themselves with their cause and began to promote themselves, identifying the kingdom of Christ with the practices and doctrines prevalent in the group.<sup>281</sup>

This new pluralistic confusion led more to try to sort matters of truth out on their own, who could then, in turn, lend their own voices to the religious cacophony, further confounding others who would often recreate the process of similarly working things out on their own.

Theologically speaking, this new approach to faith involves a subtle, unconscious shifting of the locus of knowing about the world into the individual. Hatch's democratic interpretation of the American Christian revival notwithstanding, the shift in religious view emphasizes not a democratic society, but the role of the individual, which is far different in its ramifications for political democracy. Revivalist style religion offers a divine foundation—or, perhaps, rationalization—for a person to believe that to which he or she was already predisposed. As Kessler puts the matter, breaking from traditional Calvinism, “[r]ather than condemning self-interest, most American clergymen encouraged their congregations to be religious for selfish reasons,”<sup>282</sup>. Though Kessler may be correct in arguing, then, that Tocqueville believed that:

[D]emocratic religion should emphasize moral behavior over doctrinal orthodoxy, which has little appeal to the skeptical democratic mind. This emphasis will strengthen religion while serving the causes of tolerance and civic peace. To be effective, however, religious morality must accommodate itself to the passion for self-interest, ‘the only stable point in the human heart.’<sup>283</sup>

yet accommodation does not necessarily imply that self-interest, even rightly understood, ought to become the central tenant of the religious system. Such a shift clearly alters the

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<sup>281</sup> Niebuhr. *The Kingdom of God in America*. 177

<sup>282</sup> Kessler. *Tocqueville's Civil Religion*. 95

<sup>283</sup> Ibid. 47

possibility of the religious faith to restrain the individual's self-directed actions. Thus, the religion, while still ostensibly Christian, may lose the institutional ability to moderate the direction of the democratic soul in the manner which Tocqueville had hoped. In fact, this new focus on the individual within the faith is attended by a strong Arminian<sup>284</sup> strain of thinking, as shall be seen below, which leads to a tendency to instrumentalize even religious belief for the goals of the individual. It would seem that, though post-conversion behavior was obviously policed by peers, little virtue would be supplied by this approach to religion unless it were already there in the first place; how convenient that the belief that virtue naturally resides in these common people arose to fill the breach.

A general overview of the time period of and following the American Revolution thus shows the rise of a forward-looking attitude that granted people the faith to hope for a new social order severed from traditional coercive hierarchy:

The modern concept of self-interest gave to all men the capacity for rational decisions directed to personal ends. Conservatives acknowledged the growth of self-interested actions, but in an elegiac spirit. Jeffersonian Republicans seized upon the liberating potential in this new conception of human nature and invested self-interest with moral value. Self-interest—reconceived—turned out to be a mighty leveler, raising ordinary people to the level of competence and autonomy while reducing the rich, the able, and the well-born to equality.<sup>285</sup>

In the process of rethinking the individual's place in society, Jeffersonian Republicans invested the pursuit of self-interest with a normative texture. The institutional view they held was one whereby centralized authorities had existed in the past to exploit rather than assist the people; the false sense of dependence that people felt for these systems could be

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<sup>284</sup> Recall that "Arminianism," previously a Christian heresy, was the belief that an individual could initiate her or his own salvation; that is to say, it was the term denoting that concept before the belief became adopted as one of the cornerstones of American Christianity, a change which thereby greatly reducing its perceived heretical nature through the ideational magic of religious "restoration."

<sup>285</sup> Appleby. *Capitalism and a New Social Order*. 97



discarded under a new theory where the greatest good came from individuals pursuing their own self-interest as they themselves understood it. This new normative system was taken seriously enough by people such that its scope expanded to all areas of social and intellectual life; this time period saw the rise of schisms in many classes of knowledge as many people rejected much of the professional class, including lawyers and doctors—even practices known as “sectarian medicine” became popular.<sup>286</sup>

These new norms, having sufficiently permeated the nation, effectively became sanctified in a new religious movement, ultimately crystallizing into a reconceived religion, though one still bearing the name of Christianity (albeit under many new sectarian names). While effective for founding the new anti-elite conception of society, the retrofitted religion invested individual judgment with a certain kind of divinity, or at least implicit conformity with such, thus linking the moral and instrumental judgment of things political by sanctifying the individual as the locus of right knowledge; the viewpoint of the common individual and the religious critique of hierarchy became fused. Once the individual becomes emphasized in this way, moreover, much knowledge—even knowledge of spiritual matters—may become instrumentalized towards the purposes of the individual, resulting in a reconfigured notion of the good as being consistent with the goals of the individual rather than the common good of the society at large as an unmediated end in itself. As shall be seen, this new evangelical epistemology, yielding its newly reshaped ontology necessarily reconceives and reconfigures that which would be considered politically plausible; a new understanding of the good brings about a new politics and, as such, new ways of talking about this politics.

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<sup>286</sup> And, of course, continue in their popularity to this day. Watching millionaire athletes wearing magnetic necklaces—magic beads—to improve performance ought give one pause in considering what precisely the legacy of the Enlightenment has been in America.

### **Faith in the Individual**

Ironically for Weber's conclusions concerning the relationship between Puritanism and capitalism, Calvinist doctrine came to be rejected in America by the very sort of bourgeois element that Weber envisioned as the religion's offspring. Instead, Calvinism came to seem incoherent as an explanation of the observable operations of life in early nineteenth-century America. Increasing market penetration and integration across America caused an individual's personal fortunes—economically and socially speaking, that is—to appear increasingly linked to individual effort and to an increasingly distant, nationalized economy.<sup>287</sup> Effective individuation, whereby one thinks of the individual self as the center of activity and thereby responsible for attendant success or failure, increasingly marked early nineteenth-century American society. As such, Calvinist teaching of divine control over human spiritual destiny must have lacked resonance with the rising entrepreneurial class. As Weber himself points out in his footnotes, “[t]he analogy between the unjust (according to human standards) predestination of only a few and the equally unjust, but equally divinely ordained, distribution of wealth, was too obvious to be escaped,”<sup>288</sup>. In the new American system that exhibited far greater class, economic and social mobility—coupled with the belief in the propriety of the egalitarianism of such a social context—the observation of personal control over one's apparent material destiny would seem to weaken the coherence of Calvinist predestination.

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<sup>287</sup> Block. *A Nation of Agents*. 374; Thomas. *Revivalism and Cultural Change*. esp. 34-65

<sup>288</sup> Weber. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. 281 (Ch. 5, fn. 102)

As George Thomas explains, were an early-nineteenth century denizen of much of America to listen to a Calvinist theologian and a Revivalist preacher, the former's metaphysical claims would seem largely unfounded as compared to the latter's, whose words would resonate with the experience of American life.<sup>289</sup> The obvious effective individuation of life made the sort of religious individuation inherent within Arminianism seem the more accurate theology on account of its apparent conformity with the actual experience of daily life. Accordingly, revivalism can be understood as an attempt to reconcile the religious view of life with reality—for surely divine truth cannot be mistaken. Thus:

As social life was stripped of traditional rules that maintained communal relations and group boundaries, everyday life became organized by new interpretive rules built on rational calculation, individualism, and nationalism. Revivalism institutionally framed these rules by locating them in a larger ontology. It built a sociopolitical universe within which individuals participated in a national market and a national polity. It above all was concerned with ontology, defining the nature of the individual, nation, and action. Revivalism was rooted in the rational organization of everyday life and had important political implications, which were expressed in moral reform, the abolitionist movement, and then later in support of Republican nationalism.<sup>290</sup>

Proper conduct in worldly affairs must then be evaluated within the new “plausibility structure” of right action implied by this new ontology. Within these new structures, social and democratic institutions embodying right action become means to the end of the effects on the individual, not proper ends in and of themselves.

The rise of a new conception of the individual's relationship to his or her own destiny manifests itself as the resolution to this dissonance between religious belief and material reality. Revivalism brought about an increased emphasis on the individual and the individual's role in salvation with its Arminian strain of thought. The Holy Spirit, in

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<sup>289</sup> Thomas. *Revivalism and Cultural Change*

<sup>290</sup> Ibid. 146

this conception, desired the sanctification of all souls; what remained was for the individual to seek out this blessing and become “born again” into a proper understanding of and relationship to God, thereby finding a right relationship with society. The point of religious life here moves from a predefined order of God imposed upon the people to an emphasis on the individual figuring out how to do right to better his or her own soul; understanding religion as an ontological understanding of one’s world<sup>291</sup>, the social and political implications can scarcely be more significant. The reconceptualization of religious society and the purpose of religion bring said implications into sharp relief. The basic purpose of Christian religious life, in theory, stays the same: the work of human life was to do God’s will in all its glory. However, according to the understandings of revivalist religion, the new earthly order that God’s will implied would be accomplished by the individual moral action of persons perfected through sanctification. In effect, the improvement or, more precisely, purification of society would not be pursued directly in a “macro” or holistic sense, but would rather occur as the inevitable result of a godly society being made up of individuals perfected by the pursuit of personal, inward piety and private perfection; such a social vision became inherent in the “theology of individual conversion.”<sup>292</sup>

Thus, the only problem facing society—preventing society from becoming perfected—is that not all individuals have yet been so perfected. Accordingly, there exists little reason, in this view, to consult broader society and social interests as criteria

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<sup>291</sup> See: Berger, Peter L., and Thomas Luckmann. *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. (New York: Irvington Publishers, 1980); Berger, Peter L. and S. Pullberg. "Reification and the Sociological Critique of Consciousness." *History and Theory* 4(1965): 196-211; George M., John W. Meyer, Francisco O. Ramirez, and John Boli. *Institutional Structure: Constituting State, Society, and the Individual*. (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1987)

<sup>292</sup> Boles. *The Great Revival, 1787 – 1805*. 125

for evaluating the morality of such an individual, as social improvement comes from the actions of these individuals in the first place. This is not to say that social norms would not adhere; as Block notes:

Protestantism and liberalism reconciled through revivalism. The individual experiences a psychosocial reversal in freely and voluntarily turning towards God, thereby voluntarily taking on the religious norms in the new characterological formation. While revivals appeared to be free institutions, they were exercises in collective pressure. Revivalism is the vehicle, then, for the formation of new liberal agency institutions whereby the habits and self-discipline of the converted promote social cohesion.<sup>293</sup>

This reconciliation allows, rather than the rejection of social norms, for the norms to take on a kind of tautological truth; local mores become sanctified precisely because they are the norms held by people—by collections of individual—to whom a personal religious message of divine connection was crafted.

Of course, as shall be seen in the historical analysis of the burgeoning Social Gospel movement to come, there remains the possibility for debate and disagreement about how the spiritual regeneration and salvation of the individual will is best enacted. At the dawn of the twentieth century, many spiritually minded people discovered the great possibility of social and environmental factors in the debasement of humanity, which suggested to them the need for reform to remove such impediments to salvation. However, in the absence of such a socialized vision of humanity, the problem remains largely personal. As H. Richard Niebuhr puts it:

It is a mistake to regard the individualistic vision of the end and the individualistic hope as detrimental to the sense of social responsibility... Yet it does appear that under the influence of the hope of individual salvation society was conceived in rather static terms—as an affair of institutions and laws rather than as a common life with a grand destiny comparable to that of the human soul.<sup>294</sup>

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<sup>293</sup> Block. *A Nation of Agents*. 418

<sup>294</sup> Niebuhr. *The Kingdom of God in America*. 129-130

As noted, the institutional structures of the polity lose their status as goals of the common good. Politics, for many, becomes the clichéd necessary evil for an imperfect world—or, more precisely, for a world of imperfect people.

This new orientation of the relationship between the individual and the social and institutional world attendant a new religious ontology becomes increasingly clear through Thomas's demonstrations of the significant cross-correlations between economic individuation, revivalism, and the rise of the Republican Party. Since the Republican Party is commonly seen as the party of the rugged individual and nationalism, that the GOP would similarly be strongly linked to a culture emphasizing the role of the effective individual in national markets should seem obvious and requiring little or no explanation. Thomas's empirical work suggests, though, that the link between Republicanism and this economic culture is actually largely mediated by religious views. Specifically, while revivalism is strongly linked to effective individuation of culture and Republicanism, the effective individuation and Republicanism are less strongly linked.<sup>295</sup> This finding suggests that the changes in social organization taking place in American society did not result directly in a new plan of political action as might be expected by theories of politics focusing on the rational economically self-interested utility-maximizing individual. Rather, only once a new ontology was developed through religious revivalism that legitimated new relations between the individual and broader society did a new program of political action come to life.<sup>296</sup>

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<sup>295</sup> Thomas. *Revivalism and Cultural Change*. 103-137

<sup>296</sup> Such findings further explain the seemingly stable connection between belief in the propriety of economic individuation, nationalism, and religious values that color the Republican Party to this day—a constellation that would not otherwise seem to occur of necessity.

Given these relationships, it becomes vital to understand the shifts in world-views underpinning the religious development of this period. The mechanics, so to speak, of revival religion have profound implications for an individual's sense of self and attendant relationship to society. The very individuality of this conception is the key; the individual is evaluated not based upon criteria of qualitative social standards but rather on the fact of religious conversion itself. Use of such criteria raises—and perhaps begs—the question: How does anyone know for sure that anyone else has truly experienced conversion or, for that matter, how can one be sure of one's own conversion? Thus, the epistemological problem of understanding conversion becomes one of authenticity in the context of a personal pietistic theology developed to pursue personal connection to the divine.<sup>297</sup> In this vein:

The authenticity of conversions was not judged by doctrine as was insisted upon in the eighteenth-century, but by the intensity and quality of the experience. Thus, the increase in individual autonomy and rationality coincided with emphasis on morality and, counterintuitively, subjectivity.<sup>298</sup>

In fact, Barton Stone, organizer of the famous (and unexpectedly large) Cane Ridge revival of 1801, was a self-proclaimed, if somewhat crude, practitioner of Baconian science who wrote a treatise attempting to describe systematically the various emotive gestures, gyrations and utterances performed by the revivalists. Such a blending of religious experience with Baconian science and its emphasis on direct observation of fact in nature and their attendant categorization underscores the directness of the epistemological understanding of this conception of spiritual life. The goodness of the individual comes from his or her relationship with the divine and not from an engagement with society deemed appropriate; proper society will be defined by having proper

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<sup>297</sup> Boles. *The Great Revival, 1787 – 1805*. 125

<sup>298</sup> Thomas. *Revivalism and Cultural Change*. 70

individuals, and individuals will not be defined by adherence to social norms, though, as per above, the tautological logic of sanctification suggests all shall happily coincide.<sup>299</sup> In such an epistemological context, subjectivity and objectivity become conflated, as Niebuhr bemoans:

But what ethical construction was possible to a formalism which proclaimed, “Obey God, love God and do what you please”? What definite counsel could be given to the man who sought perfection when perfection was defined not as a matter of behavior but as an affair of faith and love, neither of which was subject to man’s control? The Protestant principle was a splendid critical device for deflating the pretensions of moralism, for protesting about legalism and for showing that no particular vocation of man brought him nearer to infinite goodness. It released the laity from the inhibitions of a spuriously bad conscience, which had afflicted it with a sense of its inferiority to contemplative monasticism. But it seemed to lack all the qualities necessary for organizing the lay life. There was no precision in it; it offered no standard whereby men could make choices between relative goods and relative evils; it gave them no scale of values whereby their interests could be harmonized and the higher be made to control the lower.<sup>300</sup>

If the individual is properly converted—that is to say, has the proper orientation to his or her soul following conversion—then the actions of such a person must be morally good and further, said actions must be properly in keeping with the betterment of society. The actions of a converted individual are essentially defined as such; the sanctified individual knows what is right. God may work in mysterious ways, but the converted revivalist knows for a fact that his or her actions contribute to the divine plan. Happily for the convert, since truth is that which leads to the sanctification—and success—of the converted individual, truth will tend to be that which is instrumentally beneficial to that same individual.

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<sup>299</sup> At least in the view of the perfected soul who knows on divine authority that the relationships are, in fact, proper.

<sup>300</sup> Niebuhr. *The Kingdom of God in America*. 31-32



In this way, knowledge of appropriate modes of behavior, of means, becomes located within the individual as well. Counterintuitively, instrumental reason must then be a consequence of proper religious experience in this world view despite the inherently non-teleological nature of what is considered instrumental reason. Though Tocqueville may have been impressed by an American emphasis on practical experience<sup>301</sup>, the emphasis on practical experience over more scholarly forms of understanding would seem to arise now in an *a priori* faith that the individual knows what needs to be done and how to do it. Knowledge of right practice comes from within, not from an engagement with the world outside; in many ways, this transformed Christianity has turned Tocqueville's purpose for religion on its head. As Mitchell explains,

Unlike Aristotle, for whom participation in the polis offers a site at which men may be who they are qua human, or Arendt, for whom politics is the site where heroic action and utterance may break in upon a routinized society in order that immortality may be achieved, for Tocqueville, politics offers a forum that may draw the self out of its self-enclosed worlds and unto the domain of direct hands-on experience that is so necessary for the success of democracy. Politics is crucial here because it offers a site for the development of a certain kind of knowledge.<sup>302</sup>

In the post-revivalist conception of the world, there remains little if anything to be learned from political activity; the individual does not rely on experiences with others to learn what is right and how the good ought to be accomplished, for that knowledge stems directly from religious faith. The locating of "knowing" in the individual through religious sanctification effectively removes the possibility of external points of evaluation of what is known; the holy individual—who, in fact, was enhanced into his or her holy condition by the right connection to knowledge—knows what to do and how to do it. Moreover, the collapse of emotional connection—arguably necessarily subjective—and

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<sup>301</sup> Mitchell. *The Fragility of Freedom*. 112

<sup>302</sup> Mitchell. *The Fragility of Freedom*. 114

rationality through this evangelical approach to knowledge of the world, personal and social, provides the epistemological and ontological basis for the sorts of politics that may be considered acceptable to this context.

### **Religion and Science, Reason and Politics: A Great American Melting Pot**

Through the collapse of knowledge into the individual, the possibility, if not probability, of a kind of cross-pollination of epistemological approaches occurs. Insofar as truth lies in the individual, truths ought to cohere; that is to say, truth will equal truth, even if, as shall be seen, they be products of what might analytically be considered different kinds of truth. Analogously, instrumental rationality becomes collapsed with knowledge of normative ends, as anything that does not benefit the good individual must not be true as it would be inconsistent with the ontology of a personal religion of conversion. This amalgam of religious and rational scientific thinking, with roots reaching back to Weber's puritan capitalist par excellence, then, can similarly be expected to be found working itself out through the various political movements of the nineteenth-century in America. Before the Civil War, both Temperance and Abolition had their roots in the strong moral overtones specific to revivalist religion. Again, the insight gleaned from Weber's work retains its significance in terms of the relationship between ontology and material practice within the individual in society. As described before, some ontologies or world views will tend to resonate with worldly practice more than others, as in the case of revival religion and a world characterized by effective individuation. Significantly, many important American social and political movements can be seen as attempts to reach a social structure more isomorphic—more reasonably

consistent, so to speak—with revival religion through political means.<sup>303</sup> For example, temperance, for some, would be consistent with the economically rational effective individuation through increasing the efficacy of the worker. Abolition would remove the barriers to effective individuation, and, coterminously, individual salvation, imposed by slavery.

As such, the important political movements of the period subsequent to the Second Great Awakening—indeed, even some implicated in the advance towards the Civil War itself—can be found enmeshed in a mandate to political action directed by the ontological world-view of the Second Great Awakening. Of key importance, though, is not to make the error so often, if improperly, attributed to Weber and assign causation of the social movements to religion *per se*. Rather, shifting social ontologies arising from the interplay of religious beliefs and socio-economical condition brought certain political attitudes and their consequent plans for political action greater or lesser validity. Thus, the social landscape affects religious views, as religious views serve to validate action that in turn legitimize the reshaped social landscape.

The interjection of a national program of science after the Civil War in many ways actually solidified the relationships between rational and religious thought in the American psyche. This phenomenon can be traced to the historical development of scientific institutions in America and how science took hold in the American imagination. Before the Civil War, America had been a great source of data for scientific

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<sup>303</sup> This phenomenon may sound circular, but given the symbiotic nature of such reorientations of thought and practice, this is necessarily the case. Thus, religion is changed to bring it into better conformity with practical reality, and then the structures of practical reality in turn are affected by people working under the influence of the new religious beliefs about the world, and so on.

experimentation, but real scientific analysis was conducted in Europe.<sup>304</sup> The experience of the Civil War motivated the government to develop indigenous scientific institutions, as wars are apt to do. To this end, to gain public support for scientific programs, science was pitched as not only an attempt to understand the world but as something that could benefit the individual.<sup>305</sup> As Gail Hamner explains:

[I]t was not until the period of Reconstruction and the beginning of the second wave of industrialization that increasingly persistent calls for public (that is, government) funding [for science] arose. These appeals were fueled by well-attended public lectures given by successful scientists, who effectively disturbed the European image of the scientist as “expert” and began to portray scientific questions as ones of general interest and practical value both for individuals (especially entrepreneurs) and for the nation... The lecturers were able to depict science as not simply predictive but also inherently purposive. The emphasis on purpose in science aided the formation of a peculiarly American disposition toward science as at once a specialized knowledge that generates technological advances and as an application of common sense that encourages efficiency and discipline. A paradox is embedded in this disposition for it suggests that investigations are properly theoretical only if they produce visibly practical results, and it suggests that common sense is inherently tied to quite uncommon notions about the way a self acts in the world.<sup>306</sup>

Not just rationality, then, but notions about formal scientific thinking—the very scientific method—became intertwined with normative—recall the conflation between what is in one’s interest and what is good—and, therefore necessarily, religious approaches to

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<sup>304</sup> Hamner, M. Gail. *American Pragmatism*. (NY: Oxford University Press, 2003). 5

<sup>305</sup> Tocqueville foresaw this phenomenon as well, observing that:

The greater part of the men who constitute these nations are extremely eager in the pursuit of actual and physical gratification. As they are always dissatisfied with the position that they occupy and are always free to leave it, they think of nothing but the means of changing their fortune or increasing it. To minds thus predisposed, every new method that leads by a shorter road to wealth, every machine that spares labor, every instrument that diminishes the cost of production, every discovery that facilitates pleasures or augments them, seems to be the grandest effort of the human intellect. It is chiefly from these motives that a democratic people addicts itself to scientific pursuits, that it understands and respects them. In aristocratic ages science is more particularly called upon to furnish gratification to the mind; in democracies, to the body. Tocqueville. *Democracy in America*. Volume II. 45

That Tocqueville held that religious views would also emanate from and need to align themselves with the social condition of equality makes suggests the likelihood of normative implications for such a view of science, as shall be explored below.

<sup>306</sup> Hamner. *American Pragmatism*. 5

understanding the world; new notions of enlightenment and scientific rationality become incorporated into existing approaches to the practical problems of the world. Within American political discourse, then, reason, science and knowledge are intrinsically bound up with morality, politics and religious purpose.

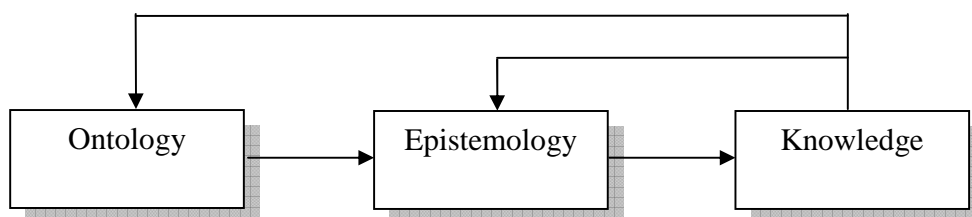
This amalgamated conception of knowledge with the locus of knowing contained within the individual provides great leverage in understanding the reformulations of religion, science and politics during the reform period of the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century in America. That the source of knowledge lies within the individual becomes critical to understanding the reciprocal reconstructions of political, scientific and religious knowledge in this period. Indeed, taken on their own as analytically distinct systems of knowing the world, science and religion both have traditions accepting incompleteness of comprehension, be it through the incompleteness of data and the limited scope of theories in scientific thought or through the ancient doctrines of the mysteriousness of God in the religious tradition. Within a given knower, however, incompatible knowledge would seem to demand resolution and, hence, the drive to further develop the knowledge systems towards the goal of reconciliation, especially within an epistemological context where such resolution, and even a beneficial impact of the knowledge upon the knower, is held as necessary for the knowledge to be properly considered true.

Specifically, new resolution of truths, within the context of the locus of knowing being within the individual, could come about through a kind of mixing or cross-pollination of aspects of different systems of knowing. To understand this process, it is useful to disaggregate what is meant when referring to a system of thought, be it religion,

science or otherwise. Indeed, the labels of “religion” and “science” often refer to very different aspects of the body or system of their respective modes of thought (e.g. the content versus the method) thereby exacerbating confusion as to that which is being discussed and, analogously, difficulties in how it might be discussed properly. A system of thought may be roughly divided into its ontology, which sets the bounds of what can be known, its epistemology, that which is considered the proper way of knowing that which can be known, and the actual content of the knowledge from the system, that which is actually known (or, at least, believed to be known).

In reality, of course, these parts are all mutually dependent, as that which is held to be known must necessarily be the conclusions of a properly executed epistemological approach, and the propriety of the approach is itself dependent upon a sense of what are the knowable things in order to determine the suitability of the aforementioned approach. Historically speaking, the basis for what we consider “modern science” began with the scientific revolution initiated in Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries which overturned the deductive Scholastic approach to scientific knowledge in favor of the more inductive, data and hypothesis driven model of science more closely resembling the contemporarily accepted scientific method. This movement saw an ontological shift away from the Aristotelian notions of causes as principles of essences within things towards a mechanical view of the world where basic materials lacked intelligent or emotional propensities and rather acted according to mechanical principles. Such an ontological shift dictated a corresponding shift in epistemological approach, whereby instead of a purely Cartesian deducing of outcomes from the essential properties of matter, the inductive empiricism of observation—a new emphasis on perception over

deduction—of repeated physical processes became the accepted scientific mode of investigation. While it is obvious that such a difference in scientific approach will yield very different knowledge conclusions about world, it is critical to note the influence that these conclusions to a large extent led to the changes in ontology and epistemology.



In other words, the systematic investigations of data by thinkers such as Copernicus, Galileo and Bacon yielded facts inconsistent with the contemporary ontology—for example, the data leading to the heliocentric model of the solar system—and epistemology, thereby forcing an alteration in scientific thought whereby the data simultaneously confirmed the reliability of the inductive approach (epistemology) and a glaring inaccuracy of the premises of science (ontology).

Given a religiously sanctified epistemology that located the point of knowledge within the individual, however, a new kind of amalgamated discourse, as seen above, became acceptable in America in terms of how best to understand social, political and even spiritual problems. As will be shown, Americans felt comfortable with synthetic approaches to problems developed from combinations of the ostensibly differing forms of thought; in effect, cross-pollination of religion, science and politics became legitimate in America. Of special note, then, is the fact that a mixing and matching of method may occur across ideas. For example, conformity may be demanded between an empirical truth predicated upon repeated observation and a normative truth based upon intensity of emotional experience without any seeming contradiction; if both methods are considered

legitimate approaches to knowledge, than might one not expect a congruence of results? Again, this is not to say that such an approach reflects how all Americans approach their lives, political or otherwise, but rather that knowledge yielded by such synthetic approaches became accepted as legitimate in American public discourse.

Once so accepted, such amalgamated approaches to understanding life, social and otherwise, can be seen manifested in seemingly distinct movements in American thought. That is to say, apparently different and highly distinct movements of American thought can be rendered coherent as having a common resonance with this amalgamated public discourse respecting religion, science, and the social and political problems such forms of thought might seek to address. Obviously, one would expect to see the instrumental reason of science brought to bear on public problems, as well as expect to find religious ideals guiding the conception of public goals in the spiritually inclined. The distinctness of the American approach is how the instrumentality and spiritual understandings are combined and even, at times, conflated, mutually influencing one another to find a coherence across otherwise analytically distinct systems of thought to allow reconciliation of knowledge within the individual knower.

To demonstrate this cross-pollination of religion, science and politics, I now turn to two case studies that manifest the combinations of science and spiritual thought and normative and instrumental reason and how the combinations in turn manifest themselves as politics. To this end, I have chosen to look at the *laissez-faire* and social Darwinist theories stemming from the new theory of evolution and the Social Gospel Movement which also had important theoretical roots in the theory of Darwinian evolution. Both cases emerge in the period after the developments in science in America following the



Civil War and therefore offer a view of how Americans would integrate new scientific understandings of the world into their thinking. What the cases will reveal is how, given the inherent relationship between instrumental reason with political means and of religious thought with the normative ends of politics, the collapse of instrumental reason with religiously textured thought yields results such that analytically distinct approaches to knowledge take on the texture of one another, e.g. a scientific view of society takes on the character of religion and vice versa, underscoring the amalgamation of the strains of thought. The fascinating insight gained here is into how religious and scientific thought, in the American social setting, each manage to become part of activities not normally considered part of their respective spheres and thereby mutually influence both one another and real political activity. Once this insight is established, I will then conclude by analyzing what the acceptance of such approaches to knowledge mean for democratic politics in America, especially with respect to how this approach may serve to undermine the ontological conception of equality that forms the basis of American democratic liberalism.

### **CHAPTER 3: AN EVOLVED SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS**

#### **Science, Evolution and a Secular Faith in Social Progress**

Sumner's synthesis brought together three great traditions of western capitalist culture: the Protestant ethic, the doctrines of classical economics, and Darwinian natural selection. Correspondingly, in the development of American thought Sumner played three roles: he was a great Puritan preacher, an exponent of the classical pessimism of Ricardo and Malthus, and an assimilator and popularizer of evolution. His sociology bridged the gap between the economic ethic set in motion by the Reformation and the thought of the nineteenth century, for it assumed that the industrious, temperate, and frugal man of the Protestant deal was the equivalent of the "strong" or the "fittest" in the struggle for existence; and it supported the Ricardian principles of inevitability and laissez faire with a hard-bitten determinism that seemed to be at once Calvinistic and scientific.

Richard Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought*<sup>307</sup>

#### **A Scientific Basis for Social Theory**

Given the acceptance of linkages between instrumental and normative thinking in American discourse, we would expect to see an increased interest in scientific approaches to social reform and political policy following the Civil War. In fact, beginning in the 1880s America saw a great increase in demand for a social science foundation for programs of reform.<sup>308</sup> This new focus on science as a tool for dealing with social problems ought not appear surprising due to its presentation to the public as a fundamentally useful field of knowledge creation; given science's apparent usefulness, surely it must offer keys to building a better society. Science became a key weapon, therefore, both for those who advocated for reform and those who wished to prevent

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<sup>307</sup> Hofstadter, Richard. *Social Darwinism in American Thought*. (New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1955). 51

<sup>308</sup> Hopkins, Charles Howard. *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism, 1865-1915*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940). 54

reform or other forms of institutional development of the government in general. Of critical note, given the intermingling of what we might now consider more “subjective” notions of truth associated with more normative conceptions of political goals and the so-called “objective”<sup>309</sup> attendant the American approach to politics, is how a single scientific theory could, and would, be appropriated to bolster opposing political positions concerning the desirability and viability of reform.

Perhaps the example *par excellence* of the opposing possibilities of a scientific theory comes in the form of Darwinian evolution. The aforementioned increase in the popularization of science along with the subsequent increase in demand for a scientific basis for social policy coincided with the key foundational moments of the development of evolutionary theory. Insofar as the development of evolutionary thought occurred as nothing short of a scientific revolution not only for biology but in the ongoing effort to apply these new theories to the fields of the social sciences, these scientific developments further fueled an increasingly intense interest in science and “the new rationalism” in approaching social policy, an interest fueled by extensive coverage in the public sphere through newspaper articles and public lectures.<sup>310</sup>

This interest in science, especially given its relationship to practical purposes developed in American discourse, led Americans increasingly to accept its claims both for personal life and for social policy. The new scientific approach offered the promise of being able to get policy right with a degree of certainty never before considered. Social science would validate this confidence in its social prescriptions by offering models to which human effort could attempt to conform, as stated by William H. Brewer

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<sup>309</sup> More accurately, one should think of them as the empirically verifiable findings of scientific rationality, though people often assert, however improperly, that that makes the knowledge “objective.”

<sup>310</sup> Hofstadter. *Social Darwinism in American Thought*. 24

of Yale University, addressing the National Conference of Charities and Corrections in 1895 on the subject of “The Relation of Universities to Charity and to Reformatory Work”:

The universe is governed by law. Science investigates the ways of nature, and deduces the laws governing her work. These laws are God's laws; and man's work, to be successful, must be in accordance with them. The closer the accordance, the more effective the work. As regards our physical work, no one disputes this; but all do not yet see that it is as true of work in charity and correction as it is in engineering, manufactures, and agriculture.<sup>311</sup>

While the scientific theory of evolution led some to urge that social life ought not be interfered with by the government—evolutionary change must be allowed to occur on its own—others saw in it an instruction manual for interventionist policy. All told, over time Americans began to feel persuaded by the new claims of science even for fundamental alterations in their daily lives, as demonstrated by the pervasiveness of scientific claims in the temperance and prohibition movement, eventually even eclipsing religious appeals.<sup>312</sup> In fact, in keeping with the collapse of the religious and the rational in American culture, Brewer could go on to contend that:

The most characteristic features of our modern Christian civilization, distinguishing it from that of the previous centuries, are those which have been stamped upon it by modern science. The application of scientific methods to the solution of economic problems constitutes the distinguishing feature of the industries of to-day as contrasted with their condition a century ago, and the growth of the physical sciences constitutes the distinctive feature of modern intellectual progress.<sup>313</sup>

Indeed, as shall be illustrated in the next chapter, science's stature and credibility grew to the point that even religious claims could be subjected to critique by its rational standard;

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<sup>311</sup> Brewer, Williams H. “The Relation of Universities to Charity and to Reformatory Work.” *Proceedings of the National Conference of Charities and Correction at the Twenty-Second Annual Session held in New Haven, Conn. May 24-30, 1895*. (Boston: Boston Press of Geo H. Ellis, 1895). 143-4

<sup>312</sup> Timberlake, James. *Prohibition and the Progressive Movement, 1900-1920*. (New York: Atheneum, 1970). 2-3; 40

<sup>313</sup> Brewer. “The Relation of Universities to Charity and to Reformatory Work.” 144

that is to say, a religion unfit to meet the demands of the new age of industry and science could not be considered properly ethical, and, thereby, not true religion rightly understood.<sup>314</sup>

To understand how such a bold position as to demand of religion conformity with science could be made requires an understanding of how social science was envisioned at the time. Not merely a set of observations, or even principles, but rather a set of laws on a par with Newtonian mechanics was sought by the pioneers of this new field. A proper social science would provide the basic mechanics necessary for engineering social reform with the authority of a very complete, not to say deterministic, understanding of human social relations. In detailing the new program to the 1894 National Conference of Charities and Correction, acting chairman of the conference Daniel Fulcomer of the University of Chicago offered this overview of the state of the field of social science:

Professor Peabody, of Harvard, who has for many years been the most prominent instructor in social reforms, says: "Sociology is a much larger subject than the practical problems of charity and reform. If it can be taught at all, it may be taught quite apart from these. It is the philosophy of social evolution." Professor Henderson, the author of the best work on charities and correction, defines sociology in the larger sense as "the study which seeks to co-ordinate the processes and the results of the special social sciences. It aims to consider society as an organic unity; to study its movement as a whole. Its purpose, the conditions of progress. It aims to show the legitimate place and dignity of each department of social investigation by, considering it as a vital part of a vast and uniform movement of thought." One of the foremost professors of sociology, Giddings, of Columbia College, says: "Sociology is not an inclusive, it is the fundamental social science. It studies the elements that make up society . . . and the simplest forms in which they are combined or organized, (1) by composition (family, clan, tribe, nation), (2) by constitution; that is, involuntary organizations for co-operation or division of labor." The most agree in calling it "a comprehensive science, including politics, economics, etc." Others call it "a science of sciences"; "the study of the social nexus that underlies the various phenomena that are included in the various departments of social science;" "it is

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<sup>314</sup> Hopkins. *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism*. 59

the philosophy of all”; “it treats of the evolution of society in its broadest sense.”<sup>315</sup>

In such a conception, anything true for or about society, be it empirical or normative, religious belief or instrumental rationality<sup>316</sup>, would necessarily lie in conformity with the lessons of social science.

If science could be a tool to understand even religion and its august conceptions of social purposes, it must necessarily also be a tool to guide social policy for the improvement of a society so often understood in terms of religiously textured goals; acceptance of science inherently invoked its utility for social purposes. Again, as shall be seen, there existed great disagreements as to what lessons science held for society. Nonetheless there existed a growing consensus that the future of society and its improvement lay with the new scientific approach to understanding the world. Such a scientific social consciousness, according to Brewer, building upon the scientifically discovered laws governing society invoked above, rendered such problems as crime and pauperism in terms of population ratios, of which the “increase will only be checked by a more rational and scientific treatment of the problem,”<sup>317</sup> in an effort ultimately even to find a plan for prevention of such social ills.

Stated alternately, if society were to be expected to improve, it would have to conform to the laws and processes understood through science. As William Graham

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<sup>315</sup> Fulcomer, Daniel. “Instruction in Sociology in Institutions of Learning.” In *Proceedings of the National Conference of Charities and Correction at the Twenty-First Annual Session held in Nashville, Tenn. May 23-29, 1894*. Edited by Isabel C. Barrows, Official Reporter of the Conference. (Boston: Boston Press of Geo H. Ellis, 1894). 72-73

<sup>316</sup> This juxtaposition is not meant to claim a lack of rationality on the part of religion, but rather the different types of approach to knowledge denoted by the terms.

<sup>317</sup> Brewer. “The Relation of Universities to Charity and to Reformatory Work.” 148

Sumner, an early proponent of the study of sociology as a “hard”<sup>318</sup> science and the godfather of what has come to be called social Darwinism in America explained, even the first lessons of a sociology in its infancy announced a natural operation to society that would be scientifically determinable:

It must be confessed that sociology is yet in a tentative and inchoate state. All that we can affirm with certainty is that social phenomena are subject to law, and that the natural laws of the social order are in their entire character like the laws of physics. We can draw in grand outline the field of sociology and foresee the shape that it will take and the relations it will bear to other sciences.<sup>319</sup>

In this view, any attempt to govern society out of conformity with these laws is doomed to failure and, even worse, the detriment of the human race. Thus, even moral knowledge must be subordinated to and brought into conformity with the new social science, lest society be led astray by an unrigorous, unscientific approach:

That sociology has an immense department of human interests to control is beyond dispute. Hitherto this department has been included in moral science, and it has only been confused and entangled by dogmas no two of which are consistent with each other, but also it has been without any growth, so that at this moment our knowledge of social science is behind the demands which existing social questions make upon us.<sup>320</sup>

What is striking about this bold collapsing of the moral prospects of society and its scientific basis is that more religiously inclined thinkers, though often disagreeing with Sumner’s prescriptions, could easily share his faith in the need for scientifically grounded approaches to society.

So scientific a project was society that even the act of social work in the settlements could be seen as the inductive data needed to inform the science, as

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<sup>318</sup> “Hard” here is meant, of course, to denote the concrete nature of the science’s knowledge claims and not difficulty of comprehension.

<sup>319</sup> Sumner, William Graham. “Sociology” as found in *Social Darwinism: Selected Essays*. Edited by William E. Leuchtenburg and Bernard Wishy. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963). 28

<sup>320</sup> Ibid. 28

underscored by the National Conference of Charities and Corrections invitation of a Hull House worker, Julia C. Lathrop, to speak on the topic of the settlement as a sociological laboratory.<sup>321</sup> Thus, according to Brewer's grand plan for the university's assistance of social work and charity:

The efficient and economical management of charities and correction on the scale we have now to deal with must be conducted as an applied science, founded on natural laws[...] In the development of this new science the universities and their professors can aid. But, as an applied science, you, not the professors, are in charge of the laboratories where the material operated upon exists, and where the observations go on and are recorded. The various organizations for dispensing charity, the schools for instructing the neglected and defective, the places of correction, are all laboratories of investigation in this new science[...] Charity is the lowest section of this department. It began with humanity itself, and its work has been the most widely and most crudely carried on. But it is by no means the simplest, although some of its results under crude methods have been brilliant as well as beneficent. But it never before has conducted on such a stupendous scale nor under such social and political conditions as now, nor where misdirection would produce such wide-spread evils. It must be directed along lines marked by the fixed laws of nature, that the lower strata of mankind may be bettered as well as helped; that the instinct of charity may not by perversion become a curse to the race, increasing its lower stratum at the expense of the better part of mankind.<sup>322</sup>

The careful reader, of course, will note the movement from helping people, commonly understood to be persons, to the broader view, consistent with the best scientific thinking of the period, of enhancing the race. Although such a shift reflects a broad moral reconceptualization, this change can be well comprehended by seeing how the new scientific vision, specifically with respect to the newly dominant evolutionary theories of the time, becomes folded into the social vision which would yield such morality.

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<sup>321</sup> "Minutes and Discussion." *Proceedings of the National Conference of Charities and Correction at the Twenty-First Annual Session held in Nashville, Tenn. May 23-29, 1894*. Edited by Isabel C. Barrows, Official Reporter of the Conference. (Boston: Boston Press of Geo H. Ellis, 1894), 313. Lathrop's comments on the subject speak to the ambitiousness of the scientificization of the project even in its infancy insofar as she opened her talk by noting that she really had little idea of what the subject of the talk meant or why she had been invited to give it.

<sup>322</sup> Brewer. "The Relation of Universities to Charity and to Reformatory Work." 147



### **Evolution: Science and Social Science**

With the understanding that the pursuit of social progress, both material and spiritual, would need to be scientific, the new prominence of Darwinian evolution in the scientific developments of the time necessitated the view that evolutionary theory must yield lessons for policy. Insofar as Darwinian evolution attained a central position in the biological sciences, any adhered to truth, be it scientific, political, or even religious in origin, that might concern social organization must necessarily conform to an understanding of Darwinian evolution. Similarly, Darwinian evolutionary theory must necessarily yield the same truths for a society seeking to apply the lessons of both religion and science to its processes and considerations of reform. That is to say, since social policy would need to be consistent with that believed to be known about the universe, to the degree that an individual might feel that knowledge about social purposes should come from both religion and science, the individual should pursue conformity between these sets of knowledge. On account of the pivotal nature of Darwinian evolutionary theory in science, social reformers would demand the development of social laws to allow a scientific basis for the classification of groups within society. Consider Franklin H. Giddings of Columbia University's explanation concerning the question, "Is the Term 'Social Classes' a Scientific Category?" at the National Conference of Charities and Correction in 1895:

If, then, we are to reduce to scientific order the vast mass of observation and statistical material which is now at our command and which is yearly accumulating, if we are to derive from it true sociological generalizations and make it available for the verification of sociological law, we must begin to ask ourselves the question, Which, if any, of these strangely confused statistical groups are true social classes? By this I mean, Which, if any, of these groups correspond to actual social differentiations of the population? The conception of evolution has given to the natural sciences a true principle of classification. If we

expect to make real progress in sociology, we must adopt the same principle in our own investigations. That is a true class in which objects or individuals are grouped with reference to some characteristic that has been produced by evolutionary differentiation. Unless this genetic test is applied, we constantly mistake temporary, adventitious, or non-essential relations of phenomena for permanent and essential ones, as did the botanists and zoologists before Darwin.<sup>323</sup>

In this way, Darwin's methodology in his theory of evolution must necessarily be the appropriate methodology for any properly scientific investigation concerning living organisms.

Of course, the theory of evolution was, and for that matter still is, a work in progress<sup>324</sup>, though Darwin is rightly considered the proper progenitor of what we think of today as evolutionary theory in biology<sup>325</sup>—indeed, there exists a rich history of different views of how evolution might occur that led the scientific community to conclude for a time that Darwin was mistaken, only to lead to further discoveries that ultimately vindicated his initial theories—evolutionary thought had already received some consideration before Darwin's publication of *The Origin of Species* in 1859. By the early 1800's, Jean-Baptiste Lamarck's *Philosophie zoologique*, first published in 1798, and its theory of acquired hereditary characteristics had garnered much interest despite its flagrant heresy that species changed over time beyond the alterations of flora and fauna occurring by specific acts of creation. Building upon this work, Herbert Spencer in 1851 published his *Social Statics*, where it was that he, not Darwin, first coined the term "survival of the fittest." This survival, he argued, occurred through the retention in

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<sup>323</sup> Giddings, Franklin H. "Is the Term 'Social Classes' a Scientific Category?" In *Proceedings of the National Conference of Charities and Correction at the Twenty-Second Annual Session held in New Haven, CONN. May 24-30, 1895*. Edited by Isabel C. Barrows, Official Reporter of the Conference. (Boston: Boston Press of Geo H. Ellis, 1895). 112

<sup>324</sup> Being, as it is, a scientific theory and such "continual work in progress" status being a characteristic quality of scientific theories (thus far, at least).

<sup>325</sup> And, thereby, possible biological bases of social and cultural evolution.

society of the fittest traits and the culling of the unfit, handed down through a Lamarckian evolutionary process that manifested itself as human progress which Spencer saw as maintaining human quality.<sup>326</sup>

Of course, in a thought process that allowed the collapse of, or even demanded conformity of, the empirical findings of science and normative theory, quality would have a moral connotation as well. The Darwinian methodology allowed the aforementioned Giddings to feel comfortable about dividing up society into ostensibly value-laden categories, yet imbue them with the status of each being “a true scientific category”<sup>327</sup>:

How shall we name and characterize the four true social classes? I should call them respectively the social, the non-social, the pseudosocial, and the anti-social, these terms denoting the gradations of social nature. The social class is made up of those whose dispositions and abilities enable and impel them to make positive contributions to that sum of helpful relations and activities which we call society.<sup>328</sup>

Perhaps most striking about this assertion is the fact that the collapsing of normative quality with scientific classification is asserted by one involved in the study of social work, whereas Spencer’s beliefs of the normative quality of evolution led him to advocate for eschewing interventions into society altogether; in his attack on the efforts of Benthamites for legislating social reform, Spencer held that his, “ultimate purpose, lying behind all proximate purposes has been that of finding for the principles of right and wrong conduct at large, a scientific basis,”<sup>329</sup>. While reaching very different notions of policy, the underlying theme of the day concerned the necessary confluence of

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<sup>326</sup> Larson, Edward J. *Evolution: The Remarkable History of a Scientific Theory*. (New York: The Modern Library, 2004). 185

<sup>327</sup> Giddings. “Is the Term ‘Social Classes’ a Scientific Category?” 116

<sup>328</sup> Ibid. 115. It is worth here recalling that Giddings was specifically concerned with how, in the absence of rigorous scientific analysis, “we constantly mistake temporary, adventitious, or non-essential relations of phenomena for permanent and essential ones.” 112

<sup>329</sup> Hofstadter. *Social Darwinism in American Thought*. 40

normative prescriptions and empirical rationality, or, in the parlance of Professor Arthur T. Hadley, an economist who would later become president of Yale, “Science and Sentiment”:

The application of Darwinism to social phenomena is of great help to teachers [“to train people to reason without teaching them to underrate sentiment and emotion”]. As long as the moral sentiments were treated as intuitions of absolute truth, there was no middle ground on which intuitionist and empiricist could meet. Either sentiment was absolute and science must conform to it, or science was absolute and sentiment must get out of the way. But Darwin has shown how the authority of sentiment and the authority of science rest on the same fundamental basis. To a Darwinian the existence of a moral sentiment furnishes the strongest presumptive evidence of its right to exist. If we instinctively look at things in a certain way, it is because our ancestors have experienced the preservative power of looking at things in that way, and not in another. Those who did so survived, those who did not do so were destroyed. But the Darwinian also sees, especially in modern times, a no less marked preservative advantage to the man or to the race which can calculate the consequences of its action. This habit of calculating consequences, which constitutes reason, is justified by the same kind of criterion as the habit of obeying unselfish impulses, which constitutes morality. When the results of the impulse and the calculations come into conflict, as they occasionally do, we have a means of finding, on this basis of preservative power, a common ground for comparing their respective merits. The subject-matter of these conflicts is so complicated that we cannot always hope for agreement even after the fullest discussion; but we have at any rate a basis on which an approach to such understanding is possible, instead of a war of eternal cross-purposes.<sup>330</sup>

Given such an approach to science and morality, the sort of attempt that Spencer made to glean normative prescriptions for empirical social policy from the theory of evolution would hardly be considered aberrant. For the purposes of this project, it must be noted that though Spencer was actually English, his ideas gained much greater traction in America than in his own country and in Europe, arguably on account of the folding of

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<sup>330</sup> Hadley, Arthur H. “Science and Sentiment” In *Proceedings of the National Conference of Charities and Correction at the Twenty-Second Annual Session held in New Haven, CONN. May 24-30, 1895*. Edited by Isabel C. Barrows, Official Reporter of the Conference. (Boston: Boston Press of Geo H. Ellis, 1895). 121. One wonders if the human moral sentiment found it gratifying to learn that it had a right to exist.

moral development into an ostensibly materialistic theory of development; as Richard Hofstadter explains Spencer's theory:

While the moral constitution of the human race is still ridden with vestiges of man's original predatory life which demanded brutal self-assertion, adaptation assures that he will ultimately develop a new moral constitution fitted to the needs of civilized life. Human perfectability is not only possible but inevitable.<sup>331</sup>

Accordingly, a moral teleology becomes imposed upon human development by the assigning of deterministic laws to social evolution under the authority of science. This inevitable progress of human improvement was seized upon by advocates of *laissez-faire* in America to develop a scientific basis for government non-interference in social affairs.

Although the survival-of-the-fittest concept came from Spencer, it was very easily located in—not to say imposed upon—Darwinian evolution's understanding of “natural selection.” Darwin's elegant explanation of a process whereby traits within a population that were more adapted to an organism's survival tended to be more likely to be passed on to successive generations or “survive” seemed to coincide with the notion that competition drives human progress which had by the late nineteenth century had a significant developmental history. Applying a normative imprimatur on the process, Darwin was understood to demonstrate how the best elements of a population endured. Rising to prominence with the much heralded work of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, the idea that competition for scarce resources must be a driving force in the progression of civilization<sup>332</sup> became increasingly sophisticated with the dissemination and analysis of Thomas Malthus's work on population and growth and the impact that would have on

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<sup>331</sup> Hofstadter. *Social Darwinism in American Thought*. 40

<sup>332</sup> Though it should again be noted that Smith's *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* came after his writing of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* which asserts human sympathy to be the basis of human civilization, providing a rich social context for the much more often quoted pursuit of self-interest which Smith describes in *Wealth of Nations* (1776).

said competition. Darwin's theory seemed to resonate with the kind of "struggle for existence" these views had engendered in America and, united with the teleological faith in human progress with which science was mixed, yielded an evolutionary model of morality. Darwin's expression "natural selection" actually proves more accurate in our modern understanding of evolution, as it connotes a selection that occurs naturally. Many struggled, however, as many still do, to understand *selection* without an apparent *selector* or agent conducting the selection—evolution is about statistical residuals and people tend to think in terms of agency—and "survival of the fittest" became the preferred term.<sup>333</sup> In such a model, for the *laissez-faire* theorists, the morality that stemmed from human progress must arise from the cause of that progress which, scientifically speaking in the temper of the time, must be evolution. Putting his faith in evolution Spencer and his disciples eschewed all government interference in economic and social affairs.<sup>334</sup> In the words of Spencer's greatest and most influential American intellectual adherent of the time, William Graham Sumner:

The only social element, however, is the competition of life, and when society is blamed for the ills which belong to the human lot, it is only burdening those who have successfully contended with those ills with the further tasks of conquering the same ills over again for somebody else. Hence, liberty perishes in all socialistic schemes, and the tendency of such schemes is to the deterioration of society by burdening the good members and relieving the bad ones. The law of the survival of the fittest was not made by man and cannot be abrogated by man. We can only, by interfering with it, produce the survival of the unfittest.<sup>335</sup>

Almost paradoxically, human progress had made it possible for the unfit to survive and multiply, so human effort must be undertaken to avoid any programs that would allow this to continue to occur.

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<sup>333</sup> Darwin, himself, originally acquiesced to the term, though came to reject it when he saw how it led to a perverted understanding of evolutionary theory.

<sup>334</sup> Larson. *Evolution*. 187

<sup>335</sup> Sumner. "Sociology." 16-17

The desire to benefit or improve society through a system of politics could now be considered to have a scientifically founded guide for the direction of public policy. According to Sumner, science had offered a guide to understand the consequences of different sorts of social controls<sup>336</sup> and, consequently, a template for what could and, perhaps more importantly for Sumner, could not be done with social arrangements to improve the lot of humans:

Sociology, therefore, by the investigations which it pursues, dispels illusions about what society is or may be, and gives instead knowledge of facts which are the basis of intelligent effort by man to make the best of his circumstances on earth. Sociology, therefore, which can never accomplish anything more than to enable us to make the best of our situation, will never be able to reconcile itself with those philosophies which are trying to find out how we may arrange things so as to satisfy any ideal of society.<sup>337</sup>

Social science could offer the knowledge of social cause and effect brought about by the use of various policy levers. Any inclination towards seeking a better world ought therefore to seek the guidance of social science to understand what would and would not be possible.

In a purely empirical sense, science can only inform as to the material consequences of an action; material science cannot articulate whether or not such consequences ought to be sought or not. For Sumner, however, evolutionary science had shown that the improvement of the human species comes from evolution itself and not from democratic attempts at reform; indeed, such efforts could only interfere with evolutionary improvement<sup>338</sup>:

As time goes on we can win more, but we shall win it only in the same way, that is, by slow and painful toil and sacrifice, not by adopting some prophet's scheme

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<sup>336</sup> Persons, Stow. "Introduction." *Social Darwinism: Selected Essays*. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963). 8

<sup>337</sup> Sumner. "Sociology." 17-18

<sup>338</sup> Persons. "Introduction." 4

of the universe; therefore we have a right to ask that all social propositions which demand our attention shall be practical in the best sense, that is, that they shall aim to go forward in the limits and on the lines of sound development out of the past, and that none of our interests shall be put in jeopardy on the chance that Comte, or Spencer, or George, or anybody else has solved the world-problem aright. If anybody has a grievance against the social order, it is, on the simplest principles of common sense, the right of busy men whose attention he demands that he shall set forth in the sharpest and precisest manner that it is; any allegation of injustice which is vague is, by its own tenor, undeserving of attention.<sup>339</sup>

For Sumner the moral tenor of social non-intervention is clear: as human progress to a better future can only occur in conformity with the scientific laws governing that progress, claims of a moral imperative for social intervention are rendered nonsensical. This view meant that for Spencer, social science could not guide the evolution of society, but rather held only negative practical conclusions for the projects of social reform, which is to say, social science demanded that such projects, no matter how well intentioned, ought to be abandoned as at best futile and at worst posing deleterious consequences for human improvement, social and otherwise.<sup>340</sup>

Progress is a word which has no meaning save in view of the laws of population and the diminishing return, and it is quite natural that anyone who fails to understand those laws should fall into doubt which way progress points, whether towards wealth or poverty. The laws of population and the diminishing return, in their combination, are the iron spur which has driven the race on to all which it had ever achieved, and the fact that population ever advances, yet advances against a barrier which resists more stubbornly at every step of advance, unless it is removed to a new distance by some conquest of man over nature, is the guarantee that the task of civilization will never be ended, but that the need for more energy, more intelligence, and more virtue will never cease while the race lasts.<sup>341</sup>

Human progress occurs, certainly, but only within the limits of the process that yields improvement—evolution. To meddle with evolution's plan would be not only misguided, but wrong.

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<sup>339</sup> Sumner, William Graham. "The New Social Issue." *Social Darwinism: Selected Essays*. 164

<sup>340</sup> Hofstadter. *Social Darwinism in American Thought*. 43-44; Persons. "Introduction." 4

<sup>341</sup> Sumner. "Sociology." 16



This negative moral evaluation of the impulse for social reform by interventionist policy occurs through the conflation and collapse of the categories of the scientific and the moral. For Sumner, science tells us what happens according to the laws of the cosmos, which then must be good. Thus, in his essay, “The Concentration of Wealth: Its Economic Justification,” Sumner could argue that, since we obviously know that the concentration of wealth occurred, its occurrence can be considered evidence of the justice of the occurrence:

Now whenever such a change in the societal organization becomes possible it also becomes *inevitable*, because there is economy in it... we see that the highest degree of organization which is possible is the one that offers the maximum of profit; in it the economic advantage is greatest. There is therefore a gravitation toward this degree of organization. To make an artificial opposition to this tendency from political or alleged moral, or religious, or other motives would be to have no longer any rule of action; it would amount to submission to the control of warring motives without any real standards or tests.<sup>342</sup>

To assign normative opposition to a social process he considers inevitable the status of being artificial and therefore void can only be rendered coherent if the so-called “natural,” which is to say, that which is not artificial, is necessarily good. Such defining of the good in terms of natural properties and processes, an act which G.E. Moore in 1903 would later term the “naturalistic fallacy” in his *Principia Ethica*, would not be seen as either tautological or fallacious in terms of a conception of knowledge where the scientific and the normative were, in fact, united. Thus, the concentration of wealth under a *laissez-faire* system could not be critiqued normatively because it must necessarily be good on account of its occurrence without intentional assistance or interference, signifying its conformity with a process of evolution allegedly understood by science to improve the race:

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<sup>342</sup> Sumner, William Graham. “The Concentration of Wealth: Its Economic Justification.” *Social Darwinism: Selected Essays*. 154

To a correct understanding of our subject it is essential to recognize the concentration of wealth and control as a universal societal phenomenon, not merely as a matter of industrial power, or social sentiment, or political policy... Stated in the concisest terms, the phenomenon is that of a more perfect integration of all societal functions. The concentration of power (wealth), more dominant control, intenser discipline, and stricter methods are but modes of securing more perfect integration. When we perceive this we see that the concentration of wealth is but one feature of a grand step in societal evolution.<sup>343</sup>

For Sumner, critiquing, much less criticizing, these social operations that occurred naturally, i.e. without human opposition, would be akin to objecting to the operation of gravity on moral grounds.

Similarly, humanitarian concerns about poverty—and those persons who suffered from impoverishment—while perhaps a credit to the sympathetic individual, could only skew one's approach for the worse should such concerns lead to positive efforts to alleviate the poverty; not only was the road to hell paved with good intentions, these intentions themselves were in fact the map and compass of perdition. Evolutionary progress was one of competition and struggle, and human progress, a fundamentally moral progress, could only occur according to those self-same processes. If moral progress consisted so largely of, "the accumulation of economic virtues," then the impoverished are the natural casualty of this benevolent, if unforgiving, competition: "Let every man be sober, industrious, prudent, and wise, and bring up his children to so likewise, and poverty will be abolished in a few generations,"<sup>344</sup>.

Moreover, assistance of the obviously less fit, knowable by their lack of prosperity owing to a failure to compete effectively, would generally come at a cost to, and therefore by penalization of, the more successful:

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<sup>343</sup> Sumner. "The Concentration of Wealth: Its Economic Justification." 151

<sup>344</sup> Hofstadter. *Social Darwinism in American Thought*. 61

But nearly all the schemes for “improving the condition of the working man” involve an elevation of some working men at the expense of other working men. When you expend capital or labor to elevate some persons who come within the sphere of your influence, you interfere in the conditions of competition. The advantage of some is won by an equivalent loss of others. The difference is not brought about by the energy and effort of the persons themselves.<sup>345</sup>

Such schemes, given the normative evaluations of the successful and the unsuccessful and the fact that their divergent fates must necessarily stem from the possession or absence of moral economic virtues, would require hurting the good to benefit the bad, thereby interfering with the overall progression towards the good. The worst schemes would actively pursue social declension. Even the most benevolent of intentions could hardly justify such a moral calamity.

Rather, benefits to society would accrue not from intervening against the hardship of the poor, but by embracing the positive impact of the free operation of the economic virtues of the rich. In effect, these economic virtues are not only why captains of industry are well paid, but also why they should be so well paid.<sup>346</sup> Little surprise may be forthcoming to learn that many of the rich embraced this articulation of their social worth and the justness of their gains as a product of a larger plan, however one so conceived it. As stated by John D. Rockefeller:

The growth of a large business is merely a survival of the fittest... The American Beauty rose can be produced in the splendor and fragrance which bring cheer to its beholder only by sacrificing the early buds which grow up around it. This is not an evil tendency in business. It is merely the working-out of a law of nature and a law of God.<sup>347</sup>

Such a positive, not to say lofty, self-image might easily be mistaken for simple conceit from the unscientific point of view. Yet Rockefeller’s inherent worth as one enriched, so

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<sup>345</sup> Sumner, William Graham. “The Forgotten Man.” *Social Darwinism: Selected Essays*. 121

<sup>346</sup> Hofstadter. *Social Darwinism in American Thought*. 58

<sup>347</sup> Ibid. 45

to speak, by the proper execution of a divine plan might not be mere arrogance should the conformity of his role with the laws of nature—surely the product of God—be demonstrated scientifically. Sumner's theory offered just such a basis:

The millionaires are a product of natural selection, acting on the whole body of men to pick out those who can meet the requirement of certain work to be done. In this respect they are just like the great statesmen, or scientific men, or military men. It is because they are thus selected that wealth—both their own and that intrusted [sic] to them—aggregates under their hands.<sup>348</sup>

The wealthy are wealthy on account of the operation of the economic virtues that developed, part and parcel, with the competition of the business world, a competition the place of which in the order of things was sanctified by the understandings of how the fittest survived such competition in evolutionary science. Such competition, as acted out by the industrialists and other business men, yielded the progress that society sought and, as such, well meaning democratic politicians could only undermine this progress through misguided pursuit of unscientific ideologies.<sup>349</sup>

Far from being crass and inhumane, this view of Sumner and his disciples embodied, in their minds, the most disciplined approach to morality yet undertaken in history. Far from the rejection of moral purposes in politics, Sumner's purpose was to find a scientific morality for the greater benefit of man in general:

The law of the conservation of energy is not simply a law of physics; it is a law of the whole moral universe, and the order and truth of all things conceivable by man depends upon it. If there were any such liberty as that of doing as you have a mind to, the human race would be condemned to everlasting anarchy and war as these erratic wills crossed and clashed against each other. True liberty lies in the equilibrium of rights and duties, producing peace, order and harmony. As I have defined it, it means that a man's right to take power and wealth out of the social product is measured by the energy and wisdom which he has contributed to the social effort.<sup>350</sup>

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<sup>348</sup> Sumner. "The Concentration of Wealth: Its Economic Justification." 157

<sup>349</sup> Person. "Introduction." 5

<sup>350</sup> Sumner. "The Forgotten Man." 116-117

Such an argument against interventionist social policies comes as no mere apology for robber baronism. Rather, Sumner's argument raises the issue of by what criteria social decisions ought to be made should different moral viewpoints conflict with respect to their social prescriptions. For Sumner, if one moral view can be scientifically proven whereas the other cannot, then that view point must be correct and the one upon which people ought to act. If such a scientific determination were possible, as believed by the thinking of the time, then it would be morally required; how could there not be a moral obligation to make sure that one's morals are in fact correct?

Of course, such a conclusion depends upon the possibility that morality could be proved as a function of scientific law, a possibility taken for granted by the collapse of normative and scientific reasoning. This vision of morality, while creating in some a pessimistic view of the possibilities of politics or social reform to do good in the world, could at the same time excite its adherents with optimistic visions of a more moral future. As the leading social reformer Charles Loring Brace put it, "For if the Darwinian theory be true, the law of natural selection applies to all the moral history of mankind, as well as the physical. Evil must die ultimately as the weaker element, in the struggle with good,"<sup>351</sup>. Such a statement reveals the utter faith that material progress must be good, yet attributes that conclusion to the understandings of science itself. In fact, science describes the principles by which material things happen; faith that that which happens must be good must be supplied from some other source.

Yet such faith in progress ought not be surprising in a thought process that not only fails to differentiate but may even demand the conformity of normative and

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<sup>351</sup> Quoted in Hofstadter. *Social Darwinism in American Thought*. 16

empirical truth. If the truth could be good, and material progress proceeds by scientific laws which are by their nature true, then how could progress not likewise be good? Sumner's social science offered a system as elegant as it was intuitive to the closely held beliefs of the time such that its truth may well have seemed self-evident.<sup>352</sup> Sumner's pessimism in political policy interventions in society can be understood, in effect, as a byproduct of his faith in a greater order of things:

Inasmuch as this would call reason and conscience into play, there might really be some hope that we might gain something toward doing away with social war; but that democracy can solve the antagonisms in the newest order of things, can adjust the rights of the contending interests by a series of "ethical" decisions, or that it can, by siding with one party, give it a victory over the other, and thereby found a stable social order, it is folly to believe.<sup>353</sup>

For Sumner, to meddle with natural processes for moral reasons could only serve to undermine those self-same purposes. As shall be seen, the idea that human agency can only interfere with evolutionary progress, rather than manifest itself as an outcome thereof, may well be and was debated. America's history of using Darwinian evolution, rightly or wrongly, as the basis for social and political policy, however, cannot be gainsaid.

### **Scientific Humanity: Eugenics and the Progress of the Race**

Debate about the proper way to implement knowledge gleaned from evolutionary theory notwithstanding, it ought not to be surprising if we expect that scientific means ought to promote moral ends. The critical concept to be here grasped, then, is how the scientific understanding becomes understood to influence the moral conception not just of the ends of social policy, but of humanity itself. The confluence of

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<sup>352</sup> Not to say apodictical.

<sup>353</sup> Sumner. "Social War in democracy." *Social Darwinism: Selected Essays*. 64

a new scientific basis for understanding society and the materialistic progression offered by the theory of evolution lent itself quite easily to a theory of the betterment of society through the betterment of the human race as a material quantity. That is to say, through science, society would be improved by an improvement of the human stock, to which political policy would necessarily need a voice.

In this vein, it was Francis Galton, Darwin's cousin, who first coined the term "eugenics" in his 1883 book, *Inquiries into Human Faculty and Development*. Building on his belief of the general inferiority of blacks to whites in terms of both "intelligence and other hereditary traits fitted to civilized life,"<sup>354</sup> Galton had set about nearly two decades before publication what he believed to be the science of human breeding denoted by the term.<sup>355</sup> Moreover, Galton was not alone in his investigations of the hereditary nature, and hence biological basis, of the proper propensities in people supportive of civilization. In America, 1877 saw the publication of the social reformer Richard Dugdale's study of "the Jukes" which, in investigating the causes of crime, concluded that degeneracy runs in families.<sup>356</sup>

For Galton, an understanding of the biological basis of the traits most conducive to civilized life meant that human effort could facilitate the process—"what Nature does blindly, slowly, and ruthlessly, man may do providently, quickly, and kindly,"—and even improve upon and replace it: "I conceive it to fall well within his province to replace Natural Selection by other processes that are more merciful and not less effective,"<sup>357</sup>. Interestingly, such optimism for the possibilities science offered for the betterment of the

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<sup>354</sup> Larson. *Evolution*. 154

<sup>355</sup> Ibid. 179

<sup>356</sup> Ibid. 182

<sup>357</sup> Quoted in: Ibid. 1; 181

race failed to color Sumner's own thoughts on the matter. Though in agreement that evolution held the key to the progress of civilization, Sumner stressed the "negative" eugenics of permitting the demise of the inferior portions of society. Rather than cultivating the superior classes of people and protecting them from regression as Galton sought to do, Sumner looked to evolution to cull the inherently uncivilized:

Vice is its own curse. If we let nature alone, she cures vice by the most frightful penalties. It may shock you to hear me say it, but when you get over the shock, it will do you good to think about it: a drunkard in the gutter is just where he ought to be. Nature is working away at him to get him out of the way, just as she sets up her processes of dissolution to remove whatever is a failure in its line.<sup>358</sup>

In this way, though agreeing with Galton that civilization depended upon traits hereditary in origin, Sumner located beneficence in the natural processes of evolution rather than the buttressing of such heredity by human design. Perhaps the departure rests in an American adherence to egalitarianism; whereas Galton sought the segregation of the good from the bad for the good of the reproduction of society—and the good for society that an appropriate selection of who does and does not get to reproduce provides—Sumner looked to evolution to provide for the general improvement of the race by leaving behind those who would prove unfit:

The sociologist is often asked if he wants to kill off certain classes of troublesome and burdensome persons. No such inference follows from any sound sociological doctrine, but it is allowed to infer, as to a great many persons and classes, that it would have been better for society, and would have involved no pain to them if they had never been born.<sup>359</sup>

This understanding of racial improvement, of course, required a sincere faith in progress or, more precisely, faith that progress was good. Specifically, though, it required a faith

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<sup>358</sup> Sumner. "The Forgotten Man." 122

<sup>359</sup> Sumner. "Sociology." 25



in the natural element of progress—that is to say, that progress occur by nature—rendering the possibilities of policy to uplift the species generally moot.

Although Sumner's own social Darwinism eschewed social intervention in its myriad forms, the general thrust of his view encouraged others that, if civilization could not be improved by social policy directly, it might still be possible to catalyze the evolutionary process by speeding the destruction of the unfit. In an ironic embrace of natural progress at once elegant and grotesque, negative eugenics seemed to allow a social intervention that remained consistent with the natural process of evolution; what could be more natural than preventing the unfit from reproducing—is this not precisely how evolution operated anyway? Accordingly, even social reformers and social workers interested themselves in the relationship between biology and heredity; in his aforementioned speech in 1895 on “The Relation of Universities to Charity and Reformatory Work,” William Brewer could state confidently that:

As applied to the breeding of our domestic animals, we have laws formulated and reasonably well understood. And these same laws apply to mankind. As regards the defective, the matter is already well understood by the expert. As I listened to your discussions over the feeble-minded and the sad facts relating to their origin, I was impressed anew by the facts you stated.

There are breeds of men as truly as there are breeds of horses; and much, if not indeed most, of your work relates to the care and training of the poorer breeds of mankind. Of the ninety-six thousand idiots and feeble-minded in our country, an enormous proportion are so by heredity, have been bred so from idiotic and weak-minded parents. It is not an uncommon thing in our poorhouses to find idiot paupers of two, three, and even four generations' growth. A wider diffusion of scientific knowledge and a more enlightened public sentiment will greatly reduce their number in the coming century.<sup>360</sup>

The rediscovery of Mendel's law in 1900 only bolstered the popular faith that humans could at least prevent the transmission of unwanted traits into future generations: “More

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<sup>360</sup> Brewer. “The Relation of Universities to Charity and to Reformatory Work.” 148

children from the fit, less from the unfit,' became the motto of a new generation of eugenicists,"<sup>361</sup>. Indiana became the first state to pass a sterilization law in 1907 and by 1915 twelve states had adopted such laws; moreover, the "National Conference on Race Betterment in 1914 shows how thoroughly eugenic ideal had gone in medicine, colleges, social work and charitable organizations,"<sup>362</sup>. "The Jukes," Dugdale's study of the hereditary basis of crime was revised and reprinted in 1915 by The Eugenics Record Office at the Carnegie Institution's Cold Spring Harbor genetics lab and there were even proposals for state programs, "to sterilize one tenth of the population of every generation,"<sup>363</sup>. To popularize the issue, William Randolph Hearst produced a propaganda film called *The Black Stork* in 1917, rereleased in 1927 as *Are You Fit to Marry?*, in which a mother, struck by visions of the life of poverty and illness that awaited her newborn infant on account of the unknown hereditary taint transmitted by her husband, makes a plea for the doctor to euthanize the child to save him from such a fate.<sup>364</sup>

For many, this evidence of heredity as the key to degeneracy swamped other possible causes. As Hofstadter notes, "Karl Pearson attributed 90% man's capacity to heredity. Henry Goddard attributed to feeble-mindedness the responsibility for paupers, criminals, prostitutes and drunkards,"<sup>365</sup>. Ironically for a movement stemming from Sumner's faith that evolution led naturally to the improvement of human society, the

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<sup>361</sup> Larson. *Evolution*. 184

<sup>362</sup> Hofstadter. *Social Darwinism in American Thought*. 162

<sup>363</sup> Larson. *Evolution*. 191; 194

<sup>364</sup> The film was based on the real life refusal of physician and eugencist Harry J Haiselden to administer care to a boy he judged to be defective.

<sup>365</sup> Ibid. 164

eugenics movement behaved as though immediate action were needed to avoid the crisis posed by degeneracy:

Early eugenicists tacitly accepted that identification of the “fit” with the upper classes and the “unfit” with the lower that had been characteristic of the older social Darwinism. Their warnings about the multiplication of morons at the lower end of the social scale, and their habit of speaking of the “fit” as if they were all native, well-to-do, college-trained citizens, sustained the old belief that the poor are held down by biological deficiency instead of environmental conditions. Their almost exclusive focus upon the physical and medical aspects of human life helped to distract public attention from the broad problems of social welfare. They were also in large part responsible for the emphasis upon preserving the “racial stock” as a means of national salvation—an emphasis so congenial to militant nationalists like Theodore Roosevelt. They differed, however, from earlier social Darwinists in that they failed to draw sweeping laissez-faire conclusions; indeed a part of their own program depended upon state action. Still, they were almost equally conservative in the general bias; and so authoritative did their biological data seem that they were convincing to men like E. A. Ross who had thoroughly repudiated Spencerian individualism.<sup>366</sup>

So great became the certainty, not to say faith, in the scientific basis of a more perfect society that eugenics could be considered part of the normal approach to social regulation. By 1935, thirty-two states had compulsory sterilization laws and nearly every state instituted programs to segregate those with hereditary defects from the general population; more than sixty-thousand people would be sterilized under these laws.<sup>367</sup> Famously, the practice of eugenics as policy famously received sanction from no less than Oliver Wendell Homes, Jr., in the case of *Buck v. Bell*:

The attack is not upon the procedure but upon the substantive law. It seems to be contended that in no circumstances could such an order be justified. It certainly is contended that the order cannot be justified upon the existing grounds. The judgment finds the facts that have been recited and that Carrie Buck “is the probable potential parent of socially inadequate offspring, likewise afflicted, that she may be sexually sterilized without detriment to her general health and that her welfare and that of society will be promoted by her sterilization,” and thereupon makes the order. In view of the general declarations of the legislature and the specific findings of the Court, obviously we cannot say as matter of law that the

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<sup>366</sup> Ibid. 163-164

<sup>367</sup> Larson. *Evolution*. 193

grounds do not exist, and if they exist they justify the result. We have seen more than once that the public welfare may call upon the best citizens for their lives. It would be strange if it could not call upon those who already sap the strength of the State for these lesser sacrifices, often not felt to be such by those concerned, in order to prevent our being swamped with incompetence. It is better for all the world, if instead of waiting to execute degenerate offspring for crime, or to let them starve for their imbecility, society can prevent those who are manifestly unfit from continuing their kind. The principle that sustains compulsory vaccination is broad enough to cover cutting the Fallopian tubes. *Jacobson v. Massachusetts*, 197 U.S. 11. Three generations of imbeciles are enough.<sup>368</sup>

It is perhaps unfair Holmes has been unfairly maligned as a eugenicist himself for this infamous decree which, rather than instituting eugenics policy merely, as per the powers of the court, upheld its constitutionality. The legal nature of the ruling, though, underscores the prevalence of the acceptance of the normative claims of the science of the times. Specifically, in noting that the claim concerns substantive due process, the Court rejects the notion that eugenic policy must necessarily be deemed invalid on its face, that is to say, that there could be no proper way of instituting the policy; regardless of whether or not such a ruling constitutes an endorsement of eugenics, it implicitly accepts the premise that such policy may possibly promote the social good and is therefore a valid exercise of the legislative power.

### **Darwinism as Discursive Plane for Social Theory**

That the survival of these alleged mysgonic misfits might actually indicate fitness in the progressing society by virtue of their survival itself, of course, was not considered in this initial analysis of social evolution as science.<sup>369</sup> Contemporary understandings of Darwinian evolutionary theory suggest great flexibility in the possible modes of interaction between organisms and their ecological niches in a dynamic symbiotic

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<sup>368</sup> *Buck v. Bell*, 274 U.S. 200 (1927)

<sup>369</sup> Larson. *Evolution*. 187

relationship. Those who insisted that Darwinian evolution demanded certain specific policy prescriptions failed to recognize that they had supplied the normative texture of the theory. In the progressive isomorphism of social ideas and structures, people often interpret ideas through the lens of their understanding of their social structure, and the case of Darwinian evolution is no different.<sup>370</sup> Working backwards, those who advocated conservatism on evolutionary grounds were insisting that, because they knew what was right, and because evolution was true, evolution must scientifically support and therefore conform to their normative vision of society. That is to say, the true science must necessarily align with true morality, and vice versa, and both should yield the same policy prescriptions. In this case, on account of the disciples of Spencer reversing their understanding of “natural” to mean that which they already understood to be right<sup>371</sup>, the social theorists of the time would claim that nothing less than the structure of the cosmos supported their belief in the correctness of their approach to social policy:

The essential elements of political economy are only corollaries of special cases of sociological principles. One who has command of the law of the conservation of energy as it manifests itself in society is armed at once against socialism, protectionism, paper money, and a score of other economic fallacies. The sociological view of political economy also includes whatever is sound in the dogmas of the “historical school” and furnishes what that school is apparently groping after.<sup>372</sup>

In this view, the operations of society stem from the laws of physics themselves, and insofar as these can be understood, we ought to enact policy in conformity with said laws. This insight apparently means that there should be as little active or interventionist policy as possible, as policy manifests itself as interference with these laws which bring us optimal improvement through evolutionary progress: “We do not need to resist all change

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<sup>370</sup> Hofstadter. *Social Darwinism in American Thought*. 203-4

<sup>371</sup> *Ibid.* 80

<sup>372</sup> Sumner. “Sociology.” 21

or discussion—that is not conservatism. We may, however, be sure that the only possible good for society must come of evolution not of revolution,”<sup>373</sup>.

What came to be seen by some as a critical error in this approach was that it assumed that human beings could somehow operate outside of these natural laws and could resist the natural process. From another point of view, our social behavior might well be understood to be part of our nature as a species, and as such, a part of nature and its attendant processes. This insight, however, was not lost on a later generation of social “progressive” reformers who insisted upon reappropriating science and for their own normative goals.<sup>374</sup> In contradistinction to Sumner, who insisted that social evolution left to its own devices must necessarily yield a normative good, John Dewey suggested that human normative ends need not and do not conform to the “struggle” aspect of evolution but actually stand opposed to it:

The position taken by [noted social Darwinist] Huxley, so far as it concerns us here, may be summed up as follows: The *rule* of the cosmic process is struggle and strife. The rule of the ethical process is sympathy and co-operation. The *end* of the cosmic principle is the survival of the fittest; that of the ethical, the fitting of as many as possible to survive. Before the ethical tribunal the cosmic process stands condemned. The two processes are not only incompatible but even opposed to each other.<sup>375</sup>

For Dewey, then, the accomplishment of normative goals must come from active human effort. Interestingly, though, this does not lead Dewey to move normative theory outside of the evolutionary process. Reconceiving humanity within the evolutionary context, Dewey instead reinserts human effort back into the process by which that which is favored is selected:

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<sup>373</sup> Sumner. “The New Social Issue.” 163

<sup>374</sup> An effort which, as shall be seen, suffers from the same normative flaws as does Sumner’s attempt to ground morality in the logic of science, precisely because of the inherent problems attendant melding rational and normative conceptions of ends.

<sup>375</sup> Dewey, John. “Evolution and Ethics.” *Social Darwinism in American Thought*. 180

We reach precisely the same conclusion with respect to “selection” that we have reached with reference to the cognate ideas—“fit” and “struggle for existence.” It is found in the ethical process as it is in the cosmic, and it operates in the same way. So far as conditions have changed, so far as the environment is indefinitely more complex, wider, and more variable, so far of necessity and as a biological and cosmic matter, not merely an ethical one, the functions selected differ.<sup>376</sup>

In this view, if humans behave in the ways that they do because they are found to be preferable for ethical or other normative reasons, then that, in itself, does not disqualify them from being deemed fit by the operation of selection. If ethical principles lead more people to survive, that does not mean that evolution has been subverted, but rather that that for which the operations of evolution are selected has been altered by the fact of human ethical principles; there is nothing in the theory of evolution that justifies moving the processes of human thought, normative or otherwise, outside of the system as the social Darwinists appear to do.

Reversing the argument of the social Darwinists while retaining the authority of evolutionary science, Dewey identifies the flaw in the removal of human activity, including social and political intervention, from what is considered the natural evolutionary process:

In other words, the chief objection to this “naturalistic” ethics is that it overlooks the fact that, even from the Darwinian point of view, the human *animal* is a *human* animal. It forgets that the sympathetic and social instincts, those which cause the individual to take the interests of others for his own and thereby to restrain his sheer brute self-assertiveness, are the highest achievements, the high-water mark of evolution. The theory urges a systematic relapse to lower forgone stages of biological development.<sup>377</sup>

As such, human ethics are part and parcel of human evolution. Accordingly, human behavior and social policy motivated by said ethics in the name of human norms can, and

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<sup>376</sup> Ibid., 193

<sup>377</sup> Dewey. “Self-Assertion.” *Social Darwinism in American Thought*. 197

perhaps must, be selected for—or rather, those norms and attendant behaviors that are selected by the process of evolution must be evolutionarily fit.

Of special note here is the fact that the Progressives did not reject evolutionary theory when it was alleged to oppose their normative goals, but rather sought to reappropriate the science for their own social view and ends. One could easily imagine a rejection of a scientific theory that seemed to oppose what the Progressives felt to be right. Similarly, Dewey could have persisted in the argument that norms are something quite different from material processes. However, in a move analogous to that of the social Darwinists, the Progressives sought to use Darwinian evolutionary theory to demonstrate that their normative social theory was scientific. The Progressives did not dispute the scientific criteria of evaluation, or rather, justification for normative viewpoints and consequent policy prescriptions put forth by the social Darwinists, but rather embraced it as justifying their own positions. That the viewpoint in question might be considered nearly diametrically opposed to that of the *laissez-faire* social Darwinists simply underscores the popular perception that social theory had to be scientific. In fact, Robert Bannister has argued that the progressives who accused their opponents of being social Darwinists were every bit as guilty of engaging in practices that could be dubbed socially Darwinistic, if not even more so given how they argued that Darwinian evolutionary theory suggested a social organism that demanded a more integrated, interpersonal social theory as the basis of social policy.<sup>378</sup> Bannister goes even further to argue that social Darwinism is a misnomer, insofar as it was simply an epithet used for political purposes to discredit one's opponents and none of the participants seemed to be

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<sup>378</sup> Bannister, Robert C. *Social Darwinism: Science and Myth in Anglo-American Social Thought*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979)



articulating an accurate understanding of the new science anyway. This contention, however, misses the point of the epithet itself: that the political discourse of the time was such that the scientific theory was wielded in the name of normatively directed social policy. As such, while holding substantially different views on policy, both the *laissez-faire* social Darwinists and the Progressives shared the view that science and normative truth must coincide in yielding political policy prescriptions.

It is the juxtaposition of divergent purposes each claiming, apparently, the same scientific truth for foundational support that brings into sharp relief the commonality of the belief that Darwinian science must yield normative conclusions for policy; the disparity in what ought to be identical is striking. That such different social prescriptions, be it the law of tooth and nail in the struggle towards progress for the Sumnerites or the progress of the social organism as a collectivist entity for the Progressives, raises the possibility previously posed that these prescriptions were read onto the theory rather than deduced there from. While scientists may disagree upon the product of their method, the scientific method itself contains the means of resolving conflict between competing claims. That no such grounds for such resolution here exist suggests that the conclusions came from outside the system of thought, which is to say that the conclusions are not properly speaking scientific. For each camp, though, the apparent conformity of science and policy prescription brought the certainty to push politically for the respective platforms. Not uninterestingly, each approach, girded with scientific fact, advocated rather callous treatment for those understood—scientifically understood—to be socially undesirable, an advocacy shielded from both sympathy and regret as only possible through the machinations of moral certainty.

The approach of the Sumnerites located the good in the natural, the natural understood to be that which existed on its own. That that which existed must then be good, and to call into question the sufficiency or moral stature of the way things were would be tantamount to an indictment of existence itself:

“Poverty belongs to the struggle for existence, and we are all born into that struggle.” If poverty is ever to be abolished, it will be by a more energetic prosecution of the struggle, and not by social upheaval or paper plans for a new order. Human progress is at bottom moral progress, and moral progress is largely the accumulation of economic virtues. “Let every man be sober, industrious, prudent, and wise, and bring up his children to so likewise, and poverty will be abolished in a few generations.”<sup>379</sup>

The issue of desirability, much less the point of view of the different locations of members of a society, becomes irrelevant to understanding the civilization and its future.

This process must necessarily be considered good, as such is the way of the world.

The objectives of the social reformers, therefore, contradicted the nature of the world. Conflict, in Sumner’s terms, is not a social problem but rather an ontological reality: “[W]henever you talk of liberty, you must have *two* men in mind. The sphere of rights of one of these men trenches upon that of the other, and whenever you establish liberty for the one, you repress the other,”<sup>380</sup>. Attempts to alleviate poverty made the mistake of thinking that conflict, the process by which there come to be winners who prosper and, more to the point, losers who succumb to poverty, is something to be corrected fails to grasp the social calculus inherent in such efforts:

In any case the right to the full product of labor would be contradictory to the right to an existence, for, if the full product of labor of some falls short of what is necessary to maintain their existence, then they must encroach upon the full labor product of others, that is, impair the right of the latter.<sup>381</sup>

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<sup>379</sup> Hofstadter. *Social Darwinism in American Thought*. 6. (citing Sumner. “The Challenge of Facts” and “Essays I”)

<sup>380</sup> Sumner. “The Forgotten Man.” 115

<sup>381</sup> Sumner. “Some Natural Rights.” *Social Darwinism: Selected Essays*. 68

Intervention into social struggle manifests itself not as bringing aid to the suffering, but taking sides in a competition that is both necessary and good.

### **Moral (of) Evolution**

More specifically, attempts at social reform not only took sides in the battle for the future of civilization, but took sides against the economically virtuous upon whom the future hopes of society hinged.<sup>382</sup> The appeal of this progress-by-struggle theory of society to the efforts of society's winners to conserve *laissez-faire* requires little explanation. Yet beyond the palliative that this view of Darwinian evolution offered to the harsh reconciling of fellow humans to hardship, Sumner lent the rejection of social intervention a moral imperative: to intervene would be to intervene in that which makes for good in this world. For Sumner, the source of good for humans in society was those economic virtues that were recognized to contribute to success:

The only two things which really tell on the welfare of a man on earth are hard work and self-denial (in technical language, labor and capital), and these tell most when they are brought to bear directly upon the effort to earn an honest living, to accumulate capital, and to bring up a family of children to be industrious and self-denying in their turn.<sup>383</sup>

The success, and therefore demonstrable fitness, of such virtuous folk ironically draws the focus of political policy not only away from them as the crux of social welfare, but also at specific expense to them:

Such is the Forgotten Man. He works, he votes, generally he prays—but he always pays—yes, above all, he pays. He does not want an office; his name never gets into the newspaper except when he gets married or dies. He keeps production going on. He contributes to the strength of the parties. He is flattered before election. He is strongly patriotic. He is wanted, whenever, in his little

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<sup>382</sup> Persons. "Introduction." 7

<sup>383</sup> Sumner. "Sociology." 24

circle, there is work to be done or counsel to be given. He may grumble some occasionally to his wife and family, but he does not frequent the grocery or talk politics in the tavern. Consequently, he is forgotten. He is a complacent man. He gives no trouble. He excites no admiration. He is in no way a hero (like a popular orator); or a problem (like tramps and outcasts); nor notorious (like criminals); not an object out of which social capital may be made (like the beneficiaries of church and state charities); nor an object for charitable aid and protection (like animals treated with cruelty); nor the object of a job (like the ignorant and illiterate); nor one over whom sentimental economists and statesmen can parade their fine sentiments (like inefficient workmen and shiftless artisans). Therefore, he is forgotten. All the burdens fall on him, or on her, for it is time to remember that the Forgotten Man is not seldom a woman.<sup>384</sup>

Politics becomes morally perverse in Sumner's rendering of progress by channeling goodwill in ways that harm the source of good itself:

Every particle of capital which is wasted on the vicious, the idle, and the shiftless is so much taken from the capital available to reward the independent and productive laborer. But we stand with our backs to the independent and productive laborer all the time. We do not remember him because he makes no clamor; but I appeal to you whether he is not the man who ought to be remembered first of all, and whether, on any sound social theory, we ought not to protect him against the burdens of the good-for-nothing.<sup>385</sup>

If policy is intervention and society is struggle, policy can only help one competitor against another. Insofar as the assistance must come through costs imposed upon the other, then only two political choices besides nonintervention are available: help the poor at a cost to the successful, or help the successful at a cost to the poor. In Sumner's formulation, the former does harm to the good portion of society, which is a contradiction for the morally inclined, and the latter is unnecessary by definition.<sup>386</sup> A moral politics is

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<sup>384</sup> Sumner. "The Forgotten Man." 132

<sup>385</sup> Ibid. 119-120

<sup>386</sup> Cf. this statement, attributed to Rush Limbaugh, which is tongue in cheek to be sure, but just as surely of common ancestry: "We must tax the poor. This is not hardhearted and mean. It is axiomatic that if you subsidize an activity or condition you get more of it; if you tax it you get less of it. Obviously, we want to eliminate poverty, and there is the one method that has never been tried: tax it. The poor represent a promising new revenue stream. More money to the Treasury, and the lessening of poverty at the same time." Retrieved on October 30<sup>th</sup>, 2008 from <http://www.rushonline.com/topics/r25.htm>

the politics that stays itself from causing well-intentioned harm; the moral policy is no policy at all.

The only appropriate politics for a society that would choose to live well as opposed to merely live, as per Aristotle's understanding of politics, is that which allows the good to go about their proverbial business.<sup>387</sup> Note the distinction between allowing people to do their work freely rather than, say, enabling them to do so, as such people require no such support. "Civil liberty is the status of the man who is guaranteed by law and civil institutions the exclusive employment of all his own powers for his own welfare,"<sup>388</sup>. The good needs little politics because the good is that which survives naturally under normal competition. What little political activity upon which the good, embodied by the successful people of society, rests is the prevention of threats to fair competition:

We see that under a régime of liberty and equality before law, we get the highest possible development of independence, self-reliance, individual energy, and enterprise, but we get these high social virtues at the expense of the old sentimental ties which used to unite baron and retainer, master and servant, sage and disciple, comrade and comrade.<sup>389</sup>

*Laissez-faire*, then, would maintain the freedom and fairness of the competition which naturally, as known by Darwin's theory of evolution, develops the best individuals who best benefit society by those selfsame traits that make them the product of the process of evolution and wellspring of progress. By intervening in favor of the inferior individuals at the expense of the successful, efforts at social reform not only stymie progress, but worsen society by enhancing the prospects of inferior individuals, identified as having

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<sup>387</sup> Again, note the failure to recognize that to live at all is to survive and qualify by definition as fit in evolutionary terms, if not the normative view of the times.

<sup>388</sup> Sumner. "The Forgotten Man." 116

<sup>389</sup> Ibid. 117

inferior social and economic traits by virtue of their failure to succeed, and allowing them to thrive. The fostering of a society increasingly comprised of inferior members could hardly be seen as an appropriate moral undertaking.

### **Evolution of Morals**

The approach of the Progressives, on the other hand, looked at the environment not as merely a cause of the evolution of individuals in society, but also as the product of human action and something that could be positively manipulated.<sup>390</sup> As Dewey put forth concerning the place of the human with respect to nature:

Thus considering the illustration, the thought suggests itself that we do not have here in reality a conflict of man as man with his entire natural environment. We have rather the modification by man of one part of the environment with reference to another part. Man does not set himself against the state of nature. He utilizes one part of this state in order to control another part. It still holds that "nature is made better by no mean, but nature makes that mean." The plants which the gardener introduces, the vegetables and fruits he wishes to cultivate, may indeed be foreign to this particular environment; but they are not alien to man's environment as a whole. He introduces and maintains by art conditions of sunlight and moisture to which this particular plot of ground is unaccustomed; but these conditions fall within the wont and use of nature as a whole.<sup>391</sup>

If the environment that spurs the evolution of man is not exogenous in its form and function but rather a function of human behavior, than any good (or harm) brought about by evolution must necessarily also be a function of human undertaking. In this formulation, then, if progress occurs by struggle in society it is not because that struggle is natural *per se* but rather because humans structured society in that way. For Dewey, then, the principle upon which evolution rests means not that, left to its own devices,

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<sup>390</sup> Hofstadter. *Social Darwinism in American Thought*. 123-124

<sup>391</sup> Dewey. "Social Darwinism." 181

evolution will select traits of intrinsic merit, but that what is fit is itself a product of the contextual social environment of human construction<sup>392</sup>:

When Huxley says that “the macrocosm is pitted against the microcosm; that man is subduing nature to his higher ends; that the history of civilization details the steps by which we have succeeded in building up an artificial world within the cosmos; that there lies within man a fund of energy operating intelligently and so far akin to that which pervades the universe that it is competent to influence and modify the cosmic process,”—he says to my mind that man is an organ of the cosmic process in effecting its *own* progress. This progress consists essentially in making over a part of the environment by relating it more intimately to the environment as a whole; not, once more, in man setting himself against that environment.<sup>393</sup>

In this way, Dewey attempts to bring a new ethical order to the apparent conflict between morality and science.<sup>394</sup> Dewey’s effort brought him not to label science morally inert, but rather to identify society as a kind of larger organism itself the product of evolutionary forces. In this way, Darwinian evolution lends Dewey’s pragmatism a kind of moral *gravitas* by disallowing the political abdication of responsibility for the environment through which evolution will occur and imbuing this normative formulation with the certainty of science.<sup>395</sup>

Although Dewey himself opposed *laissez-faire*, these new movements in thought did not discredit the theory in the minds of many, but rather led to a reconsideration of the role of human effort in maintaining conditions of competition (e.g. preventing monopoly).<sup>396</sup> Yet such a view inherently contradicts the notion that the competition

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<sup>392</sup> That the criticism of the social Darwinists that Dewey makes here so closely aligns itself with Berger’s definition of alienation, i.e. that alienation is the failure to realize that we are made for the world just as the world as made for us (and by us, of course), is instructive to the religious texture to the arguments about evolution in question. Berger. *The Sacred Canopy*. 3-28

<sup>393</sup> Dewey. “Social Darwinism.” 182

<sup>394</sup> Hofstadter. *Social Darwinism in American Thought*. 138-139

<sup>395</sup> Hofstadter notes, in fact, that Dewey attributed the development of instrumentalism in his thought to ideas that emerged from his attempts to reconcile ethically the seemingly differing aims of morality and science.

<sup>396</sup> *Ibid.* 120

valued by Americans was itself natural. Rather, if Americans wished for those with the traits well adapted to economic competition to succeed then they must craft political policy and institutions to favor such individuals. This new view, though embracing Sumner's conservative policy allegiance, sought the policy in question through an understanding of politics more similar to Dewey's in that individual success would be a product of social situation, itself a product of human effort and design. Ironically, though, this politics of Dewey's was itself based upon his understanding of Darwinian evolution, just a very different understanding than that held by Sumner. In this socially dynamic understanding, that which is fit is not innate precisely because of the social nature of the context:

Just because the acts of which the promptings and impulses are the survival, were the fittest for by-gone days they are not the fittest now. The struggle comes, not in suppressing them nor in substituting something else for them; but in reconstituting them, in adapting them, so that they will function with reference to the existing situation.<sup>397</sup>

If that which is fit is not static but a product of the social environment, then the fit will change as society changes. Therefore, progress manifests as the changing characteristics of what is fit:

That which was fit among the animals is not fit among human beings, not merely because the animals were nonmoral and man is moral, but because the conditions of life have changed, and because there is no way to define the term "fit" excepting through these conditions. The environment is now distinctly a social one, and the content of the term "fit" has to be made with reference to social adaptation. Moreover, the environment in which we now live is a changing and progressive one. Every one must have his fitness judged by the whole, including the anticipated change; not merely by reference to the conditions of today, because these may be gone tomorrow. If one is fitted simply to the present, he is not fitted to survive. He is sure to go under. A part of his fitness will consist in that very flexibility which enables him to adjust himself without too much loss to sudden and unexpected changes in his surroundings. We have then no reason here to oppose the ethical process to the natural process. The demand is for those

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<sup>397</sup> Dewey. "Social Darwinism." 187-188



who are fit for the conditions of existence in one case as well as in the other. It is the conditions which have changed.<sup>398</sup>

Any hope for progress, in this view, requires that the ethical be resituated within evolutionary thinking. As Dewey states, the processes of the ethical and the natural are not opposed, nor could they be. The ethical progress of society demands the development of circumstances that make the ethical fit.

Of course, this formulation, though perhaps even an accurate rendering of the progression civilization and culture, obscures the unknowability of the good through material science in its recognition of the necessity for the good, if it is to be realized, to become a product of evolutionary process. Thus, Dewey employs Darwinian evolution to demonstrate that for society as a whole to progress towards good, this progress must occur through active political involvement in constructing the society that is both cause and effect of evolution. From there, Dewey quite easily asserts the ethical mandate to pursue the good in this way. What the theory lacks is the criteria for determining how society ought to direct its efforts. A scientific explanation of the progression of forces contains nowhere in its theory or approach to knowledge of reality a reason for joy, *per se*; Newton's Laws are not cause for celebration—they just *are*. Conversely, though he asserts a basis in science, Dewey's pragmatism reveals a large measure of faith in progress itself; without such teleological faith that progress will find the good, such instrumental experimentation on society—on people—could easily be considered terribly callous. In fact, in keeping with the historical trend, the Progressive Age saw Darwinian arguments concerning a vision of the social organism as bolstering policy for eugenics as

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<sup>398</sup> Ibid. 184

a means of safeguarding society's collective destiny and imperial expansion as a product of group survival.<sup>399</sup>

Ultimately, the collapse of science and human values is brought into sharp relief by the fact that, once science increased in prominence, it was felt that social policy must necessarily conform to its dictates. As Darwinian evolution took its place at the pinnacle of the biologically oriented sciences, so then would the moral, the ethical and the political be required to conform to its principles, regardless of how tortuous the imposition of that apparent conformity might in retrospect seem. A more developed understanding of science might suggest that science does not have normative dictates, but rather understandings of processes. One may decide that that which is scientifically observable—reality itself—is good, but that is a normative assessment from outside the system and, arguably, an element of faith.<sup>400</sup> Taking the various political combatants as an aggregate, the striking feature common to their thinking is that a scientific approach to politics will necessarily yield the proper ethical solution—an is from an ought that might make Hume quit philosophy in concession of defeat. Yet such thinking is not odd in the American context where faith and rationality may coexist and even coincide rather than necessarily collide, yielding even a faith *in* rationality and the demands for a rational basis for faith. Sumner himself, who argues the correctness of his normative prescriptions based on the neutrality of his science, has been seen to collapse the approaches. As Hofstadter puts it:

I have said that social Darwinism was a secularist philosophy, but in one important respect this needs qualification. For social Darwinism of the hard-bitten sort represented by men like Sumner embodied a vision of life and, if the phrase will be admitted, expressed a kind of secular piety that commands our

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<sup>399</sup> Hofstadter. *Social Darwinism in American Thought*. 172

<sup>400</sup> Cf. Judaism.

attention. Sumner, and no doubt after him all those who at one time or another were impressed by his views, were much concerned to face up to the hardness of life, to the impossibility of finding easy solutions for human ills, to the necessity of labor and self-denial and the inevitability of suffering. Theirs is a kind of naturalistic Calvinism in which man's relation to nature is as hard and demanding as man's relation to God under the Calvinistic system. This secular piety found its practical expression in an economic ethic that seemed to be demanded with special urgency by a growing industrial society which was calling up all the labor and capital it could muster to put to work on its vast unexploited resources.<sup>401</sup>

Indeed, it is perhaps through the sheer intellectual force of the proponents that the quasi—or in some cases, explicit—religious or theological roots of the theories drop out of focus. These theories look to a scientific understanding of the development of human beings from nature and the development of society with an eye to progress and, especially, for Dewey, “growth.” To use Dewey as an example, his call to think about political problems through empirical scientific approaches on account of the fact that, “[t]he formation of states must be an experimental process,”<sup>402</sup> must be seen within the context of his utter faith in progress, an almost religious teleology. Such experimentation with the policies that affect people’s lives might to some seem callous<sup>403</sup>, but not so if colored by a sincere belief that the progression of these experiments will lead to advancement of the nation—and humanity in its entirety—to some yet undiscovered good.

### **Postscript To Darwin in America: Evolution and Social Truth**

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<sup>401</sup> Hofstadter. *Social Darwinism in American Thought*. 10. It should be noted, though, that Hofstadter may himself be buying into a somewhat perverted understanding of Calvinism as per the distortions of Weber’s theory of Calvinism as intrinsically causing a life of toil and capitalism as such. This view of Calvinism, for example, notably lacks any conception of God’s grace. That such conflation occurs so easily and are so widely and easily accepted, though, is a large part of what I assert as a problem for American democratic politics.

<sup>402</sup> Dewey, John. *The Public & Its Problems*. (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1954). 33

<sup>403</sup> Of course, that the states of the union ought to be “laboratories of reform” has been articulated by Justice Louis Brandeis, *New State Ice Co. v. Liebman*, 285 U.S. 262 (1932) among others.

As has been seen, the deployment of Darwinian evolution in politics can manifest itself in opposite directions. For some, the merger of science and normative theory led to the embrace of evolutionary concepts; the notion of a humanity continually evolving towards greater perfection provided the ultimate link between scientific understanding of the world and the quest for the good. Yet, as we know, religious belief has also given rise to opposition to the teaching of evolution. That evolution might be opposed on religious grounds due to inconsistencies with the Bible is obvious. However, less well known are the broader utilitarian arguments that formed much of the initial foundations of the resistance to Darwinism, as Eric Larson so effectively describes in *Summer of the Gods*.<sup>404</sup> Rather than the knee-jerk reaction against inconvenient science, which is the common presentation of the anti-evolution position of the famous Scopes Monkey trial, the opposition stemmed from a much more nuanced view that evolutionary theory could not be true, because nothing true could be as harmful as the consequences of an embrace of Darwinism appeared to be.

Rather than the defense of scientific thought against oppressive religious bigotry—though this is what it meant to Darrow and Mencken and, indeed, has been the trial’s legacy—Larson draws out the origins of the trial as embedded in an ACLU test case for individual liberty against simple majoritarianism. Much of the controversial nature of evolution in America was not just that it ran afoul of the Christianity—in fact, a theistic form of evolutionary thought that held that God directed evolution dominated much of the period—but rather that belief in evolution led to bad morals and bad social policy, exemplified by eugenics, the robber barons’ “survival of the fittest” defense of

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<sup>404</sup> Larson, Edward J. *Summer of the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America’s Continuing Debate Over Science and Religion*. (New York: Basic Books, 1997). 318

their business conduct and the alleged ramifications of “Nietzschean” philosophy on morals and public policy.<sup>405</sup> As Larson points out, with respect to eugenics:

Some antievolutionists denounced eugenics as the damnable consequence of Darwinian thinking: First assume that humans evolved from beasts and then breed them like cattle. Bryan decried the entire program as “brutal” and at Dayton offered it as a reason for not teaching evolution. Everywhere the public debate over eugenics colored people’s thinking about the theory of human evolution.<sup>406</sup>

Accordingly, many people—often religious liberals—sought to enact laws preventing their tax-dollars from going towards the teaching of a theory that they did not agree with and did not think ought to be taught; from the point of view of the religious, it was unfair that they could not teach their creationist beliefs, but these other people could teach their evolutionary beliefs.<sup>407</sup>

The case itself came from an attempt by the ACLU, then seeking its first legal victory, to find a volunteer for a test case against a Tennessee law that misguidedly applied a penalty to the law forbidding the teaching of evolution in public schools—a measure which William Jennings Bryan in fact opposed. The main point and purpose of finding such a case became effectively hijacked and, in retrospect, irreparably altered, though, when some town leaders in Dayton figured they could parlay the case into a national reputation and make a good deal of money for the town. Because the town did not actually care about prosecuting the case, the World’s Christian Fundamentals

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<sup>405</sup> Nietzschean philosophy was roughly, and improperly, equated with egotistical nihilism (if that even makes sense) by many at the time. Indeed, Clarence Darrow, who becomes important for understanding this issue as party to the defense in The Scopes Trial, defended the then famous “Leopold and Loeb,” two murderers who sought to demonstrate their status as “supermen” by committing the perfect crime and getting away with it. Arguing that they could not be held accountable because they had been so influenced by the philosophy of Frederick Nietzsche that they had learned at the University of Chicago, Darrow eschewed the expected insanity defense, had them plead guilty, and had them exonerated. The nexus between knowledge, socialization and morality is striking, as is the conception of the effect on the individual.

<sup>406</sup> Ibid. 27-8

<sup>407</sup> Ibid. 50

Association (WCFA) asked Bryan to help with the prosecution, whereupon the virulently agnostic Clarence Darrow<sup>408</sup>—against the intended purposes held by the ACLU in retaining his services—eagerly involved himself to fight with Bryan, thus transforming the case into one where religion was on trial, culminating in the famous cross-examination of Bryan by Darrow as to the literal truth of the Bible. It should also be noted that this trial did not signify the end of fundamentalism as many thought at the time, but may have been instrumental in fundamentalism turning inward and working on its own people; it appeared to disappear from the national scene, but actually continued to grow as a vibrant force in its own territories and communities. The case, ironically, pretty much evaporated in the appeals process.

The degeneration of the case into a battle of celebrity personalities on the matter of religion aside, the more nuanced position of the law's supporters—through Bryan especially—is a fantastic case study of the complex relationship between science, religion and politics in the American mind, or, more accurately, in the minds of many Americans. Evolutionary science is opposed because it leads to bad morals and bad social policy; in effect, then, truth is evaluated through the lens of its perceived usefulness and utility. Consider the idea of an idea or an action being “right.” The complication arises insofar as we employ the word “right” in both empirical and normative contexts. In the application at hand, the consequences of evolutionary theory, such as eugenics, are clearly wrong—they are not right. As such, evolutionary theory must not be right either.

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<sup>408</sup> As Larson explains: “[Darrow] called himself an agnostic, but in fact he was effectively an atheist. In this he imitated his intellectual mentor, the nineteenth-century American social critic Robert G. Ingersoll, who wrote, ‘The Agnostic does not simply say, “I do not know [if God exists].” He goes another step, and he says, with great emphasis, that you do not know.... He is not satisfied with saying that you do not know—he demonstrates that you do not know, and he drives you from the field of fact.’” Ibid. 71

The unspoken converse, of course, may be that it is important to believe the Bible is true because it is beneficial or useful to do so; in effect, truth and utility are collapsed.

In a very real sense, adherents of this position at the time did not care that some people thought that the science of evolution is what really happens; it is wrong on its face. Absent in this view is any need for reference to an idea about a method; the issue is what ought to be taught in public schools, which is taken to be a democratic issue to be decided by majorities. Indeed, the legal position of those against the teaching evolution, as stated in the brief on appeal was that just because a group of self-styled intellectuals who call themselves scientists believe something does not mean that the legislature cannot forbid the teaching or practice of something that the legislature may conclude inimical to the general public welfare.<sup>409</sup> That the antievolutionists did not seek to teach creationism in the schools is noteworthy for its contribution to understanding what they think education ought to be about; material ought to be taught not based on some sense of objective truth, but rather based upon whether or not it is a good idea to teach them. Granted, this is a rather simple view of democracy—basic majoritarianism—but it raises what appears to be a much more complicated point about the relationship between truth and politics than is initially apparent. Science is not good unless it is useful—even though, of course, that which is considered useful is a subjective human judgment outside the field of scientific inquiry—especially with respect to moral behavior. Politics ought to be about people doing what is good for them. The very notion here that evolution may be true—meaning it is what really happens—becomes irrelevant; truth must lead to good, so if evolution leads to bad, it cannot be the truth.

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<sup>409</sup> Ibid. 213

## **CHAPTER 4: GOD IN THE MACHINE**

### **The Social Gospel and a New Scientific Faith in Progress**

The Church is not connected with the State and is not tainted, as in Europe, with the reputation of being a plain-clothes policeman to club the people into spiritual submission to the ruling powers. The churches of monarchical countries have preached loyalty to the monarchy as an essential part of Christian character. The Church in America believes heartily in political democracy. But a Church which believes in political democracy can easily learn to believe in industrial democracy as soon as it comprehends the connection. It has one foot in the people's camp. The type of Christianity prevailing in America was developed in the Puritan Revolution and has retained the spirit of its origin. It is radical, evangelical, and has the strong bent toward politics which Calvinism has everywhere had. American ministers naturally take a keen interest in public life, and, as well as they know, have tried to bring the religious forces to bear at least on some aspects of public affairs.

Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and Social Crisis*<sup>410</sup>

### **Introduction: A Society of Science**

The rise in a scientific understanding of society and a collapse between this new scientific approach and personal, spiritual approaches to knowledge eventually led to the religious reconceptualization within Christianity known as the Social Gospel. In effect, the Social Gospel manifests itself as a reaction to the incongruity between the new conclusions for normative political policy alleged by the new scientific view of society and the religious principles and values of so many Americans. This religious portion of American Progressivism finds its roots in the early period of the Gilded Age as a holdover of the dominant social and humanitarian

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<sup>410</sup> Rauschenbusch, Walter. *Christianity and the Social Crisis*. (London: The MacMillan Company, 1920). 323.



concerns before the Civil War. Indeed, the war itself was in many respects a manifestation of what for many was a religiously based humanitarian concern against slavery, specifically the fact that so many individuals were denied the opportunities to pursue their own spiritual lives and the attendant chance at redemption. With the conclusion of the war, previously submerged social concerns took on a renewed importance as the nation's reformers turned their attention to the well-being of the freedmen and, in turn, to the state of all free individuals in American society.<sup>411</sup>

Within this context the burgeoning field of sociology conceived of itself as understanding society as governed by laws no less cosmic or fundamental than the law of conservation of energy itself—that “the natural laws of the social order are in their entire character like the laws of physics”<sup>412</sup>—and, as such, claimed a scientific basis for political non-interference in social affairs and the non-equality of men. Given the perception of legitimacy in American public discourse of a collapse between scientific and religious knowledge, a certain sort of cognitive dissonance may well be expected in the consideration of a social or political plan should scientific and religious beliefs fail to cohere. The Social Gospel movement and its attendant programs for knowledge creation, propaganda and political action can be well understood as a reaction to a felt need to reconcile the apparently differing conclusions of the different systems of knowledge of the day. At the turn of the twentieth century, a religiously minded approach to politics would need to reconceptualize either religious belief or the scientific understanding—or both—through which society, at the time, was conceived. That is to say, should religious

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<sup>411</sup> Hopkins. *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism*. 12

<sup>412</sup> Sumner. “Sociology.” 21; 28.

thought and politics be brought together, given the apparent cross-pollination of, not to say confusion and conflation between, the epistemological approaches possible in American thought, a new synthetic approach to knowledge would likely be forthcoming; the disparate elements would be combined in new ways, developing new approaches to knowledge. In the Social Gospel, America finds not only a new scientific understanding of religion dictated by the need for a religiously scientific response to the scientific understanding of society, but also a new demand for new social science appropriate to the political goals of the new religion. Thus, a religious view of politics yielded a new scientific understanding of the social world.

To appreciate how a vision of what God wanted for the world would require conformity with the new social sciences—or rather, what people believed the social sciences declared—this theological response must be situated within the exceedingly robust claims of sociology of the day. Again, the post-bellum period saw not only a great expansion of industry and its attendant social dislocations in America, but also the increased development of science in all its myriad—if at times poorly conceived—forms. Both the newness of the scientific endeavor in America and the propensity towards its pragmatic aspect in American thought led to a dynamic approach towards application, even at the expense of theoretical perversion.<sup>413</sup> As a result, by 1894 The National Conference of Charities and Corrections was holding discussions of the expansion of the field of sociology—noting that the colleges engaged in its instruction had quadrupled in the five years leading up to the conference, and perhaps even doubled in that final year<sup>414</sup>—and of the possibilities

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<sup>413</sup> As illustrated by, among other things, the applications of Darwinian thought in America.

<sup>414</sup> Fulcomer. "Instruction in Sociology in Institutions of Learning." 68.

this new field held for their work within society. Given the acceptance of collapse and conflation between empirical rationality and normative reasoning, a course such as “Ethics of Social Reform” could be held to be the original class on sociology, and yet sociology could still retain its character as a hard science.

Indeed, though such a course might be considered a liberal arts course within today’s academic curriculum<sup>415</sup>, given the all-encompassing purview of the understanding of the proper approach to governing social relations, an understanding uniting both empirical and normative components—an understanding that a hard science would not only require adherence to ethics but incorporate them within itself—becomes necessary to the project. The aforementioned acting chairman of Daniel Fulcomer the 1894 National Conference of Charities and Correction was confident to go so far as to say that, “education will some day be considered the most important function of society and the study of mankind the most important part of education,”<sup>416</sup> in his description of the bold view of sociology arising from his polling of leading educators in America.<sup>417</sup> From this perspective sociology in a very real sense would become politics, or at least displace the need for independent deliberations and formulations of social policy. Such displacement becomes possible and, indeed, the most humane approach to society insofar as the correct mode of behavior towards society—how best to treat human beings—would be a matter of scientific knowledge.

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<sup>415</sup> Or, perhaps more accurately, a contextual or corrective addendum alongside the classes more focused on the mechanics of the discipline, as with a class on business ethics in a business curriculum. Of course, the continued debate over whether or not the social sciences are “real sciences” underscores how much greater was the certainty of the knowledge in the field then as compared with today.

<sup>416</sup> Ibid, 79.

<sup>417</sup> See: Chapter 3

Any approach to social reform would obviously and necessarily become assimilated under the banner of sociology in this view of knowledge. Arguably, if this reasoning were correct, it would be crass not to let one's conclusions for reform—or lack of reform, as has been seen to be the case for some sociologists—be so dictated by such a comprehensive science. Significantly, much of the social discussions of the time concerned the potential to do more harm than good through social work, from the possibilities of creating dependency on charity to propping up the perpetuation of degenerate racial stock; even at the National Conference of Charities and Correction concerns existed of the, “infinite possibilities of mischief”<sup>418</sup> implicit in social interference. Yet devotees to the social cause need not fear callousness on their part, for even their emotive response to the plights of those whom they would seek to help could be incorporated into this great social theory, recalling that:

The application of Darwinism to social phenomena is of great help to teachers in this matter. As long as the moral sentiments were treated as intuitions of absolute truth, there was no middle ground on which intuitionist and empiricist could meet. Either sentiment was absolute and science must conform to it, or science was absolute and sentiment must get out of the way. But Darwin has shown how the authority of sentiment and the authority of science rest on the same fundamental basis. To a Darwinian the existence of a moral sentiment furnishes the strongest presumptive evidence of its right to exist. If we instinctively look at things in a certain way, it is because our ancestors have experienced the preservative power of looking at things in that way, and not in another. Those who did so survived, those who did not do so were destroyed.<sup>419</sup>

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<sup>418</sup> Powers, Professor H. H. of Smith College, Northampton, MASS. “Sociology in Schools and Colleges: Its Feasibility and Probably Results.” *Proceedings of the National Conference of Charities and Correction at the Twenty-Second Annual Session held in New Haven, CONN. May 24-30, 1895*. Edited by Isabel C. Barrows, Official Reporter of the Conference. (Boston: Boston Press of Geo H. Ellis, 1895). 127

<sup>419</sup> Hadley, Professor Arthur T. “Science and Sentiment in Economic Policy.” 121.

Of course, as the good Professor Hadley would go on to explain, the outcomes of these worthwhile sentiments also require rigorous analysis, lest some unforeseen and unintended deleterious consequences undermine the noble purposes of those engaged in charity. Hence, a mandate for those active in the work of charities and corrections to understand how best to achieve their goals instrumentally through the understandings available by science meets the equally important mandate of sociologists to reach out to those engaged in social work to maximize the social utility of the science, or, in Professor Hadley's words:

The teacher is learning that his conclusions are of little value, and their practical applications dangerous, unless he includes the whole man in the scope of his study. His work is less abstract and partial than it was a generation ago. On the other hand, the philanthropist is learning that obvious results and intentions are not the most important things to take into account; that he must use scientific methods and follow out indirect results, unless he would have his work superficial or self-destructive. As a representative of economic science, I welcome this meeting of the Conference of Charities and Correction under the shadow of university walls as emblematic of the growing union between two classes of workers for the same end, who have sometimes stood in apparent antagonism in the past, but are coming together to-day, and must continue to come the past, but are coming together to-day, and must continue to come more closely together for all time.<sup>420</sup>

This happy convergence of theory and praxis allows social work to be done faithfully and without fear, as the pervasive harm of which charities and corrections were deemed so prone could be rationally assessed and avoided.

There exists an inherent tension, however, in a world where the work at the Hull House social settlement could be discussed as a “sociological laboratory,”<sup>421</sup> in

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<sup>420</sup> Ibid. 122.

<sup>421</sup> One “Miss Julia C. Lathrop” was invited to the 1894 National Conference of Charities and Corrections to give a talk on just such a matter—a matter which, as she indicated her opening remarks, she lacked any qualifications for proper evaluation, which may offer some consideration as to the level of scientific engagement of the contemporary social workers as well as the extent of the overreaching on the part of the science itself.

subordinating sentiment to science in an epistemology where the truth of sentiment may be given equal weight to scientific knowledge, i.e. in the sort of epistemology validated by the Second Great Awakening. As indicated, when science is understood as an external body of thought—a system of observed data and rational analysis of material circumstances—and, similarly if not analogously, morals and norms are teased out of theological manipulations and formal logic, contradiction between conclusions of each system of thought need not be considered cause for concern, owing to the separateness of the spheres of knowledge. The possibility of contradiction does certainly exist for material claims of religious thought, such as the age of the world<sup>422</sup>, the special creation of species<sup>423</sup>, the hairiness of Esau<sup>424</sup>, and so forth. Similarly there may be disagreement between normative speculation on the one hand and specific dictates of religious texts, as with continued debates about the normative texture of homosexual relations, the boundary between religious and political authority and the eating of shellfish. What is at issue here, for the purposes of the following discussions of the Social Gospel movement in America, is how it may become seen as legitimate by the American people to demand coherence between normative and material systems of conjectural thought which would not normally, analytically speaking, seem to overlap.

To answer this riddle, it is useful to see politics as the search for appropriate social ends and the appropriate means to those ends. Politics, then, may be understood as a vehicle for accomplishing normative social ends and as the discernment of the appropriate means of those ends. Growing interest in the scientific

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<sup>422</sup> Genesis 2:2

<sup>423</sup> Genesis 1:11; 1:20-1:27

<sup>424</sup> Genesis 25:25; 27:11

investigations of the world brought about a secularization of thought that led the more liberal theologians to a consideration of social questions.<sup>425</sup> Whereas theology had, in the eyes of many, grown abstruse in its manipulations for the consideration of the salvation of each soul, a scientific understanding of society resituated the human being, and hence the soul, into its social conditions. For members of the Social Gospel movement, then, religious norms must necessarily concern themselves with social conditions. As Walter Rauschenbusch, the preeminent theologian of the Social Gospel, would write in 1907, “We have seen that the religious concern in politics ceased only when politics ceased,”<sup>426</sup>.

In the spirit of the times, to establish a religious concern in politics meant an engagement with the new science of society. For the Social Gospelers, the scientific understanding of the biological person and of society supported—and to a large extent brought about—their burgeoning ideas for the “socialization of Christianity.” As shall be seen, the evolutionary perspective of history offered a new foundation for the inexorable progression towards the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth.<sup>427</sup> Faith notwithstanding, science would come to offer a new reason to believe in and do God’s work. Yet such a situation would in no way surprise the believer, as the happy coincidences of truths should be seen as no coincidence at all and, in fact, might well be deemed implied by the term “truth” itself. That in the Progressive Age’s reaction and rebuttal to the *laissez-faire* arguments of the Gilded Age, evolutionary science offered what appeared to be a new science of progress—a progress believed, it should come as no surprise, to be moral—towards the Kingdom

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<sup>425</sup> Hofstadter. *Social Darwinism in American Thought*. 107

<sup>426</sup> Rauschenbusch. *Christianity and the Social Crisis*. 42

<sup>427</sup> Hofstadter. *Social Darwinism in American Thought*. 108

of God merely confirmed that science had progressed admirably as it had managed to prove what had already been known in and by faith.

The sanctification of the work predicated on these sciences would obviously prove inevitable. As stated by Frederic Almy, Secretary of the Charity Organizations Society of Buffalo at the National Conference of Charities and Correction in 1911:

Modern social work is also vitally religious, though it has neglected the religious appeal. It is in fact religion applied to life. Its success depends largely in my opinion on whether it can reach the hearts as well as the heads of the American people; upon whether it can get itself adopted by the church in every hamlet and cross roads.<sup>428</sup>

The confluence of normative and instrumental reason intrinsic to social work resides in and resolves the apparent paradox of how social work could be religious and yet fail to acknowledge the mutual manifestation; scientific work, if properly scientific, will conform to religion just as religious work demands science to assure the success of its endeavors. Because social work was scientific, it would be religious, and because it was religious, it would be based in science. This identity of means and purposes in social work would be further articulated at the conference the following year where Rauschenbusch would deliver its annual sermon, which included his pronouncement to the participants that:

Your work is religious work. Let no man rob you of that conviction. God is working through you to heal and redeem humanity, and when you work with Him, you have this great opportunity of experiencing His loving power and so entering the religious fulfillment of your own life.<sup>429</sup>

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<sup>428</sup> Almy, Frederic, Secretary Charity Organizations Society, Buffalo, "The Value of the Church to Social Workers." *Proceedings of the National Conference of Charities and Correction at the Thirty-Eighth Annual Session held in the City of St. Louis, Mo., June 7-14, 1911*. Edited by Alexander Johnson. (Fort Wayne, Ind.: Press of the Archer Printing Company). 255

<sup>429</sup> Rauschenbusch, Prof. Walter, of Rochester Theological Seminary. "Conference Sermon." *Proceedings of the National Conference of Social Work, Formerly, National Conference of Charities and Correction at the Thirty-Ninth Annual Session Held in Cleveland, Ohio June 12-19, 1912*. (Fort Wayne, Ind.: Fort Wayne Printing Company, 1912). 19



In this view, religious work extended beyond personal redemption to all social efforts, a view that would require a whole new conception of that effort and its proper conduct.

Conversely, if social work be religious work, then it would be the business of religion generally and the churches—and, for that matter, the church— to engage in social concerns and work pursuant to those ends. Although the salvation the soul, a work that can only happen within an individual, could never be displaced as the churches' primary concern, we shall see that the social concern came to become the context of that effort which required the engagement of the churches in social work. This shift in focus is underscored by Rauschenbusch when he points to the Methodist Convention's establishment of its Bill of Rights for members of society, an inherently social and, for that matter, political declaration:

The Bill of Rights adopted by the Methodist Convention was presented with some changes and adopted without the slightest disposition to halt it at any point. The following declaration, therefore, has stood since 1908 as the common sense of the Protestant churches of America: —

“We deem it the duty of all Christian people to concern themselves directly with certain practical industrial problems. To us it seems that the churches must stand —

For equal rights and complete justice for all men in all stations of life.

For the right of all men to the opportunity for self-maintenance, a right ever to be wisely and strongly safeguarded against encroachments of every kind. For the right of workers to some protection against the hardships often resulting from the swift crises of industrial change.

For the principle of conciliation and arbitration in industrial dissensions.

For the protection of the worker from dangerous machinery, occupational disease, injuries, and mortality.

For the abolition of child labor.

For such regulations of the conditions of toil for women as shall safeguard the physical and moral health of the community.

For the suppression of the ‘sweating system.’

For the gradual and reasonable reduction of the hours of labor to the lowest practicable point, and for that degree of leisure for all which is a condition of the highest human life.

For a release from employment one day in seven.

For a living wage as a minimum in every industry, and for the highest wage that each industry can afford.

For the most equitable division of the products of industry that can ultimately be devised.

For suitable provision for the old age of the workers and for those incapacitated by injury.

For the abatement of poverty.

To the toilers of America and to those who by organized effort are seeking to lift the crushing burdens of the poor, and to reduce the hardships and uphold the dignity of labor, this Council sends the greeting of human brotherhood and the pledge of sympathy and of help in a cause which belongs to all who follow Christ.”<sup>430</sup>

The aforementioned religious concern with politics can scarcely be more clear and, as shall be seen, would be built upon as the social gospel movement progressed.

Such exhortations for social intervention and involvement come as a far cry from the dire warnings against such acts and policy sounded by the Social Darwinists. Remarkably, the self-same basis for the social philosophy of non-intervention championed by Sumner, Darwinian evolution, would serve as the science by which Social Gospelers demanded not just a new politics of social intervention, but a new theological formulation the better to comprehend the new socialized ethics this science to them suggested. That is to say, in the eyes of the Social Gospel movement, the science of Sumner was not sufficiently Christian, so he must have misapprehended Darwin's theory or it was no science at all. Once the science was understood, however, and its ethical content extracted, it would become apparent to these religious progressives that their own religion was not up to the task of creating a

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<sup>430</sup> Rauschenbusch, Walter. *Christianizing the Social Order*. (London: The MacMillan Company, 1919). 14. (Referencing "The Social Creed of the Churches," edited by Harry F. Ward, an exposition of the planks in this platform.)

more ethical society, a society such as the Kingdom of God must certainly be, and so these devout souls would develop a new theology, the Social Gospel, to incorporate the updated scientific understanding of the world. Not uninterestingly, this new socialized Christianity would spur an attendant demand for a more robust social science to effectuate its religion and translate its ideals into a material, religious reality.

### **The Social Gospel: A Scientific Christianity for a New Social Order**

A new understanding of an ethical society and the well-being of Americans would have to be understood in a markedly new social context. The Civil War had seen the beginning of what had, and would continue to become, a process of rapid industrialization and urbanization. In the period from 1870 to 1890, America experienced a radical change in its demographic make-up as the population living in cities rose from one-fifth to one-third of the total populace. This urbanization and industrialization, coupled with a period of intense immigration of mostly European peasants, put new strains on America's social fabric and its attendant system of values. The postwar moral reaction to this state of affairs revealed severe strains on the traditional ethical and social standards arising from what seemed to be increasing prevalence of government corruption and the simultaneous decline of business ethics<sup>431</sup>, a problem exacerbated by the social Darwinistic justification of laissez-faire that did not merely accept brutal competition as a necessary evil but rather embraced it as the natural order of things. As such, the Social Gospel constitutes a response by American Protestantism to these new challenges of a more modern industrial, urban

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<sup>431</sup> Hopkins. *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism*. 11

and pluralistic society—a response embraced by practically all Protestant Christian denominations, but especially Unitarians, Congregationalists and Episcopalians, the three American religious bodies inheriting state-church traditions of responsibility for public morals.<sup>432</sup>

As might be expected given the religious nature of social discourse in America, the rise of Progressivism brought with it new religious ideas; in the context of the amalgamated discourse of science, religion and politics in America it would seem scarcely possible to find such political shifts absent new developments in religious thought.<sup>433</sup> Specifically, there developed a new, terrestrial conception of the Kingdom of Heaven.<sup>434</sup> Given the evangelical heritage of looking to divine initiative for revolutionary change in the crises of human life, a new Christian solution to the new practices of modern capitalism would have to be worked out, resulting in the socialization of much of American Christianity.

Again, this is not to say that all Christianity, or even all Protestant Christianity, underwent such socialization. Protestant orthodoxy tended to steel itself against reforms deemed unnecessary to, and perhaps distracting away from, the more important regeneration of individual souls, and the Roman Catholic Church had a very different understanding of the relationship between religion and culture owing to their recognition of Papal authority. Still, the Social Gospel can be understood as a classically American solution in its melding of rational and spiritual principles and

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<sup>432</sup> Hopkins. *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism*. 318

<sup>433</sup> It should be here reemphasized that these ideas were not necessarily universally held. Rather, the point to be here gleaned is the fact that the changes in thoughts often come in constellations, so to speak, which underscore their epistemological connection in the view of some Americans and the acceptance of such views in mainstream American political discourse.

<sup>434</sup> Timberlake. *Prohibition and the Progressive Movement*. 35-36

the evangelical tradition of looking to divine inspiration to meet perceived crisis in order to meet the changing needs of Americans in a new period of history.<sup>435</sup> In this case, the crisis manifested itself as the potential loss or destruction of the traditional American middle-class values. This threat to the American way of life appeared both from above, in the deterioration of the fair system of economic competition, and from below by labor unrest among the lower classes and the introduction of immigrants who did not necessarily share a commitment to American values.

A deterioration of free competition constituted, in the American psyche, a threat to national greatness from the demise of equal opportunity and the competitive system that served as the foundation of America's moral strength.<sup>436</sup> Classic middle-class American values were understood to be molded by the economics of America; the system of free and fair competition inculcated American virtues such as industriousness, sobriety, thrift and others of the sort so famously endorsed in the American psyche since Benjamin Franklin's praise—if not practice—of the good, hard-working American way of life. Similarly, those in possession of these virtues would be rewarded in the market, thus uniting economic success and moral rectitude in these self-same virtues and establishing a population both able and worthy with respect to participation in a political democracy of free, equal and respectable citizens. Robber-baronism, trusts, monopoly and other uncompetitive and corrupt business practices threatened the viability of these virtues, making them not merely

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<sup>435</sup> The writings of Jim Wallis and the founding of his group "Sojourners" offers a contemporary incarnation of this approach, whereby the Exodus story frames debate on how we think of social problems in America. See: Wallis, Jim. *Who Speaks for God? An Alternative to the Religious Right--A New Politics of Compassion, Community, and Civility*. (New York: Delacourt Press, 1996); Wallis, Jim. *God's Politics: Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It at All*. (San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc. 2005); Gutterman, David S. *Prophetic Politics: Christian Social Movements and American Democracy*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005).

<sup>436</sup> Timberlake. *Prohibition and the Progressive Movement*. 100-101

sins in themselves but actual assaults on the moral basis of America. In this view, the social crisis is simultaneously, and perhaps necessarily, religious and political. Given the interplay of the instrumentality of religious and political purposes, economic change would require that religion offer a social theory to maintain the political situation necessary to achieve the religious purposes of American life.

A corollary threat arose with these economic changes in the dissatisfaction of labor among the lower classes and the potential for conflict between these workers and the newly ascendant monopolistic and oppressive capital, as presaged by modern socialist theory.<sup>437</sup> Much of the urban lower class that comprised the laborers was made-up of immigrants, likely peasants, who did not share American values of competition, self-help and personal success. Nor did such a class of people necessarily hold dear the American ideals of social mobility and political equality and could not therefore be counted upon for efforts towards reforming government into a positive moral force for buttressing a system that would protect said ideals. As such, these immigrants often clashed with “old-stock” middle class reformers when these charitable souls tried to assimilate and morally uplift the masses against their wishes.<sup>438</sup>

Thus, in the period of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the traditional-value-minded<sup>439</sup> middle class looked at American society from that classic evangelical view point of crisis, both from above and below; such is a crisis that

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<sup>437</sup> Hopkins. *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism*. 53, 117

<sup>438</sup> Timberlake. *Prohibition and the Progressive Movement*. 116-117

<sup>439</sup> Note, of course, the irony that the values invoked as traditional are, as is so often the case, of relatively recent origin, invoking the claim of a purer previous pre-declension tradition to validate themselves for their new social function.

forms impetus for political action, as the Progressive historian James Timberlake sums up the situation:

In addition to the threat from big business, middle-class Americans were haunted by the danger of lower-class unrest and discontent. Labor and agrarian upheavals in the late nineteenth century had already frightened many middle-class Americans. Although the farmers and laborers had gone down to defeat, the middle classes continued to be apprehensive, seeing in the rapid growth of monopoly and the lessening of opportunity an ever-increasing source of revolutionary danger. This apprehension increased as they watched the rapid growth of organized labor, the rise of the Socialist party, and the revolutionary activities of the I.W.W. Fear of the lower-class unrest, together with a genuine desire to eliminate the inequities and injustices of the social order and to improve the lot of the underprivileged, propelled many middle-class Americans into the work of reform.<sup>440</sup>

One form this work of reform would take, as shall be seen, would both influence and grow out of the socialized Christianity that this new social context instigated.

As a response to this crisis in American life, the Social Gospel viewed these social and economic problems as religious concerns. Writing in 1907, Walter Rauschenbusch describes the new fragmentation of American society:

The inability of both capital and labor to understand the point of view of the other side has been one chief cause of trouble, and almost every honest effort to get both sides together on a basis of equality has acted like a revelation. But that proves how far they have been apart.<sup>441</sup>

As noted above, such divisions threaten the free and equal society that was held to be the necessary economic precondition of the symbiotic relationship between the democratic and moral natures of the American polity. Accordingly, by 1912 Rauschenbusch would argue that, “the relation between the two great industrial

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<sup>440</sup> Ibid. 101

<sup>441</sup> Rauschenbusch. *Christianity and the Social Crisis*. 252

classes, the class of the owners and managers on the one side and the class of the industrial workers on the other, is the great moral problem of our age,”<sup>442</sup>.

The new socialized Christianity that emerged, as in keeping with the intellectual trends of the age, took on a decidedly progressive cast with a view towards the redemption of American culture over its burgeoning corruption<sup>443</sup>: in Walter Rauschenbusch’s terms, “Progress is more than natural. It is divine,”<sup>444</sup>. As such, the progress of history could not rightfully be left to merely materialistic processes of arbitrary moral and spiritual value. In this new Christian understanding, morality now had an economic cast that required a new analytical focus on economic competition, as when Rauschenbusch asked, “Is this unequal struggle between two conflicting interests to go on forever? Is this insecurity the best that the working class can ever hope to attain?”<sup>445</sup>. In this climate of economic concern, a social Christianity would combine religion and views from socialism, initially rejected in the 1880s but later widely accepted among the Social Gospelers, to form a view in contradistinction to and against a materialistic social order that pursued profit through competition without reference to or regard for the ethical and spiritual values that Americans felt their social order must be arranged to effectuate.<sup>446</sup> To do God’s work in the world, Christian thought would need to understand the new situation of human life in society and not just in relationship to the divine:

In the same way the situation is changed when the social relations are dominated by a principle essentially hostile to the social conceptions of Christ. Then the condition is not that of a stubborn raw material yielding slowly to the

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<sup>442</sup> Rauschenbusch. *Christianizing the Social Order*. 193

<sup>443</sup> Timberlake. *Prohibition and the Progressive Movement*. 7

<sup>444</sup> Rauschenbusch. *Christianizing the Social Order*. 30

<sup>445</sup> Rauschenbusch. *Christianity and the Social Crisis*. 407

<sup>446</sup> Hopkins. *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism*. 323



higher fashioning force, but of two antagonistic spirits grappling for the mastery. The more such a hostile principle dominates secular society, the more difficult will be the task of the Church when it tries to bring the Christ-spirit to victorious ascendancy.<sup>447</sup>

If it would engage the soul, Christianity would need to do so in its social context, and to do that, Christianity would need to understand and become relevant to that context.

To this end, Social Gospel thinking began to reconsider what the problems arising from the rationalization of competitive structures of the American economy meant for the relationship between the church and the people<sup>448</sup>:

It cannot well be denied that there is an increasing alienation between the working class and the churches.<sup>1</sup> That alienation is most complete wherever our industrial development has advanced farthest and has created a distinct class of wage-workers. Several causes have contributed. Many have dropped away because they cannot afford to take their share in the expensive maintenance of a church in a large city. Others because the tone, the spirit, the point of view in the churches, is that of another social class. The commercial and professional classes dominate the spiritual atmosphere in the large city churches.<sup>449</sup>

Here the Progressive vein of thought fostered a shift towards “this worldly-sentiment” in American religious thought.<sup>450</sup> This new emphasis made it possible for the Social Gospel to view those who had strayed from religion as product of a social situation that the church had neglected rather than merely deviant beings with unregenerate souls.

This relationship with respect to the social significance of the church becomes critical insofar as Americans viewed the church as depository and steward of social values, especially given the emerging anxiety that the church had lagged in

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<sup>447</sup> Rauschenbusch. *Christianity and the Social Crisis*. 309

<sup>448</sup> Hopkins. *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism*. 24

<sup>449</sup> Rauschenbusch. *Christianity and the Social Crisis*. 329; internal footnote: “<sup>1</sup> On the extent and causes of this alienation see Richard Health’s ‘Captive City of God.’”

<sup>450</sup> Hopkins. *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism*. 12

addressing the concerns of a new age. The Social Gospel began to understand that Christianity had failed to become relevant to the lives so many people lived; in effect, Christianity in America had allowed itself to be circumvented, eschewed or otherwise rejected from large portions of life as Americans lived it, as Rauschenbusch points out in the economic sphere's rejection of Christian principles:

As soon as the competitive philosophy of life encounters an opposing philosophy in socialism, it is angrily insistent on its own righteousness. The same is the case when any attempt is made to urge the Christian law of life as obligatory for business as well as private life. "Don't mix business and religion." "Business is business." These common maxims express the consciousness that there is a radical divergence between the two domains of life, and that the Christian rules of conduct would forbid many common Transactions of business and make success in it impossible. Thus life is cut into two halves, each governed by a law opposed to that of the other, and the law of Christ is denied even the opportunity to gain control of business.<sup>451</sup>

Given the relevance in American thought of economic virtues to moral ones, or even an outright comingling or collapse of the two, a Christianity that spoke not to business practices was a religion that neglected American values itself.

Such religion almost by definition failed the people in its mission in the Progressive view; to Progressives, religion would need to be able to address social relations to do its religious work. If a Christian way of life was to be sought, of what significance could Christianity be if it neglected commerce and industry when:

It is in commerce and industry that we encounter the great collective inhumanities that shame our Christian feeling, such as child labor and the bloody total of industrial accidents. Here we find the friction between great classes of men which makes whole communities hot with smoldering hate or sets them ablaze with lawlessness. To commerce and industry we are learning to trace the foul stream of sex prostitution, poverty, and political corruption.<sup>452</sup>

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<sup>451</sup> Rauschenbusch. *Christianity and the Social Crisis*. 313. That an ethic of competition would itself compete with other ethics ought perhaps not be surprising—though to demand that the other ethics are not allowed to organize to compete effectively seems a bit like cheating.

<sup>452</sup> Rauschenbusch. *Christianizing the Social Order*. 156

Viewing moral problems as social problems led the Social Gospel to reconsider the work of the salvation of souls. In this new vision, there appeared a disconnection between asking people to be good Christians and seeing to it that they led good Christian lives. If Christianity were not social then Christian principles would not be applicable to the lives of would-be Christians, greatly complicating the possibilities of Christian life:

Whoever declares that the law of Christ is impracticable in actual life, and has to be superseded in business by the laws of Capitalism, to that extent dethrones Christ and enthrones Mammon. When we try to keep both enthroned at the same time in different sections of our life, we do what Christ says cannot be done, and accept a double life as the normal morality for our nation and for many individuals in it. Ruskin said: "I know no previous instance in history of a nation's establishing a systematic disobedience to the first principles of its professed religion."<sup>1</sup> <sup>453</sup>

If American Christianity could not speak to the Christianization of the new ways of life emerging in America, then a new theorization was required to make Christianity relevant to the souls with which the religion was concerned. In fact, the reformers Col. Robert G. Ingersoll and Henry George often decried the "unethical character of an otherworldly religion unfit to meet the demands of the new age of industry and science," and would demand that, "a socially ineffective Protestantism show ethical cause for its continued existence,"<sup>454</sup>. In the words of Rauschenbusch, "Religious individualism lacks the triumphant faith in the possible sovereignty of Jesus Christ in all human affairs, and therefore it lacks the vision and the herald voice to see and proclaim his present conquest and enthronement,"<sup>455</sup>.

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<sup>453</sup> Rauschenbusch. *Christianizing the Social Order*. 322. Internal footnote: <sup>1</sup> "Unto this Last," p. 88

<sup>454</sup> Quoted in: Hopkins. *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism*. 59; 55

<sup>455</sup> Rauschenbusch. *Christianity and the Social Crisis*. 338

This view that a religion would require an ethical justification—especially one that involved a demonstration of instrumental political and social relevance—reflected the contemporarily developed ruling theological ideology that held that an evolutionary Kingdom of God was to be built as part of humanity’s inevitable progress—a divine progress—on earth by men of good will.<sup>456</sup> A new theory of the immanence of God developing through the work of men—of society—grew out of the naturalism that accompanied the new biological sciences which led the more liberal clergy, “to turn from abstractions of theology to social questions,”<sup>457</sup>. In fact, the new theology itself was reconfigured to incorporate and encapsulate new scientific understandings of the world, particularly the newly ascendant theory of Darwinian evolution, accepted by progressive American theologians as evidence of God’s purposes unfolding on earth.<sup>458</sup> Far from being envisioned as a spiritually devoid conception of material biology, Darwinian evolution was considered by Social Gospelers to be among the greatest religious discoveries of all time: the notion that material processes could eventually bring about increasingly complex life forms and forms of consciousness served to reveal God’s divine plan.

Understanding Darwinian evolution as evidence of God’s divine plan meant that religious thought must necessarily accommodate the theory. Insofar as the divine plan must be true, a theology that did not account for or conform to the material data of this plan could not be valid. Religious thought therefore had to develop itself into a theology that could account for the new scientific understanding of God, as Rauschenbusch noted when he stated:

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<sup>456</sup> Hopkins. *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism*. 121-122

<sup>457</sup> Hofstadter. *Social Darwinism in American Thought*. 107

<sup>458</sup> Hopkins. *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism*. 320

The spread of evolutionary ideas is another mark of modern religious thought. It has opened a vast historical outlook, backward and forward, and trained us in bold conceptions of the upward climb of the race. There is no denying that this has unsettled the ecclesiastical system of thought, much as the growth of tree roots will burst solid masonry. But it has prepared us for understanding the idea of a Reign of God toward which all creation is moving. Translate the evolutionary theories into religious faith, and you have the doctrine of the Kingdom of God. This combination with scientific evolutionary thought has freed the Kingdom ideal of its catastrophic setting and its background of demonism, and so adapted it to the climate of the modern world.<sup>459</sup>

Incredibly, the apparent scientific proof of God demonstrated in the eyes of the Social Gospelers the error and omission in the previously dominant Christian theology even as it proved the rightness and, for that matter, empirical accurateness of the Christian religion as a whole. Thus, the Social Gospelers could set about a new religious formulation with the confidence made possible by science and faith united.

Of course, this new understanding of the plan of providence offered—as is so often the norm in American thought—an attendant social theory. Of special note is that while embracing Darwin's theory of evolution for its organic view of society as a social organism, in a radical departure from the *laissez-faire* promulgators of the social application of evolutionary theory, the Social Gospelers understood this vision as demonstrating a solidaristic vision of society.<sup>460</sup> This accommodation of Christianity to the macroscopic view of society supplied by evolutionary theory, “produced three clearly related ideas that together constituted a logical and unified frame of reference for social Christianity. These were the immanence of God, the organic or solidaristic view of society, and the presence of the kingdom of heaven on earth,”<sup>461</sup>. The nexus of these ideas suggested not only the desirability of the

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<sup>459</sup> Rauschenbusch. *Christianizing the Social Order*. 90

<sup>460</sup> Hofstadter. *Social Darwinism in American Thought*. 108

<sup>461</sup> Hopkins. *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism*. 123

solidaristic model of society but, in drastic departure from the *laissez-faire* applications of evolutionary theory, its possibility and, indeed, its inevitability.

Such harmonization through the immanence of God and the building of the kingdom of heaven on earth in the stead of the competitive struggle for existence radically altered further still the social location of the soul and the possibilities and approach to salvation:

The conception of the Kingdom of God will also demand the development of a Christian ethic for public life. We have none now. Our religion in the past was a religion of private salvation; consequently it developed an effective private morality. It had no ideal of salvation for the organic life of society; consequently it developed no adequate public morality. The conclusive proof of this assertion is the fact that the Christian Church during the nineteenth century allowed a huge system of mammonistic exploitation to grow up which was destructive of human decency, integrity, and brotherhood, and the Church did not realize its essential immorality until its havoc had become a world-wide scandal which even the most blunted conscience could comprehend. Other-worldly religion was sensitive about anything that endangered the salvation of the soul, for that was its one great object. The virulence of sins was measured by their influence on the soul of the sinner rather than by their effect on society.<sup>462</sup>

The society as a whole would necessarily become the object of Christian efforts. The goal of the regeneration and salvation of individual souls would not change, but the Social Gospel would understand that these individual souls exist within a social context. Therefore, society as a whole must necessarily be addressed, which is to say, Christianized, for that regeneration to occur.

Thus, scientific and religious understandings of the world were not only perfectly consistent, but each produced a more exhaustive understanding of the other. This synthesis yielded a new social ethics that was required by a religious mandate that was scientifically demonstrable; indeed, the rise of the Christian religion became

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<sup>462</sup> Rauschenbusch. *Christianizing the Social Order*. 100

part, parcel and product of the evolution of humanity. The reshaping of the ethical world, then, rested upon the necessity of divine will and evolutionary science, each and both being the same.

In addition, this new reconceptualization of the knowledge of religion by science and science by religion in the Social Gospel generated a religious mandate for social and economic reform. Previously, the social Darwinists had argued that evolutionary theory demanded social non-interference as the natural order of things. Yet, “‘Christianity,’ wrote the Rev. A. J. F. Behrends, ‘cannot grant the adequacy of the ‘laissez-faire’ philosophy, cannot admit that the perfect and permanent social state is the product of natural law and of an unrestrained competition,’”<sup>463</sup>. In effect, the fact that social Darwinists advocated *laissez-faire* served as evidence that they had misapprehended the science for, by definition, truth could not conflict in such a way with Christian ethics; the religion and the science must coincide, as must the vision of society said coincidence would promulgate:

If the Church cannot bring business under Christ’s law of solidarity and service, it will find his law not merely neglected in practice, but flouted in theory. With many the Darwinian theory has proved a welcome justification of things as they are. It is right and fitting that thousands should perish to evolve the higher type of the modern business man. Those who are manifestly surviving in the present struggle for existence can console themselves with the thought that they are the fittest, and there is no contradicting the laws of the universe. Thus an atomistic philosophy crowds out the Christian faith in solidarity. The law of the cross is superseded by the law of tooth and nail. It is not even ideal and desirable “to seek and to save the lost,” because it keeps the weak and unfit alive. The philosophy of Nietzsche, which is deeply affecting the ethical thought of the modern world, scouts the Christian virtues as the qualities of slaves.<sup>464</sup>

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<sup>463</sup> Quoted in Hofstadter. *Social Darwinism in American Thought*. 108

<sup>464</sup> Rauschenbusch. *Christianity and the Social Crisis*. 315

The policy prescriptions of the social Darwinists could correspondingly be dismissed as inappropriate on account of their falsity. These sentiments were echoed by Washington Gladden's assertion that, "The principle of competition, the survival of the fittest, is the law of plants and brutes and brutish men, but it is not the highest law of civilized society. The higher principle of good will, of mutual help, begins to operate in the social order, and the struggle for existence disappears with the progress of the race,"<sup>465</sup>. The prominent collapse of the empirical reality and normative prescription in Gladden's use of the word "law" simply underscores the happy and inevitable coincidence of right and reality; as Professor George Herron would state in *A New Redemption*, "the Sermon on the Mount is the science of society,"<sup>466</sup>.

### **A New Christianity of Social Reform**

In the Social Gospel the work of social reform now found itself not just an outgrowth of charitable inclinations worthy of Christian *caritas* but a part of the core mission of Christianity. Science, by altering and creating new conceptions of civilization and providing the tools to create them had similarly made possible new religious projects not previously conceivable. Given the norms of the Social Gospel, these religious projects become more than an approach to spirituality but, rather, constitute the remaking of the world in the new ethical vision of social Christianity. In effect, Christianity in the Social Gospel, in many ways an altogether new form of Christian practice, became a work not merely spiritual in the traditional personal sense but intrinsically economic and, therefore, political.

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<sup>465</sup> Quoted in Hofstadter. *Social Darwinism in American Thought*. 109

<sup>466</sup> Quoted in Ibid. 110



This new engagement with politics and economics necessitated by the new social understanding of religious purposes was both founded in the solidaristic views of society gleaned from science, especially evolution, and made possible by the scientific advances that made a more active creation of society, particularly with respect to the economy, itself possible. Reverend Frank Oliver Hall noted the change in his talk entitled “The Influence of the Church” at the 1911 Annual Session of the National Conference of Charities and Correction, admonishing the church for not accommodating the newly understood social realities, stating:

But recently the world has taken on a different aspect. Life for the first time is worth living. Humanity is getting enough to eat and has tasted freedom and education. Life is interesting and not horrible. Men begin to see that the world is not a wreck but raw material out of which we may build such a ship as never sailed the seas. Men are beginning for the first time to realize what Jesus meant when he taught us to pray, “Thy Kingdom come on earth.” So instead of the interest of humanity being centered in some other sphere it is being focused here. But the church for the most part is still talking about the other world, still seeking to save souls from catastrophe in another sphere of existence. The hymns that we sing are about “Jerusalem our happy home,” rather than about a happy New York or Boston or Philadelphia. Salvation means going to heaven rather than building heaven on earth. The strongest, bravest and wisest men of our time are intensely interested in social improvement and to that extent are not interested in the old-time message of the church. That is one reason why the message and work of the church seems less vital to-day than formerly.<sup>467</sup>

New possibilities meant the viability of new religious practices. Moreover, if there were religious work that could be done, then that work ought to be done, necessitating a change in religious practice. Theologically speaking, a new conception of salvation meant, in turn, that a new way of considering Christianity had become not only not heretical but appropriate:

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<sup>467</sup> Hall, Rev. Frank Oliver, D. D., Pastor of the Church of the Divine Paternity, New York. “The Influence of the Church.” *Proceedings of the National Conference of Charities and Correction at the Thirty-Eighth Annual Session held in the City of St. Louis, Mo., June 7-14, 1911*. Edited by Alexander Johnson. (Fort Wayne, Ind.: Press of the Archer Printing Company). 230-231

I believe that the time is ripe for the reorganization of the forces of Christendom and the harnessing of the tremendous energy represented in the churches of the world for the performance of the work that Jesus wanted to have done. For the first time since Jesus died for humanity the whole world is astir with the hope and confident expectation of splendid things that are going to happen soon and happen here.<sup>468</sup>

Such a call is not a rejection of the old mission of saving souls; call for renewal given new religious discoveries is certainly consistent with the prophetic or jeremiad tradition of Christianity. In this instance, the issue is the direction and technique to which Christian energies shall be applied, specifically here to the regeneration of society as a whole, making the approach inherently political insofar as it requires a program of economic and social reform.

Conversely, proper social and economic reform was, recalling Rauschenbusch's sermon to the 39<sup>th</sup> National Conference on Charities and Corrections in 1912 noted above, religious work—work accomplishing the bidding of God. The new conception of the kingdom of God that had emerged since the Second Great Awakening came to mean not “the reign of God within men's hearts”—though such reign could be expected as a product of the new social effort—but rather the spread of God's words and the Christian practice willed to all the people of the world, a redeemed social order.<sup>469</sup> The building of such a kingdom required not just the personal connection with God on the part of individual Christians seeking to regenerate their own souls but the active work of engaging all of society. In this way, the Social Gospel manifested itself as a new “social” rather than individualistic theology:

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<sup>468</sup> Ibid. 231

<sup>469</sup> Timberlake. *Prohibition and the Progressive Movement*. 34-35

The conception of race sin and race salvation become comprehensible once more to those who have made the idea of social solidarity in good and evil a part of their thought. The law of sacrifice loses its arbitrary and mechanical aspect when we understand the vital union of all humanity. Individualistic Christianity has almost lost sight of the great idea of the kingdom of God, which was the inspiration and centre of the thought of Jesus. Social Christianity would once more enable us to understand the purpose and thought of Jesus and take the veil from our eyes when we read the synoptic gospels.<sup>470</sup>

The ethical concern of Christianity or, more accurately, of a good Christian, could no longer simply be personal in the concern for one's own soul, but, insofar as a religious adherent would consider that ethics need conform to the dictates of God, social, in keeping with the new social Christianity. Thus the Social Gospel sought the ethicalization of American society as a corrective against the "otherworldliness" inculcated by the conservative orthodoxy's individualistic approach to the salvation of souls.<sup>471</sup>

The Social Gospel would therefore take up causes previously excluded from the concerns of mainline American Protestantism. If society were to be Christianized, due consideration and, indeed, ethical theorization of those areas of society not in conformity with Christian principles would have to be conducted. In the context of the Gilded Age, the new social Christianity would now evaluate American capitalism according to Christian standards, an area of life that Rauschenbusch found ethically lacking in juxtaposition with Christianity:

Christianity teaches the unity and solidarity of men; Capitalism reduces that teaching to a harmless expression of sentiment by splitting society into two antagonistic sections, unlike in their work, their income, their pleasures, and their point of view.

True Christianity wakens men to a sense of their worth, to love of freedom, and independence of action; Capitalism, based on the principle of autocracy, resents independence, suppresses the attempts of the working class

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<sup>470</sup> Rauschenbusch. *Christianity and the Social Crisis*. 340

<sup>471</sup> Hopkins. *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism*. 320

to gain it, and deadens the awakening effect that goes out from Christianity.<sup>472</sup>

This critique finds the exclusivity of the material profit motive as ethically subversive and producing competition at odds with Christian love.<sup>473</sup> The Social Gospel found modern capitalism to embody principles insufficiently ethical and even hostile to those of Christianity and therefore unworthy of the people of the kingdom of God:

A subject working class, without property rights in the instruments of their labor, without a voice in the management of the shops in which they work, without jurisdiction over the output of their production is a contradiction of American ideals and a menace to American institutions. As long as such a class exists in our country, our social order is not christianized. Civilization has now reached the point where power must shift from the ruling class to the people in industry as it has shifted in the political constitution of States. We need industrial democracy.<sup>474</sup>

If America would be Christian, then it must reconsider its economy. Similarly, Rev. Gladden argued that if Christian law could solve such conflict, then there was a duty to regulate the economy in conformity with that law.<sup>475</sup> This argument demonstrates the intrinsically political nature of the theology of the Social Gospel: the kingdom of God would have a Christian economy, and so to build that kingdom would require the active construction of the economy, an inherently political act, in accordance with Christian principles.

Thus, Christianity turned its eye to policy and the movement for reform. As the kingdom of heaven became conceived as a perfected human society that brought

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<sup>472</sup> Rauschenbusch. *Christianizing the Social Order*. 321.

<sup>473</sup> Hopkins. *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism*. 325. The fact that the Christianity that Weber theorized supported and developed capitalism could eventually develop in ways that critiqued and condemned capitalism for inconformity with Christian principles underscores the dynamism of the relationship between economics and religion. That the mainline of Christianity of today tends to embrace capitalism only further underscores the point.

<sup>474</sup> Rauschenbusch. *Christianizing the Social Order*. 198

<sup>475</sup> Hopkins. *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism*. 29

together the spiritual goals of both the individual and the social organism<sup>476</sup>, so would the society need to be remade:

The chief purpose of the Christian Church in the past has been the salvation of individuals. But the most pressing task of the present is not individualistic. Our business is to make over an antiquated and immoral economic system; to get rid of laws, customs, maxims, and philosophies inherited from an evil and despotic past; to create just and brotherly relations between great groups and classes of society; and thus to lay a social foundation on which modern men individually can live and work in a fashion that will not outrage all the better elements in our present task deals with society; our present task deals with society.<sup>477</sup>

More than a jeremiad excoriating society on its failings, social Christianity must become a theory of the institutional processes that govern societal relations and a plan to build them in a Christian manner. This shift in the theory, though, is of the kind that requires an associated shift in its theory of practice. As the Reverend Owen Lovejoy, General Secretary of the Child Labor Committee in New York would say in his 1920 National Conference of Charities and Correction Presidential Address, “The Faith of a Social Worker”: “Perhaps the most universally accepted belief is belief in the Kingdom of Heaven: What is there then in this idea of the Kingdom of Heaven that has taken possession of the world? Is there here some conception which will shape the whole trend of a man's life in social service,”<sup>478</sup>. A Christian concerned with the salvation of his or her own soul can practice that Christianity within. A social Christianity, on the other hand, must exist outside of the self in society, which

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<sup>476</sup> Ibid. 109

<sup>477</sup> Rauschenbusch. *Christianizing the Social Order*. 41-42

<sup>478</sup> Lovejoy, Rev. Owen. “The Faith of a Social Worker.” *Proceedings of the National Conference of Social Work, Formerly, National Conference of Charities and Correction at the Forty-Seventh Annual Session Held in New Orleans, Louisiana April 14-21, 1920*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1920). 6

is to say, through social practice. Accordingly, social Christianity demanded a new form of Christian service in society:

Christianity bases all human relations on love, which is the equalizing and society-making impulse. The Golden Rule makes the swift instincts of self-preservation a rule by which we are to divine what we owe to our neighbor. Anything incompatible with love would stand indicted. Christ's way to greatness is through preeminent social service. Selfdevelopment is desirable because it helps us to serve the better. So far as the influence of the Christian spirit goes, it bows the egoism of the individual to the service of the community. It bids a man live his life for the kingdom of God.<sup>479</sup>

Note that in Rauschenbusch's formulation the social activities of this Christian practice benefit the individual practitioner; the religious goals of the individual are not subordinated or cast aside. Rather, the goals of social Christianity are synthesized with the goals of the individual into a sort of symbiotic relationship in accordance with the solidaristic theory of the social organism that is to be Christianized.

Thus we see that in the Social Gospel the work of Christianity becomes the work of making a society or, quite literally, social work. Rev. Gladden states this premise quite clearly in a report entitled "The Function of the Church in Social Work: Should it Inspire, Guide or Administer it?" in his report of the Committee "The Church and Social Work" at the National Conference of Charities and Correction in 1911. Noting that, despite references to churches at previous conferences, until that meeting the churches had, "not had any integral part in the program" of designing the philanthropic work, Gladden explained the Social Gospel vision of social work:

"The Function of the Church in Social Work" is our theme for the hour. It is quite possible that to some ears this may sound like a disturbing innovation. "What business has the church with social work?" they will be asking. "Let her stick to her proper vocation of teaching religion and saving souls." Others may be quite differently affected. To them it may appear that the church has no other function than social work; the question may sound like discussing the

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<sup>479</sup> Rauschenbusch. *Christianity and the Social Crisis*. 309

function of the loom in weaving cloth, or the function of the bee in making honey. We shall not try to mediate between these critics, but to those who believe the business of the church is the establishment on earth of the Kingdom of God, the latter conception may, perhaps, seem a little nearer the truth. To anyone who is familiar with the narrative of the first three Gospels, it appears strange that there should be any question as to whether the church which assumes to represent Jesus Christ is invested with a social function; and to those who have studied the Hebrew prophets, it would be equally clear that the religion of which they were the expounders was a religion whose credentials were found in its fulfilment [sic] of social functions.<sup>480</sup>

Gladden makes a point of acknowledging the disagreement among viewpoints on the proper role of religion in social life, even among Christian believers. He is quite clear, however, that his position on the matter asserts that the social work he discusses is not only consistent with the meaning of Christianity and therefore appropriate, but that social work is that faith in practice, indivisible from the faith itself.

This understanding of social work would become well established in the years to come. Whether or not social work was a profession<sup>481</sup> in its own right was first asked at the 1915 National Conference of Charities and Corrections; this discussion had been ongoing as to the place of philanthropic efforts in the lives of the practitioners. Yet by 1920 the conference was renamed the National Conference of Social Work, a work that J. B. Mitchell would there claim explicitly to be the work of the Christian Church given a proper understanding of the Kingdom of God:

This emphasis on eternal life with the belief in the speedy return of Christ gave to the early church an erroneous idea of the Kingdom of God. Under this ideal the kingdom was God-made and handed down to men, it was the New Jerusalem coming down out of Heaven. The work of the church was merely to prepare men for the coming kingdom. She was not to concern herself so much with evil institutions, political and social injustice, slavery, etc. Men were

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<sup>480</sup> Gladden, Rev. Washington. "The Function of the church in Social Work: Should it Inspire, Interpret, Guide or Administer it." In *Proceedings of the National Conference of Charities and Correction at the Thirty-Eighth Annual Session held in the City of St. Louis, Mo., June 7-14, 1911*. Fort Wayne, Ind.: Press of the Archer Printing Company, 1911. 214

<sup>481</sup> As distinguished from some non-remunerative "calling."

rather to bear these conditions looking for release in the glorious life to come. Her ideal was individualistic, not socialistic; to save individuals out of society rather than to undertake to revolutionize society.<sup>482</sup>

While such criticism of the older approach to salvation and the theory of the millennial Kingdom of Heaven does not solve the issue of professionalism *per se*<sup>483</sup>, it certainly suggests an increased centrality of the efforts to the lives of the practitioners. In the old way of thinking about Christianity, an approach whereby the concern for the regeneration of souls emphasizes that each ought to seek to redeem his or her own soul, charity work would be a personal choice on the part of those inclined to try to alleviate the suffering of others—a noble concern, but certainly a concern within this world of the flesh quite ancillary to the greater issue of salvation in the Kingdom of Heaven. In the view of social Christianity, however, philanthropy is not merely a noble hobby but the practical work of a Christian befitting a civilization of souls redeemed by social redemption.<sup>484</sup> As John Glenn would suggest at the 1913 National Conference of Charities and Corrections, “social service is the practical, inevitable, necessary consequence and complement of true spiritual belief. They are mutually essential,”<sup>485</sup>.

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<sup>482</sup> Mitchell, J. B. “The Relation of the Church and Social Work.” *Proceedings of the National Conference of Social Work, Formerly, National Conference of Charities and Correction at the Forty-Seventh Annual Session Held in New Orleans, Louisiana April 14-21, 1920*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1920). 55

<sup>483</sup> Though below it will be explained that this new religious mandate for social work produced a related mandate for the development of science the better to effectuate said efforts, an effort which would be expected to professionalize the endeavor.

<sup>484</sup> This final statement is not as redundant as it sounds. Indeed, the precise shift in thinking that manifests itself in the Social Gospel is the linkage of the redemption of the soul with the redemption of society.

<sup>485</sup> Glenn, John M. “The Church and Social Work.” *Proceedings of the National Conference of Social Work, Formerly, National Conference of Charities and Correction at the Fortieth Annual Session Held in Seattle, Washington July 5-12, 1913*. (Fort Wayne, Ind.: Fort Wayne Printing Company, 1913). 146



Mitchell further notes that the very practical and instrumental possibility of this new work in the name of religion is itself evidence of the truth of this understanding of Christianity:

But today, stimulated by the discoveries of science and aroused by the crying need of the changing social order, the church has turned back to study anew the teaching of her Master. She has discovered that while Jesus spake of eternal life as a reality, a consummation to be contemplated and devoutly sought, yet far more of his teaching relates to this life. She has discovered that while a man's relationship to God is personal, his relationship to his fellowman is social. She has discovered that the Kingdom of God is not an institution divinely made and handed down, but that it is to be built by us, God's Spirit working through us. She has discovered that the kingdom relates to this world as well as to the next, and that it relates to men's bodies and minds as well as to their souls. She has discovered that the kingdom is a kingdom of conservation as well as a kingdom of salvation; that the same teacher that said "The Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost," said to the church, "Ye are the salt of the earth." Salt is a prophylactic, not therapeutic; a preventive, not a curative. She has discovered that the kingdom is revolutionary as well as regenerative; that it stands for regeneration of individuals but also for revolutionizing of society.<sup>486</sup>

Thus, in the larger scope of Christianity becoming a social project, the new possibilities afforded humanity by developments in science allowed this new normative development in Christianity. Science brought to Christianity not only a new way of understanding society—specifically, as a solidaristic organism—and a correspondingly new vision of its purpose within and for that society, but also the instrumental knowledge by which to enact these new goals.

### **Social Science: Practical Religion and a New Science of Christian Love**

This program of reform to further the religious purposes of Christianity in turn requires the work of science that makes it possible. In a sense, the synthetic approach to knowledge whereby religious and scientific approaches conform to and collapse

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<sup>486</sup> Mitchell. "The Relation of the Church and Social Work." 56-57

within one another, takes on a kind of symbiotic character within the Social Gospel movement. On the one hand, new science demanded new religion, or, stated more accurately, new theories and understandings of science required new theological understandings to allow Christian comprehension of the world to coincide with the truths newly provided by science. On the other hand, so too did the new social Christianity not only influence the interpretation of the social meaning of the new scientific discoveries but also demand new developments in the science the better to serve the social ends that could be known to be the true purposes of a normative project of knowledge, a project developed precisely on account of the synthesis of the disparate modes of knowing the world. Science gave Christianity a new social mission, and part of that mission became for science and religion to develop the means of effecting their goals; in effect, science had gained a religious calling.

Indeed, the coincidence of the joint advent of the new scientific and religious understandings reinforcing one another, in combination with other events such as the, “increase in democracy, increase in religious liberty, increase in science and technology, increase in Christianity in Asia and Africa, broadening of intellectual horizons, increase in social conscience in private and public philanthropy, political and economic and social reforms,”<sup>487</sup> was widely accepted as evidence to Protestants of the coming of the kingdom. In the Social Gospel, Christianity could be understood as a natural religion, the product and indeed culmination of natural processes bringing about a humanity that could know and love its creator and understand the divine will

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<sup>487</sup> Timberlake. *Prohibition and the Progressive Movement*. 36

as the crown of creation.<sup>488</sup> An important part of this culmination entailed the new scientific approach to religious work:

In the prescientific age men lived in that fashion with Nature, taking her blessings and her blows as they came, and cooperating with her in a feeble and half-comprehending way. Science has given us directive powers, and we can now make Nature make us. As we are comprehending the great laws of social life, the time for large directive action is coming, and we shall make Society make its members. My appeal is to Christian men to use the prophetic foresight and moral determination which their Christian discipleship ought to give them in order to speed and direct this process. If any one thinks it cannot be done, let the unbeliever stand aside and give place to those who have faith. This thing is destiny. God wills it. What is morally necessary, must be possible. Else where is God?<sup>489</sup>

Science has made possible new religious achievements, and as they became possible, so too did it become necessary by religious mandate to employ science to those ends. The Social Gospel apprehended new possibilities for religion in a society of science and industry, possibilities that allowed for a greater control of society towards religious ends; as Rauschenbusch pointed out, “We now have such scientific knowledge of social laws and forces, of economics, of history that we can intelligently mold and guide the evolution in which we take part,”<sup>490</sup>.

In the view of the Social Gospel, religion would need a more realistic appraisal of the task of salvation, an appraisal rooted in a richer and more comprehensive understanding of the situation of the soul gleaned from sociology.<sup>491</sup> Although the knowledge did not come from more traditional religious means of learning, once known by the religiously motivated individual, it would need to be incorporated into the understanding of what, in fact, was the religious work of the

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<sup>488</sup> Hopkins. *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism*. 125

<sup>489</sup> Rauschenbusch. *Christianizing the Social Order*. 331

<sup>490</sup> *Ibid.* 40-41

<sup>491</sup> Hopkins. *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism*. 320

world. Just as social work, as noted above, would come to be seen as religious work, so too would religion become social work, both for the salvation of all souls and for the individual religious practitioner. Recalling Rauschenbusch's 1912 conference sermon at the 39<sup>th</sup> National Conference of Charities and Correction in 1912 where he told attendees that their work was religious work, so too did he note the fusion of the traditional view of individual salvation with the new social vision:

This, then, is one of the elementary doctrines of Christianity, that love to God must have its immediate result and counterpoise in love to men, and it must be love that will cost something and will link us with the death of Christ. But there is an even closer relation between religion and ethics, between love of God and love of man. It is by loving men that we enter into a living love of God. Social work may be a gateway to religion.<sup>492</sup>

Here, then, social work becomes not only the work of facilitating the salvation of other souls, and one's own, through the amelioration of degraded social conditions that impede said salvation, but also an increasingly critical part of one's own pursuit of salvation. Thus, despite the emphasis on the people as parts of a social organism and the social factors affecting salvation, the Social Gospel does not depart from the fundamental contention that, as Hopkins puts it, "the social crusade began in and existed for the individual,"<sup>493</sup>. In the words of Rauschenbusch:

If then we honestly call on God to help us save, power comes to us in the night. Social work becomes the gateway to religion. By loving men we learn to love God, and then by that warm, sweet love of God we come to love men still better.

This is one of the tests of our social work. Is it bringing us that insight? Is it working out wonder and reverence, tenderness and awe in us? Has our work for men quickened our sense of God? If it has not wrought any of these things in us, our work has not done much for us, and it is questionable if we have done much for others.<sup>494</sup>

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<sup>492</sup> Rauschenbusch. "Conference Sermon." 15

<sup>493</sup> Hopkins. *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism*. 321

<sup>494</sup> Rauschenbusch. "Conference Sermon." 17-18

What had changed, then, was not the emphasis on the salvation of the individual, but the belief of how individuals achieve salvation, a belief altered by an understanding of the relations of individuals developed through science. In this new approach to salvation, the efforts to save one's own soul are informed by sociology's lessons that the souls are inextricably socially linked; thus, "[i]t's not a man's business to save his own soul, but to save somebody else's soul,"<sup>495</sup>. By sociology, not only could social Christianity see that an individual could facilitate another's efforts to save his or her own individual soul, but because that individual could do so, he or she had a religious requirement to do so under the mandates of Christian love.

Within the new mandate, the very concept of the Christian good becomes irrevocably social, collectivist and community oriented:

All human goodness must be social goodness. Man is fundamentally gregarious and his morality consists in being a good member of his community. A man is moral when he is social; he is immoral when he is anti-social. The highest type of goodness is that which puts freely at the service of the community all that a man is and can. The highest type of badness is that which uses up the wealth and happiness and virtue of the community to please self. All this ought to go without saying, but in fact religious ethics in the past has largely spent its force in detaching men from their community, from marriage and property, from interest in political and social tasks.<sup>496</sup>

In this vein, the socialization of the Christian good places a new emphasis on service. Certainly, Christianity had long included notions of service, yet those notions often

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<sup>495</sup> Stelzle, Rev. Charles. Supt. Department of Church and Labor, the Board of Home Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. "The Preparation of Ministers for Social Work." *Proceedings of the National Conference of Charities and Correction at the Thirty-Eighth Annual Session held in the City of St. Louis, Mo., June 7-14, 1911*. Edited by Alexander Johnson. (Fort Wayne, Ind.: Press of the Archer Printing Company, 1911). 233. Stelzle was elaborating upon understanding of Gladden's theology as: "In one of Dr. Gladden's recent books, he quotes those who say that 'the message of Christianity is to the individual.' 'Yes,' Dr. Gladden replies, 'but here's the message:--you are not strictly an individual any more than your hand is an individual. You do not live for yourself. If you try to save your life you will lose it, but if you are willing to forget your individuality you will be saved.'"

<sup>496</sup> Rauschenbusch. *Christianity and the Social Crisis*. 67

had tended to devolve towards service to the church; love of God meant to serve Him through His appointed church.<sup>497</sup> Yet if that love becomes broadened in scope, then both the concepts of Christian goodness and its counterpart, sin, would necessarily become recontextualized:

Social religion, too, demands repentance and faith: repentance for our social sins; faith in the possibility of a new social order. As long as a man sees in our present society only a few inevitable abuses and recognizes no sin and evil deep-seated in the very constitution of the present order, he is still in a state of moral blindness and without conviction of sin.<sup>498</sup>

To try to live as a moral individual in a sinful society without working to redeem it would be itself sin.

In a very real sense, then, the religious becomes political. As Christian religion proceeded rationally to analyze society and its problems in terms of its ethical position, it became a kind of political program in and of itself, a part of the new faith in progress inculcated in the Progressive Age.<sup>499</sup> In his 1914 President's Address to the National Conference of Charities and Corrections entitled, "The County—A Challenge to humanized politics and volunteer co-operation," Graham Taylor made clear his belief in the mutual interdependence, if not identity, of the church's mission and its politics:

There is at last a growing conviction that even the church cannot succeed if the community fails, and that the community cannot succeed if the church fails. The citizen is feeling his need of religion in "facing all that is disagreeable and problematic in democracy, concealing nothing, blinking nothing away, and at the same time, keeping his will strong and temperate, so that its edge will never turn." For the citizen "to meet all his social obligations

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<sup>497</sup> Of course, historically this service could often be diverted towards the sovereign as well, through the magic of the established church.

<sup>498</sup> Ibid. 349

<sup>499</sup> Hopkins. *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism*. 123

properly, to pay all his political debts joyously, never to throw a glance over his shoulder to the monastery—this is a mighty day's work.”<sup>500</sup>

Religious work, social work and political work here all converge in developing both the ethical ends to be effected in society and the means to produce them. Insofar as the new scientific developments of the period brought about this convergence, it may be no great exaggeration to say that, for the Social Gospellers, sociology brought about a new science of Christian love; as Lyman Abbott would explain, “The object of Christianity is human welfare; its method is character building; its process is evolution; and the secret of its power is God,”<sup>501</sup>.

This new practical approach to Christianity and society, of course, meant a new role for Church and clergy. As evangelical Protestantism increasingly tended towards a progressive desire to overcome corruption in the world with the end of Christianizing society, the attendant Christian duty to use secular power to transform culture<sup>502</sup> created a very different sense of purpose for the clergy. In other words, a new definition of sin meant a new definition of the role of the church. As the Reverend Charles Stelzle put it:

We are told that “it is the business of the Church to convict men of sin.” True, but this refers not merely to sin in the abstract. It must have reference to the sin of child labor, the sin of the sweat-shop, the sin of under-pay and over-work, the sin of insufficient protection from fire in a shirtwaist factory, the sin of killing little children with a tenement-house, the sin of an economic system which deprives men and women of their rights.<sup>503</sup>

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<sup>500</sup> Taylor, Graham. “President’s Address.” *Proceedings of the National Conference of Social Work, Formerly, National Conference of Charities and Correction at the Forty-First Annual Session Held in Memphis, Tennessee May 8-15, 1914*. (Fort Wayne, Ind.: Fort Wayne Printing Company, 1914). 14

<sup>501</sup> Quoted in Hopkins. *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism*. 130. (Cited: “What is Christianity?” *Arena* 3 (1891). 46)

<sup>502</sup> Timberlake. *Prohibition and the Progressive Movement*. 7

<sup>503</sup> Stelzle. “The Preparation of Ministers for Social Work.” 233

This religious project was a project of society, not only individuals seeking absolution or avoidance of their own sins, and that shift meant the project extended far beyond the membership of any given church.<sup>504</sup> More than a social project, the Social Gospelers steeled themselves to face the project of society itself.

Moreover, this project meant that the clergy ought to promote the earthly happiness of all mankind.<sup>505</sup> Traditional theological admonitions that too much concern with earthly things would lead people astray from the proper contemplation of a pious relationship with God would no longer hold given a social conception of sin:

We are warned that social service will interfere with the preaching of the Gospel, that it contains too much thought for worldly welfare, that in working for material decency it will lose its spiritual vision, will lessen its communion with its God, will become a mere social agency. Could anything be farther than this view from the teaching of Moses and Isaiah, of Jesus and Paul? These great leaders and lovers of men were full of zeal for the temporal welfare of men. They emphasized not only individual obedience to the law and the commandments, but they make it clear that seeking the temporal welfare of men is an essential part of righteousness, an essential part of any gospel that would lay claim to being God-inspired.<sup>506</sup>

Far from concerns of worldliness imperiling the soul, an inadequate engagement with society would not sufficiently address the problem of sin once that sin was situated within social conditions. No longer could a Christian remain “right with God,” so to speak, without involvement in the world, an involvement guided by his or her Christian faith. As Rev. Gladden put it in his committee report, “The Church and Social Work,” “It seems very clear that the program of Jesus Christ did not contemplate any such separation between religion and philanthropy; one does not like

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<sup>504</sup> Hopkins. *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism*. 125

<sup>505</sup> *Ibid.* 84

<sup>506</sup> Glenn. “The Church and Social Work” 141-142



to think of what His judgment would be upon this tendency, to exalt sentimentalism and undervalue service,”<sup>507</sup>.

As for the question that he was immediately addressing, “The Function of the Church in Social Work; Should it Inspire, Interpret, Guide or Administer it?” Gladden noted, “I am rather inclined to change ‘or’ to ‘and’ and answer ‘Yes.’ It should do all these things as soon as it is qualified and as well as it can,”<sup>508</sup>. That final qualifier is telling as to Gladden’s attitude with regard to the inadequacies of the clergy to the new task for the church at that time. The methods and tools needed to counsel one who was concerned with the sin within his heart could not be expected to be sufficient to deal with a whole new conception of sin, particularly one that assayed the individuals’ influence on the potential for sin in the community. The Social Gospel’s “discovery” of the proper Christian mission and, therefore, the proper role of the church in society meant that the church and its clergy would need to develop new competencies to meet what was now considered their appropriate tasks.

Accordingly, the fact that the church had not previously prepared and positioned itself for this role could only be seen as a failure on the part of the church. Unaware of the true nature of sin and the social nature of redemption, the church had not developed the capacity or propensity to integrate itself with the political project that the Social Gospel conceived for Christianity. As such, in the eyes of the Social Gospelers, the church, though well-meaning and noble in its intentions as befitting an institution of divine service, was deficient as measured by the newer, worldlier conception of Christian ethics:

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<sup>507</sup> Gladden. “The Function of the church in Social Work.” 216

<sup>508</sup> Ibid. 216

One of the keenest satires on the failure and futility of much church work to meet the demands of the times, ends with this frankest confession of the need of it in a democracy, and this noble insistence upon the dependence of social justice upon religion: “Nothing but a church will do. All the other schemes of democracy come to naught for want of that. The lecture platform is no substitute for Sinai. Democracy is a religion or nothing, with its doctrine, its forms, its ritual, its ceremonies, its government as a church—above all, its organized sacrifice of the altar, the sacrifice of self. Democracy must get rid of the natural man, of each for himself, and have a new birth into the spiritual man, the ideal self of each for all. Without religion, how is man, the essentially religious animal, to face the most tremendous of all problems —social justice?”<sup>509</sup>

Previously, the Church’s appropriate role would have been to prevent, or at least mitigate the dangers of such worldly engagement at the peril of risk to one’s soul. In such a social scheme, wandering from the church could itself be considered sin on account of the failure of the individual to maintain responsibility for the proper contemplation of God worthy of His Grace. A social Christianity, though, could hold the Church responsible for not being relevant to the actual social nature of sin and demand that it reform itself to the real needs of the salvation of the race.

As the Social Gospel movement matured, then, there came to be an increasing interest on the part of ministers not just in social issues but also an increase in the teaching of social science in theology schools and conferences.<sup>510</sup> Building on, and past, the Bill of Rights referenced by Rauschenbusch above, most churches of evangelical Protestantism set up social service commissions and nearly all adopted the Federal Council of Churches’ Commission on the Church and Social Service’s Social Creed,<sup>511</sup> drawn up in 1912, the presentation of which made the front page of *The New York Times*:

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<sup>509</sup> Taylor. “President’s Address.” 14

<sup>510</sup> Hopkins. *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism*. 149

<sup>511</sup> Timberlake. *Prohibition and the Progressive Movement*. 23-24

CHICAGO, Dec. 3. -- The Commission on Church and Social Service presented its report through the Rev. Frank Mason North to-day at the opening meeting of the Quadrennial Conference of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America. It included a new "social creed" for the churches. Some articles in this creed are:

Protection of the family by the single standard of family, uniform divorce laws, proper regulation of marriage, and proper housing.

The fullest possible development for every child, especially by the provision of proper education and recreation.

The abolition of child labor.

Such regulation of the conditions of toil for women as shall safeguard the physical and moral health of the community.

The abatement and prevention of poverty.

The protection of the individual and society from the social, economic, and moral waste of the liquor traffic.

The protection of the worker from dangerous machinery, occupational diseases, and mortality.

Suitable provision for the old age of the workers and for those incapacitated by injury.

Release from employment one day in seven.

The gradual and reasonable reduction of the hours of labor to the lowest practicable point, and that degree of leisure for all which is a condition of the highest human life.

A living wage as a minimum in every industry, and the highest wage that each industry can afford.<sup>512</sup>

The methodology of enacting so ambitious a social program required more than the formal logic of theology but rather "a wider study of man" in the every-day processes of humanity.<sup>513</sup> By 1913, Frank Tucker noted in his National Conference of Charities and Corrections presidential address, "Social Justice," that:

This National Conference had reached the stage when preventive philanthropy became its dominant note. It had reached the stage when its formulation of the causes of poverty and crime became much more definite. When the causes of poverty and crime had been crystallized as inefficient and dishonest government, inefficient education, exploitation of labor, exploitation of the physical and economic necessities of everyday life, exploitation of weaknesses of character, for which causes some of the best and some of the worst of our countrymen from captains of industry to the ward

<sup>512</sup> "Social Creed for Church; Commission Presents Its Views to Federal Council In Chicago." New York Times 4 DEC 1912. Page 1

<sup>513</sup> From Hopkins. *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism*. 62

boss controlling organized vice, were equally guilty, the men and women of this Conference began to search for remedies.<sup>514</sup>

If this preventative angle be the approach to social work and if the church were to retain its legitimacy in the view of social Christianity, the church would need to become part of the program, so to speak. And certainly a program it was, entailing efforts not just to offer succor in the traditional ways of Christian charities but to intervene against problems that were increasingly understood at the institutional level, for it was newly understood to be the work of Christianity to consider: "What are some of the problems which are restraining men's spirituality that the church might be attacking with reasonable hope of success?"<sup>515</sup>.

This need to meet social conditions head on and do something about them constituted a significant break in the Church's understanding of society. Obviously, the jeremiad tradition historically has more than a little to say about the decadence and degradation of mainstream culture and its influence on the spirit, but rarely, if ever, had it adhered to an institutional program.<sup>516</sup> Now, though, the Church would need to understand not only how society distracted one from the proper contemplation of God that led one to right action, but also its tendencies to inhibit the development of the individual to choose such contemplation:

Underlying all Catholic sociology is the fundamental doctrine that, having from God a soul endowed with intellect and will enabling him to know and do good and avoid evil, man is responsible to God for every thought and deed concerning his fellows and himself, and that without this sense of responsibility and consequent responsiveness to right, no external law can be effective. Hence man's right to life includes the right to be born well of clean

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<sup>514</sup> Tucker, Frank. "President's Address." *Proceedings of the National Conference of Social Work, Formerly, National Conference of Charities and Correction at the Fortieth Annual Session Held in Seattle, Washington July 5-12, 1913*. (Fort Wayne, Ind.: Fort Wayne Printing Company, 1913). 4

<sup>515</sup> Glenn. "The Church and Social Work." 142

<sup>516</sup> The notion of Constantinian Christianity as a holistic enterprise notwithstanding.

and moral parents, and the right from parents and society to full mental, moral, and physical development, and opportunity for its decent continuance in liberty and the pursuit of happiness, God-given rights which no majority may alienate;<sup>517</sup>.

Again, it must be emphasized, as did Rev. Michael Kenny in his talk on “The Relation of the Church to Social Work,” from which came this Christian sociological doctrine that the engagement of the material conditions of life were not to come at the expense of ignoring the spiritual element of redemption; “true happiness can never be attained by individual or nation unless the pursuit follows the lines of righteousness stamped by God on the human heart and illumined and deepened by the church,”<sup>518</sup>. Yet sociology had informed Christian doctrine of the notion of material social preconditions for salvation. No longer would it be sufficient for the Church to exhort people to turn their eyes to God, but rather it would need to undertake the work of empowering the people to seek salvation, a work consistent with the newly understood belief that social work comprised a vital part of an individual’s efforts towards the same.

Given the attitudes of the progressivism of the time, this new role for the Church meant that the Church would have to act scientifically in society. As Jane Addams put it in her 1910 National Conference of Charity and Corrections presidential address, the different factions of the Progressives, whom she calls broadly “the charitable” and “the Radicals,” had come ultimately to converge on, “the conviction that the poverty and crime with which they constantly deal are often the

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<sup>517</sup> Kenny, Rev. Michael, S.J. Professor of Sociology and Jurisprudence, Loyola University, New Orleans. “The Relation of the Church to Social Work.” *Proceedings of the National Conference of Social Work, Formerly, National Conference of Charities and Correction at the Forty-Seventh Annual Session Held in New Orleans, Louisiana April 14-21, 1920*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1920). 53

<sup>518</sup> Ibid. 53

result of untoward industrial conditions,” and also that, “if they would make an effective appeal to public opinion they must utilize carefully collected data as to the conditions of the poor and the criminal,”<sup>519</sup>. In effect, the realization that individual fortunes depended so heavily upon structural and systemic concerns was derived from science and would hence require science to demonstrate the insight to others in order to gain political support for the reforms such realization implied was necessary:

Moreover, modern charity, continually discovering new obligations, has been obliged to call to its aid economics, sanitary science, statistical research, and many other agencies as the program of this Conference will testify. It has therefore through dire need, been forced to recognize that charitable effort is part of the general social movement; somewhat as John Stuart Mill, when he was hard pressed by the problems of life, restored political economy to its proper place as a branch of social philosophy, insisting that it was not a thing by itself, but was an important part of the great whole.<sup>520</sup>

If the Church would be part of the social movement, it would have to embrace all of it, the scientific approach included.

The Christian love of the Social Gospel, then, meant that if Christians were to love rightly, which is to say socially, they would require science. Such a combination would not be difficult, though, given the expectation of conformity between religious and scientific truth. Some might consider it a happy coincidence that goodness is useful to society and that that which is socially useful is good, as when Rauschenbusch observes:

Cooperation is not only morally beautiful, but economically effective. The great achievements of modern life are almost wholly due to the application of this principle. Progress consisted in learning to expand the size of our cooperating groups and to make all the parts interlock more smoothly. The

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<sup>519</sup> Addams, Jane, of Hull House, Chicago. “President's Address: Charity and Social Justice.” *Proceedings of the National Conference of Charities and Correction at the Thirty-seventh Annual Session held in the City of St. Louis, Mo., May 19th to 26th, 1910*, Edited by Alexander Johnson. (Fort Wayne, Ind.: Press of the Archer Printing Company, 1910). 1

<sup>520</sup> Ibid. 2

triumphs of applied science are due to the sharing of intellectual results and methods.<sup>521</sup>

On the other hand, the confluence of instrumental and normative efficacy might well be seen as a kind of epistemological necessity if one holds that scientific and moral knowledge, rightly understood, each flow from a single well-spring of truth. To the extent that the different approaches to knowledge are expected to cohere, then what some would attribute to coincidence is actually a function of reality.

Religious work, given this comprehension of reality, would need to be done scientifically to be done well. That is to say, if the religious problems of the world observed by social Christianity could be understood scientifically and if scientific investigation could offer methods for social work to find solutions, then Christianity would have to be scientific in its approach. For the Social Gospel, this approach was not a departure in the history of Christianity but rather a natural development given the progression of the state of knowledge, a progression in which science was intimately involved:

The millennial hope was the modern social hope without the scientific conception of organic development. The Church Fathers were lacking in the historical sense for development. The educated men among them had been trained in the Roman rhetorical schools, and the educational system of that day was almost useless for producing historical insight. The air of the miraculous which hung about Christian thought down to modern times was also directly hostile to any scientific comprehension of social facts. When all things happened by devils or angels, how could men understand the real causes of things?<sup>522</sup>

In this formulation of Rauschenbusch's, what might seem to be a break in tradition to some is in reality just an updating of doctrine on account of new discoveries—in effect the scientific method applied to theology. If the scientific method is an

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<sup>521</sup> Rauschenbusch. *Christianizing the Social Order*. 170

<sup>522</sup> Rauschenbusch. *Christianity and the Social Crisis*. 196

appropriate method for discovering truth and there is a moral mandate to understand religious truth, then the scientific method would seem appropriate to the theological task.

In this way, religious progressives came to hold the Church responsible for social science. Social science was deemed necessary to the effectuation of a moral world, so if the Church would retain—or, as some would articulate the notion, regain—its moral stewardship in America, it required the tools of social science. The clergy would need social science because their work was social work. In the words of Rev. Stelzle, “‘But why hold the theological seminary responsible for the situation?’ somebody may ask. For the same reason that I would hold the medical school responsible if physicians were improperly trained for their life’s work,”<sup>523</sup>. Accordingly, the church would need to become involved in the project itself, as when Glenn offered his list of “Practical Methods to Adopt” in his remarks on “Church and Social work” at the 1913 National Conference on Charities and Corrections:

How can the churches as churches deal with social problems? It is not possible to map out a definite program that will apply universally. Each church must make its own program according to the needs of its community and the instruments at its command. But it is possible to make some general suggestions applicable to any church.

1. A church's members should study community problems and carefully consider what are the wisest methods of attacking them, so as to destroy the bad and build up the good.
2. A church should co-operate with all intelligent and well administered social agencies, public and private, getting the benefit of their knowledge and experience, and leaving to them everything that they are equipped to do - within their respective spheres.
3. A church can provide for its members, young and old, elementary instruction and courses of study in social questions, and it can bring those who need further instruction or training into touch with institutions and agencies that are equipped to teach and train.

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<sup>523</sup> Stelzle. “The Preparation of Ministers for Social Work.” 235



4. A church can insist that theological seminaries shall give courses dealing with social questions, and training to their students through direct contact with the poor under trained social workers, so that their graduates may lead wisely in healthy, sound social progress.
5. A church can make its influence felt in politics by insisting on pure and honest administration in government and on the choice of clean, strong men for office, in local government at least; and by expressing itself clearly and publicly as to legislation and policies which will clearly aid or hinder social righteousness, according to the church's conception of it. Its members should, collectively as well as individually, constantly express their sympathy with honest and wise officials and speak their minds frankly to selfish and careless ones. Incidentally, a similar policy should be pursued toward owners and managers of newspapers, which should be looked upon essentially as public agents, not merely as private critics.
6. A church can federate with other churches to do these and other things where the power of combination is necessary to bring good results more speedily.<sup>524</sup>

To take seriously the religious mission meant that the Christian church ought not only to learn to understand itself better through new scientific knowledge and reconceive its purpose and function through the same, but also it should learn from science the knowledge necessary for a good society and demand that politics incorporate this knowledge in public administration.

### **A Science of Christianity**

Ultimately, the extension of the reasoning that made the Church feel the need for science meant that the Church ought necessarily to become a part of the process of science itself. Christianity for the Social Gospel had become scientific in a very real sense. Moreover, the idea of an institution being “scientific” carries with it two common connotations, referring at once to a method of understanding and also to a method of accomplishing goals; both here apply. On the one hand, the theology of the Social Gospel had been shaped by the new scientific discoveries of the time,

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<sup>524</sup> Glenn. “The Church and Social Work.” 144

especially evolution, which seemed, on account of the acceptance of a collapse of normative and empirical thought, to demand that Christianity reform its ethics to address the reality of the people for which it was meant. On the other hand, as the Social Gospel learned about society through science, so too would it require scientific approaches to solve the social problems that inhibited the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth and the salvation of all souls. Thus, in the Social Gospel, Christianity became itself a kind of science of the redemption of society.

Once Christianity adopted a sociological view of society and, therefore, salvation, such theological development may have become inevitable. As early as 1885 a group of Social Gospellers, led by Professor Richard T. Ely founded the American Economic Association<sup>525</sup> specifically in response to a demand for social science to fulfill the religious goals of which theology alone proved incapable and which required the science of economics to move “in the direction of practical Christianity,”<sup>526</sup>; the church was charged with its overemphasis of a theological compliance with the First Commandment as a failure to study the social science necessary to fulfill the Commandment of love for one’s fellow man.<sup>527</sup> For this reason, Prof. Ely asserted the need for the social rather than individual gospel on account of the Church having lost its leadership on materialist views. Similarly, Newman Smyth would claim that, while the clergy ought not teach economics, they should “apply economics in their teachings and lives to the needs of men in this present life,”<sup>528</sup>.

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<sup>525</sup> Yes, the same one that puts out the *American Economic Review*. I’m serious.

<sup>526</sup> Quoted in Hopkins. *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism*. 116

<sup>527</sup> Ibid. 106; 149

<sup>528</sup> Quoted in: Ibid. 90

Sociological reasoning combined with the historical method had itself forced progressive theologians to situate their society, including culture, religion, economics and so forth, within larger historical forces. Little was required, then, to follow the reasoning of the interdependence of the development, as when Rauschenbusch notes:

So religious frugality laid the foundations for capitalism and put civilization on its legs financially. Now capitalism is disintegrating that virtue in the descendants of the Calvinists and persuading them to buy baubles that capital may make profit.

How deeply our standards of morality are affected by commercialism probably no man can estimate. Not only the practice, but the theory of honesty is weakened.<sup>529</sup>

Religion influences the mores of a society. The mores influence development of the economics of the society. The economics then in turn alter the mores. While such insight might be commonplace today, this new comprehension introduced a whole new conception of the ability to control the social processes shaping human life, the kind of control that made the organization of the forces of society towards the building of a terrestrial kingdom of God appear, for the first time, feasible:

To undertake the gradual reconstruction of social life consciously and intelligently would have required a scientific comprehension of social life which was totally lacking in the past. Sociology is still an infant science. Modern political economy may be said to have begun with Adam Smith's "Wealth of Nations," which was published in 1776. Modern historical science, which is interpreting the origins and the development of social institutions, is only about a century old.<sup>530</sup>

If Christianity had only recently accepted the challenge of making a more perfect world for the salvation of all, it could surely be excused for its previous failure on account of the fact that not only were the means unavailable, but so too was the knowledge that such a goal was even possible.

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<sup>529</sup> Rauschenbusch. *Christianizing the Social Order*. 212

<sup>530</sup> Rauschenbusch. *Christianity and the Social Crisis*. 194

Once such a religious possibility was realized, however, it became imperative. To these ends, then, it was necessary to develop the science through which this purpose could and would be enacted. In this vein, science was believed to provide access to hitherto impossible comprehension of Jesus's message. This comprehension was utterly new to the nineteenth century because, as Rauschenbusch elaborates, "The first scientific life of Christ was written in 1829 by Karl Hase. Christians had always bowed in worship before their Master, but they had never undertaken to understand his life in its own historical environment and his teachings his hearers,"<sup>531</sup>. The Social Gospel, because it engaged Christianity scientifically, was a more true Christianity. The reason for this, as understood by the scientific approach, was that Christianity was itself a science, for, "Jesus had the scientific insight which comes to most men only by training, but to the elect few by divine gift. He grasped the substance of that law of organic development in nature and history which our own day at last has begun to elaborate systematically,"<sup>532</sup>.

In principle, according to such a formulation as Rauschenbusch's, the Christian message—the Gospel—was itself the knowledge content of science. As such, it is clear that in this view, science has normative content. Moreover, part of that normative content is to engage in more science, the better to enact the goals illuminated by the normative content. The discovery that Jesus spoke on matters relating to everyday life created a demand for courses on Jesus's social utterances and his social teachings.<sup>533</sup> Similarly, some theological schools began to accept responsibility for the sociological education of their clergy and there was seen the

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<sup>531</sup> Ibid. 46

<sup>532</sup> Rauschenbusch. *Christianity and the Social Crisis*. 59

<sup>533</sup> Hopkins. *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism*. 213

development of biblical and Christian sociologies employing a methodology based on the life and words of Christ.<sup>534</sup>

Obviously, gleaning techniques from science could be considered useful to many, if not most, endeavors, religious or otherwise; one uses whatever appropriate tools are available.<sup>535</sup> The specific texture of the Social Gospel, though, clearly indicates an embrace of not only the continuity but a kind of integrity of religious and scientific approaches to knowledge. That social Darwinism had, for some, become a kind of religion was certainly not lost on Rauschenbusch who observed:

For a century the doctrine of salvation by competition was the fundamental article in the working creed of the capitalistic nations. It was the “natural theology” of industry, and no political economy was orthodox that did not preach it. Governments felt it would be a sin to interfere while competitors were having a Donnybrook Fair.<sup>536</sup>

While problematic, such a social theory was not unreasonable, as science properly employed would yield the path to truth; the problem with this view was not one of method, but of incorrect conclusions. Conversely, through the Social Gospel a more correct—or corrected—science would be the vehicle for the new Christianity of the future:

We have the new sciences of political economy and sociology to guide us. It is true, political economy in the past has misled us often, but it too is leaving its sinful *laissez-faire* ways and preparing to serve the Lord and human brotherhood. All the biblical sciences are now using the historical method and striving to put us in the position of the original readers of each biblical book. But as the Bible becomes more lifelike, it becomes more social. We used to see the sacred landscape through allegorical interpretation as through a piece of yellow bottle-glass. It was very golden and wonderful, but very much apart from our everyday modern life. The Bible hereafter will be “the people's book” in a new sense. For the first time in religious history

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<sup>534</sup> Ibid. 167-168

<sup>535</sup> What constitutes “appropriateness” is, however, another story altogether.

<sup>536</sup> Rauschenbusch. *Christianizing the Social Order*. 177

scientific knowledge that a comprehensive and continuous reconstruction of social life in the name of God is within the bounds of human possibility.<sup>537</sup>

In no way would this mean to imply, however, that science had replaced religion.

Rather, science was knowledge of truth, meaning that, in this view anyway, the project of science and religion were properly considered one and the same.

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<sup>537</sup> Rauschenbusch. *Christianity and the Social Crisis*. 209

## **CHAPTER 5: GOD ONLY KNOWS?**

### **Problems of Conflating Epistemological Approaches to Political Knowledge for American Democracy**

A Political Era—or *the* political era—in American history is ending. Earlier, Americans knew or felt that when liberalism and modernity failed them, there was another world to which they could repair. Made most visible by the churches, the ethnic groups, and the small communities, it was what Americans meant when they spoke of “home.” Its invisible side, the values and symbols and the culture these reflected, helped intellectuals to organize and clarify their own discontent and, in politics, allowed them the warm illusion of a fraternity between the excluded and the alienated. Now, however, the groups which supported that tradition are dead or dying, as liberal society becomes more and more to resemble that blank sheet which its great prophet asserted was the natural beginning of men. And the ideas which our older culture reflected and kept partly alive have been banished by fashion to odd corners—to dusty alcoves and the minds of the eccentric or fortunate—and have become distant from the life of men.

W. Carey McWilliams, *The Idea of Fraternity in America*<sup>538</sup>

### **Epistemological Collapse and the Instrumentalization of Spiritual Thought**

By now I hope I have conveyed how a seemingly aberrant policy choice might be comprehensible through an understanding of the underlying religious and scientific epistemology of the policy’s proponents. That scientific and normative reasoning might intermingle in the realm of politics is, in a sense, not so surprising considering the role political policy plays in society. Policy must deal with the world as it is, and endeavor to make the world as we would like it to be. Accordingly, instrumental reason must be employed to achieve conceptions of the good insofar as we believe them to be possible through political activity. Indeed, American pragmatism itself—considered by many to be America’s unique contribution to philosophy—represents the philosophical merger of the scientific method with teleological notions of an explicit or quasi-religious type that

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<sup>538</sup> McWilliams. *The Idea of Fraternity in America*. 618

analytically has no real place in contemporary understandings of “pure” or “hard” science. In effect, even many of the more scientific approaches to politics and thought can be found to share the special texture of American thought’s tendency to incorporate spiritualism and religiosity into empirical debate; no need is felt to separate what some would argue are analytically distinct elements. As Richard Rorty states, in attempting to explain his own philosophic views<sup>539</sup>:

The American pragmatist tradition, by contrast, has made a point of breaking down the distinctions between philosophy, science and politics. Its representatives often describe themselves as ‘naturalists’, though they deny that they are reductionists or empiricists. Their objection to both traditional British empiricism and the scientific reductionism characteristic of the Vienna Circle is precisely that neither is sufficiently naturalistic. In my perhaps chauvinistic view, we Americans have been more consistent than the Europeans. For American philosophers have realized that the idea of a distinctive, autonomous, cultural activity called ‘philosophy’ becomes dubious when the vocabulary which has dominated that activity is called into question.<sup>540</sup>

An anti-foundationalist such as Rorty, of course, leaves out religion in his assessment of this mindset.<sup>541</sup> However, as has been made clear above, American public discourse allows as legitimate, if not encourages, arguments with a distinctly religious texture, even, if not especially, when considering practical problems of social and political importance.

This discourse contains within it new and distinctive conceptions of democracy and republicanism. That is to say, American politics are understood by the people to be democratic and republican, but the beliefs concerning what makes the country a republic

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<sup>539</sup> Rorty, interestingly, though a self-proclaimed intellectual disciple of Dewey, expressly rejects any foundations for his own brand of pragmatism. This rejection may prove problematic for a politics of growth in the American world-view insofar as little distinction can be made between the good of the individual versus the good of the community, as shall be examined. Rorty, Richard. *Philosophy and Social Hope*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1999).

<sup>540</sup> Ibid. 17

<sup>541</sup> The avoidance of religion is an interesting historical point as he was the grandson of Walter Rauschenbusch.



and what the point of democracy is departs greatly from the classical understandings invoked, perhaps misleadingly, by the founders. The democracy that John Dewey saw as characterized in America's imagination as "neither a form of government nor a social expediency, but a metaphysic of the relation of man and his experience in nature,"<sup>542</sup> entailed a collective vision of the good to be sure. Accordingly, as James Morone has found, "Precisely when American politics grows most contentious, Americans look beyond adversary democracy and expect to find a consensus about shared interests residing in the people. A Rousseauian common good seems to beckon from beyond the Lockean status quo,"<sup>543</sup> Popular contemporary imagination on the role of the individual in American life notwithstanding, Morone demonstrates that institution building in America has proceeded with the invocation that the institutions will embody this metaphysic of democracy—the democratic wish.<sup>544</sup> That the common good, which will tend towards the greatest good for individuals as well, often coincides with government establishment—or preservation of, depending upon your point of view—of freedom ought not to distract from the main issue that the point is still held to be this greater common good. There is an interesting tension within Rousseau's theory of the common good, though, where he states, "This presupposes, indeed, that all the qualities of the general will reside in the majority: when they cease to do so, whatever side a man may

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<sup>542</sup>Quoted in: Mitchell, Charles E. *Individualism and Its Discontents. Appropriations of Emerson, 1880-1950*. (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997) . 110 (Citation: Dewey, John. "Maeterlinck's Philosophy of Life." *The Middle Works of John Dewey*. (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1979) Vol. VI ). According to Dewey, only Emerson, Whitman and Maeterlinck had made this realization.

<sup>543</sup> Morone, James A. *The Democratic Wish: Popular Participation and the Limits of American Government*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998). 6

<sup>544</sup> Morone also effectively demonstrates that whether the institutions so formed do indeed promote said democracy is another matter altogether.

take, liberty is no longer possible,”<sup>545</sup>. The puzzle of what to do when the common good is not manifested in the will of the majority endures for democratic theory, and most probably drives the interest in this irresponsible genius. The competing visions of American democracy and its appropriate scope in governing—in commanding—the wills of individual people and what best constitutes and promotes a republican common good might be understood as mirroring this never solved problem of locating, in practice, the Rousseauian common good.

To understand how these politics are understood and pursued in the American context it becomes necessary to consider more thoroughly the operation of the legitimated plausibility structure—i.e. that which Americans consider the appropriate scope for political action—in terms of the contemporary relationship between the individual and society. Stated more succinctly, knowledge of how Americans understand the relationship between the individual and society will inform an understanding of what Americans believe to constitute legitimate politics. As seen above, the popular understanding of this relationship has changed dramatically from America’s puritanical roots. Moreover, the various waves of immigration have radically changed the source populations in America—in many ways the current debates about immigration can be seen to mirror the theoretical notions of whether or not “these people” share “our” American values such that they may rightfully participate in the American enterprise.<sup>546</sup> For present purposes, leverage on this matter can be gained by investigating the sorts of spiritual and quasi-religious belief and thought systems that have risen in twentieth

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<sup>545</sup> Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *The Social Contract and Discourses*. Translated by G. D. H. Cole. (London: Orion Publishing Group, 1999)

<sup>546</sup> Whatever the hell that is—a point debatable and much debated and, in many ways, the impetus behind this dissertation.

century America. What will be shown—I hope—is how, in recent times, Americans have embraced forms of religious and spiritual thinking that, in keeping with the acceptance of epistemological collapse between instrumental and normative thinking, radically emphasize the utility and instrumental use of such thought to the ends of individual utility. These movements of course do not necessarily cause the corresponding political ramifications discussed, but rather can be seen as symptomatic of the reorientation of what are considered to be acceptable political attitudes away from the common good thinking of traditional republicanism described above and towards a focus on the pursuit of personal goods.

The reorientation discussed, of course, is closely bound up with the rationalization of society and the individual's place in it, as theorized by and since Weber. Rationalization seems almost necessarily at times to place the emphasis on the individual, the holder of the reason by which society is transformed:

As both the sacred (the cosmos) and nature are simplified and made abstract, society is desacralized. Social structure, exchange, and authority lose ultimate value and are no longer taken as ends in themselves, but rather as means to the attainment of value exogenous to them. Social organization becomes profane and is rationalized as a set of interrelated means-ends chains. With the transformation in the external cosmos and nature, the ends of these chains becomes located in the abstract individual, who is now the primordial entity that anchors this ontology.<sup>547</sup>

Yet what often falls out of such discussions is the character of such an ontology when religious sentiments concerning the phenomenon are retained. As such, rationalization does not necessarily dominate or exclude the tenets of faith, but rather may work with them to reform ontologies to structure and legitimate certain kinds of behavior and approaches to politics. Such observed ontologies may then serve as vehicles for

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<sup>547</sup> Thomas. *Revivalism and Cultural Change*. 51

understanding the mind-set of the individuals holding them and how they work out their normative relationships with society.

What a viewing of post-World War II America reveals is a rise in the acceptance and popularity of spiritual and quasi-religious movements that emphasize utility to the individual. Whereas religious forms of thought were held, in the classical theory of liberalism, to define and justify social obligations and even the very structure of society and the mandate to participate in it politically, increasingly we see that such thought has become a tool for personal development. This emphasis can be observed in the character of the rise, development and acceptance of certain individual-oriented strains of thought that have become increasingly popular. Such new developments can be seen in the movements of Objectivism—based upon the philosophy of Ayn Rand, the religion of Scientology—not recognized as a religion in many other countries outside the United States, Est or the Landmark Forum<sup>548</sup>, the bastardization in American thought of many eastern religious philosophies—particularly Buddhism (meditation) and Yoga, and arguably the self-help industry and its sometimes almost cultish adherents. Of course, adherents of some of these systems of thought and practice would certainly balk at the association with some of the others. The contention here, however, is not to derogate any of these practices in and of themselves *per se*.<sup>549</sup> Rather, the goal is to underscore certain shared features that suggest not only that these practices are of a kind, but that they conform to and may be understood as manifestations of the amalgamated epistemological

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<sup>548</sup> The group's name was changed when it changed orders in the midst of law suits about abuses conducted by Est, including even non-consensual hypnosis.

<sup>549</sup> Yoga, for example, has a very salutary effect on many modern practitioners despite their failure to study the yogic scripture developed over hundreds, if not thousands of years to guide the practice.

approach accepted as legitimate in the American understanding of the proper relationship of individual and society.

These common approaches often lead to similar methods of coping, or even exploiting, aspects of the aforementioned social relationship. Obviously, religious and spiritual thought is a purposive sort of enterprise. Part of the religious impulse is to place oneself in the world, the universe, the cosmos—existence. “What is the meaning of life?”<sup>550</sup> “What are we here for?” “What am *I* here for?” And of particular political importance, “What, if anything, should I be doing?” The answers to these questions will necessarily evolve with a changed understanding of one’s place in the mix and, indeed, what the nature of that mix is.<sup>551</sup> As seen, the model of Lockean liberalism, rightly understood, places the individual within the context of participation in the achievement of the common good and a mandate for liberty and moral politics that are essentially one and the same. This relationship remains religious in texture while at the same time allowing for great breadth in religious ethics. Thus, the religious foundations with their attendant common good reasoning justified great liberty and personal freedom. As the religious underpinnings of liberty and the common good justification change or fall out, then freedom may become characterized as a lack of fixedness in society rather than the bedrock of virtue envisioned by Locke.

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<sup>550</sup> To grasp how insipid this question is, one need only pick up a rock and ask, “What is the meaning of the rock?” “What is a rock good for?” “Can I use the rock?” “How did the rock come to be here?” or even “Is there a reason this rock is here?” are all much better questions. This is not to suggest a foundational metaphysic for evaluating such questions so much as to point out that the original question, “What is the meaning of the rock?” has no real meaning at all—it fails to engage what is meant by “meaning,” as Ronald Dworkin so effectively points out in his evisceration of Justice Scalia’s treatise on “the plain meaning of the constitution.” See Dworkin’s “Comment” Scalia, Antonin. *A Matter of Interpretation: Federal Courts and the Law*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997)

<sup>551</sup> See especially Berger’s discussion of the human relationship with a culture that is product of human activity yet appears to be an exogenous, objective force exerting a perhaps unwanted influence on the individual which, ironically, was formed within its context. Berger. *The Sacred Canopy*. 3-28

As Luckman and Berger have shown, personal identity becomes more precarious in industrial and post-industrial society.<sup>552</sup> Paradoxically, this precariousness grows even as personal identity moves to the center of the understanding of social relations.<sup>553</sup> Modern rationalized capitalism has been characterized by mobility, the blurring of class-structure and other criteria for locating social status, a relative uncertainty concerning status location and status inconsistency due to multiple variable criteria for status ranking. In essence, the rationale of production in modern society shifts emphasis from ascribed to achieved bases of status placement. Accordingly, the standards to live by are no longer defined by traditional status groups. Rather, standards are defined by groups for which membership is sought through personal interaction. While voluntary participation in such secondary associations creates the potential for more authentic validation and meaning for the individual<sup>554</sup>, if these standards can become self-referential to the individual as per a metaphysical understanding centered on the self, as Tocqueville observed for people in a social condition of equality<sup>555</sup>, no clear horizon exists for achievement. Consequently, individuals may face a persisting sense of failure in their lives and seek solutions—solutions, in effect, to their lives.

### **An Individualistic Solution for the “Problem” of Self in Society**

<sup>552</sup> Berger and Luckmann. *The Social Construction of Reality*

<sup>553</sup> Ibid.; Weber. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*; Thomas. *Revivalism and Cultural Change*. Though it may well be contended that is only a paradox if it is believed that investigation necessarily leads to greater clarity, a belief that a cursory examination of the history of philosophy might easily deny.

<sup>554</sup> McWilliams. “Democracy and the Citizen.” 83. I pray he forgives me for using the term authenticity in relation to any of his thought. I find it useful here precisely because it underscores the indeterminacy of meaning that a rootless interaction can create as opposed to the more grounded sense of identity for which he searched through the acceptance of political commitments and obligations, an identity founded in intentionality. Carey was fond in his impish way, of pointing out, of course, that nobody who went soul searching ever “found themselves,” as the expression goes, “in Cleveland,” so I think he would understand and, I hope, agree with the basic thrust of that at which I am here getting.

<sup>555</sup> Tocqueville. *Democracy in America*. Volume II. 34

The movements in thought described above share a type of solution for this modern existential quandary. The solution hinges upon notions of how the individual can succeed within the constraints of the world in which we live. Bryan Wilson has termed such movements, “manipulationist.”<sup>556</sup> This reference to manipulation refers to the attempt to find a way to manipulate existing reality to the benefit of the individual—not to any propensity of proprietors of such systems of thought to manipulate the practitioner or consumer, though that may sometimes unfortunately be the case as well.<sup>557</sup> What these movements offer is:

Rather than a means of escape from the world, of attaining other-worldly salvation, or of achieving a radical transformation of the prevailing society, they offer the believer some superior, esoteric means of succeeding within the status quo. They offer knowledge and techniques to enable the individual to improve his ‘life-chances’; the means of achieving the valued goals of this world.<sup>558</sup>

Different systems of this kind will tend to work out the solution in different ways. In many respects, this is on account of radically different philosophic, theologic, or scientific foundations for the different systems. What is striking, in fact, is how the various systems take pieces of science, or philosophy or economic systems of thought and convert them into a sort of working metaphysic of theology, and yet how such systems may resonate so similarly with a common underlying purpose of promotion of self-interest and self-referential virtue. Two of the most easily apparent illustrations of this phenomenon in highly developed form that are widely enjoyed in America exist in Objectivism and in Scientology.

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<sup>556</sup> Wilson, Bryan R. *Religious Sects: A Sociological Study*. (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1970)

<sup>557</sup> It may be fairly suggested, though, that people seeking out such movements may be somewhat susceptible to such manipulation for the same reasons that they came to the movement in the first place. This in no way excuses those who would prey upon the existential uncertainty and angst of these truth seekers—although the epistemological confusion makes it difficult to discern the predator from the true believer, greatly complicating any assessment of moral or ethical blame, much less the assignment of harm.

<sup>558</sup> Wallis, Roy. *The Road to Total Freedom: A Sociological Analysis of Scientology*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977). 4

Beginning with Objectivism, what we are presented with is a vision of human beings—Ayn Rand speaks of “man”—as justifying a specific social order. Specifically, the purpose of *The Fountainhead*<sup>559</sup>—Rand’s first articulation of her philosophy in novelized form<sup>560</sup>—is to present the vision of the perfect man. In terms of how this man is perfected, it should be noted that at least John Wesley had a method for achieving this. Rand’s vision though has a loftier purpose, though, than to worry about the imperfect and the potential means that might be available to them for their own self-improvement. For Rand, the importance of understanding the perfect man is that it implies and justifies a vision of the best society. The best society would be that which allowed the perfect man to emerge. Obviously, for Rand, this is *laissez-faire* market capitalism.

In terms of a system of belief—as that is what this is, entailing quasi-metaphysical standards of evaluation for the individual and society—Rand’s system is man worship. Distinctly man worship, it is not men worship, or the worship of humanity or any common purposes potentially lying therein. There lies within Rand’s vision no project of making anything greater than man—particularly, in the case of the perfect man, a man who already exists. As David Kelley explains, “[i]n ethics, [Ayn Rand] said that the good is, ‘an aspect of reality in relation to man.’... Ayn Rand held that values are rooted in the fact that living things must act to maintain their own survival,”<sup>561</sup>. Here, concepts of the good are fused to rather thin understandings of Darwinian evolution to justify the actions of great individuals. Politically speaking, the problem becomes how to get such

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<sup>559</sup> Rand, Ayn. *The Fountainhead*. (Indianapolis, IL: Bobbs-Merrill, 1968)

<sup>560</sup> It was through the task of identifying the underlying philosophical concepts held by her individualistic fictional heroes that Rand developed her philosophy of Objectivism. Some might argue, then, that Objectivism is a quest to discover what makes fictional heroes so great without considering as a possible answer: “the fiction.”

<sup>561</sup> Kelley, David. *The Contested Legacy of Ayn Rand: Truth and Toleration in Objectivism*. (Poughkeepsie, NY: Objectivist Center, 2000). 19



individuals to work on any sort of political project. To the contrary, there exists only justification for the smallest possible political enterprise imaginable. As Ronald Merrill put it:

Rand's 'limited government' is consistent with her approach to epistemology. Justice is objective and knowable. Man can, by logical analysis, determine what justice is and construct a government which will enforce it. What is missing—and it is a crucial omission—in the Objectivist politics is a positive theory of the origins of government. What is government? What justifies it? Why should rational men submit to it? How does it, or should it, originate?<sup>562</sup>

Through this heightened emphasis on the individual, politics effectively drops out. From Rand's point of view, politics are constrained by a notion of ethical egoism—society can count on right minded individuals. Yet this theory compels Rand to take the position that no conflicts of interest will exist among rational men. While such politics may take credit for its elegant parsimony, it seems somewhat doubtful that Mr. Madison<sup>563</sup> would be similarly impressed.<sup>564</sup>

Rand's solution to this quandary is to fall back on the Aristotelian notion that man is social. In Rand's conception of this insight, man gives up nothing by entering into society; society itself is simply for pure profit to the individual. Thus, Rand's "Útopia of Greed."<sup>565</sup> Such a society would only be implementable if the society is made up only of rational men, ethics being assumed as a key feature of such rational beings. The underlying theory here is that political systems constitute mere reflections of the individual beings making it up. This theory nullifies any possibility of seeing the political project as an attempt to improve humanity's situation in the world, much less to inculcate and foster a better humanity.

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<sup>562</sup> Merrill, Ronald E. *The Ideas of Ayn Rand*. (LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court, 1991). 142

<sup>563</sup> As distinguished, perhaps, from the President that he would become.

<sup>564</sup> See: Madison. "Federalist 10."

<sup>565</sup> Rand, Ayn. *Atlas Shrugged*. (New York: Dutton, 1992)

Granted, this is Rand's own specific view on social matters. Yet it is usefully illustrative of the ramifications for political action to which such individualist reasoning leads. The individualist purpose becomes survival, refined to fit the needs of the given society the individual lives in. An irony arises in Rand's specific vision in that she advocated a society that would allow the expression of the ideal man—an end in himself—yet lay out no means for the achievement of such a society. The ideal society that allows ideal men can only be achieved by ideal men that can only emerge in the ideal society. Given this paradox, the perfect man is left to go about his business and, it would seem, hope for the best. Fortunately for him, he exists as that in which he may confidently place his faith.

In this way, ethical egoism must necessarily degenerate into the self-centered egotism which Rand claimed to eschew. If one is in a flawed society and knows that he or she is objectively right, then the rightness of that person's opinion of their own action cannot be evaluated or even questioned by the standards of that society. Accordingly, the individual becomes justified by this philosophy to do anything he wills—the justification for liberty devolves into license. How then, can such an individual be obligated to do anything, or even to obey, except by use of force? The individual thinks he is right—indeed, one might argue that that is what it means to think or believe something<sup>566</sup>—and the Objectivist has a philosophical foundation to reject any duties or obligations externally imposed. This view, then, creates a philosophic tension between the individual and the fundamental nature of democratic politics or, indeed, authority in any form beyond the will of the self. For example, recall the tension in politics in the concept of

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<sup>566</sup> Ayers discusses this problem of knowledge and belief at length as central to problems in Locke's epistemology with which Locke wrestled at length and, ultimately, failed to resolve. Ayers. *Locke – Volume I*

the existence of the Rousseau's "general will" that was raised above concerning the impossibility of liberty if the majority is not characterized by alignment with the general will. With Objectivism, the general will becomes irrelevant except insofar as society becomes composed only of perfect men, whereupon the project of politics for which the general will operates becomes similarly irrelevant.

That initial belief that notions of the good and the values of man are related to survival is similarly the central principle of *Dianetics*<sup>567</sup>, the foundational book of the religion of Scientology. That a super-rational philosophy supporting a socio-economic system embraced by so many Americans and a transcendent religion explaining the scientific means of individual perfection—a religion, it bears repeating, that is barely recognized institutionally as such outside of the United States—should share a core conception of value should not at this point come as a surprise. What Scientology attempts to do is extrapolate out of this insight of the centrality of survival to human existence a theory of how to maximize individual survival.<sup>568</sup>

Problematically for Scientology, this notion of "maximizing survival" has no real meaning in the anthropological or socio-evolutionary biological literature that thinking in this way about survival must necessarily invoke.<sup>569</sup> Fitness and survival in this sense—the scientific sense—is based upon propagating off-spring—everyone alive is proof that their parents were to at least some degree fit; survival is a binary proposition here—a person lives or she does not. Moreover, the history of anthropologic studies has by and

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<sup>567</sup> Hubbard, L. Ron. *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health*. (Los Angeles: Bridge Publications, 2000)

<sup>568</sup> A far cry from, among others', Twain's implication that there are conditions under which life is not worth living. Twain, Mark. "The Turning Point of My Life." In *The Complete Essays of Mark Twain*. Edited by Charles Neider. (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 1963)

<sup>569</sup> Wilson, Margo and Martin Daly. *Homicide*. (New York: A. de Gruyter, 1988); Trivers, Robert. *Social Evolution*. (Menlo Park, CA: Benjamin/Cummings Publishing Co., 1985)

large demonstrated—and done so scientifically—that human cooperation on common projects may be the greatest adaptation towards survival.<sup>570</sup>

Yet for the Scientologist, social existence is taken as given, and legitimate leverage on the individual by society is obliterated through a somewhat complicated understanding of the cosmos, which requires some explanation. Scientology's *Dianetics* is a handbook on techniques to improve individual functioning—in society, the world, the universe, the mind, whatever. Essentially, there are problematics, called “engrams” that adhere into<sup>571</sup> what may be called the life-monad. These engrams keep us from being all that we could be in our true nature; engrams are blockages of the flow of human possibility. If the human being is properly “audited,” these engrams can be processed out of that being to the radical improvement, if not to say perfection, of that being. In keeping with the discussions of an amalgamated epistemological approach to understanding humanity, the infusion of scientifically styled psychological thinking into a religious conception of the universe that comes to define the relationship between the individual and society is striking.

The religious element enters the system of thought to take care of the aforementioned problems in the foundations of the theory. As already mentioned, sociologically and anthropologically—historically even—the greatest achievements benefiting the individual have been cooperative; indeed, the development of systems of

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<sup>570</sup> A popular set of forums on college campuses today concerns whether or not humans' brains are wired for altruism. The answer to the question is a resounding, “That question is a red herring.” There exists a vast consensus, however, on the notion that altruism is entirely consistent with the theory of evolution, even to the point that martyrdom may be selected for, insofar as cooperation is conducive to the survival of individuals working in cooperation such that they may be more likely to pass on their selfish little genes.

<sup>571</sup> Given the ontological formulation of Scientology discussed below, it is not entirely clear to me what the appropriate preposition is for the relationship of engram to whatever it is people were before they screwed up sufficiently to become such.

cooperation may be the greatest achievements of all.<sup>572</sup> If the basis of value is to find itself in individual survival, some theoretical way around this social state of affairs must be found. Such a solution comes to Scientology from what appears to be a posited assumption<sup>573</sup>: individuals are perfect if and when regressed to their original state. The belief, then, is that all limitations felt by human beings are in some way self-imposed. The techniques of Scientology center on how to restore the individual to her—“His”? “Its”?—original capabilities by the removal of the manifestations of these limitations, the engrams, limitations which are actually self-imposed as they must be, given the perfect nature of the beings in question.<sup>574</sup> Accordingly, Scientology has its own cosmology emphasizing the role and agency of the individual being:

The thetan is immortal, ‘omniscient and omnipotent’. The true self of each individual, which has existed before the beginning of matter, energy, space, and time. These latter are merely creations of thetans bored with their existence. ‘Life’ Hubbard assures us, ‘is a game’. To enliven the game, thetans permitted limitations upon their abilities. They began to create matter, energy, space, and time (MEST), to form universes and worlds with which, and in which, they could play. These worlds might take any variety of forms, but gradually the thetans became increasingly attracted by the universes they had created. Progressively they became absorbed into the games they were playing, permitting further limitation of their abilities, imposing limitations upon other thetans, forgetting their spiritual nature, and becoming more dependant upon the material universes they had created. While the MEST universe began as the postulation of thetans it gradually acquired an overwhelming sense of reality. The thetans became so enmeshed in their creation they forgot their origins and true status, lost the ability to mobilize their spiritual capacities, and came to believe that they were no more than the bodies they inhabited.<sup>575</sup>

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<sup>572</sup> It is all well and good to point to Michaelangelo’s *David* on the one hand, but quite another to point to the Florentine Republic of the Medici’s; to mention *Christendom* is to enter into another conversation altogether.

<sup>573</sup> The adherent of Scientology might claim that this claim is not a posited assumption but rather an observed phenomenon, or even one experienced. In the absence of one who has achieved such a state and the ability to even comprehend the nature of that being, however, that claim would itself have to be taken on faith, which would pose certain fundamental epistemological problems for the alleged scientific basis of the religion.

<sup>574</sup> That is to say, us.

<sup>575</sup> Wallis. *The Road to Total Freedom*. 103-104 I rely heavily on Wallis’s account as the Church of Scientology has been very resistant to allow systematic study of their beliefs or practices. Wallis’s

Scientology in this way gives its adherents a metaphysical justification for rejecting the conventional norms of society. Granted, there may be reasons to follow social norms, but there is not only a fundamental unreality to them, but their existence is a sort of pernicious effect upon the thetan soul, though even that effect is caused by the individual itself.

The underlying norm in this system of thought is that experiences in society—the world itself—is what makes a mess of people. Moreover, it is not just one form of society or another that creates these problems, but the reality of contemporary social life—of what we term reality, really—itself. Experience, as experienced by human beings, holds the individual back. Accordingly, as Roy Wallis observes:

The social involvement of Dianetics was severely limited by its individualistic character and monocausal theory. Dianetics was oriented to the alleviation of social and economic ills by individual improvement rather than social or political change. The root of man's social, economic and political misfortunes was held to lie in the formation of engrams which led individuals—politicians in particular—to acts that were detrimental to the survival of the individual and society. Erase the engrams, and social and political ills and injustices would disappear.<sup>576</sup>

Again, as seen in Objectivism, the goal is the individual fulfillment of potential that occurs explicitly outside of and independent of any common social project. A perfect society can only occur when the individuals each get cleared, a project to which society is fundamentally part of the problem. Accordingly, a large part of the identity and efforts of the Scientologist must be to reject any form of control said society has on the individual self:

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sociological study may well be unique in this vein. For the record, Wallis is not a Scientologist, and apparently there were some negotiations as to what could be in the book. Some may find it amazing that some of the passages found in this piece are among those agreed upon.

<sup>576</sup> Ibid. 74

One aim of Scientology is therefore to increase the thetan's ability to control the body it inhabits and its environment, to be willing to have and 'not-have' MEST, postulates, facsimiles, etc. That is, to overcome the stimulus-response reaction and increase the self-determinism of the thetan; to restore its ability to be 'at cause' over its environment.<sup>577</sup>

Scientology offers control of one's own destiny, and an absolution from responsibility for any personal failings, pinning those on experiences in society itself. Certainly, the individual should be good, but the potential ability to do the good will depend mostly upon the individual and his or her own ability to work out the problems imposed upon the soul by society.

### **Social Ramifications for Dealing with the Other**

Perhaps the most intriguing element of the comparison of Objectivism and Scientology is how they take essentially the same position on human value and ultimately form very similar views of the relationship and responsibilities of the individual to society through apparently divergent reasoning. Objectivism forges a philosophy of radical individualism through an alleged rational understanding of man and society and employs that understanding to develop a normative theory of society. Scientology develops a religious vision of the cosmos that will serve as a guide for the rational techniques of human perfection. Yet both systems share the intermingling of such analytically distinct ways of thinking about these problems as found in science, reason, philosophy, religion and economics. Of special note is that both systems come to a similar conclusion about people who do not adhere to the respective philosophies.

"They don't get it."

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<sup>577</sup> Ibid. 109

This characterization and relegation of the uninitiated—members of the “out-group”<sup>578</sup>—to epistemological insignificance can be easily gleaned from a syllogism central to Scientology:

- Knowledge is certainty.
- Certainty is sanity.
- Reality is Agreement.

One does not have to be an expert in logic to see that, if one does not agree with Hubbard’s knowledge, then he must be out of touch with reality; he who does not agree does not live in reality.<sup>579</sup> Should this poor soul then argue that this characterization of his life—his lack of engagement with reality—cannot be known for certain, he is rendered insane.<sup>580</sup> Implicit within this world-view is that people who do not agree or, indeed, believe in the theory, the philosophy, the religion, can be safely disregarded and dismissed. This ceases to be true only upon conversion, which would be to adopt the system of thinking itself.

This divide between the in-group and out-group of “getting it” is made even more explicit in the teachings of the Landmark Forum.<sup>581</sup> “The Forum,” a Large Group Awareness Training seminar arose out of the “est”—Latin for “it is”<sup>582</sup>—technologies purchased from Werner Erhard by his brother. The organization offers people who can afford the courses the opportunity to change their lives through communication and life

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<sup>578</sup> Hardin, Russell. *One for All: The Logic of Group Conflict*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995)

<sup>579</sup> Or, perhaps, the person lives in a reality misperceived and false.

<sup>580</sup> For some reason, MS Word thinks this sentence should end in a question mark. I find this fact hysterical.

<sup>581</sup> A surprisingly thorough description of the history of est and The Landmark Forum can be found on-line at the *Skeptics Dictionary*: retrieved October 20<sup>th</sup>, 2008 from: <http://skepdic.com/landmark.html>

<sup>582</sup> Or, for that matter, “she is” or “he is.”



skills obtained through the study of philosophy.<sup>583</sup> The organization and its previous incarnation both have sordid histories of law suits concerning fraud, manipulation and even non-consensual hypnosis.<sup>584</sup> Perhaps most interesting is the standard of evaluation of success on the part of the individual—the individual is asked if she gets it. If she says yes, she is ready for the more advanced course. If she says no, she is informed that that is the very essence of the point: there is nothing to get, and therefore she gets it.<sup>585</sup> Such a program has the great advantage of invoking a near total validation of the individual, largely through the distinguishing of the individual personality from the uninitiated and unenlightened, while being accessible to anyone.<sup>586</sup>

Again a sort of class-hierarchy of enlightenment is created, this time through a self-help seminar that, like Objectivism and Scientology, merges elements of rationality, philosophy and metaphysics to establish a belief system that validates the individual in separation from society and its mores. The essence these systems of thought share goes on to implicitly invalidate claims of responsibility to social or political action. Perhaps more importantly, these ontologies reinforce avoidance in political discourse by privileging the beliefs of the adherents over those of others. Ontologically speaking, there is no basis for refutation or negotiation; the correctness of a view point is

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<sup>583</sup> Notably through books, some of which have been in the public domain for millennia and are freely available at any public library worthy of the name.

<sup>584</sup> Of course, it is not abundantly clear that people can be hypnotized against their will, which generally involves consent. Suffice to say that the very fact that such allegations comes up may serve to emphasize the alleged sordidness of the proceedings.

<sup>585</sup> I am drawing heavily upon personal conversations with graduates and recruits for this portion of the “get it” dialogues. Given the extreme value of this information, apparently, it is not always freely available.

<sup>586</sup> On this point, it should be noted that one of the critical texts often used in the first stage of the course is “The Allegory of the Cave,” found in Plato’s *Republic*, available, as pointed out above, both on-line and in any decent library. Furthermore, in employing the device of distinguishing oneself as understanding something through the realization that there is nothing to get, the teaching turns Socrates on his head, as the Oracle at Delphi’s message was not that Socrates was wisest, but rather that there was no one more wise than he, implicitly suggesting the total failure of humans to hold wisdom which is properly the province of the divine and not, therefore, to be gotten by humans—although, it would seem, that might be the great thing to be gotten, or not gotten, as the case may be.

determined endogenously to the individual, by the belief system held by the adherent and the fact of the individual holding it, and political discourse must be either teleological or irrelevant. In the case of an individual who is cleared, or gets it, or is morally perfected or already perfect, &c., that individual knows for certain, within and justified by that person's belief system, that what that person thinks politically is correct. A political discussion that does not conform to that which such a person already believes by his or her own natural disposition, but rather which is created by politics, simply cannot be correct.

### **Spiritual Mastery and the Negation of Equality**

Once again, this is not to say that these movements or systems of thought cause the avoidance in political discourse described *per se*; they may well be better considered symptomatic, existing on account of being legitimated by a political discourse that accepts and even encourages such spiritual and religious underpinnings within its structure. Again, the Weberian point is not one of simple mechanical causation but of resonance and articulation. What the systems do is allow us to understand the underlying ontologies with which these systems of thought resonate and within which they may successfully develop. Nor would it be right to claim that individuals ascribing to these or similar modes of thought will not act in ways beneficial to society and even to politics. The importance of this analysis is that if such individuals do so, it will be contingent on their understandings of what they ought to do for themselves and not as part of a larger responsibility to and respect for the importance of the project of politics for the common good. This manifests the shift from a system of public virtue to one of holding values;

what is desired is not that people fulfill civic obligations, but that they value certain things deemed salutary.<sup>587</sup>

In effect, any benefit to a notion of the common good would come incidentally through the individual doing what is good for herself—she need not consider any common good beyond that which is understood as arising from individuals pursuing their own goals, for the consistency of benefiting the self with the progression towards a better society is inherently assumed. Thus, a coherent common project that originated in religious mandates has dropped out of the American project, ironically, largely through the developments in religious and spiritual thinking. The irony of course is that it was for the purpose of achieving the common good that the religious foundations of liberalism were initially validated. The progression towards the common project and the goal of a perfect society became assumed over time, or rather, subsumed into the priority of the individual to the exclusion of consideration of other goods. Through this process, the rightness of individualism and the individual conduct of good people became assumed—how could a good person do anything detrimental to society in pursuing their own good? American thought is now, in effect, left with the individualism of Lockean liberalism, yet without the constraining framework of authority that justified in the first place that liberty in the name of the good.

Spiritual thought may no longer be counted on to bind society together, or, if it does, that effect will be ancillary to the purposes of the individual. In fact, it is not clear

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<sup>587</sup> It is in this vein that conservatives are often split between preferences for Americans possessing proper virtue as opposed to possessing the proper values and the relationship between the two concepts. See: MacIntyre. *After Virtue*; Arkes, Hadley. *First Things: An Inquiry into the First Principles of Morals and Justice*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986); Weaver, Paul and Irving Kristol, ed. *The Americans, 1976: An Inquiry into Fundamental Concepts of Man Underlying Various U.S. Institutions*. (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1976); Niebuhr, Reinhold. *Does Civilization Need Religion*. (New York: MacMillan Company, 1927); Niebuhr, Richard. *Radical Monotheism and Western Culture*. (New York: Harper and Row, 1970)

that society should be bound together at all unless the society serves said purposes, a fact which cannot be counted upon in these new epistemologies of the individual and the good. Thus, concerns such as those held by McWilliams that politics will cease to ennoble the human being are rendered moot. Consider McWilliams's observation that:

The citizen finds little in public life to elevate his spirit or support his dignity; he finds much that damages both. Political parties, which ought to connect private feelings with public life, are waning along with the communities that were their foundation. Increasingly, the citizen retreats into the "solitude of his own heart," denying the country the allegiance it needs to address looming crises and himself those possibilities that still exist for friendship and freedom.<sup>588</sup>

That which McWilliams argues "ought" to occur is implicitly, or even explicitly, denied by the theories of good that exclude the possibility that therein lies the purpose, value or meaning of human life. Far from worrying over the possibility that, "Democracy has few footholds in modern America. Strengthening democratic life is a difficult, even daunting, task requiring sacrifice and patience more than dazzling exploits,"<sup>589</sup> an adherent to a rationally individuated spiritual system may find himself free of such work that, far from lifting his spirit, merely encumbers his efforts to the detriment of his own personal development.

Critical to this reconceptualization and rejection of political enterprises is that this view of public life is essentially nonnegotiable by virtue of its derivation from an epistemology that is non-falsifiable. Given the character of what may constitute legitimate belief in American public discourse, as has been seen, intensity of feeling may serve as grounds to allege certainty. As the locus of knowing is in the individual, that one may be certain that what he is feeling is really what he is feeling, the grounds of certainty become self-referential; one knows that she really knows what she thinks she

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<sup>588</sup> McWilliams. "Democracy and the Citizen." 100

<sup>589</sup> Ibid. 100

knows because she knows it. With profound implications for the politics of liberalism, such a construction of knowledge in forming the basis for understanding right conduct manifests itself as almost precisely that which Locke feared and sought to deny in his own theory of knowledge. As Ayers points out, “Locke would have liked to believe that human beings are automatically rational, only when some of the evidence is not before them, but he could not ultimately reconcile this thesis with his actual experience of irrationality,” and because of this, “Influenced ‘more particularly, by the “enthusiasm” of the Puritan sectaries’ he was ‘gradually driven into a new picture of belief, in which it is no longer a weaker form of knowledge, but rather... an attempt to remove uneasiness, to satisfy our inclinations,’”<sup>590</sup>. Ayers explains in great detail the significance of reason in Locke’s system as critical to preventing the validation of mere self-referential notions of interest by locating an external authoritative reference point of right knowledge:

Rather like Kant’s ‘sense of duty’, the ‘love of truth’ is a respect for reason for its own sake, not itself one of our ‘inclinations’ or ‘passions or interests’, but explicitly opposed to them. The enthusiast lacks it, whether or not his beliefs are true. Those beliefs themselves Locke went on to ascribe, not to the conventional passions or desires (the enthusiast’s beliefs are not classed with the lover’s belief that his mistress is true), but to the imagination. They are ‘the ungrounded Fancies of a Man’s own Brain’, it sets up ‘phancy for our supreme and sole Guide’ [698,22; 699,27; 703,7]. As such, it is an ‘internal impulse’ which

Like a new Principle carries all easily with it, when got above common Sense, and freed from all restraint of Reason, and check of Reflection, it is heightened into a Divine Authority, in concurrence with our own Temper and Inclination. [699,32]

‘Inclination’ and the conventional ‘passions’ enter this story at a rather late stage: because it ‘so flatters many Men’s Laziness, Ignorance and Vanity... when once they got into this way of... certainty without Proof, and without Examination, ‘tis a hard matter to get them out of it’ [700,4]. It is not an unreasonable passion which was Locke’s fundamental target, but a misconception; and his argument runs on familiar enough lines. When men believe themselves divinely inspired, ‘Does it not stand them upon, to examine upon what Grounds they presume it to

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<sup>590</sup> Ayers. *Locke – Volume I*. 111

be a Revelation from GOD?’ [702,4] The passions get in the way of this duty of examination, but are not responsible for the original conceits.<sup>591</sup>

The purposes of reason and religion alike, given their relationship in Locke’s theory of knowledge and its implications for social and political conduct, are to avoid believing that one’s own inclinations are right just because they are strong, which ultimately devolves into a relationship to knowledge where people are “sure because they are sure.”<sup>592</sup> Thus, in order to be sure in knowledge, precisely because humans hold passions which might sway their inclinations, the unreason of belief “must pay its tribute to reason in the form of rationalization,” as “Motivated belief, for all that it owes to emotion or interest, must also be a part of our intelligence and powers of interpretation,”<sup>593</sup>.

Locke’s role for religion in his liberal system hinged upon its role in orienting people to authoritative beliefs about their conduct in society. Rationally individuated spiritual systems, however, allow authority to devolve into the validation of personal inclination. In a very fundamental sense, this reverses the orientation of the soul for which Tocqueville believed was required the moderating guidance of religion in a democracy and its underlying conditions of equality. No longer is each individual an equal under an overarching authority to which people at liberty will learn of their need to conform. Given acceptance in American political discourse of such views as legitimate religious systems of thought, people may consider their own inclinations as authoritative guides to knowledge and conduct. Whatsmore, this notion of authority, rather than establishing a belief in the providential nature of human equality, may actually serve to

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<sup>591</sup> Ayers. *Locke – Volume I*. 111

<sup>592</sup> *Ibid.* 124-127

<sup>593</sup> Ayers. *Locke – Volume II*. 148

undermine the very ontological conception of that equality upon which the liberal system was initially premised.

In sanctioning the pursuit of the purely personal as an authoritatively right guide to conduct—by making Tocqueville's self-interest rightly understood into the righteousness of self-interest—rationally individuated spiritual thought can effect an ontological rift between the individual and the other individuals that compose society. As foreseen by Tocqueville<sup>594</sup> and observed in the emergence of contemporary approaches to knowledge of the self, America has seen the emergence of beliefs in the perfectability of the individual human being. Moreover, by their self-referential approach to authority stemming from the locus of knowing moving into the individual, these thought systems tend to loosen any requirement of a method towards the ends of attaining human perfection and establish said perfection as a preexisting state awaiting realization by the individual. Insofar as knowledge of this perfection cannot be denied, any invocation of authority, moral or otherwise, upon the individual necessarily reveals the imperfect state of she who would assert such authority. In effect, ontological separation is established between persons on account of disagreement concerning the nature and dictates of authority; to disagree shows that an individual lacks the knowledge that flows naturally from a right understanding of reality, revealing that individual's ontological imperfection. Spiritual epistemologies of this kind thus hold the power to obliterate the ontological equality of all human beings, for what sort of equality can exist between the perfect and the imperfect? Arguably, political equality—an equality of rights, for example—could still be retained. However, political equality necessarily emerges from the commitments to polity that are, in the classical understandings of liberalism and

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<sup>594</sup> Tocqueville. *Democracy in America*. Volume II. 34

democracy, themselves actuated by mandates from metaphysically grounded authority facilitated by the liberty to pursue knowledge thereof. Yet it is religious thought itself that now allows the denial of the authority of this mandate, thereby creating the potential for the rejection of equality and its ramifications for what are considered right politics.

### **Social Virtue and Material Calculation**

For reasons that shall become clear—if they have not already—this reorientation of the concept of virtue and its potential impact to sever the bond between individual and society has a close analog to the concerns, previously discussed, that emerged from the Gilded Age. Of specific concern was the fear that the forces of industrialization and the rising dominance of commerce—forces made possible by the burgeoning development of scientific progress and the rationalization of culture—was undermining the social fabric of American culture. Indeed, the Progressive Era was born as a reaction to the subversion of morality, of the perception that these new economic forces would subvert the possibility of benefiting from living a good life as traditionally understood by good, hard working, God fearing Americans. The apparent replacement of the American value system by these forces led the Progressives, in turn, to try to re-harness these rationalized forces and develop their own science of society to reassert moral control over society, an effort that may be seen as characterized by and suffering from many of the problems of the admixture of scientific and moral reasoning discussed herein.

The problem, as understood by witnesses of the times, was that these new forces that increasingly seemed to be driving society operated under their own logic. Problematically for human life, the logic seemed to ignore and, worse still, undermine



and even subvert the possibility of human good. Life approached from the perspective of these rational forces, an approach perceived to be necessary to achieve any modicum of success in this brave new world, obliterated the link between traditional notions of right conduct and the utility to the individual; traditional virtue seemed not only not to guarantee success, but even impede it.

This social crisis is perhaps appreciated nowhere more magnificently than in the autobiography of Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams*. To tell this story of the clash between the forces unleashed by rational culture and the enduring American quest to be a moral people and, significantly, the political implications of this showdown, Adams presents an account of his own odyssey in search of a set of general principles by which to live in a society characterized by the disrupting forces of its own evolution.<sup>595</sup> His search for the right way to live leads Adams to believe that the flow of history itself will ultimately yield the truth he seeks, only to devolve into the conclusion that the flow is merely motion unto itself—and, problematically for Adams, little virtue is required to understand flow, which is rather a matter for science to understand. The force of progress, well beyond the control of those seeking to grapple with it, forms the very principles one must employ to follow it; the order of nature yields chaos to he who would harness it. Yet despite the maelstrom the propagation of forces creates in the world, Adams may still conclude—as he understands his project, he must—that there is a place for right thinking within the insurmountable tide of time.<sup>596</sup> That the totality of the circumstances of life cannot be harnessed in its entirety does not mean that one cannot find a niche within the chaos to order one's own life. The trick of the matter, then, is not

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<sup>595</sup> I apologize in advance for making what will *turn into*, given the subsequent discussion, a pun.

<sup>596</sup> Where he will locate the authority and guide for this right thinking, of course, carries shades of the orientation of authoritatively constrained liberty that underlies the Lockean liberal project.

to exhaust one's energy in trying to learn how to win the game, "of which neither he nor anyone else back to the beginning of time knew the rules or the risks or the stakes,"<sup>597</sup>. Rather, right effort is revealed to direct one to make oneself fit for something that society, or the game itself, might find of use.

Born in 1838, young Henry Adams's initial formative influence derived from the fixed Puritan morals of Quincy, in stark contrast to the moneyed forces of the financial center of State Street in Boston. Quincy, for Adams, represented a citadel for the good fight:

For numberless generations his predecessors had viewed the world chiefly as a thing to be reformed, filled with evil forces to be abolished, and they saw no reason to suppose that they had wholly succeeded in the abolition; the duty was unchanged. That duty implied not only resistance to evil, but hatred of it.<sup>598</sup>

Good, for Adams, was a knowable truth that served as the standard in combat against the veritable army of the night.<sup>599</sup> The unquestioned proper purpose of a life rightly lived was to become an instrument for the improvement of a world filled with moral corruption and bring about the right way of living for all society. Of course, the precondition for such a task lay in a proper understanding of the general principle of goodness to which one must direct him or herself; in effect, Adams required an authoritative guide for his conduct, the existence of which he took for granted yet did not immediately apprehend. His own education, therefore, became the all consuming task of young Adams, for,

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<sup>597</sup> Adams, Henry. *The Education of Henry Adams*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). 9

<sup>598</sup> Adams. *Education*. 12

<sup>599</sup> Significantly, Adams seems not unaware of the problems implicit in his belief being closer to an assumption rather than demonstrable knowledge, a problem central, of course, to Locke's grappling with his theory of knowledge. Ayers. *Locke – Volume I*. 124-127. 142-150

“education was divine, and man needed only a correct knowledge of facts to reach perfection,”<sup>600</sup>.

That such an endeavor must take precedence over all other labor served as a point of dogma for young Adams, not to say a religion. Just as Tocqueville understood that the form and normative quality of democracy could take different forms depending upon the mores and efforts of the people<sup>601</sup>, so too did Adams understand that the world might have the potential to be a moral place, but it would require the imposition of the general principles such morality entailed to become such. Indeed, to Adams, despite the obvious existence for ready perception of a right standard of conduct<sup>602</sup>, the country was run by questionable, not to say shady, men, such that even, “the most troublesome task of a reform President was that of bringing decency back to the Senate,”<sup>603</sup> to speak nothing of the suspect character of most Presidents themselves. To render—or, more wistfully, to restore—the affairs of the governance of the land as they rightly ought to be would require a drastic reordering of the system. Therefore, Adams understood he must educate himself, for:

This problem of running order through chaos, direction through space, discipline through freedom, unity through multiplicity, has always been, and must always be, the task of education, as it is the moral of religion, philosophy, science, art, politics, and economy.<sup>604</sup>

Education, then, would provide Adams with knowledge of both the ends and the means to direct properly his efforts towards a rightly ordered society.

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<sup>600</sup> Adams. *Education*. 33

<sup>601</sup> cf. Mitchell. *The Fragility of Freedom*.

<sup>602</sup> A possibility for moral knowledge which Locke wished existed, but could not support. Ayers. *Locke – Volume I*. 51-76; 141-150; 172; 253

<sup>603</sup> Adams. *Education*. 220

<sup>604</sup> *Ibid.* 16

The dilemma that emerged for Adams lay in the practical problem of establishing the moral order. Although he was exposed to an environment that claimed to hold the keys to the kingdom, he saw little attempt at engagement with the world to bring its vision to earth:

That the most intelligent society, led by the most intelligent clergy, in the most moral conditions he ever knew, should have solved all the problems of the universe so thoroughly as to have quite ceased making itself anxious about past and future, and should have persuaded itself that all the problems which had convulsed human thought from earliest recorded time, were not worth discussing, seemed to him the most curious social phenomenon he had to account for in a long life.<sup>605</sup>

For Adams, his education must be a practical one. There seemed little point in understanding how the world ought to be if it yielded no formula for the enactment of that vision. However, the political arena, that occupation by which humans order their society, seemed to require subversion in practice of the very principles he would seek to enact in a morally ordered world. To achieve and to do right did not appear to share a common bond, much less relationship to the knowledge needed for each respective pursuit. Adams's earliest lesson in practical politics, concerning the noble effort towards abolishing slavery—a practice which, “drove the whole Puritan community back on its Puritanism,”<sup>606</sup>—required a moral compromise to gain office for his friend, Charles Sumner. Adams could not question the propriety of the ends for which the election of Sumner to the Senate was instrumental, yet this compromise in principle represented:

The boy's first lesson in practical politics, and a sharp one; not that he troubled himself with moral doubts, but that he learned the nature of a flagrantly corrupt political bargain in which he was too good to take part, but not too good to take profit... As a politician, he was already corrupt, and he never could see how any practical politician could be less corrupt than himself.<sup>607</sup>

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<sup>605</sup> Ibid. 34

<sup>606</sup> Ibid. 46

<sup>607</sup> Ibid. 46-47

The dissonance between the enactment of interest and the moral could scarcely be more clear—what hope could remain for a world that required corruption to end corruption?<sup>608</sup> Paradise, as Adams understood it, could have no back door. Accordingly, Adams, as a moth drawn to the light, dedicated himself to his own education as the means to find the way of proper conduct in a world that seemed to thwart one's best intentioned efforts.

Being a sensible man, Adams pursued a practical education in the actual practice of society, observing and participating in society in a life of Harvard, diplomacy, journalism and government. Yet though he everywhere sought to learn of general principles of rightness, he saw only conformity to practical rules of society for society's sake; the basic rationality of culture dominated all social practice. The lack of an ordered purpose to these societies—that they be properly directed towards chosen ends—even those in whose occupation it lay to order society at large, eventually drove Adams to seek out science for an answer to the practical ends of proper organization. “The kinetic theory of gases, and Darwin's Law of Natural Selection, were examples of what a young mind had to take on trust,”<sup>609</sup>. In science Adams found the logic to the action of the world, an end to which the forces of the cosmos converged, that the arbitrary mores of people in society conspicuously lacked. “Natural Selection led back to Natural Evolution, and at last to Natural Conformity... It was the very best substitute for religion;

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<sup>608</sup> Wolin, of course, offers a moralistic account of Machiavellian politics in his discussion of an economy of violence. For Wolin, insofar as power is a precondition to accomplish the good, even seemingly amoral or even immoral political practices take on an affirmative moral dimension depending upon the ends to which the efforts are directed. Wolin, Sheldon S. *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought*. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, Inc., 1960). 195-238. Adams, however, though certainly having had read his Machiavelli, found this allegedly necessary subordination of the moral good to rational calculation disturbing.

<sup>609</sup> Adams. *Education*. 190. *Nota bene*: the impish implied discussion of the relationship between science and faith in the consideration of knowledge appropriate to purposive ends.

a safe, conservative, practical, thoroughly Common-Law deity,”<sup>610</sup>. Darwinism offered the promise that only those fittest for this world would prosper, and at last, survive. “It was a form of religious hope; a promise of ultimate perfection,”<sup>611</sup>. That Charles Sumner, whom Adams as a youth had seen as, “the highest product of nature and art,”<sup>612</sup> would be sullied by these processes only followed from the irrefutable logic of this working order for the universe, the self-same reason that the other Sumner of note here, William Graham, sought to embed normative social strictures in an inviolate and unchanging theory of nature.<sup>613</sup>

Such a system bounded headlong and strong, though, beyond his hopes for the formal education which society offered, a system whose faults Adams felt, “could lead only to inertia,”<sup>614</sup>, “or, in plain words, total extinction for anyone resembling Henry Adams,”<sup>615</sup>. In the principles of scientific evolution by the laws of natural selection Adams saw an order to the progression of history; more, he saw a progression of history to order, an order which could only conform to the iron-clad law of selection of the fittest which bound the progression. With the knowledge that the world headed towards its right ends, all Adams needed was, “a historical formula that should satisfy the conditions

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<sup>610</sup> Ibid. 191

<sup>611</sup> Ibid. 196

<sup>612</sup> Ibid. 31

<sup>613</sup> That, as has been previously discussed, these would be morals may, can and often did devolve into grotesque social, economic and political practices ought not detract from what may be understood as a noble attempt to safeguard morality against historicism by rooting them in something more enduring, a practice at least as old as recorded history itself. This may be seen as another big win for good intentions—the wariness of which, of course, is what led William Graham Sumner to seek to embed morality in the security of science and safe from such fallible intentions in the first place.

<sup>614</sup> Ibid. 254

<sup>615</sup> Ibid. 221

of the stellar universe,”<sup>616</sup>. With such a formula, Adams could anticipate events to their appropriate destination, and so he:

Wanted only to chart the international channel for fifty years to come; to triangulate the future; to obtain his dimension, and fix the acceleration of movement in politics since the year 1200, as he was trying to fix it in philosophy and physics; in finance and force.<sup>617</sup>

Because science yielded confidence that the future headed in the right direction—to lack a faith in nature itself would be, of course, to reject the Creation with which would vanish the sort of authoritative good which directed his quest—Adams needed only to find the future.<sup>618</sup> There was no reason to worry if a moth could not reach the light it sought, for the progression of time would yield a better moth fit to the task.

Unfortunately for Adams, he could not make his practical education conform to the scientific. The very logic of his evolutionary beliefs suggested—demanded—that society yield people, leaders, fit for the task of bringing about the rightful order. In consequence, the election of what Adams could only consider a sub-mediocre President<sup>619</sup> in the form of General Grant:

Irritated him, like the Terebratula, as a defiance of first principles. He had no right to exist. He should have been extinct for ages. The idea that as society grew older, it grew one-sided, upset evolution, and made of education a fraud.<sup>620</sup>

No system of mechanical improvement over the ages could account for such a moral deficiency of rule. Indeed, the institution of slavery, the source of the abolitionist seed

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<sup>616</sup> Ibid. 314

<sup>617</sup> Ibid. 353

<sup>618</sup> The dangers of belief that a predetermined future may be identified with moral truth has been shown by history to be among the most dangerous moral formulations for political practice. On the other hand, if this conception of authority is real, the question remains: could things be otherwise? Accordingly, implicit within Adams’s analysis is the preeminent importance of understanding the proper epistemic relation to authority for a politics that would be moral. The fact that the implications may become so imminently creepy only serves to complicate but not relieve the individual of responsibility of its comprehension.

<sup>619</sup> O tempora, o mores!

<sup>620</sup> Ibid. 224

from which Adams's desire to order society against injustice had grown, manifested itself as all too peculiar in the context of a coherent progression of improvement to be ignored. Even the general organization of society seemed to deny the rule of survival of the fittest: "as far as he knew, no one, seeking in the labor market, ever so much as inquired about their fitness... The labor market of good society was ill-organized,"<sup>621</sup>. Instead of a moral order, the irresistible force of progress seemed to yield only a progression of forces, propagating more forces still. Rather than convergence to coherent principle, these forces, in multiplying themselves, multiplied further the problems of principle for which Adams's scientific education had promised resolution:

His morals were the highest, and he clung to them to preserve his self-respect<sup>[622]</sup>; but steam and electricity had brought about new political and social concentrations, or were making them necessary in the line of his moral principles—freedom, education, economic development and so forth—which required association with allies as doubtful as Napoleon III, and robberies with violence on a very extensive scale.<sup>623</sup>

Even that bastion of Puritan morals, Minister Adams himself, had needed to resort to the force of will with England, making the Union's will of force clear: to keep England from recognizing the slave-holding South's right to secede.

Even the forces of the forces prevailed in Adams's world. The banking crisis showed how, "blindly some very powerful energy was at work, doing something that nobody wanted done,"<sup>624</sup>. The notion that money, purportedly instrumental to the ends of man, could hold its creator captive flew in the face of any reasonable attempt to order society by force of reason. What good could education, a concept predicated on human

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<sup>621</sup> Ibid. 204

<sup>622</sup> It is not clear from the text as to whether or not he had any guns to which to cling.

<sup>623</sup> Ibid. 75

<sup>624</sup> Ibid. 283. In retrospect, given the enduring overall prosperity that the nation has shown, it may well be said that the fundamentals of the economy were strong. We the people, however, are not an economy. Or, perhaps more poignantly, we are not *only* an economy.



reason, be when, as in the case of one who seemed as objectively fit as the financial speculator Clarence King, ruin and demise lay just around the corner, as manifestly evidence in the collapse of King's fortune in the stock market crash of 1893: "the result of twenty years' effort proved the theory of scientific education failed where most theory fails—for want of money,"<sup>625</sup>? The increasing multiplicity of forces working on society, birthed by the very progression of society, were such that, "the movement of the forces controls the progress of his mind, since he can know nothing but motions which impinge on his senses, whose sum makes education,"<sup>626</sup>.

The education which Adams had undertaken in order to find the principles by which to order the world had led to a scientific education of progress. Yet a right understanding of this progress had revealed to him that the progress overwhelmed any attempt to form or maintain a constant and enduring set of principles with which the progress, itself, might be dealt. Adams's quest had brought him to science with faith that, "the object of education for [the] mind should be the teaching itself how to react with vigor and economy,"<sup>627</sup>, to the forces that surround it in society in an effort to control these forces to impose proper direction. Yet the understanding of the forces at work in society yielded only the conclusion that, "society is immoral and immortal,"<sup>628</sup> and mocked any hope of such subjugation.<sup>629</sup> The one underlying constant that could be

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<sup>625</sup> Ibid. 290.

<sup>626</sup> Ibid. 395

<sup>627</sup> Ibid. 264

<sup>628</sup> Ibid. 230

<sup>629</sup> Similar conclusions led to the establishment of the *Discovery Institute*, the progenitors of Intelligent Design Theory to combat what they perceive to be the annihilation of the possibility of moral meaning to human life implicit in acceptance of the theory of scientific determinism. They discuss their theory and purpose in, "The Wedge Document: So What?" a paper discussing and explaining their controversial "Wedge Document" that was attacked for allegedly trying to undermine science. For themselves, they claim rather: "Far from attacking science (as has been claimed), we are instead challenging *scientific materialism*—the simplistic philosophy or world-view that claims that all of reality can be reduced to, or

gleaned was that of reproduction, that, “societies which violated every law, moral, arithmetical, and economical, not only propagated each other, but produced also fresh complexities with every propagation and developed mass with every complexity,”<sup>630</sup>. Society tended to gain momentum—it accelerated. It did not make sense to fight the future, even if a sense of morality demanded that such a fight be joined. Yet this acceleration showed no clear plan, and indeed, rather complicated the project of generating an enduring set of norms for behavior within it. Society, for Adams, moved steadily onward without providing for the improvement—the increased fitness—of its components. “All he could prove was change. Coal-power alone asserted evolution—of power—and only by violence could be forced to assert selection type,”<sup>631</sup>. Progress did not produce a moth any more efficient or effective at attaining the light; it only changed the color of the piltown moth.<sup>632</sup>

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derived from, matter and energy alone. We believe that this is a defense of sound science.” 2. In commenting on the original document, this internal exchange is informative:

“Yet a little over a century ago, this cardinal idea [that humans were created in the image of God] came under wholesale attack by intellectuals drawing on the discoveries of modern science. Debunking the traditional conceptions of both God and man, thinkers such as Charles Darwin, Karl Marx, and Sigmund Freud portrayed humans not as moral and spiritual beings, but as animals and machines who inhabited a universe ruled by purely impersonal forces and whose behavior and very thoughts were dictated by the unbending forces of biology, chemistry, and environment.”

“Comment: This statement highlights one of the animating concerns of Discovery Institute Center for Science and Culture: the worldview of scientific materialism. We think this worldview is false; we think that the theories that give rise to it (such as Darwinism, Marxism and Freudian psychology) are demonstrably false; and we think that these theories have had deleterious cultural consequences. (Consider, for example, the eugenics crusade pushed by Darwinist biologists early in the twentieth century or the present denial of personal responsibility endemic in our legal system and therapeutic culture). 6.

“The Wedge Document: So What?” 2. Feb. 3, 2006. Retrieved October 30<sup>th</sup>, 2008 from

<http://www.discovery.org/scripts/viewDB/filesDB-download.php?id=349>

<sup>630</sup> Adams. *Education*. 294

<sup>631</sup> Ibid. 195

<sup>632</sup> The piltown moth is considered a classic case study in natural selection. In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century England, 98% of piltown moths were light in color. Due to the progression of the industrial revolution in England, enough coal soot was produced to bring about the selection of darker colored moths that could more easily blend into its darkened surroundings. Accordingly, by the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, 98% of piltown moths were dark in color.

However, this onslaught of progress did not mean, for Adams, that a practical education was a lost project. Rather, it ultimately forced a reassessment as to the proper ends of a practical education. Though Adams's attempt to educate himself as to how to force an order of general principles on the progress of society might have failed, it eventually revealed to him the proper way to be practical to society. One could spend an eternity trying to grapple with the forces of progress, or one could more simply and appropriately become a part of the project itself:

Education should try to lessen the obstacles, diminish the friction, invigorate the energy, and should train minds to react, not at haphazard, but by choice, on the lines of force that attract their world... The moral is stentorian. [<sup>633</sup>] Only the most energetic, the most highly fitted, and most favored have overcome the friction or the viscosity of inertia, and these were compelled to waste three-fourths of their energy in doing it. Fit or unfit, Henry Adams stopped his own education in 1871, and began to apply it for practical uses, like his neighbors.<sup>634</sup>

Indeed, Adams's education, while perhaps yielding great insight into the motion and forces of progress, by the sheer time and energy expended on its attainment, disqualified him from participation. At one point, "Adams would have liked to help in building railways, but had no education. He was not fit,"<sup>635</sup>. Properly directed effort of a person in society, then, ought to be, "to make the political machine run somehow, since it could never be made to run well,"<sup>636</sup>. Oftentimes throughout his life, Adams had tended to deplore the way in which, "all the dogmatic stations in life have the effect of fixing a certain stiffness of attitude forever,"<sup>637</sup>. Yet only after much search of a practical education that yielded no useful practice, could he observe that this fixedness, this inertia of behavior, served to create a niche that one might make some sense of to live

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<sup>633</sup> Stentorian is a word of great complexity, meaning, "very loud."

<sup>634</sup> Ibid. 264

<sup>635</sup> Ibid. 204

<sup>636</sup> Ibid. 311-312

<sup>637</sup> Ibid. 89

comfortably, profitably, and usefully for society; in this way Adams shifts his identification of the authoritative guide to conduct from the moral to the utilitarian, as defined by the rationale of science which Adams takes to be the driving force of progress.<sup>638</sup> Given the failure of moral authority to guide progress, one could not order the chaos by education, but one could still perhaps educate oneself well enough to create a pocket of order in the chaos to go about his or her business.

There is an irony to Adams's conclusion, in that he relates that he recognized at its inception that, with respect to his effort to triangulate the future of progress, "to the practical man, such an attempt is idiotic,"<sup>639</sup>. As a young man, Adams had eschewed inertia as the death knell of a progress necessary for the proper ordering of man. Only later did he recognize the, "bourgeois' dream of order and inertia,"<sup>640</sup>. Living as one must in the wake of tremendous forces of change is by definition unsettling, against which one must learn some way to steady oneself. For Adams, "his artificial balance was acquired habit,"<sup>641</sup>. Ultimately, Adams found he could find motives on which to maneuver within the sheer inert momentum of progress, "so long as these motives were habitual, and their attraction regular, the consequent result might, for convenience, be called movement of inertia,"<sup>642</sup>. The project of society did not require that one determine if it brought about people who were fit, but rather:

The new Americans, of whom he was to be one, must, whether they were fit or unfit, create a world of their own, a science, a society, a philosophy, a universe, where they had not yet created a road or even learned to dig their own iron. They had no time for thought; they saw and could see, nothing beyond their day's

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<sup>638</sup> He did not, however, as did L. Ron Hubbard, decide to celebrate this act and found a religion around it. To some extent, though, the Progressives may be considered forbearers of Hubbard's approach.

<sup>639</sup> Ibid. 330

<sup>640</sup> Ibid. 340

<sup>641</sup> Ibid. 362

<sup>642</sup> Ibid. 368

work; their attitude to the universe outside was that of a deep-sea fish. Above all, they naturally and intensely disliked to be told what to do, and how to do it, by men who took their ideas and their methods from the abstract theories of history, philosophy, or theology. They knew enough to know that their world was one of energies quite new.<sup>643</sup>

Essentially, Adams's lesson learned was to yield to the flow of history. "Thus far, since five or ten thousand years, the mind had successfully reacted, and nothing yet proved that it would fail to react,"<sup>644</sup>. For society at large, as with the problem of the unasked for forces of money, "the public had no idea what practical system it could aim at, or what sort of men could manage it. The single problem before it was not so much to control the Trusts as to create a society that could manage the Trusts,"<sup>645</sup>. The task then of education was not to learn to control history, but to keep up with it such that one might play a useful part. If the moth were given the power of reason, one should expect it to conclude that the light is unreachable, that the light would scorch it upon attainment, and that its energies might be better suited finding an open window to the outside where it might find other moths with which to reproduce and keep the spirit of mothiness alive in the world.

In sum though, Adams's understanding of a human being's place in the progression of history does not result in a standardless measure of society. That one must fit oneself to the forces operating on his or her person simply shows that one ought to educate oneself ways to be practically useful to the project of society. Moreover, all ought to be given their due chance to find their way in the world to this end.

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<sup>643</sup> Ibid. 203. Cf. Tocqueville's observation that people living under condition of equality, "commonly seek for the sources of truth in themselves or in those who are like themselves. This would be enough to prove that at such periods no new religion could be established, and that all schemes for such a purpose would be not only impious, but absurd and irrational. It may be foreseen that a democratic people will not easily give credence to divine missions; that they will laugh at modern prophets; and that they will seek to discover the chief arbiter of their belief within, and not beyond, the limits of their kind." Tocqueville. *Democracy in America*. Volume II. 9

<sup>644</sup> Adams. *Education*. 414

<sup>645</sup> Ibid. 416

Accordingly, even a very young Adams failed to comprehend an education that told of the arbitrary subjugation of one to another against the force of reason. “The more he was educated, the less he understood. Slavery struck him in the face; it was a nightmare; a horror; a crime; the sum of all wickedness! Contact made it only more repulsive. He wanted to escape, like the negroes, to free soil,”<sup>646</sup>. The bondage of the negro, for Adams, was as the bondage of himself. The enormous amounts of effort and energy required to maintain such a state defied the logic of progress itself. If anything, the education of Henry Adams taught that friction ought to be reduced, that society might flow better with the momentum of history. Accordingly, “the Southerner, with his slave-owning limitations, was as little fit to succeed in the struggle of modern life as though he were still a maker of stone axes, living in caves,”<sup>647</sup>. The logic of evolution, even understood on modern terms, favors finding a niche in which life may flourish. To struggle to maintain artificially a niche against the intractable forces of history is to defy history, and the effort is doomed to fail, with so much energy wasted in the futility of the attempt. The effort of society in America, then, may be judged in the creation of a society that promotes the ability for each to find their best use in the project, as opposed to other attempts to control the situation by force against force itself for selfish or even pernicious purposes. Indeed, Mr. Bright understood this in making the speech cited by Adams, declaring that, “privilege has shuddered at what might happen to old Europe if this great experiment should succeed,”<sup>648</sup>. The logic of evolution might be one tending towards chaos. Yet reason may still retain a standard by which to measure the workings of a society to that same logic. The moth may flutter about in random paths, defying

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<sup>646</sup> Ibid. 42

<sup>647</sup> Ibid. 53-54

<sup>648</sup> Ibid. 161

rhyme or reason, thwarting its own best intentions, perhaps even burning itself in the light. Still, the terebratula that defied Adams's understanding in its apparent refusal to change with the times sits slowly beneath the deep, unaffected by the forces of evolution.

With his reference to that which endures even within the ever dynamic system of evolution that led to a society characterized by disruptive rational forces, Adams implies that there may still remain the possibility of fixity even if he fails in its comprehension. Yet even in shifting his focus to the development of a niche for the direction of his worldly efforts, Adams demonstrates the ultimate failure of his moral search. Essentially, Adams falls back on rationalizing the fitness of morality rather than using reason to seek—to justify—morality as his guide. This failure in a certain sense mimics the falling short of similar goals for knowledge experienced by Locke. As Dunn explains:

Initially he had hoped that an explanation of men's power to know would show them *why* they should try to live as he supposed they should. But the theory of knowledge which he constructed proved to show nothing of the kind. In consequence his theory of practical reason (of what men have good reason to do) was from his own point of view a disastrous failure.<sup>649</sup>

So too does Adams find that the niche, the locus of evolutionary pressure, must define the direction of his exertions. Adams's pursuit of knowledge of the good led him to conclude that his notions of right conduct must conform to the dictates of the rational forces to which he was subject.

Thus, the age of science did appear to necessarily retrofit the very concept of human virtue and demand conformity to its rational dictates. The standard of behavior would then become not that which was good, but that which worked, which would then be called the good. In effect, normative assessments would be subject to the rational assessment of utility. Utility is, of course, a self-referential norm; who is to say what is

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<sup>649</sup> Dunn. *Locke*. vi

useful to whom? And useful to what ends and in what way? If interests were served, then it would be fair to say that that which served the interests succeeded—it worked—and that which works is good. In this same vein, many Progressives would follow Dewey in declaring growth to be good, engaging in a kind of complacent faith in the direction of history, a history driven by the science upon which this faith would therefore rest.

Acceptance of the principle, however, in no way erases the fact of the subversion of traditional notions of good. That this solution to the moral problem of merely reforming one's thinking about morality served, at best, to circumvent the fact of subversion was not, unsurprisingly, lost on Mark Twain who not coincidentally himself coined the phrase that has since defined the time we know as "The Gilded Age." In his short story, "The Man Who Corrupted Hadleyburg," Twain brings into sharp relief the contingency and therefore susceptibility to moral compromise of a self-referential conception of virtue. As the story goes, there was a town, Hadleyburg, full of people very self-satisfied in the contemplation of their own virtue, famous as they were for being, "the most honest and upright town in all the region round about,"<sup>650</sup>. Indeed, this reputation for honesty became central to the town culture, the town being:

so proud of it, and so anxious to insure its perpetuation, that it began to teach the principles of honest dealing to its babies in the cradle, and made the like teachings the staple of their culture thenceforward through all the years devoted to their education. Also, throughout the formative years temptations were kept out of the way of the young people, so that their honesty could have every chance to harden and solidify, and become a part of their very bone.<sup>651</sup>

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<sup>650</sup> Twain, Mark. "The Man that Corrupted Hadleyburg." In *The Man that Corrupted Hadleyburg and Other Essays and Stories*. (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1900). 11

<sup>651</sup> *Ibid.* 11



In this way, the virtue of honest was taught to a degree that the town gained a reputation for being “incorruptible,”<sup>652</sup>.

Despite this reputation for virtue, a reputation apparently deserved, the people of the town still manage to somehow offend a stranger from out of town. Clearly, then, some tension must exist in Twain’s eyes between the virtue of honesty and a full understanding of right conduct. Granted, the possibility remains that the man may have himself deserved the offense in the eyes of the people—or even our own—but such a moral systems strains against the kind of Christian ethics that inform so much of conventional American moral thinking. Vowing his revenge upon the town, the man decides to divest the people of their reputation for honesty.

To this end, the stranger drops off a sack of gold valued at around \$40,000 at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Richards to be given to the man who imparted to him some important life changing advice. In this way, Twain juxtaposes the virtue for which the town is famed, honesty, with another example of morality, that of assisting another person, even though he be a stranger.<sup>653</sup> Moreover, this assistance comes in the form of advice, which is to say, knowledge. Knowledge, then, has an implicit connection to moral conduct; right knowledge is a benefit to the individual, and therefore it is good to teach it.

The trap is set, though, as the identity of he who gave the advice will be known by submission to the town minister, Reverend Burgess, a note with the advice given which may then be compared, at a public town meeting, to a note inside the sack bearing the message received. All the righteous people of the town are thereby tempted to hope that

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<sup>652</sup> Ibid. 11

<sup>653</sup> Or, stated differently, as Jim Wallis might point out, a “sojourner.”

it was they who had delivered this boon; in effect, the desire for the gold offers incentive to each person to be uncertain as to whether or not they may have done the good deed, thereby justifying their efforts to, “guess out that remark,”<sup>654</sup>. The very possibility of their being an incentive to be uncertain in knowledge of one’s own conduct reveals the complication of knowledge when confronted with temptation—each may ask, “Could it not be that I am the good soul and I just do not yet know it?” The Richards couple has their doubt resolved, however, by receipt of a letter informing them that while they had not done the service of advice to the stranger, Mr. Richards might be rightfully considered the fortune’s heir:

“I am a stranger to you, but no matter: I have something to tell. I have just arrived home from Mexico, and learned about that episode. Of course you do not know who made that remark, but I know, and I am the only person living who does know. It was GOODSON. I knew him well, many years ago. I passed through your village that very night, and was his guest till the midnight train came along. I overheard him make that remark to the stranger in the dark—it was in Hale Alley. He and I talked of it the rest of the way home, and while smoking in his house. He mentioned many of your villagers in the course of his talk—most of them in a very uncomplimentary way, but two or three favourably: among these latter yourself. I say ‘favourably’—nothing stronger. I remember his saying he did not actually LIKE any person in the town—not one; but that you—I THINK he said you—am almost sure—had done him a very great service once, possibly without knowing the full value of it, and he wished he had a fortune, he would leave it to you when he died, and a curse apiece for the rest of the citizens. Now, then, if it was you that did him that service, you are his legitimate heir, and entitled to the sack of gold. I know that I can trust to your honour and honesty, for in a citizen of Hadleyburg these virtues are an unfailing inheritance, and so I am going to reveal to you the remark, well satisfied that if you are not the right man you will seek and find the right one and see that poor Goodson's debt of gratitude for the service referred to is paid. This is the remark ‘YOU ARE FAR FROM BEING A BAD MAN: GO, AND REFORM.’

“HOWARD L. STEPHENSON.”<sup>655</sup>

Though the Mr. Richards did not earn the reward of gold directly by informing the stranger of his need for moral improvement, he becomes implicitly worthy of it, at least

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<sup>654</sup> Ibid. 32

<sup>655</sup> Ibid. 32-33

by the understanding of himself, his wife and, apparently, Mr. Stephenson, by having done service to Goodson. It is important to note that this worthiness is not contingent upon even Mr. Goodson liking Mr. Richards, but on account of the more fundamental virtue that would lead Mr. Richards to conduct his good works for even a man who harbored for him distaste. The problem still remained to discern what possible service might have been done to ensure that receipt of the fortune be justified. Happily, Mr. Richards eventually finds a rationale, specifically, that he had “saved Goodson from marrying,” a girl “tainted” with a “spoonful of negro blood in her veins,”<sup>656</sup>.

Believing the fortune to be theirs, the Richardses<sup>657</sup> begin to spend freely on credit—the belief of future riches has loosened the puritan virtue of thrift as, though they spend more, it is sure to be well within their newfound means. Problematically and unknown to them, each of the nineteen other principal families of the town received identical letters and had, each in turn, undertaken similar mental gymnastics, each concluding their own right to the fortune. Ultimately, at the town meeting it is revealed that each of the nineteen principal families has submitted an identical note to Reverend Burgess, each incomplete in reproducing the statement found in the sack which continued, “*Go, and reform—or, mark my words—some day, for your sins, you will die and go to hell or Hadleyburg—TRY AND MAKE IT THE FORMER,*”<sup>658</sup>. Not only is the honesty of each impugned, thus rendering a reputation for incorruptibility definitionally beyond repair, but the first of the principals to be called are reduced to slandering one another for the fortune, and the town eventually ridicules all.

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<sup>656</sup> Ibid. 39; 39; 38

<sup>657</sup> How does one make a plural of such a name?

<sup>658</sup> Ibid. 53

Without going into the further subtleties and developments of the fates of the denizens of a town once revered for an honesty apparently undeserved as untested,<sup>659</sup> what Twain demonstrates is the instability of a self-referential virtue, a virtue of such kind as honesty is revealed to be. In effect, honesty is good because it is beneficial; the honest gain the reputation so valued by the people of Hadleyburg for being honest, a reputation which facilitates the transactions of society. In the Lockean frame, even in the absence of an overarching sovereign power, society may hold together through the benefits of living in society; the only problems occur with the introduction of what may be termed “the bad man” and the lack of a neutral judge to enforce contracts.<sup>660</sup> A reputation for unfailing honesty would, in principle, circumvent this problem and allow society to function for the common benefit that naturally occurs through work and trade<sup>661</sup>—unless, of course, the individual no longer needed the society.

The problem of self-referential virtue, contingent in its nature as compared to being sourced in some inviolable authority, can be seen in the very reason that it could be compromised in the people of Hadleyburg: it is negotiable. Whereas Locke held that people, for reasons bound up in the nature of the authority that they, in liberty, sought, would need to engage in politics, a good that depends upon perceived benefit to the individual allows the individual to choose among competing goods; accordingly, they may deny the need to engage in politics. If the individual judges that a greater benefit will accrue to behavior besides that deemed virtuous, the virtue may be properly

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<sup>659</sup> Indeed, the good Reverend Burgess himself engages in duplicity, albeit for reasons of gratitude, though the self-serving nature of repayment due to gratitude only underscores Twain’s point.

<sup>660</sup> Locke. *Two Treatises on Government*. Book II. Ch. 5. The point that, “No man is allowed to be judge in his own cause; because his interest would certainly bias his judgment, and, not improbably, corrupt his integrity,” is raised by Madison as well. “Federalist 10.” 50

<sup>661</sup> Locke. *Two Treatises on Government*. Book II. Ch. 5

discarded in favor of that which offers greater bounty. A virtue that does not maximize the utility of the individual is judged no benefit at all. Just as Adams found that the rationalization of culture served to displace moral reasoning as the guide for conduct, so too did Twain demonstrate that self-interest rightly understood, in a context where one may hopefully achieve great material success at the expense of one's neighbors, if the success is potentially great enough to allow the individual to shed the alleged need of and for his fellows, then a right understanding of self-interest in the absence of greater overarching moral stricture will tend to reverse the traditional calculation that guided the right minded individual in the performance of virtue. That the reward for such jettisoning of traditional virtue turned out to be merely guilt in Twain's telling only serves to emphasize that it is the possibility—the mere hope—of greater reward from individual rather than social pursuit of self-interest that unbalances the equation and brings about the demise of rational expectations of moral conduct, at least in interpersonal relations.<sup>662</sup>

### **The Problem of Equality in Spiritual Calculus: Democracy for the Saints**

Where Adams and Twain feared the prospect of material gain subverting moral social fabric of America, a rationalized spiritual thought can subvert the very principle of equality upon which even that fabric is premised. In the Gilded Age, the rational forces of progress destabilized the social fabric by making it possible for individuals to garner great material gain without respect to the fulfillment of social obligations. Analogously, rational spiritual thought suggests to the individual the possibility of spiritual gain that effectively separates the individual from the rest of society on the most existential and ontological of levels—or at least separated from those members of society who are not

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<sup>662</sup> The issue as to whether or not one can sin against oneself is well outside the scope of this project.

spiritually perfect or perfected anyway. Given the locus of knowledge in the individual being, since the individualized, instrumentalized spiritual thinking suggests that knowledge of being benefits the individual directly and not by orientation to society or politics; right knowledge translates into a right individual. The political ramifications of this fact come on account of the fact that disagreement thereby suggests that one of the parties in disagreement must lack right knowledge, meaning that the person is spiritually suspect and therefore may be dismissed as not only mistaken but herself not right. Note that the dismissal, or what Tracy Strong refers to as “avoidance in the discourse,” occurs not only because of the dissonance in what is claimed as knowledge, but rather because the dissonance in knowledge is taken as symptomatic of a fundamental ontological difference in the nature of the individuals in disagreement. Such an epistemological point of view allows not just the dismissal of deviating knowledge, but the rejection of the individual as ontologically deficient; equality is attacked and separation created on the very level of being.

The ramifications for American democracy of the acceptance of such epistemological viewpoints in American public discourse could scarcely be more significant. Americans may still consider equality to be providential, but that equality is rendered neither foregone premise nor fact of being but a potential to be achieved. Such a reconceptualization of the idea of equality becomes critical to how we understand political participation and the validity of dissenting view points in the public sphere. Consider Tocqueville’s maxim on the relationship between religion and politics:

BY the side of every religion is to be found a political opinion, which is connected with it by affinity. If the human mind be left to follow its own bent, it will regulate the temporal and spiritual institutions of society in a uniform

manner, and man will endeavor, if I may so speak, to harmonize earth with heaven.<sup>663</sup>

To the extent that this is true, Americans adhering to beliefs about the instrumental good of rationalized spiritual thought may come to believe that some people are not fit for democracy. Surely these benighted souls<sup>664</sup> hold within them the potential to fit themselves for democracy, at least in some of the systems discussed here. But that fitness becomes fundamentally conditional upon the proper spiritual development on the part of the individual.

Politics, then, may become organized around the issue of whose opinions may be legitimately considered—as distinguished from which are considered legitimate—a legitimacy in effect premised on agreement as said agreement indicates the right knowledge which in turn reveals the validity of the individual to participate in politics—that is, to be listened to at all. As Block notes:

The pervading religious claim from the Puritans to Dewey to possess the “truth which shall make you free” meant that the truth could never be regarded as a constraint. Yet with ends so predetermined, the release of individualism from the responsibility and power regarding ends to focus on means has as an inevitable result the pervasive conformity and docility of American life.<sup>665</sup>

The classical view of truth as the authority that defines true liberty in the Lockean sense, though, becomes reoriented in the reversal of the spiritual calculus of a religious view made rationalized to the ends of spiritual improvement. People may be considered

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<sup>663</sup> Tocqueville. *Democracy in America*. Volume I. 300

<sup>664</sup> The Great Unwashed? The class implications of this problem are substantial as well. Many of the systems of thought in question are not free. As such, material resources, sometimes significant resources, are needed to advance to greater levels of ability. Yet that ability, itself a product of the spiritual systems that benefit the individual, is required to get the material resources. Thus, those of lesser means may be appropriately dismissed politically as justified by their obvious lesser nature, identifiable by their poverty. The classical elitist argument about our betters is recreated, but now with a return to the ontological basis, upon which it is so often founded, provided by, for some, a religious system allegedly emphasizing freedom from such artifacts of history.

<sup>665</sup> Block. *A Nation of Agents*. 543

constrained if they do not know the truth. The views of such limited people, as compared to those whom the truth has freed, are not relevant to the effectuation of political ends; indeed, their views may threaten what the spiritual elite understand to be for the greatest good of all—to listen is to put at risk the divinity intended for humans in this world.

Once again, radical as such a portrayal of the ramifications of this spiritual epistemology may seem, its seeds may be seen in a Progressivism that is quite mainstream. As Block describes it:

The thinker [Dewey] who emerged in the early 1890s undertook the bold shift from a religious to a liberal framework because he was convinced that the world, at least in its American variant, had come to immanently embody ultimate theological principles. The pervasive sense of philosophical closure lurking underneath his fluid images suggests a universe now operating according to its ultimate ends. In describing this “deep structure” of universal processes perfectly authorized and fulfilled by the units, and units with fully evolved places and functions in the whole, Dewey inscribed the agency cosmology as the final meaning of modernity. This completed vision of agents willing their own agency and their agency institutions forms a perfectly closed circle: the reopening of ends cannot even be formulated because reality itself proceeds by means of agency systems. Dewey, like Hobbes, realized that a permanent and stable attempt to create a dynamic nontraditional society of equally dynamic individuals required predictable motion, or at least stable channels for motion provided by a common institutional authority.<sup>666</sup>

The confidence Dewey could have in the products of liberal democracy may appear unsettling to say the least given the history of human error both violent and unjust. That American power has grown so greatly through the operation of such principles should only sharpen our awareness of the dangers and encourage restraint. The threat would be mitigated—or at least it would seem to be to someone who believed in this way—if not fully dissipated, by the development of institutions that produced the sorts of individuals

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<sup>666</sup> Ibid. 539



who would experience a reversal, as Block calls it, in their sense of freedom that ensured they become agents to what are functionally cosmically validated ends.<sup>667</sup>

Yet the individuation of the belief system undercuts the democratic nature of the vision. In the eyes of many, not every American can be counted upon to be proper agents of the politics considered appropriate, a vision apprehended with the confidence of direct connection to the right way of things. As the individuated spiritual epistemology reverses the equation of the individual's sense of benefit from being driven into social and political relations, so too does it reverse the individual's understanding of her status with respect to a situation of the alleged equality of all people. Long ago, Tocqueville held concerns that belief in equality could lead to the devolution towards a base equality that sacrificed even liberty:

There is, in fact, a manly and lawful passion for equality that incites men to wish all to be powerful and honored. This passion tends to elevate the humble to the rank of the great; but there exists also in the human heart a depraved taste for equality, which impels the weak to attempt to lower the powerful to their own level and reduces men to prefer equality in slavery to inequality with freedom. Not that those nations whose social condition is democratic naturally despise liberty; on the contrary, they have an instinctive love of it. But liberty is not the chief and constant object of their desires; equality is their idol: they make rapid and sudden efforts to obtain liberty and, if they miss their aim, resign themselves to their disappointment; but nothing can satisfy them without equality, and they would rather perish than lose it.<sup>668</sup>

In his view, individuals would pull down to their level anyone who, by appearing above the fray, suggested the unreality of social equality. Reorienting the relationship, one who understands their own spiritual perfection knows that that which he freely pursues both benefits him and is right, so any who would try to rein him by invocation of authority or otherwise must necessarily be unqualified to engage in the politics by which this would

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<sup>667</sup> Ibid. 540-549

<sup>668</sup> Tocqueville. *Democracy in America*. Volume I. 53

occur. Disagreement may be interpreted as an attack on the self, for to claim even that I am mistaken is to suggest that my understanding is incorrect. As my epistemology defines my ontological status, your claim of my error cuts to the spirit of my being, an attack that demonstrates it is you who are not fitted to the equality that characterizes the democracy of right minded people. Neither dogs nor children are allowed to participate in self-governance in civilized lands, so neither shall the spiritually defective as identified by their dissent from right knowledge.

Locke's political mandate is now on its head, at least with respect to a form of liberalism suitable for egalitarian democracy. The Progressives thus suffer the same fate as did Sumner in his articulation of social ethics, a fact that should be unsurprising as they follow his lead in the attempt to imbue the scientific understanding of things with moral force to ground their moral theory in something known to be scientifically enduring. In the logic of Progressivism's attempt to recapture the rationalistic forces of society to their cause of justice, as per above, the nature of the forces alter the character of the authoritative morals, aligning the good with that which occurs. Problematically for normative theory, the operations of reality itself become sanctioned as divine will without regard for any loftier, exogenous or traditional assessments of the justness of what happens.<sup>669</sup> As Block points out:

Once religious authorization was elided into a societal validation, the religious vision of societal integration unavoidably became a transcendent defense of the collective. [Dewey's] call to recognize ultimate national values unfolding in the participatory process could easily be conflated with the prevalent if unrealistic public belief that the America arising as the first popular society embodied such an unquestioned consensus.<sup>670</sup>

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<sup>669</sup> Existence, it would seem, implies the rightness of the existence of that which it exists by virtue of the existence itself.

<sup>670</sup> Block. 545

The rational individuation of that religious vision now renders this apparent unity, the one to which individuals become agents, unstable. The unquestioned consensus becomes unquestioned through a disallowing and disavowing of dissent on ontological grounds. Although he perhaps did not foresee the future of what would be considered acceptable religious thought in America, Tocqueville was prescient in his concern that, “Thus not only does democracy make every man forget his ancestors, but it hides his descendants and separates his contemporaries from him; it throws him back forever upon himself alone and threatens in the end to confine him entirely within the solitude of his own heart,”<sup>671</sup>.

And certainly such distance and freedom from one’s fellows is the right of an individual; to say otherwise may well be to do violence to an understanding of rights as a protected space from legitimate interference. The logic of rights, though, similarly disallows the denial of the rights of others. These rights, even if considered self-evident and derived from nature, still depend upon political enactment; the Declaration of Independence states that it is “to secure these rights,” that “Governments are instituted by Men.”<sup>672</sup> If a belief system validates the withdrawal from society for reasons that stem from a similar validation of the rejection of one’s fellows as equals, then the belief system jeopardizes the belief in equality that supports the democratic enactment of the rights in the first place. The problem is not that a person may be freely anti-social, but rather that the underlying form of thought invalidates belief in the political premises that ground the edifice by which we protect that freedom.

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<sup>671</sup> Tocqueville. *Democracy in America*. Volume II. 99

<sup>672</sup> One wonders if the capitalization of “Men” was a prophetic harbinger of the politics to come...

Thus we find that the American liberal system contains a fundamental functional instability in that it allows, indeed, its discourse may even encourage, belief systems that can undermine its own political foundations. The discourse may encourage these belief systems by the marked preference of Americans that people hold religiously informed values.<sup>673</sup> To the extent that religious and spiritual belief systems themselves can be the vehicles for promoting these beliefs that are anti-political as well as destructive of the political foundations of equality, this encouragement of religiously situated values in public discourse allows for the undermining of polity and politics—even those politics that protect the liberalism, ironically in Locke’s theorizing, that protect and foster religious belief for the benefit of the common good.

Of course, the system of American liberalism, as seen in chapter one, deviates significantly from that theorized by Locke. For many observers of democratic liberalism, however, religion could still play the salutary role theorized by Locke on account of the toleration of religion embedded in the Constitution. In much popular imagination about politics in America, in fact, it is the decline of faith in America that most imperils the republic. Block, for example, points to the process of secularization in his account of modernity and the development of authority in relation to the rationalization of culture:

The birth of a modern relation to authority is thus both a religious and secular account. It evolved both in the religious relation of the essential self to an ultimate author and in the worldly reshaping of institutional authorities and structures. Secularization is only the later phase of the process in which the rational apprehension of self-evident truths—that is, truths now embedded—replaces the early institution of these truths through faith. At the same time, grounding these truths in faith or in an ethic derived from the “the good” unduly privileges religion. Secularism for its part seeks the reasons for and implications of particular faith projects. It is only in arising and operating together that faith

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<sup>673</sup> Wolf. *One Nation After All*.

and its reasons complementarily promoted and jointly sustained the modernist tradition.<sup>674</sup>

Yet such an account fails to realize the impact that that self-same rationality had on the modes of faith considered acceptable in America and the impact those belief systems would have on authority. Rather, in stark contrast to the mandate for republican politics envisioned by Locke or the fostering of community so famously described by Tocqueville and advocated by many advocates of religion for the health of American politics today, religion may now serve as the vehicle of social atomization to which Tocqueville feared democracy could lend itself:

It cannot be absolutely or generally affirmed that the greatest danger of the present age is license or tyranny, anarchy or despotism. Both are equally to be feared; and the one may proceed as easily as the other from one and the same cause: namely, that general apathy which is the consequence of individualism. It is because this apathy exists that the executive government, having mustered a few troops, is able to commit acts of oppression one day; and the next day a party which has mustered some thirty men in its ranks can also commit acts of oppression. Neither the one nor the other can establish anything which will last; and the causes which enable them to succeed easily prevent them from succeeding for long; they rise because nothing opposes them, and they sink because nothing supports them. The proper object, therefore, of our most strenuous resistance is far less either anarchy or despotism than that apathy which may almost indifferently beget either the one or the other.<sup>675</sup>

As described in chapter two, in Tocqueville's view, American religion fostered the democratic soul and inculcated the mores appropriate to democratic politics. Yet he also noted that religion would need to conform to the ideas prevalent in the society. Synthetically then, Tocqueville's concern that the equality of conditions could lead to apathy and individualism should also mean that that spirit could permeate the popular religion of the people.

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<sup>674</sup> Block. *A Nation of Agents*. 19-20

<sup>675</sup> Tocqueville. *Democracy in America*. Volume II. Appendix BB. 370-371

Paradoxically for Locke's theory, this apathy and individualism may be characterized on the part of adherents to such faiths as the culmination of republicanism because, as the outcome of religious faith, they must necessarily be understood to serve the public good. Moreover, the republican nature is held to be unassailable by virtue of the non-falsifiability of the religious claims in question. The legitimacy of emotive foundations for certainty in knowledge within the mainline American tradition of belief raises precisely the problems that haunted Locke in his theory of knowledge, as Ayers describes as follows:

Finally, and perhaps most interestingly for the secular philosopher, Locke's discussion of faith possesses a striking feature with a bearing on the rest of his epistemology. For, in the case of 'enthusiasm' he recognized both the possibility of an illusion of 'evidence' and the need to explain it. What he did, and indeed had to do, was to reduce the purported evidence to mere conviction, and to demand grounds for the conviction: 'For all the Light they speak of is but a strong, though ungrounded persuasion of their own Minds that it is the Truth.' [702,33] Their persuasions 'are right, only because they are strong in them. For when what they say is strip'd of the Metaphor of seeing and feeling, this is all it amounts to.' [700,27] Yet Locke himself can be accused of relying on just the same unenlightening metaphors for his explanation of intuitive knowledge, which 'is irresistible, and like the bright Sun-Shine, forces it self immediately to be perceived'. [531,10] What could he reply to the sceptical accusation, brought by Hobbes against Descartes, that intuitionists too are only 'sure because they are sure'? [700,25]<sup>676</sup>

In fact, it was this problem of knowledge that made revelation a second-best solution to the problem of knowledge of rightful authority. Reason would appear to demand a more formal and thorough engagement; knowledge by reason could not be assumed and could certainly be refuted if found to be defective. Yet the proper employment of reason similarly could not be assumed, which would undermine the universalism insisted upon by a foundation of his theory in the Law of Nature:

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<sup>676</sup> Ayers. *Locke – Volume I*. 124

Moreover, as it has been argued at length above, he by no means preferred revelation to natural reason as the source of moral knowledge. If in *The Reasonableness of Christianity* he came to assign revelation greater importance for the moral life than he had done in the *Essay*, that seems to have been only as a development of the thought already present in the latter work that people commonly lack the leisure and training to make out their duties by the light of nature (together, perhaps, with a chastened appreciation that ethics might have some of the *difficulty* of mathematics).<sup>677</sup>

Revelation then becomes critical to make the knowledge of authority available to all, a point critical to Locke's liberalism. The non-falsifiability of the instrumental emotive epistemology of much of American belief only underscores the defect of knowledge in Locke's theory in its historical demonstration of the rejection of the sort of republican politics he hoped religion would foster. Although, as stated, the American liberal system differed from Locke's, this experience of religion in liberty does suggest, as noted by Dunn above, how Locke could believe that, once the problem of subjectivity in religious experience is revealed, now his failure is complete. In Dunn's terms:

What Locke hoped to show men was that a rational understanding of man's place in nature required them to live like Christians. But what he in fact showed was that a rational understanding of their place in nature did not, and does not, *require* men to live in any particular fashion. Worse still, the close relation between conceptions of how to live and the history of particular languages and cultures places all men's lives at the mercy of history. Even if there were a God who had designed the order of nature as a whole for men to live well within it, they could not draw their conceptions of how to live directly from this order through the exercise of their reason alone. Instead they must fashion their values for themselves as best they can out of the more or less seductive or menacing suggestions of others and by their own powers of reflection.<sup>678</sup>

Toleration of religion for Locke thus becomes a necessary but not sufficient condition for the success of a republican liberal politics. In the American experience, although

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<sup>677</sup> Ayers. *Locke – Volume II*. 190. The similarity here to the Straussian problem of not everyone being capable of real philosophy is striking. Locke, however, appears far more egalitarian, at least in Ayers's view, in that the problem is one of opportunity, whereas some Straussians seem to focus on an insufficiency of intellect, which would imply the need for guardians to govern them. Locke, it would appear, is the far better democrat, looking almost Jeffersonian by comparison to many Straussians.

<sup>678</sup> Dunn. *Locke*. vii

toleration continues to offer the opportunity for greater corrective possibilities to politics by way of religion, the freedom from political commitment has allowed faith to attack the very basis of the politics that made religion free.



## **EPILOGUE: A NEW HOPE?**

### **Life, Liberty and the Vocation of Democracy**

Human progress never rolls in on wheels of inevitability; it comes through the tireless efforts of men willing to be co-workers with God, and without this hard work, time itself becomes an ally of the forces of social stagnation. We must use time creatively, in the knowledge that the time is always ripe to do right. Now is the time to make real the promise of democracy and transform our pending national elegy into a creative psalm of brotherhood. Now is the time to lift our national policy from the quicksand of racial injustice to the solid rock of human dignity.

Martin Luther King, Jr., *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*<sup>679</sup>

### **Making Liberty Work**

Some may see my argument as an attempt to reject, or at least to discredit, liberalism in its modern form. That is in no way my intention. Similarly, I bear no fundamental hostility towards religion, organized or otherwise, sharing, rather, Peter Berger's sympathetic attitude towards an attempt to make sense of the world in a way that might allow us to live together in just harmony, as well his suggestion that it may not actually be possible for humans to think otherwise, whether they reject the contention or not and no matter how wrongheaded that attempt may actually become.<sup>680</sup> What I contend, though, is that liberty must be understood as it is, not as what we would it were. I may well prefer that people be absolutely free without moral consequence, but that don't make it so. To demand otherwise would arguably be to recreate that original sin that expelled human being from paradise in rejection of the creation. We humans build a polity, and I believe in the importance of acknowledging our creation in all its imperfections as well as the influence the act and consequence of creation has upon us—

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<sup>679</sup> King, Martin Luther, Jr. "Letter from a Birmingham Jail." 6. April 16, 1963. Retrieved October 30<sup>th</sup>, 2008 from <http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/frequentdocs/birmingham.pdf>

<sup>680</sup> Berger. *The Sacred Canopy*. esp. v; 179-188

our humanity is part and parcel of our own creation and we abdicate responsibility of awareness of that fact at our own peril. That polity we build, however, even as we affect the world—alter own niche—must be built in this world as we receive it and, perhaps most importantly, that is ok.

As such, in the grand tradition of baseball umpires, I have tried to avoid the arrogance of saying that liberty and the role of our beliefs within a liberal system is what I say it is, instead doing my best to call it like I see it. Continuing in that vein, some sets of concepts appear to me to work together and others do not. It behooves us, therefore, to understand what is possible by our efforts, be they individual, social, political, religious or otherwise; there can be no moral imperative to do that which is not possible. Of course, attributing impossibility to a project or endeavor may itself become a self-fulfilling prophecy, as, precisely because you have assumed the feat is impossible, that is why you fail. Yet this piece of Greek wisdom only underscores the paramount importance of understanding what can and cannot be done in and with liberty; if we truly value our freedom we ought to learn how it works. Contemporary conservatives of a certain ilk are fond of saying that freedom is not free. This may well be true, but it eludes me as to why the conclusion always seems to be that we must therefore fight. The fact of freedom not being free means not that it must be fought for, but rather that it requires work of which fighting even the good fight is but a part. My own investigations have led me to believe that this work is the work of politics, specifically democratic politics, regardless of what that self-same freedom has allowed so many of my fellow Americans to conclude.

To this end, it is my further contention that while Americans are fond of the idea of religious faith, to advocate the panacea of religion without reference or understanding of its epistemological or ontological content is no path towards conserving that which we hold most dear, be it freedom or security, justice or harmony. Indeed, given that which has come before, such a complacent attitude towards belief may, in reality, allow or even itself constitute the most egregious assault on the goods said conservatism avows it would value and protect, making it no real conservatism at all. David Gutterman, in his book *Prophetic Politics*, ably demonstrates that a religious movement may either support or resist democratic politics, indeed, even in invoking the same narrative tradition; Christianity may be political or anti-political.<sup>681</sup> To assume without reflection the function for religion in our world—especially given that, as Gutterman reminds us, “When the threat of meaningless haunts our lives, we crave the clarity and inspiration of a well-told story. When the hunger for meaning is so acute, we are ill-equipped to judge what we should eat,”<sup>682</sup>—then, is to take for granted the influence of religion on our collective lives and as individuals, which is not to take it seriously at all—yet another irony among the many found within the ongoing discussion of religion in public life in America.

Of course, understanding religious experience raises certain problems for conducting historical inquiry, scientific or otherwise, that differ from analyzing a history of religion *per se*. The history of religion may often be conducted through a sort of sociological critique, examining its dissemination, propagation and function within a community and its development thereof. The idea of religious experience, however,

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<sup>681</sup> Gutterman. *Prophetic Politics*.

<sup>682</sup> Ibid. 168

speaks to how and what the individuals engaging in the practice of their religion feel and claim to know about the experience. H. Richard Niebuhr, for example, resisted such dispassionate sociological and historical formulations of the role of religion in American life as denuding it of the very meaning that makes the phenomenon significant and an important object of study. Though he allows for the element of truth in each and all of these theories, Niebuhr points to a prophetic or revolutionary strain in American Christianity which demands rebirth rather than conservation, keeping its eye on God's salvation rather than human achievement<sup>683</sup>:

Because the sociological interpretation deals with static or passive rather than dynamic Christianity in America it is unsatisfactory as a complete explanation.

We are put on our guard against this interpretation, furthermore, by the reflection that the instrumental value of faith for society is dependent upon faith's conviction that it has more than instrumental value. Faith could not defend men if it believed that defense was its meaning. The godliness that is profitable to all things becomes unprofitable when profit rather than God comes to be its interest. This ancient dilemma is not solved by any doctrines of necessary fictions but only by the recognition that objectivism rather than pragmatism is the first law of knowledge. Hence if we are to understand American Christianity we need to take our stand within the movement so that its objects may come into view. If we adopt a point of view outside it we shall never see what it had seen but only the incidental results of its vision, which we shall then seek to explain as due to some strange transmutation of political and economic interest.<sup>684</sup>

The belief in the power of a dynamic and prophetic religion as distinct from—and not so easily understood in terms of—conservative forces co-opting its thought to justify the status quo, as developed by the theorists of social control, is a point well taken. However, Niebuhr's theory of knowledge, itself an assertion, is not so persuasive. Indeed, this assumption of objectivity may itself be the sort of necessary fiction that he disparages, allowing people to believe in a sort of moral certainty for the maintenance of

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<sup>683</sup> Niebuhr. *The Kingdom of God in America*. 11

<sup>684</sup> Ibid. 12

the possibility of resolute action in a world that is actually confusing and uncertain.<sup>685</sup> That Niebuhr further claims that one cannot truly judge a religious faith without the experience of that faith, without being “in it” so to speak, devolves into the all too frequent circumvention of the problem of religious authority, making analysis invariably problematic in terms of the approach and its attendant teaching as to the right way of life being intrinsically non-falsifiable. Niebuhr is eager to save American Christianity from the clutches of the sociologists and the social control theorists, but in the process underscores the epistemological problems within the dynamic and prophetic strands of the faith that he would celebrate.

This claim of knowing how to live, the right way to live—often understood through the term “belief”—raises the key epistemological problem of how people go about knowing whatever it is they claim to know. The problem for a history of religious experience stems from the fact that the historical processes tend to be described in the terms of those undergoing the experience themselves. For example, histories of the Second Great Awakening tend to use the language of how the people understood their times. As such, these histories contain accounts of how many conversions occurred, where, when and how. The conversions are recorded because people said they occurred; by the logic of religious experience, therefore, they did occur. The pivotal question for an investigation into a religious experience that might prove contingent upon other matters, however, must turn on the nature of that experience, which is ultimately subjective. Put simply, if an individual claims sanctification by the Holy Spirit, who is to

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<sup>685</sup> That the person to whom authorship, rightly or wrongly, of *The Declaration of Independence* is assigned also constructed his own version of the Bible, excising the parts with which he disagreed, is perhaps instructive.

say otherwise? But on the other hand, how might someone else, even a believer, really know that this person has been so sanctified?<sup>686</sup>

In this vein, the revival period reveals many attempts to garner a kind of empirical evidence of the experience of religious conversion. To take an example from eighteenth century British revivalism, the development of Methodism as a sect emphasized just that: a method for achieving evangelical conversion. In the distinctive American experience, as mentioned in chapter two, Barton Stone, for example, was an adherent of Baconian science and would try to categorize the various gyrations and utterances (“the falling exercise, jerking exercise, running exercise, singing exercise”<sup>687</sup> etc.) of the emotive experience in a roughly systematic way. Attribution or acceptance of the fact of sanctification of the individual tended to be evaluated based upon the depth of the emotive experience.<sup>688</sup> Yet the problem remains as to how to know for certain, first, the depth of another’s emotive experience, and secondly, that this experience is actually a divine—as perhaps distinct from a religious—experience.

As mentioned, the histories of the period often tend to take the language of religious experience at face value. Yet this attempt apparently to maintain a certain evenhanded, non-evaluative approach at academic disinterestedness would tend to validate the subjective claims of the participants; ironically, the validation of the subjective, emotive claims arises precisely from the attempt to remain objective—or at

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<sup>686</sup> This problem can be likened to the old saying, “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.” In this fashion, a friend of mine, Ariel, once spent a not insignificant amount of time trying to convince my freshman roommate, Irakli, that the actress Michelle Pfeiffer was not attractive. Irakli would contend that he, indeed, found Pfeiffer attractive, to which Ariel would respond, “No, trust me; she’s not attractive.” This conversation did not get anywhere and Irakli began to avoid Ariel. Not uninterestingly, Ariel now denies that this ever happened.

<sup>687</sup> Weisberger, Bernard. *They Gathered at the River: The Story of the Great Revivalists and Their Impact Upon Religion in America*. (Boston: Little Brown, 1958). 24

<sup>688</sup> Thomas. *Revivalism and Cultural Change*. 70

least maintain a critical distance—from the historical subject matter in question. This irony would seem to underscore the pivotal problem for understanding, and, more importantly, evaluating the role of religious claims in politics: On what grounds may the critic of the epistemological basis of a political claim presented by a religious adherent argue that the claim is not sufficiently valid? To reject the claim out of hand on account of its religious texture would seem to many to have an illiberal element, as in a democracy it is not clear that the privileging of an a-religious subjectivity is more epistemologically justified than privileging the religious view-point; just because so many self-professed liberals assert that religious adherents tend to reject the view of the liberal without investigation does not make it right to do the same in return—as Robert Frost says, “a liberal is a man too broadminded to take his own side in a quarrel,”<sup>689</sup>. The crux of the problem for liberal democracy—or, arguably, any sort of democracy—is that the need for discursive engagement will inexorably lead to questioning the validity of the religious adherents’ beliefs, which may in fact border on blasphemy from the point of view of said believer.

The irony that so many religious believers in America contend that God smiles upon American democracy is enough to reduce the thoughtful citizen to tears.

Yet democracy itself may hold the solution to this Gordian Knot in contemporary American politics. While it may be deemed untenable to the allegedly opiated masses that their personal religious beliefs be not accepted as valid, this does not necessary require that the political claims they set forth be accepted on the same epistemological

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<sup>689</sup> Frost, Robert. Attributed. cf. “Forgive, O Lord, my little jokes on Thee; And I’ll forgive Thy great big one on me.” Frost, Robert. “Forgive, O Lord...” In *The Poetry of Robert Frost: The Collected Poems, Complete and Unabridged*. Edited by Edward Connery Lathem. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1979). 428

basis of truth upon which they were initially founded. That is to say, the weak link in the argument of so many religiously motivated political contentions in American society is that these contentions be accepted because they are known to be true. Rather, it would seem that if they are indeed true, then their truth ought to be able to shine forth in some way besides a believer's zeal. As Ayers understands Locke, for example:

He took it that when there are disputes about the content and interpretation of God's word, careful and rational consideration will generally reveal that at least one improbable construction has been placed on it. But in any case other interpretations than one's own should be tolerated, and the issue left available for rational resolution. Only the atheist and the politically dangerous papist deserve to be the object of intolerance.<sup>690</sup>

Even in a theological conception, I may have faith in God without having absolute faith in your—or even my own—understanding of said divinity. If what I believe is true, then it is true not because *you* believe it, but because it is out there.

As such, my investigation of more contemporary instances of the impact on the rational individuation of religious experience—systems of belief that place the locus of knowledge of the truth out there within the individual, with what I argue are often regrettable consequences for democracy—that developed during the nineteenth century serves to demonstrate how otherwise seemingly disparate religious systems manifest very similar types of epistemological and ontological claims. Indeed, many religious adherents would balk at the contention of similarity to some of the other systems of thought I consider.<sup>691</sup> However, the point is that these ostensibly different and opposed

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<sup>690</sup> Ayers. *Locke – Volume I*. 121

<sup>691</sup> As for me, I would include *The Secret*, the DVD, the book, website and so forth, enthusiastically endorsed by Oprah, which reveals to us the secret principle of the laws of attraction whereby like things attract like, so one need only think good things for good things to happen to them. According to the film, the reason such a small percentage of people in America control such a large percentage of the wealth is because those privileged few know the secret—which is why they don't want you to know! The individuation of all responsibility and the rendering of politics as irrelevant as they are obsolete to the real problems of life in this ontological formula should, by now I hope, be abundantly clear. *The Secret*,



belief systems function to promote highly similar ways of putting forth claims, of making truth claims, about the world. Specifically, many religious and spiritual systems in America appear to have a tendency towards making the emotive experience of the individual the locus of knowledge—indeed of truth—in a way that allows for the rejection of competing knowledge claims at face value on account of the fact of disagreement alone. As such, the question must be addressed as to whether or not this epistemological development is rooted in theology from divinity, or rather is a product of a certain sociological, economic and political locale. As I have endeavored to show, the commonality in the conception of truth claims across these otherwise radically different theological forms would suggest that they stem from a discursive political structure that invites such claims from an ontological conception that gives rise to them.

This of course, is not to say that the spiritual and religious experiences of the adherents of these various systems are invalid. Far from it. In fact, one might well claim that the similarity of the epistemologies of the different systems is more proof of a miraculous God that can work through many languages and creeds.<sup>692</sup> The extension of such reasoning, of course, is that the divine hath given people a common way of knowing, but because so many still disagree on the substance of political goods and goals, that contention of knowing cannot be the sole basis for political decision making.

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incidentally, in book form, has reached the New York Times Bestseller List for books on advice (it is #3 among hardcover advice books at the moment of this writing) and both it and the DVD have ranked among the top sellers at Amazon.com. Upon hearing of the phenomenon that is the product of *The Secret*, one of my colleagues, an ardent (post-)Marxist and atheist, declared that the churches need to get back to the serious business of discussing heresy.

<sup>692</sup> Ayers similarly argues that this is a feature, though one he suggests may be problematic, in Locke's theory of knowledge by way of religion: "It may sometimes seem that Locke puts revelation on the same level as human witness, since trust in either is a matter of judgement. God, however, cannot lie or make mistakes. The word of God is transmitted through fallible and not always intelligible human beings, but is necessarily honest and draws on omniscience and so is immune to certain kinds of doubt or merely piecemeal acceptance. Sometimes this feature of revelation is emphasized with misleading rhetoric." Ayers. *Locke – Volume I*. 122

Following Locke's lead, then, we may understand that in this view God becomes a promoter of liberal discursive democracy as he has created a system whereby our ways of knowing what we know produce dissension and discussion that ultimately force everyone to return to the negotiating table.<sup>693</sup> Rather than bracing oneself against the heresy of heathens<sup>694</sup>, the suggestion inherent within this critique is that it may well be necessary for the believer to scrutinize what is believed to be known for possible "social contamination," as it were, and other problems of knowing the divine in the world of imperfect human beings.

This scrutiny might be conceived similarly as what the good Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. famously termed "self-purification." Reverend King's approach, while unquestionably religious, was distinctly democratic; in many ways, King's approach could not be properly religious as he understood it without it being democratic:

You may well ask: "Why direct action? Why sit-ins, marches and so forth? Isn't negotiation a better path?" You are quite right in calling, for negotiation. Indeed, this is the very purpose of direct action. Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored. My citing the creation of tension as part of the work of the nonviolent-resister may sound rather shocking. But I must confess that I am not afraid of the word "tension." I have earnestly opposed violent tension, but there is a type of constructive, nonviolent tension which is necessary for growth. Just as Socrates felt that it was necessary to create a tension in the mind so that individuals could rise from the bondage of myths and half-truths to the unfettered realm of creative analysis and objective appraisal, we must see the need [sic] for nonviolent gadflies to create the kind of tension in society that will help men rise from the dark depths of prejudice and racism to the majestic heights of understanding and brotherhood.<sup>695</sup>

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<sup>693</sup> Or, alternatively, kill each other. Make no mistake: this is a problem. But if we have faith that God does not endorse murder, then we may happily put down our arms and set about the other solution.

<sup>694</sup> Heathens are identifiable, of course, by their heresy.

<sup>695</sup> King. "Letter from a Birmingham Jail." 3

King had a religious belief in justice for the people, a justice that he had faith enough was God's will effectively to threaten America with the fear of God's wraith—the notion that *The Book of Amos* says that God will let “justice roll down like waters,” is a more recent translation, perhaps reflecting a more modern conception of how God's will might benefit us.<sup>696</sup> However, justice as Dr. King understood it could not be imposed in oppressive fashion. Thus, religious belief requires justice be enacted democratically, as any other approach to the problem of injustice would be to act unjustly in the name of justice, which is unacceptable to King's religious faith:

It is true that the police have exercised a degree of discipline in handling the demonstrators. In this sense they have conducted themselves rather "nonviolently" in public. But for what purpose? To preserve the evil system of segregation. Over the past few years I have consistently preached that nonviolence demands that the means we use must be as pure as the ends we seek. *I have tried to make clear that it is wrong to use immoral means to attain moral ends.* But now I must affirm that it is just as wrong, or perhaps even more so, to use moral means to preserve immoral ends. Perhaps Mr. Connor and his policemen have been rather nonviolent in public, as was Chief Pritchett in Albany, Georgia but they have used the moral means of nonviolence to maintain the immoral end of racial injustice. As T. S. Eliot has said: “The last temptation is the greatest treason: To do the right deed for the wrong reason.”<sup>697</sup>

It is not good enough to know the truth. Nor is it good enough to enact the truth by any means necessary, at least as the phrase is so commonly and, I would argue, wrongly held to mean. Indeed, the very phrase, “by any means necessary,” implies knowledge of correct relationship between ends and means and which means are necessary to effect the ends. In this light, necessary means are by definition required to achieve given ends; that is what the word “necessary,” in fact, means.

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<sup>696</sup> King, Martin Luther, Jr. “I Have a Dream.” Address Delivered at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. August 28<sup>th</sup>, 1963. 2. Retrieved October 30<sup>th</sup>, 2008 from [http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/publications/speeches/address\\_at\\_march\\_on\\_washington.pdf](http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/publications/speeches/address_at_march_on_washington.pdf); Book of Amos 5:24

<sup>697</sup> King. “Letter from a Birmingham Jail.” 10. Emphasis added.

What means then are necessary to the ends of justice? As Dr. King suggests to us, those means are the tools and functioning of democracy. To impose a just order on society is to violate the liberty of the would-be beneficiaries. If we take seriously the belief that justice will be characterized by a people at liberty, then such an approach to justice falls into self-contradiction. For real justice to become manifest, then, we must bring everyone with us, and we must do so in just fashion. This means democracy: we will only have a just society when the people will it.

This conclusion, in turn, suggests further conclusions about the nature of the democracy in question. As McWilliams indicates, even majority rule involves not just a role for consent but also the machinations of force.<sup>698</sup> What validates submission to such rule cannot, therefore, be the hope that there is wisdom in crowds or that popular opinion is most likely correct; even a probable justice would be by definition unsure and, therefore, suspect. The legitimacy of majority rule, then, must come from something deeper, more fundamental. The politics that make such an order justified must extend beyond mere voting, a justification which, “rests upon a fragmentary idea of democracy,”<sup>699</sup>. As McWilliams proffers:

I rely on an older, more comprehensive understanding that makes citizenship, rather than voting the defining quality of democracy. Common sense tells us that speaking and listening precede voting and give it form. Democracy is inseparable from democratic ways of framing and arguing for political choices. Almost all agree, for example, that elections in so-called people's democracies are shams. At a deeper level, moreover, democracy depends on those things that affect our ability to speak, hear, or be silent. In this sense, I will argue that democracy requires community, civic dignity, and religion.<sup>700</sup>

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<sup>698</sup> McWilliams. “Democracy and the Citizen.” 80-81

<sup>699</sup> Ibid. 79

<sup>700</sup> Ibid. 79

Democracy in this view acknowledges and accepts that human life, following Aristotle, is political life. Even to pretend otherwise is a political act, and the ability to do so in any meaningful way itself depends upon a politics that allows such freedom.

As has been discussed, though, it appears that democracy, just as it develops its own kinds of human beings, in turn rests upon certain types of human beings for its health and quality. Democracy depends upon the mores of the people, as Tocqueville observed, for its right—or wrongheaded—functioning. If religion will be part of this equation, as many feel it might be necessarily so—especially if religion be broadly defined—then our belief in democracy, in liberty, and in justice, demands a right relationship with religion to ensure that it works for righteousness. The failure to demand of religion an accounting of its operation in our world is to fail in religion itself. As even Niebuhr could ultimately admit, for example, of the recent roots of his own religious tradition:

Yet the evangelical doctrine of the kingdom was not adequate for the new situation in which these men found themselves. It could not emancipate itself from the conviction—more true in its time than in ours—that the human unit is the individual. It was unable therefore to deal with social crisis, with national disease and the misery of human groups.<sup>701</sup>

A religion that does not meet the needs of the people is rendered suspect in this understanding.

Yet this understanding is to beg the question, as religion concerns itself with an understanding of what those needs of the people, in fact, are, not just how to serve them. Herein lies the rub, given the great difficulties in evaluating purposes religiously ordained. Who is to deny what another contends is the divine commandment to good? Here again we find that democracy, however imperfect, supplies the remedy. If we

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<sup>701</sup> Niebuhr. *The Kingdom of God in America*. 162

believe that justice need be enacted democratically, and also that religion must provide knowledge of justice or be no true religion at all, then the way in which democracy and religion cohere might offer some clue to guide our politics as well as our faith.

A faith that pulls people apart and rends the social fabric now must become inappropriate to a people who would be righteous or free. That a religion aims at what might appear to be even noble or, at least, sensible goals cannot absolve a belief of the crimes of undermining the right way of things. And, again, it is clear that knowing the right way of things, how to know them and how to achieve them—or even if there is any such thing at all!—is the crux of the problem we face as human beings. It would seem fair, though, given the above discussion, to think that a religion of righteousness would necessarily be a righteousness for all. If this is so, then a faith that tears our democracy asunder, even as it claims to benefit, even to perfect, the spirit is unworthy of a justice seeking soul. In his concerns for the orientation of our modernist, rational thinking towards our world, McWilliams admonished that:

Democracy requires, I think, an end to the moral dominion of the great modern project that set humankind in pursuit of the mastery of nature. Democracy is for friends and citizens, not masters and slaves. The ultimate ground for democratic ideas of equality and the highest limitation on democracy's excesses both derive from a universe in which humanity is at home, my dignity is guaranteed by the majesty of the law I obey, and perhaps even “those who have no memorial” do not pass from memory.<sup>702</sup>

Extending the logic above, this same principle ought to extend to our spiritual thinking as well. The possibility of becoming something more is tempting, but fundamentally illusory. That the quest for a greater fulfillment than of humanity's more ostensible promise, a quest so often attributed the status of mission, devolves into a fool's errand that denudes humanity of meaning and separates its alleged purpose from its very

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<sup>702</sup> McWilliams. “Democracy and the Citizen.” 101.

existence suggests the futility, the danger, and ultimately the error of the endeavor. This error, of course, stems from the premise of the approach itself. We may seek noble transformation, but not demand a transcendence that is as impossible as it is unnecessary. Human life not is a problem requiring a solution, but rather a practice.

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### **MEMORIAL: W. CAREY MCWILLIAMS**<sup>703</sup>

Pulling into Clan McWilliams one day, I recall noting that the garden at the end of the driveway was missing. In its place grew a couple dozen tiny saplings of somewhat less aesthetic appeal. When asked about the change, Carey began, in response, “Well, you see, I’m a member of the local tree board...” I now assume that by this he meant the Hunterdon Land Trust Alliance, but something in the way Carey rolled the gravel of his voice over the words *tree board* with glimmer and smirk gave some hint, unexplained as per his wont, of the humor he maybe found in the cumbersome tool of bureaucracy employed to conserve in nature that state which existed before people mucked it up in the first place. The problem, as the story went, was that Hunterdon County needed more trees; everyone on the tree board seemed to agree on this. What to do about the dearth, though, had become a matter of some contention. Where Hunterdon would grow the trees was particularly problematic, as the local deer had an unnerving tendency to eat the Board’s most valiant attempts at safeguarding nature when cultivated in the wilderness of the preserves. Anyway, after much heated discussion, though the careful reader has probably already guessed it, Carey managed to solve the mighty conundrum facing his town: he would grow the trees himself. At the end of his driveway.

This story—or story of a story, as the case may be—comes to me whenever anyone talks about Carey and how he lived, be it in the context of his public politics or his own personal—I balk at saying private—life. When a friend recently asked if I thought McWilliams would be remembered more for his work towards a Puritan theory of American history or for his radical populist communitarianism, I could not but think of both expressions as ancillary to Carey’s understanding of human worth. Deeply wary of any notion of politics that might limit the value we find in life, Carey sought to convey the value of humans in a way that expanded that value by the very operation of the lesson: we learn love as we teach it. As such, the politics cannot be rent from the man any more than value from this virtue of humans. Carey revealed a politics that enables us to learn about, and become, that for which we might otherwise only hope.

To this end, I never met another human being who lived life so intentionally as Carey. He took great care, not in the sense of the timidity the word so often regrettably denotes, but the care that comes from the knowledge that anything that can be done can be done rightly, and therefore ought to be so done. Indeed, Carey felt the *caritas* of knowing that taking care of doing things rightly expands the meaning and value of our shared experience in this world. I remember Carey describing the subtle elegance of popular medieval Christianity as distinct from complex theology—ironic, perhaps, to hear from the man who once bellowed at me, “Good Heavens, Jim! I’m a Calvinist! Of *course* I think we’re headed towards a crisis!” The understanding was that there is darkness and there is light, so a person ought to try to cultivate light in his corner of the world. Carey’s service as beacon, then, may come not so much as an effort to lead, but from the fact that a source of so much light will invariably become a point by which others may navigate.

Not that you were ever to acknowledge his efforts should you catch him surreptitiously guiding the practical problems of the world to resolution. Certainly not. When anyone spied him stealthily up to acts of random good, through a glance Carey could convey not only his satisfaction in the proper ordering of things, but also, perhaps more importantly, the satisfaction that somebody else had noticed his way and said not a word. Ironic again, that such a profound lecturer would fear cheapening the lesson of service through mere explication? Another part of his theory of teaching as cunning, I suppose, for Carey taught me that, yes, we can take care of ourselves. But we take care of ourselves best when we take care of each other. Thank you Carey.

Jim Mastrangelo

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<sup>703</sup> Written and submitted for *In Memoriam: Wilson Carey McWilliams, September 2, 1933 to March 29, 2005*. Assembled by Nancy McWilliams.



## CURRICULUM VITAE

### JAMES E. F. MASTRANGELO

#### EDUCATION

**Rutgers University**, New Brunswick, NJ (January, 2009)

*PhD, Political Science*

- Committee: Daniel Tichenor (Chair), Dennis Bathory, Gordon Schochet (Former Chair: Carey McWilliams (Deceased))
- Major Field: Political Theory; Minor Fields: Public Law, Institutional Analysis in American Politics
- M.A., Political Science, May 2006
- 4.0 GPA; Rutgers Excellence Fellow (2000-2002)

**Amherst College**, Amherst, MA (May, 1998)

- B.A., Economics and Law, Jurisprudence & Social Thought;
- Magna Cum Laude; 3.72 GPA; Continental Grain Scholar in Economics

#### TEACHING EXPERIENCE

**Rutgers University**, New Brunswick, NJ (Summer 2001-Fall 2008)

*Part Time Lecturer*

- *Law and Society* (Spring 2002; Spring 2004; Fall 2005; Spring 2006)
- *Rutgers Model Congress* (Fall 2006)
- *Rutgers Model United Nations* (Spring 2007)
- *Politics of American Capitalism* (Fall 2007)
- *Nature of Politics* (Fall 2007; Spring 2008)

*Summer School Instructor (PTL)*

- *Law and Society* (Summer 2001; Summer 2002; Summer 2007)
- *Politics of Criminal Justice* (Summer 2006)
- *Nature of Politics* (Summer 2006; Summer 2008)

*Teaching Assistant*

- *Law and Politics* (Fall 2002; Spring 2003; Fall 2003)
- *Nature of Politics* (Fall 2006; Fall 2007)

*Internship Supervisor*

- (Summer 2003; Spring 2004; Summer 2004; Fall 2004; Spring 2005; Summer 2005; Fall 2005)

*Instructor: English Department Writing Program*

- *Expository Writing* (Fall 2004)
- *Basic Composition with Reading* (Fall 2005)
- *Tutor* (Fall 2005)