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## *Agrarian Virtue and Republican Freedom: An Historical Perspective*

WE ARE ALL hearing and reading a great deal these days about the "national purpose." The occasion, of course, is the deepening crisis in our relations with the Communist world, and the sense that we are declining, if not falling, in the contest for all the world. The sense of urgency intensified during the presidential campaign with the conviction that the country is at a kind of crossroads, and that we all have a measure of responsibility for the decisions about to be made.

In reading through the remarkable series of essays published by the New York Times and Life I was struck above all by one thing. Although the series was announced to be a debate, there was in fact no striking disagreement or conflict of views on the announced theme. The authors differed in their emphasis, and sometimes wrote about very different things; but what they said complemented each other. That we had a "national purpose," and that that purpose was most excellently defined for us on an appropriate level of generality by such documents as the Declaration of Independence, the Preamble to the Constitution, the Gettysburg Address, and some other of the more notable speeches of our greatest presidents, no one really questioned. Walter Lippmann seemed to think we needed new purposes, that we had fulfilled much of the programmatic expectations of the "national purpose" as conceived in the nineteenth century. But what he seemed to mean, was that we had to re-think the concrete demands in our own time of our traditional purposes, not that we needed anything to replace or supplement the commitment to freedom expressed on the level of abstraction of, say, the first two paragraphs of the Declaration of Independence.

With all this I have no quarrel. And yet I think the tone of the "debate" has been rather too much determined by present exigencies to fulfill our genuine needs. Confronted by the overwhelming purposefulness of the Communist world — that is, by its absolute conviction of its rightness, and unwavering pursuit of a single

end — we seek to reassure ourselves by looking backward to a time when America's revolutionary spirit flamed high. In effect, we hope to reproduce a decent version of Communism's monolithic dynamism, not so much because we are dissatisfied with what we have, as because we think we will not keep what we have unless somehow we change a little. We hope to control the future by recapturing the past. I believe something very like this is the only policy by which we will be saved, if we are saved. But we will not succeed by means of a synthetic past mirroring back to us only what we want to find in it.

We will never discover, for example, an America firmly united simply by the inspirational conviction of a great purpose, so that without coercion it wheeled and marched as efficiently as a modern totalitarian regime. The American people were probably as deeply divided upon the question of independence in 1776 as upon, let us say, intervention in the European war of 1939, and probably much more deeply divided than they are today upon a more drastic approach to the Communist peril. In the gravest of all our crises, the American Civil War, the division of the American people passed all visible boundaries. The greatest of all expressions of national purposes came from the gravest moments of doubt and conflict over those very purposes. The passion that found its consummation in, for example, the Gettysburg Address is inseparable from the tragedy that produced it. I do not mean to suggest that we must become tragic figures ourselves before we can understand a pronouncement like the Gettysburg Address, but I do think that if we are to have a vicarious salvation, we must understand in a far more profound way than we hitherto have, the integrity of the Gettysburg Address and the tragedy it expressed.

Each age has its own urgent reasons for division as well as for unity. The American people are not today divided in the sense that they were in 1776 or 1861. We are restless and discontented and we are worried, but these passions afflict all of us together. The question of more or less government spending, of flexible or rigid price supports, of whether medical support for the aged shall or shall not be undertaken within the framework of the social security system, are not questions for the sake of which we seize the standards of righteousness, and embark upon crusades. There is nothing here for which to pledge our lives, fortunes and sacred honor, or to give the last full measure of devotion. We now know what popular government means. It means government by the consent of the governed, and we know that this consent must be expressed in such things as frequent elections with secret ballots, accompanied by freedom of speech,

press, association and religion. No considerable group, pressure, interest, faction, sect or opinion must be denied access to a major party, or be denied the possibility of forming itself into a party. One-party politics is morally unthinkable, because without competition between at least two parties, minorities are at the mercy of majorities, and the majority itself is at the mercy of the oligarchy which controls the organization of the majority. Knowing all this so well, we are at a loss to see anything but massive evil in a massive world movement which, while frantically calling itself democratic and egalitarian, denies it all. And yet, if we look into our own past, to ponder and to learn, and not merely to overcome moral enervation, we will find divisions as deep as any that now divide us from the Communists. If we would draw inspiration from men of the stature of the founding fathers, or of Lincoln, we must draw it as much from encountering the deep and justifiable doubts and anxious difficulties that they encountered, in fashioning a national purpose for us, as in professing devotion to that purpose as a shaped and finished thing.

Reflection upon the nature of our "national purpose" begins, of course, with the Declaration of Independence. It was there announced that governments are instituted to secure certain rights, and that by their adequacy in securing these rights they are to be judged; and judged not by privileged orders, but by the people, by and for whom alone they may be rightfully instituted. But the rights for whose security the American government was instituted were not regarded as being in any sense uniquely American. They were, on the contrary, believed to be rights held in common with all mankind, rights held in virtue of the self-evident truth "that all men are created equal." The United States was the first nation consciously dedicated to the security of rights so conceived; it was the first nation to link its own welfare in this way with the welfare of all nations, by announcing that what it sought for itself was the birthright of all other peoples as well. Paradoxical as it may seem, the uniqueness of America's national purpose lies in its universality. Other nations might follow the banner of equal human rights, but we alone had raised it, and our claim to distinction as the exponents of the creed inscribed upon that banner could never be rivalled so long as we remained faithful to it. To paraphrase Webster, in the great drama of human affairs we had been placed at the head of the system of representative and popular governments, and as long as we fulfilled the duty incumbent upon ourselves "to preserve the consistency of this cheering example," and took care that nothing weakened "its authority with the world," no one could share with us this post of honor. This nation has had no other past to celebrate paramount

to that constituted by the events of the American revolution. From the moment of the revolution its more remote past could be looked upon as no more than a preparation for independence. By contrast, for example, the reaction which followed the revolution in France could find in France's monarchical past — in the story of Joan of Arc, for example, and all that that story symbolized — another and different explanation of France's claim to greatness. But there has never been any similar possibility here. Only in this country have all possible claims to national superiority and national uniqueness subsisted both in logical and psychological harmony with the assertion of the common and equal rights of all people and all nations.

It is not to be supposed, because of America's dedication to the political creed set forth in the preamble to the Declaration of Independence, that conflicts as to national purpose were thereby to be avoided. Not only did equality as a principle hold out great promises of moral and material improvement; it also made demands not unlike those which made the rich young man in quest of the kingdom of heaven turn sadly from Jesus. Lincoln often compared it to the Gospel injunction, "Be ye perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect." It held up a standard that was, in a sense, beyond attainment. In inviting men to aspire to what they could never wholly attain it engendered frustrations which could not but embitter political life. Like the Gospel, in the name of peace it brought not peace, but a sword. The Civil War is not only the gravest crisis this nation has had to undergo; it is at once an epitome of all the great conflicts in American history and represents them in sharper focus. For it is important to realize that, in the Civil War, not only did both sides read the same Bible and pray to the same God, but both believed they were fighting for the cause for which Washington fought. Still more important is it to realize that both were, in a profound sense, correct. According to the revolutionary faith, because all men are created equal, governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed alone. But that consent may rightfully be withdrawn whenever in the opinion of the governed the government no longer protects their unalienable rights to life and to liberty. There never was a time from the moment of independence that white Southerners in an overwhelming majority did not believe that their lives and liberty would be terribly endangered by large-scale emancipation. Jefferson, even as he condemned in unmeasured terms the wrong of slavery, confessed, "Justice is in one scale and self-preservation in the other." And he always insisted that even gradual emancipation, if it were pursued, as he believed it should be, must be accompanied by deportation of the

emancipated slaves. Meanwhile, many good men doubted that deportation, even if it were feasible, would be more humane or just than slavery. In this, Southerners may have been wrong, but it is important to remember that government in accordance with the opinion or consent of the governed does not require that the governed be right. Sooner or later the experiment in popular government had to face the question of just how wrong the opinion of the governed might be, and still continue to constitute the foundation for the just powers of government. From this you will see that the Declaration of Independence, while it propounded a purpose, propounded a problem as well.

In my opinion, the Civil War became as inevitable as any human event can be from the moment that the war with Mexico, hard upon the annexation of Texas, added great new territories to the country in the South and West. It was not so much a question of the extension of slavery, although that assuredly was involved, as it was a question of political control of the new states and territories by either the old slaveholding, or the old free, states. In 1860 the election of Lincoln meant that the free states had won; for with that election it became practically certain that there would never in the future be a majority in both houses of Congress who would vote to admit, and a president who would approve, the admission of another slaveholding state. From this moment the time was not far distant when the control of the relation of the races in the South could, and probably would, be taken from the hands of the white Southerners. No protests by Lincoln could be convincing that he did not mean to interfere with slavery in the states where it already existed. He could not commit the new and growing antislavery majority as to the future. It would not have required a constitutional amendment to have given the death sentence to slavery in the slave states. Recent studies bear out the view that federal interference with the interstate slave trade would have subjected slavery to economic strangulation, and the power so to interfere could easily be inferred from the commerce clause of the Constitution. It was only a matter of time until the North had the naked power to enforce such restrictions upon the South through the federal government. But to the South the American revolution meant nothing if it did not mean that the control of the safety of home and hearth should never be out of the power of the people or their immediate representatives. In 1861 the South saw the government of the Union they had done so much to create becoming an instrument of the deadliest kind of hostility against themselves. The great error of the South, although it was never committed by some of her noblest sons, was in denying the tenet of equality itself. If the

South had continued to stand upon the right to security of life and liberty, and the right to judge of the means indispensable to that security, rights truly sanctioned by the idea of equality,<sup>1</sup> her case would have been well-nigh irrefragable. Goaded on by the abolitionists' appropriation of the great proposition she came to believe, and even demand that the North believe, that slavery was not merely a necessary evil but a positive good. In denying the principle in virtue of which her own consent might be required as a basis of the common government, the wheel of contradiction came full circle. In terms of abstract logic, here was one answer to the question of what limits there might be to the errors of the governed. As the abolitionists had forgotten the requirement of consent, the disciples of Calhoun and Fitzhugh had forgotten why there must be consent. As Lincoln interpreted the Civil War, both sides had sinned against a common faith; both had to make a common atonement to achieve a common redemption. The denials of either side were like Peter's denials of his Lord. They were somehow necessary for the passion both were to undergo that they might both become witnesses of a single truth, a truth which, like the house built upon it, had in a sense become divided against itself.

To understand the fatal polarization of conflict in American politics in the Civil War we must go back to the period of the founders, and to the subsequent party politics of the Jeffersonian and Jacksonian eras. The founders, whatever their differences, were agreed that popular government might become practicable now, only because of recent discoveries and improvements in political science, discoveries and improvements which would strengthen the rational powers of the people, and hence strengthen the popular capacity for just government. This, indeed, helps to account for the annunciation of the principle of equality, the principle of popular government, only so late in human history as the last quarter of the eighteenth century. The famous tenth Federalist catalogues some of the vices of "the American constitutions," notwithstanding their "valuable improvements" on popular models, both ancient and modern. That popular government is inherently unstable, given to excess factionalism, and that the rights of property and person under it are notoriously insecure, was the view of Madison, and it was a view he expected his public to share. Yet he and they believed its inherent evils

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<sup>1</sup> For an extended discussion of the idea of equality in the Declaration of Independence, see Chapter XVII, "The Meaning of Equality: Abstract and Practical," in my *Crisis of the House Divided: An Interpretation of the Issues in the Lincoln-Douglas Debates*. Doubleday, New York. 1959.

might be overcome, and overcome in such a way as to make it preferable to every other form of government. Why?

The means of improving popular government fall, broadly speaking, into two categories. First, the means for the direct improvement of the people by education, particularly education in science, that science of which, in the eighteenth century, Newton was the most celebrated exponent; science was the key to all progress and the enemy of all the medieval superstitions which buttressed feudal class distinctions and false pretensions to merit; education would teach men to know and assert their rights, and to recognize the men and measures that truly advanced and secured them. Second, the construction of a constitutional order in which impulses to action would come from majorities, but in which there would be many different majorities, in whose differences would lie many inducements to impartiality and reasonableness. The very idea of majority rule would be transformed from a numerical to a qualitative concept.

The transformation of majority rule from a quantitative to a qualitative concept: Hoc opus, hic labor est. Yet this is the work that the founders set out to achieve, and upon which the truth of the proposition of equality, for all its self-evidence, depended. How Jefferson sought to achieve this transformation, with particular reference to the first of the means above mentioned, may be indicated by what he wrote to John Adams in 1813:

For I agree with you that there is a natural aristocracy among men. The grounds of this are virtue and talents . . . . May we not even say, that that form of government is best which provides the most effectually for a pure selection of these natural aristoi into the offices of government?

According to Jefferson, the best form of government is democratic precisely because it is also aristocratic, in the true sense of the latter word. In a democracy we "leave to the citizens the free election and separation of the aristoi from the pseudo-aristoi, of the wheat from the chaff." But since these citizens differ among themselves as much as the wheat does from the chaff, it is not surprising that, as Jefferson confesses, "in some instances wealth may corrupt and birth blind them." To minimize this, Jefferson had drawn up the laws abolishing primogeniture, entail and the alliance of church and state in Virginia, laws which, he says, "laid the axe to the foot of the pseudo-aristocracy." But, he added, "had another which I prepared been adopted by the legislature, our work would have been complete."

This measure, which is here said to complete Jefferson's scheme for uniting the principles of democracy and aristocracy,

was his bill for the general diffusion of learning. It would have provided free primary, secondary and university education. But it would not have opened all to all students. Only primary education would have been universal. Only a select number of gifted scholars would have gone to high school, and a still more select number of the more gifted to the university. This scheme Jefferson called the "keystone of the arch" of the form of government he advocated, and it is impossible to overestimate its significance in understanding the original expectations in regard to democracy by the man who, more than any other, laid the foundations of democratic thought in America. The purpose of this class of university men, co-opted out of the mass of their fellows on the basis of ability and achievement alone, is to demonstrate the difference between an aristocracy of merit, a natural aristocracy and the pseudoaristocracy of birth, wealth or other fictitious claims to distinction. The existence of this intellectual aristocracy would, in practice, considerably narrow the task of the citizens in separating the wheat from the chaff, for I do not doubt that Jefferson expected most if not all public officials to be chosen from it. And I think it worth noticing that, violently as Jefferson condemned Plato's Republic, membership in one or another of Jefferson's three educational classes would be determined by a process not unlike that in which membership in one or another of the three classes — whose souls are gold, silver and brass — is determined in the Republic. Educational "government" is from the top down, even as the authority for political government is from the bottom up. Yet Jefferson's scheme is not the less authentically egalitarian: genuine equality of opportunity necessarily leads to inequality of reward. Superior talent deserves superior training and superior recognition. And this kind of recognition supplies to merit the prestige it needs if the ordinary citizen is to be guided by it in choosing those who are really able to fulfill the public trusts.

Next we come to those discoveries and improvements in political science which cause even the bad effects of the popular principle to have beneficent consequences. Democracy in 1800 had a bad name in America, not only because of the French revolution, but because it was still understood in its ancient sense of direct rule of the people in a community small enough for the sovereign authority to consist of the assembled citizens. We have already adverted to the fact that Madison, in the tenth Federalist, rejects such a form of government — apart from the fact that it would be impracticable for a modern nation — because it is turbulent and unjust to minorities. The concentration of all the powers of government, as in a direct democracy is, according to



Jefferson, "the definition of despotic government," and it is "no alleviation that these powers will be exercised by a plurality of hands and not by a single one." The poor may despoil the rich with their votes, or the largest religious sect may persecute lesser ones. The fundamental remedy of the founders is derived from the following familiar (Federalist #51) Madisonian proposition:

In a free government the security for civil rights must be the same as that for religious rights. It consists in the one case in the multiplicity of interests, and in the other in the multiplicity of sects. The degree of security in both cases will depend on the extent of country and number of people comprehended under the same government.

The theory of the extensive republic is the main contribution of the celebrated Federalist to the solution of the problem of the tyranny of the majority. This theory depends upon the idea of representation. It is true that representation must be supplemented by separation of powers and checks and balances, but in the Federalist the most vital checks and balances are not the legal ones, but those brought into play by representation in an extensive republic. Now representation, like Jefferson's educational plan, itself implies an aristocratic modification of democracy, as that term was anciently understood. It substitutes the discretion of an elect — because elected — few, for that of the people at large. In the famous tenth Federalist, Madison is explicit that, in the large republic, because the representatives are far fewer in proportion to the population — e.g. congressional districts are much larger than state assembly districts — they will in all probability be abler and more disinterested men. More important, because the variety of interests that they will be called upon to reconcile will be much larger, they will have much more freedom to follow the rules of justice instead of the interests of factions.

But what did Madison mean, when he spoke of following the "rules of justice and the rights of the minor party?" In my opinion, "rules of justice" and "rights of the minor party" are distinguishable but inseparable. Justice means giving to everyone his due, and is supremely concerned with that irreducible minority, the individual. But individuals differ. Hence justice involves a concern for, and liberation of, individual differences. There is, Madison says, "a diversity in the faculties of men from which the rights of property originate," and this diversity is "sown in the nature of man." Because it is, it must also be patronized by the "Laws of Nature and of Nature's God." Indeed, says Madison,

laying down a proposition of incalculable weight for the understanding of our constitutional tradition, "The protection of these faculties [viz., the "different and unequal faculties of acquiring property"] is the first object of government." That the emancipation of natural human talents from artificial class barriers meant primarily the liberation of the acquisitive faculties did not mean that these were regarded as the most important or valuable human faculties; but it did mean that they were politically the most important. The passion for material well-being is the dominant passion of the mass of men precisely when they are freed from the restraints of a feudal class system and feudal religion, which invite most men to forego their claims to justice in this world, in exchange for promises to be fulfilled in another. Jefferson understood this — somewhat distastefully, to be sure — when he wrote during the revolution: "From the conclusion of this war we shall be going downhill . . . the people . . . will forget themselves but in the sole faculty of making money." Again, in the tenth Federalist Madison wrote: "A landed interest, a manufacturing interest, a mercantile interest, a moneyed interest, with many lesser interests, grow up of necessity in civilized nations . . ." Finally: "The regulation of these various and interfering interests forms the principal task of modern legislation, and involves the spirit of party and faction in the necessary and ordinary operations of government." I have underscored the word "civilized" to make clear that the emancipation of acquisitiveness, the loosing of the spirit of faction, even though this is something intrinsically bad — as indicated by the famous definition of faction — is the very characteristic of civilization. And the task of modern legislation — meaning legislation in a civilized society — consists in regulating the interests which arise from the different species of property, which themselves arise, be it remembered, from a diversity of faculties sown in the nature of man.

In the paragraph following the one we have just quoted from, in the tenth Federalist, Madison says that "most important acts of legislation [are] so many judicial determinations, not indeed concerning the rights of single persons, but concerning the rights of large bodies of citizens." He has already observed that no man can be a just judge in his own cause, and he now observes that in legislation "the different classes of legislators [are nothing but] advocates and parties to the causes which they determine." He follows this with three examples. The first has to do with private debts, the second with protective tariffs and the third with the apportionment of taxes on various descriptions of property. Let us quote the central example, that concerning the tariff:

Shall domestic manufactures be encouraged, and in what degree, by restrictions on foreign manufactures? These are questions which would be differently decided by the landed and manufacturing classes, and probably by neither with a sole regard to justice and the public good.

Now all three examples, but this one pre-eminently, define the struggle then going on, but much more the struggle that was to go on throughout the Jeffersonian and Jacksonian eras, between the agricultural interest and all other interests in American politics. What is of immense importance in understanding the politics of these eras, from the perspective of the Philadelphia convention of 1787, is that the Madison of the Federalist held that the question above propounded could be far more justly judged by the representatives of the extensive republic. In 1798 Jefferson formulated, and Madison explained and defended, the republicanism of the Virginia and Kentucky resolutions. According to this latter doctrine, it is the representatives of the states, and not those assembled in the national legislature, who can best be entrusted with judging infringements of the rights of the minor parties. State rights and strict construction became the supreme dogmas of the party of which Jefferson and Jackson were the greatest leaders, and of which Madison was a most notable chieftain. But they arose in massive contradiction to the theory of the extensive republic, which was the most important theory underlying the Constitution of 1787, of which Madison is rightly known as the father.

Although Madison in the Federalist clearly envisaged the question of a protective tariff arising under the Constitution, and equally clearly thought that it was a question that could be decided best in the national congress, it later became Democrat party dogma that any protection of manufactures not incidental to revenue, was not "protection" for one class of acquisitive faculty, but exploitation of others for the benefit of one. The same attitude came to be held in regard to a national bank and internal improvements by the national government.

Let us for the moment consider the latter, internal improvements, since in some respects it was the most characteristic of the issues dividing the parties before the slavery issue came to dominate everything else. The Whigs felt that building roads and canals, clearing and deepening rivers and harbors and encouraging science and invention were things that at once emancipated the initiative and talents of individuals and enabled the whole country to grow more prosperous. But it was impossible to appropriate money from the federal treasury, to which the whole country contributed, to build a road or canal without spending it

in some part of the country, where some few individuals or groups would gain particular advantages. The characteristic Whig view was that the improvement of the part was simultaneously the improvement of the whole. According to that theoretician of state-rights republicanism, John Taylor of Carolina, Congress had no more right to confer economic benefits that were not simultaneously enjoyed by all, than to confer benefits upon a particular religious sect. It could no more lay a tariff to encourage the manufacture of woollens than to lay a tax to promote membership in the Congregational Church.

Nothing is clearer, from the famous tenth Federalist, than that all economic interests as such are on the same moral, or rather immoral, level. In view of the fact that in 1787, and indeed until after the Civil War, the "landed" interest remained the interest of the overwhelming majority of Americans, the problem of controlling faction was practically the problem of enabling interests other than those of farmers to have an equal chance to survive and to grow. The constitutional convention is frequently looked upon in the histories as a Thermidorean, or conservative reaction against the democratic radicalism of the revolution. This thesis has been very persuasively controverted recently.<sup>2</sup> But whatever validity it has must be seen against the background of agrarian "radicalism" as against the alleged "conservatism" of other interests. That agrarians should then have been radical democrats is not surprising, when we consider that farmers were the overwhelming majority, and the greater the moral weight attributed to the majority as such, the greater the moral weight of the interests of farmers in their struggles with conflicting interests. There is no question in my mind that the movement for the Constitution was in concrete terms a movement to neutralize the overweening power of agrarian forces, which frequently rode roughshod over banking, commercial and manufacturing interests in the states. Nor do I have much doubt that Hamilton's program, from the funding of the debt and establishment of the National Bank, to the Report on Manufactures, was a logical extension of the movement that engendered the Constitution, although it may have been a greater extension than anyone envisaged in 1787. Certainly the acquisitive faculties that found protection, and

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<sup>2</sup> "Democracy and The Federalist: A Reconsideration of the Framers' Intent," by Martin Diamond, in Amer. Polit. Sci. Rev., March, 1959. I am indebted to Professor Diamond for a clearer understanding of the role of the large or extended republic in the theories of The Federalist, as set forth in his unpublished essay on "The Federalist's View of Federalism," Institute for Studies in Federalism, Claremont Men's College, February, 1960.

enjoyed growth, under the aegis of the national banks and the tariffs, could never have had such an efflorescence under the Articles of Confederation. And yet the whole movement of Jeffersonian democracy — and in this respect the Jacksonians only sought to restore the pristine Jeffersonianism from which Jefferson's heirs had fallen away — was a movement to restore the full force of the numerical majority, the agrarian majority, which the federal system designed in 1787 was intended to fragment and divide. The purpose of party organization, Jeffersonian and Jacksonian, was to bring together the latent agrarian majority in the whole country, and enable it to be "united and actuated by [the] common impulse of passion, or of interest," that distinguished them from the moneyed, manufacturing and commercial interests. Why was it that Jefferson did not think, as did the Madison of the Federalist, that such a passion and interest, no less than the passion and interest of any other economic group, would be "adverse to the rights of other citizens [and to] the aggregate interests of the community?"

The answer is to be found in the agrarian ideology which was part of Jefferson's thought from the outset, and which subsisted in uneasy relation to those other elements upon which we have already dwelt. Let us hear the great thematic passage in the Notes on Virginia:

The political economists of Europe have established it as a principle, that every state should endeavor to manufacture for itself; and this principle, like many others, we transfer to America, without calculating the difference of circumstance . . . . In Europe the lands are either cultivated, or locked up against the cultivator. Manufacture must therefore be resorted to of necessity not choice, to support the surplus of their people. But we have an immensity of land courting the industry of the husbandman. Is it best then that all our citizens should be employed in its improvement, or that one-half should be called off from that to exercise manufactures and handicraft arts for the other? Those who labor in the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever he had a chosen people . . . . Corruption of morals in the mass of cultivators is a phenomenon of which no age nor nation has furnished an example. It is the mark set on those who, not looking up to heaven, to their own soil and industry, as does the husbandman, for their subsistence, depend for it on the casualties and caprice of customers. Dependence begets subservience and venality, suffocates the germ of virtue, and prepares fit tools for the designs of ambition . . . .

Here we uncover a deep stratum of early American party conflict. Jefferson hated Hamilton not so much for his ultramontane constitutionalism, or alleged monarchism, as because the financial and commercial interests Hamilton promoted, and the manufacturing he would promote, produce the wrong kind of human being. John Miller notes that "of the Tory property

confiscated by Virginians during the Revolutionary War, one third belonged to the hated Scotch merchants of Norfolk."<sup>3</sup> I have little doubt that Jefferson felt an ancestral dislike for the "bastard brat of a Scotch peddler" who later stood for the protection and promotion of these same commercial interests, as well as defending Tory claims to restitution under the Treaty of Paris and Jay's Treaty. Equality of opportunity could not legitimately demand a bank or tariff, not because the power to do these things was not enumerated in the Constitution, but because banking and manufacturing were not morally healthy activities for the citizens of a republic.

But Jefferson was mistaken when he spoke of the husbandman not depending on the casualties and caprice of customers. I do not think an argument is necessary at this date to support the proposition that agriculture in the United States, then as now, has been emphatically a commercial operation. In fact, the idea of independence which Jefferson here expresses is an adaptation of the aristocratic contempt for those who are "in trade." But this idea is not only aristocratic, but in its hostility to commerce is hostile to the very foundations of a democratic order. Jefferson wished America's workshops to remain in Europe. Yet so long as this remained the fact, not only would the sources of political independence remain remarkably fragile, for obvious reasons, but American farmers would continue to be, as Jefferson himself once said that Virginia planters were, "a species of property annexed to certain mercantile houses in London." More profoundly, commerce (whose home was the cities) was, historically, the very engine of that personal liberty reaching political fruition in the American republic. A purely agrarian society once subsisted upon the soil of western Europe, and its system was known as feudalism. Primogeniture, entail and all the other props of the artificial aristocracy Jefferson so loathed, were the logical and necessary concomitants of a society based exclusively upon the ownership of land. And no society ever exhibited greater "corruption of morals," in Jefferson's own sense of that term. The mass of cultivators, in that most agrarian of regimes, were serfs, that is, in the decisive sense, slaves.

Because of the supposedly superior virtues of farmers, Jefferson would

let our workshops remain in Europe . . . . The mobs of great cities add just so much to the support of pure government, as sores do to the

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<sup>3</sup> John C. Miller, *Origins of the American Revolution*. Stanford University Press, Stanford, California. P. 17

strength of the human body. It is the manners and spirit of a people which preserve a republic in vigor.

Yet in another passage in the same Notes, Jefferson indulged his most famous denunciation of slavery, as a "perpetual exercise of the most boisterous passions, the most unremitting despotism on the one part, and degrading submission on the other," concluding that "the man must be a prodigy who can retain his manners and morals undepraved by such circumstances." Yet Jefferson did not seem to realize the extent to which, in constantly seeking to strengthen agriculture, not with other elements making for a balanced economy, but at the expense of other elements, he was acting to strengthen slavery.

A remarkable, if not wholly accurate clue to the relation of the ideological and material elements in the early American party struggle is given in the following passage from Henry Adams' John Randolph:

Between the slave power and states' rights there was no necessary connection. The slave power, when in control, was a centralizing influence, and all the considerable encroachments on states' rights were its acts. The acquisition and admission of Louisiana; the embargo; the war of 1812, the annexation of Texas "by joint resolution;" the war with Mexico, declared by the mere announcement of President Polk; the fugitive slave law; the Dred Scott decision — all triumphs of the slave power — did far more than either tariffs or internal improvements, which in their origin were also southern measures, to destroy the very memory of states' rights as they existed in 1789. Whenever a question arose of extending or protecting slavery, the slaveholders became friends of centralized power, and used that dangerous weapon with a kind of frenzy.

I think Adams is less than fair in characterizing measures of Jefferson's and Madison's administrations as measures to extend slavery. I do not think they were meant to be, yet in the perspective of history we must observe the extent to which they in fact had that tendency and effect. It should be noted, for example, that before Iowa was admitted as a free state in 1846, every state admitted to the Union from territory acquired since the revolution was a slave state. These included Louisiana, Missouri, Arkansas, Florida and Texas; and it was provided in the resolution of annexation that Texas might be subdivided into four more slave states. The parties of Jefferson and Jackson, profoundly influenced by the agrarian ideology of which Jefferson was the chief architect, had as their supreme practical objects, the acquisition and protection of land — land plentiful and cheap. Next to this came low taxes — cheap land and cheap government. The powers of the national government might be construed to the limit — and even beyond, for Jefferson himself did not believe there was any

constitutional power to purchase Louisiana — if the object was to gratify farmers. At the same time, these same powers were construed in the strictest manner in order to veto things like internal improvements, which might require the government to raise taxes for any other purpose than to buy, annex or conquer land, land which might be sold to poor farmers at nominal prices, although more often it went to land speculators.

Jefferson may not have intended it, but the agricultural interest he strengthened was primarily a southern agricultural interest. The Louisiana Purchase gave slavery a territorial foundation it otherwise would have lacked, when the invention of the cotton gin, and the British power looms, called the great ante-bellum cotton kingdom into existence. And there certainly was never a commercial operation which begot such subservience upon a market, over which the producer himself had little or no control, or which begot such venality and ambition as the cotton kingdom.

The fate of the Jeffersonian agrarian ideology in the South is poignantly illustrated by a passage in John Taylor's Arator, first published in 1803. Taylor, be it remembered, was a disciple of Jefferson, and Jefferson wrote in 1820, that he "rarely, if ever, differed in any political principle of importance" with Taylor. Taylor still accepts the view that slavery is, in the abstract, an evil. But, in the Notes on Virginia, he cannot accept the condemnation of slavery as a corrupter of morals. He tries to explain away these passages by saying that they were written in the somewhat excessive heat of the revolution, a war for liberty, and hence were a kind of generous excess. And then we hear the first, not so faint beginnings, of the "positive good" school concerning slavery.

Slavery was carried farther among the Greeks and Romans than among ourselves, and yet, these two nations produced more great and good patriots and citizens, than, probably, all the rest of the world . . .

To me it seems, that slaves are too far below, and too much in the power of the master, to inspire furious passions; that such are nearly as rare and disgraceful towards slaves as towards horses . . . that children from their nature are inclined to soothe, and hardly ever suffered to tyrannize over them; and that fewer good public characters have been raised in countries enslaved by some faction or particular interest, than in those where personal slavery existed.

I conjecture the cause of this to be, that vicious and mean qualities become despicable in the eyes of freemen from their association with the character of slaves. Character, like condition, is contrasted, and as one contrast causes us to love liberty better, so the other causes us to love virtue better.

Slavery, like agriculture, is now seen as a school of good



manners and morals, and the characters resulting from it are held to be more favorable to true republicanism than where all men are more or less on a level of equality. The "submission and flattery of slaves" Taylor says, makes free men despise flattery. But the "submission and flattery of freemen," which is what happens when politicians court votes in free states, "fills men with the impudent and wicked wish to dictate." Slavery makes men gentle, and equality makes them despotic! I think there is no little truth in the contention that the flattery of politicians can corrupt voters. But, it seems to me, the truest remedy for this is something like the educational scheme Jefferson proposed, carried out on a national scale. Here we have the view that the degradation of one class of human beings may be desirable in order to elevate the characters of another class. This was, as Taylor seems to be aware, of the essence of the aristocratic republicanism of the ancient world, but it was the denial of the democratic republicanism of ours.

The attempt of the Jeffersonians, following one strand in their Protean leader's<sup>4</sup> Protean thought, to shore up democratic egalitarianism against the corruptions of a nascent capitalism, resulted in a mistaken elevation of agriculture, as a peculiarly moral occupation. In the aristocratic ancient world, there was an affinity between virtue and agriculture. Land was held to be the only stable kind of wealth, and inherited wealth to be the precondition for that disinterested and educated concern with political affairs which was the essence of statesmanship. But the application of science to production, as advocated by no one more than Jefferson, made it possible for all men to aspire now to a level of material well-being, and hence to leisure and education, that had heretofore been possible only for a few. Technology and the division of labor would result in an economy which would implement this much higher level of material well-being. Such an economy, however, required the whole paraphernalia of commerce, finance and industry. This is why Madison, in the tenth Federalist, referred to this complex of interests as the mark of a civilized nation. The immortal part of Jeffersonian democracy lies in its perception of the need for virtue as the indispensable ingredient of a republic, modern as well as ancient. But virtue could never again mean quite the same thing in a world

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<sup>4</sup> What one might call the Jefferson problem is amusingly symbolized by a story told in Nathan Schachner's biography of Jefferson. After receiving the British ambassador in homespun and carpet slippers – and being mistaken for one of the servants – President Jefferson would retire to Monticello and, in the intimacy of his domestic circle, dress like a grandee of the pre-revolutionary Paris he had once adorned.

revolutionized by science. Perhaps Jefferson's very greatness lies, in a way, in his comprehensive inability to abandon those aristocratic elements in the definition of virtue that his commitment to democracy required. The quasi-feudalism of the antebellum South was greatly fortified by its inheritance from Jefferson of an agrarian ideology. Although quixotic and anachronistic, it endowed America's great "lost cause" with more than a touch of the antique glory it recalled. But such a cause could not be permitted to survive in a nation devoted more profoundly and truly to that flaming proposition, of which Jefferson was also the author, that all men are created equal.

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## *Discussion*

THIS CHAPTER is well worth rereading. Its relevance to the harried and hurried head-lining news of agricultural policy lies not so much in its valuable historical detachment as in the particularly deft manner by which its author suggests the nature of public policy — whether agricultural or not — as an historical-social process. I think the point is especially pertinent. As a person who for a good many years has taught a sociology course in American farm movements, I have often been struck with the fact that agricultural policy in the past has seldom if ever had the neat, machined precision of mathematics, but rather has displayed a dramatic situational dialectic in which ideology and sentiment and oftentimes sheer idiocy have weighted the balances of decision making. Indeed, the historical narratives seem to have few econometric models.

Since I am not the least bit a professional historian, I shall not pass judgment on the reliability of Professor Jaffa's "recapture" of the past. I must add, however, that as a devoted admirer of Henry Nash Smith's volume Virgin Land, I was a trifle puzzled by Jaffa's sentence: "Jefferson may not have intended it, but the agricultural interest he strengthened was primarily a southern agricultural interest." This is to me a strange reading of the aftermath of the Louisiana Purchase. Be that as it may, not at all puzzling was his presentation of an historical analytical model which describes some neglected dimensions of agricultural policy, which may in its developmental aspects be conceived of as a birthing process aided by the obstetrical services of group ideology, politicized interests, and logicizing

activities — a formidable paramedical team for a patient needing care.

As I interpret his main point, with respect to the goals and values in agricultural policy, he is emphasizing the modes and pathologies of an historical process by which the dialectics of differences are stated and resolved, perhaps wrongly, but nonetheless resolved. The image evoked by his perspective is the Toynbee concept of "challenge and response." He writes: "The greatest of all expressions of national purposes come from the gravest moments of doubt and conflict over these very purposes." He presents and analyzes several such moments, and in so doing he is underlining the twin themes that (a) some such conflictive and transcending process is at work with respect to current agricultural policy as surely as it has been present in earlier great debates about the "national purpose," and (b) some of the modes and hazards of definition of policy as we find them in our own national history are powerful agents in our collective behavior today. By returning to the early decades of our national history, he is asserting, as do some child psychologists and sociologists about the developing person, that the nation-as-child is indeed father to the nation-as-man.

Perhaps I am reading too much into Jaffa's words. I hope not. Perhaps there was less of a pronounced analytical model in his intentions than in his writing. Nevertheless I was impressed with the role that analogy played in the organization and development of this chapter. There is, of course, nothing strange about this. All models are analogies, and generalizations from models are analogical extensions. The value of his analytical model — the value to me at least — is that it renews its strength when it re-establishes contact with history, exactly as did Antaeus, son of earth.

American agriculture today is surely in a minority position. Professor Jaffa returns in history to a time when the position of agriculture was exactly reversed, when the American farm population was a decisive majority. Defining and rationalizing the interest, the role, the significance of the agricultural establishment with respect to the whole nation involves considerations and criteria no different now than then. The problem may be described in Gestalt psychology terms, as the part-whole relation. Whether the part is large or small with respect to the whole, there is always the tyrannizing tendency of the part (any part, mind you!) to identify itself with the whole, indeed as the same as the whole: thus, for example, agrarian virtue as republican freedom. This mode of moralizing one's interest is, of course,

not confined to farmers and agricultural economists. With no difficulty at all, one can say that what is good for the AAUP is good for the country!

This bit of rhetoric, this synecdoche of ideology, in which the part stands for the whole, can be a vicious and dangerous thing, whether it occurs in the form of Communist monolithic dynamism or in the form of American corporate dynamism. Professor Jaffa's sympathies, as he works out the solution of the part-whole relation, lie with Madison, it appears, and much less with Jefferson. Jefferson's passion for democratic egalitarianism led him, as Professor Jaffa points out, to the absurd elevation of agriculture as a peculiarly moral occupation. Madison, propounding the theory of the extended republic, approaches the problem from the other end of the relation, from the whole to the part. Here, it might be pointed out, Jaffa outlines two great, two very conflictive concepts of justice: the Platonic and individualistic concept of justice embodied in the phrase, "to each his own," as against the Aristotelian and collective concept of justice as the bond between man and his community.

Professor Jaffa's sympathies seem to lie with the latter. And so do mine. For the alternative is ultimately an Hobbesian world in which the hand of all is raised against all. The demanding and infantile isomorphism of the one regarded as the many, of the minority as the same as the majority, of the majority as the same as the total in the end seems to wind up in some holocaust of conflict in which all must come to make atonement in order that all may have a common redemption. This kind of historical process is humanly wasteful, culturally destructive. There is surely some other solution.

Each part proclaims its identity as the whole; this is indeed a classic instance of Harry Stack Sullivan's concept of the paratactic distortion of social reality. Professor Jaffa points, however, to a process of situational transcendence — to use Kenneth Burke's arresting phrase — by which the doctrine of the extended republic comes to replace the omnipotent infantilism of the overdetermining part, be that part agriculture, or manufacturing, or labor, or a state or a region. Such transcendence is not easy to achieve; it is, as he points out, always enmeshed in a web of conflict of some kind and some intensity. For the process of transcendence of individual differences and irreconcilability is often blocked by an irrationality, the irrationality of an illusion which succeeds, unhappily for the part, only very ineffectively to screen the reality.

To be specific: American enterprises of all species and types, agriculture no more than the others, pretend to a kind of protestive innocence, to a kind of historical virtue, to a kind of

"down-underneath-we-hate-all-these-compromises" rationalization, while voting themselves more and more bureaucratization, more and more central direction, more and more involvement with administered rather than market decision making. The real world has changed, but the illusory image of freedom, of uniqueness, of special virtue persists. In time, the irrational refusal to accept the reality of an other-controlled existence ends in the pseudoschizophrenic posture, in which the offended but innocent self-styled victim complains, "I am damned if I do, and I am damned if I don't." This double bind — as Gregory Bateson and his colleagues call it — is characterized by the most hopeless confusion of literalness and metaphoricness. Like the schizophrenic patient, the embattled and confined and angry and anxious part, persisting in his metaphorical identity with the collective good, seems doomed to some permanent rupture with reality. He may, paranoiacally, blame the market, or the administration, or technology, or somebody, for his ailment. He may, hebephrenically, mimic what everybody else is saying or doing — or what he thinks they are saying or doing. Or he may, catatonically, retreat into a world of dumb and injured rejection.

I have taken liberties with Professor Jaffa's analytical model, because I think the agricultural establishment in the United States exhibits a number of parallels with the disturbed and anxious condition of the schizophrenic patient. (After all, for many years now, I have been hearing that American agriculture is sick.) Like any analogy or model, this one has its limitations, its own distortions of reality. But it serves a useful purpose: there are many perspectives on reality; sometimes the most profitable one is the incongruous perspective. However, as in psychiatry so in history, salvation lies along a road of transcendence. This process of transcendence may be called by many names. Professor Jaffa's fine phrase, from the Federalist, the doctrine of the extended republic, is surely one of them. It is, of course, not the sole dimension of public policy. But in its wonderful accent on integrity, it is by all means a very important dimension of public policy.