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Citizenship, Duty and Virtue: A Vision of Jefferson's America

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Citizenship, Duty and Virtue: A
Vision of Jefferson's America

by

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requirements for the degree of

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Abstract

In contemporary American political life, concepts such as duty to country and society often play a role in political discourse, but are often forgotten in the lives of average Americans. The life of the average citizen is focused on issues of economic survival, familial matters, and the diversions that occupy persons.

Devotion to country is made an at best secondary concern for Americans.

The purpose of this work is to examine the concepts of civic virtue that historically have dominated American political thought, using the writings of Thomas Jefferson and his influences as the primary source material for this effort, as well as the writings of modern western political theorists. Through this work, a conflict emerges between the values of western liberal thought and classic republicanism; to this end, a secondary purpose of this work is to reconcile those differences in an American context. Finally, a third purpose of this work is to offer a theoretical plan for re-connecting the average citizen with concepts of civic virtue through a proposal for public service.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Historically, the United States has been described as having a republican form of government. Central to republican governance is a politically active and vibrant electorate. Civic virtue is central to virtually every classic definition of republican concepts of liberty, providing a definition of political participation. But what exactly is civic virtue? More importantly, what role does civic virtue play in the history of America? To answer these questions the writings of Thomas Jefferson and republican thinkers will be examined in detail. Additionally, for reasons that will be explained in detail, the liberal influence on the thinking of Americans will be explored as well. Finally, a method for cultivating civic virtue in the complex modern American polity will be examined, serving as a thought experiment that is intended to illustrate the problems surrounding the cultivation of civic virtue in an increasingly individualist society. Jefferson's writings will be the focus of this exploration because while this essay will explore the concept and consequences of citizenship broadly, the purpose of the philosophical remedy that will be offered is not meant to apply to political bodies outside the United States. Put most simply, both Thomas Jefferson and I are writing with the purpose of addressing issues that are of concern to the American polity. The purpose of this essay is to explore what it means to be a citizen of a political body and what should be the expectations for citizens. In this effort, the first chapter of this project will focus on civic virtue and republicanism, reflecting the republican nature of the early American culture. The second chapter will focus on liberalism and the effect liberal philosophy has had on American culture and values. The third chapter will focus on republican and

Christian morality, with the purpose of illustrating the underlying moral implications of political participation in the American republic. Throughout this examination, the writings of Thomas Jefferson will serve as the focal point of historical reference; in addition, for the purpose of comparison and in some cases for reinforcement and contrasting against Jefferson's perspective, the writings and ideas of contemporaries of Thomas Jefferson will also be used, such as John Adams and James Madison. Finally, in the fourth and final chapter, a proposal will be offered that is designed to reinforce and reinvigorate civic virtue in America. It is my contention that virtuous citizens are necessary for the survival of the republic and the political culture. It is to civic virtue in America that this discussion turns to first.

What is Civic Virtue?

"Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country."¹
— President John F. Kennedy

Civic virtue is easily (if poorly) defined as the tendency of individual citizens to lay aside the personal concerns that they may have and instead to make political decisions that are in the best interest of the overall polity, as opposed to the interests of narrow groups or factions of people. There are several accounts of civic virtue; the accounts provided by Machiavelli (who theorists like Paul Rahe suggest greatly influenced Jefferson²), Rousseau (who influenced the French Revolution, of which Jefferson was a great supporter of³), and the American founders are the accounts to be focused on in this exercise. Classically, there are two competing definitions of civic virtue that need to be

¹ John F. Kennedy, "Inaugural Address," January 20, 1961.

http://www.famousquotes.me.uk/speeches/John_F_Kennedy/5.htm

² Paul Rahe, *Machiavelli's Liberal Republican Legacy* (Cambridge: UK2005).

³ Thomas Jefferson, *Jefferson: Writings* Pp 947-955 (New York 1984).

explored first: those of Machiavelli and Rousseau.

Machiavelli's Account of Civic Virtue

“For how we live is so far removed from how we ought to live, that he who abandons what is done for what ought to be done, will rather bring about his own ruin than his preservation.”⁴ – Niccolo Machiavelli

Machiavelli's primary concern was the formation of a stable and enduring Italy; people of a common cultural heritage cannot be happy if they are not united under a single rule or prince⁵. As such, it should come as no surprise that he views the primary purpose of civil government to be the formulation of a stable state and society. This stability was not only in freedom from the threats posed by outside political bodies, but stability within the political society governed itself. Good government, in Machiavelli's estimation, is made possible when the social condition is one where either the governing officials or the citizens are feared by the body politic. Speaking of failed states, Machiavelli states that governments fail when “neither the individual citizen nor the public official is feared; each individual lived according to his own wishes, so that every day a thousand wrongs were done.”⁶ This statement is revealing because, true to his reputation, Machiavelli suggests that stability comes when a certain degree of fear of the prince influences the behavior of society.

This is clearly a top-down view of governance. But more than that, when Machiavelli tells his readers that “each individual lived according to his own wishes, so that every day a thousand wrongs were done,” Machiavelli is making a claim of moral behavior and the effect on the polity the lack of morality and virtue can have. This is a

⁴ Niccolo Machiavelli, ThePrince, Pg 60 (Cambridge: UK 1903).

⁵ Niccolo Machiavelli, “The Discourse on Livy,” ThePortableMachiavelli, Peter Bondanella and Mark Musa (Editors), Pg 212 (New York: New York 1979).

⁶ *Ibid.* pg 179

key statement in understanding this view of civic virtue: public virtue is not possible without a private conception of virtuous or moral behavior. The virtue of citizens is defined by Machiavelli on the previous page, where he states that the virtuous citizen acts by “subordinating their own interests to the common good, and they managed and maintained both their private and public affairs with the greatest care.”⁷ This suggests that the person who takes great care to manage the personal sphere of life in accordance with moral behavior is capable acting in the public sphere in the same manner.

Machiavelli seems to have been writing on the issue of personal political wisdom when he defines what constitutes virtuous behavior in the citizen. But where does this wisdom come from? Virtue comes from the example set by political leadership; leaders provide an example to follow that influences the moral character of the people. More than that, the character of those who rule can have a lasting impact on society, setting the stage for the ability of future princes to rule. Successful republics, Machiavelli states, have a succession of kings and princes who teach the good habits of virtue and citizenship required to maintain the strong polity. Inevitably, the strong leadership will be succeeded by weak or corrupt rulers who will create conditions that lead to the destruction of the political body. “The reason is that no one man can live long enough to teach good habits to a city which has for a long time known only bad ones. And if one man with an extremely long life or two successive reigns are not able to accomplish this, then when the reformers disappear....the city comes to ruin unless the reformers...have managed to bring about her rebirth.”⁸

Civic virtue comes from the example set by leaders, according to Machiavelli.

⁷ *Ibid.* page 178

⁸ *Ibid.* page 224

Clearly, if the state does not have a tradition of the people living virtuously, then reforms are to be short lived unless there is a long succession of strong and virtuous minded leaders. What qualities are found in virtuous leaders? Machiavelli states in *The Discourses* that good leaders will be strong and brave, will display prudence and wisdom concerning the issue of justice⁹. Leaders must possess wisdom in establishing republics because the creation of enduring states requires that those who found states recognize that political power comes from forming alliances with the plebeians against the nobility. This is not just because the plebeians are numerous and the aristocracy few but because good government comes from the balancing the interests of the two competing classes against one another¹⁰.

The virtuous leader will win the loyalty of the people by respecting property rights, allow commerce, avoid high taxation, and generally provide for the justice of the people in a manner compatible with even the most extreme of times. As Machiavelli states, “a government which acts otherwise...a government which believes it can win men over again with benefits the moment danger arises deceives itself; for not only will it not win them over, but it will accelerate its own ruin.”¹¹ Establishing the loyalty of the people allows the prince to forgo the use of large armies, the building of fortresses, and other costly implements of defense because in times of crisis the people will defend the prince who has fostered their loyalty. In this way, the prince comes to be synonymous with the state or republic.

Fostering the loyalty of the people is key for Machiavelli because of his view of

⁹ *Ibid.* page 177

¹⁰ *Ibid.* page 183

¹¹ *Ibid.* page 240

human nature. “As is demonstrated by all those who discuss civic life (and as history is full of such examples), it is necessary for anyone who organizes a republic and institutes laws to take for granted that all men are evil and that they will always express the wickedness of their spirit whenever they have the opportunity; and when such wickedness remains hidden for a time, this is due to a hidden cause that is not recognized by those without experience of its contrary; but then time, which is said to be the father of every truth, will uncover it.”¹² It is because of this inevitability of time that unless states have a long history of virtuous behavior by the citizens that degeneration into immorality is all but guaranteed. There are any number of causes of the degeneracy of a republic, including the rulers favoring the nobility at the expense of the common people, or princes failing to reinforce the values of the culture through use of religion and militarization¹³.

The Roman Republic was Machiavelli's ideal state, possessing the measure of virtue in both citizens and rulers that Machiavelli identified as key to the creation of a lasting state. In Rome, the good rulers provided the example to future princes so that “he will see a ruler secure in the midst of his secure citizens, and a world of peace and justice; he will see a senate with its full authority, the magistrates with their honors, the rich citizens enjoying their wealth, the nobles and ability exalted, and he will find tranquility and well-being in everything...it's prince endowed with respect and glory, its peoples with love and security.”¹⁴

Machiavelli's faith was not in the average person, who can be driven by self serving desires of personal greed and glory. His view of human nature is the key to

¹² *Ibid.* page 182

¹³ *Ibid.* page 208

¹⁴ *Ibid.* page 206-207

understanding why Machiavelli's view of civic virtue is not compatible with the view to be fostered in the United States. Certainly there are features that should be fostered (Machiavelli's desire for balancing and dividing power, for example); however, the belief that the people only learn virtue from political leaders makes Machiavelli's conception of civic virtue coming from leaders difficult to apply to American political culture, which is most certainly not a culture dominated by political leaders. It is because of this that this examination turns to the other major view of civic virtue coming from the republican tradition, that of Jean Jacques Rousseau.

Rousseau

“Man was born free, and everywhere he is in chains¹⁵.” – Jean Jacques Rousseau

Jean Jacques Rousseau's view of civic virtue is inexorably linked with his view of the citizen and personal morality. The duties of citizenship and our personal selfish desires are in conflict. Alan Bloom, in the preface to Emile, describes Rousseau's position on this subject as being almost paradoxical, which a quick examination would seem to provide evidence for. However, Bloom tells us that the paradox Rousseau presents is purposefully constructed:

(These) are not expressions of a troubled soul, but accurate reflections of an incoherence in the structure of the world we all face, or rather, in general, do not face; and Emile is an experiment in restoring harmony to that world by reordering the emergence of man's acquisitions in such a way as to avoid the imbalances created by them while allowing the full actualization of man's potential¹⁶.

Emile is concerned with the proper education of a person in such a manner that allows for self-realization and the creation of the proper kind of person that will enable

¹⁵ Jean Jacques Rousseau, TheSocialContract, pp45 (Christopher Betts translation) (Oxford: UK 1995).

¹⁶ Alan Bloom. “Introduction.” Emile. Pp 3 (Alan Bloom translation) (New York: USA1979).

civil society to flourish. Rousseau saw modern society as stifling human potential. Instead, Rousseau offers a treatise on education, told through an allegorical device to make his point. This allegory is the education of a child, Emile, through what Rousseau considered proper motivation and example setting. What were the motivations Rousseau gave to Emile in the story?

First, Emile is taught the value of labor and private property through learning the value of labor. In an almost Lockean sense, Rousseau provides a hands-on teaching of a theory of private property, derived from a kind of selfish motivation. What appears to at first be instituting selfishness into the young boy turns into a lesson over the division of labor and respecting the property rights of others by establishing contractual limits to property¹⁷. This is a recognition of equality of persons, which in the story Rousseau has reinforced through his concept of *amour-propre*, or self realization or self love.

Compassion, or empathy (as I will call it further in this discourse), is central to Rousseau's educational scheme. This may seem to contradict *amour-propre*, but as Bloom describes the relationship between the concepts, "*amour-propre* is only alienating if a man sees others whom he can consider happier than himself¹⁸." Compassion is taught through the mechanism of seeing the misfortunes of others and relating them to possible misfortunes that the individual may face personally later in life. This relates the needs of other persons to the needs of the self that allows for civil society to function, while making duty to others possible as well. Compassion has a secondary effect on the education of the individual, however: contempt for those who would consider themselves superior to others. Individual superiority is the opposite of what Rousseau is promoting,

¹⁷ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*, pp 97-100.

¹⁸ Bloom. Pp 17

which is self-sufficient and egalitarian man¹⁹.

Finally, society is made possible by love. Families are the essential ingredient to create communities, not individuals. Passion is what creates families, according to Rousseau, and provides the standards that the individual can judge others and their relationships²⁰. The key takeaway from Emile is that the ideal citizen will be a passionate individual who is self-reliant and recognizes that they share common traits with others, which makes civic society possible.

Rousseau's other work that is relevant to American political life is The Social Contract, which enumerates the basis of rights in his political scheme. Rights cannot be surrendered because the natural condition of people is one of equality. The equality that Rousseau is concerned with is equality before the law and the respect due to persons from the state. Rousseau clearly states that persons are not endowed with equal natural endowments: some are more intelligent, talented or attractive than others. "...instead of destroying natural equality, the fundamental contract substitutes moral and legal equality for whatever degree of physical inequality nature has put among men; they may be unequal in strength or intelligence, but all become equal through agreed convention and by right."²¹ To surrender our rights to other persons would eliminate equality and replace it with a system of inequality and servitude.

If rights cannot be surrendered to others then sovereignty cannot be surrendered. In Rousseau's philosophy, sovereignty resides with the people. Citizenship is defined as combining in all members of society the qualities found in the sovereign and in the

¹⁹ Bloom, pp 19.

²⁰ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Emile, pp 327-355.

²¹ Ibid. pg 62

subject. All are sovereign, and all are subject to the authority of the sovereign²². Clearly, Rousseau envisions a polity where all citizens participate to some degree in the political process. Participation is important because liberty in the republican mold is concerned not with the freedom of the individual to do whatever is desired by the individual; rather, republican philosophy defines liberty as the freedom to participate in the decision making process that affects the lives of the members of the polity.

The social contract guarantees freedom and the stability necessary to conduct the business that makes society and individual well-being possible. Civil freedom is made possible by the general will or the embodiment of the communal interest manifest in the law. This common interest requires that persons overcome personal desires and wants in favor of the needs of the entire culture. All have a duty to adhere to the decisions of the sovereign, as they represent the desires of the general will. "Hence duty and self-interest oblige both contracting parties equally to give each other mutual assistance, and the same individuals must seek, in their double capacity, to take advantage of all the benefits which depend upon it." Self-interest often leads persons to see personal interests as being different from communal needs, reducing contributions to the common good as "gratuities."²³ Reason allows citizens to look past immediate individual desires and to see the bigger picture: that our fundamental needs are the needs of the community. Immediate desire can be the result of being the slave of our passions. Rousseau calls this moral liberty, and it is at the core of his conception of civic virtue²⁴.

Moral persons are virtuous both in the private lives they lead and in exercising

²² Ibid. pg 56

²³ Ibid. pp 57-58

²⁴ Ibid. pg 59

sovereign authority. This is especially important to understand, given Rousseau's assumption that human nature is inherently selfish, but not evil. Individuals, says Rousseau, act out of preference, while the general will is concerned with equality²⁵. The people are only able to set aside personal preference in service to the general will out of an enlightened understanding that personal interests are served by society, even if they conflict at times. The community protects property, provides safety and stability, all of which are key to establishing the conditions needed for a functional society²⁶.

Of the two conceptions of civic virtue explored here, the vision of Rousseau is most important for this exercise. This is not to say that Machiavelli had no influence on the political philosophy of Jefferson and the other American founders; rather, through Jefferson's own later admission, Rousseau was at least an indirect influence on the thinking of Jefferson and others. This is evident through the fondness and hope Jefferson expressed in his letters about the events occurring in France as they unfolded; even later, when the grisly truth of the French Revolution came to light, Jefferson was still generally positive in his assessment of the outcome, blaming the failure of that revolution on Napoleon²⁷.

Having thus identified two of the more compelling definitions of civic virtue from the history of republican thought, it should be stated that Jefferson's conception of civic virtue was more closely aligned with the view held by Jean Jacques Rousseau. This is due to Jefferson's belief that civic virtue required a citizenry that was virtuous in both public and private life, as well as the focus of virtue being placed on citizens and not on

²⁵ Ibid. pg 63

²⁶ Ibid. pg 60

²⁷ Thomas Jefferson, Letter to PS Dupont de Nemours. Writings. Pp 1099-1102 (New York: New York 1984).

powerful sovereign rulers. This point will be expanded upon in later chapters; for now, the next course of action is to define what the founders believed republicanism to be in the American context. Was the republicanism that Jefferson and his contemporaries espoused that of the ancients (such as Aristotle), was it the kind of politics that Rousseau envisioned, where all people were sovereign, or was it something more complex? It is to American republicanism that we turn to next.

American Republicanism

“No man is good enough to govern another man, without that other's consent. I say this is the leading principle — the sheet anchor of American republicanism.”²⁸ — Abraham Lincoln

If civic virtue is a central concern in republican thought, then first we must understand what the American founders thought civic virtue entailed. One of the most concise definitions of civic virtue in American history comes from John Adams, who defined the concept in a letter to Mercy Otis Warren in 1776:

“Public Virtue cannot exist without private, and public Virtue is the only Foundation of Republics....There must be a positive Passion for the public good, the public Interest, Honor, Power, and Glory, established in the Minds of the People, or there can be no Republican Government, nor any real Liberty. And this public Passion must be Superior to all private Passions. Men must be ready, they must pride themselves, and be happy to sacrifice their private Pleasures, Passions, and Interests, nay their private Friendships and dearest connections, when they Stand in Competition with the Rights of society.”²⁹

The Adams quote has several key ideas expressed as a definition of civic virtue. Adams states that a healthy polity relies on a private morality that has, at its core, values of moderation, self sacrifice and a willingness to make the business of government an important aspect of their individual lives. These values stand in stark contrast to political

²⁸ Abraham Lincoln. Speech at Peoria, Illinois, Oct 16, 1854, CollectedWorksofAbrahamLincoln, vol. 2, pp 266 (Piscataway: New Jersey 1990).

²⁹ Paul A Rahe. P. 23 (Quoting John Adams).

attitudes in the contemporary society, which are often characterized as seeing government as a means of attaining personal goals and promoting personal (or special) interests³⁰.

Adams' definition of civic virtue most closely resembles Rousseau's, including the requirement of a strong moral foundation in the citizens for the polity to be stable.

But the American conception of civic virtue is much more complex than that vision supplied by Rousseau. In the American context, civic virtue takes on elements of liberalism and blends those elements into classic republican philosophy. The individualist strain of liberalism will be examined in the following chapter; first, the American concept of civic virtue will be explored in detail. American civic virtue embodies an idealized image of the yeoman farmer, living off the land, embodying both the pinnacle of private virtue and public obligation that leads to a vision of the ideal citizen that is both personally independent and dependent on the body politic. The source of this image for the American philosophers of the 18th century was both the ancient philosophies of Cicero and Aristotle, as well as the Whig mythologies originating out of England. "In the excitement of the Revolutionary movement, these classical republican values came together with the long existing European image of Americans as a simple, egalitarian, liberty-loving people to form one of the most coherent and powerful ideologies the Western world had yet seen."³¹

What did independence and dependence mean in this context? Dependency did not mean dependency on government leadership, as it had under the monarchies of the Old World. Rather, dependency meant that individuals would be dependent on one-

³⁰ George C Martin, P Wattenberg, and Robert L Linberry, Government in America: People, Politics and Policy 11th Edition, (London: England 2004).

³¹ Gordon S Wood, The American Revolution: A History, Pp 94 (New York: New York 2003).

another to sustain the sovereignty of the people. “If republics were to have order, it would have to come from below, from the people themselves, from their consent and virtue, that is, from their willingness to surrender their personal desires to the public good....republicanism thus stressed a morality of social cohesion and devotion to the common welfare, or *res publica*.”³² Dependency on the people meant simply that the people must rely on each other for society to continue to propagate the values that republican society required to sustain itself.

Independence in the American republican context means self sufficiency from the elites that represent the unnatural aristocracy – those landed individuals who, not because of talent or virtue but because of influence from other elites, rule over other persons. During the Revolution, ontological conceptions of property ownership in America underwent a shift in focus. During an incredibly short period of time (roughly from 1760-1776), Americans embraced republicanism and the view that the majority of private property being held by the elite few constituted a threat to society. This seemingly egalitarian shift in public philosophy has deep roots in classical Whig theory³³.

Equality of individuals became a driving force behind the Revolution. Instead of wealth and offices being bestowed to persons because of what family they belong to and because of who they knew, wealth and prestige were the products of work, talent and merit. This egalitarianism has a distinctively individualist component to it. No longer would Americans watch outsiders and a privileged few who were connected to the English Crown gain access to the highest offices of America, where they could exercise

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Gordon S Wood, The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787, pg 88 (New York: New York 1969).

power over people who had no say in their placement into office; during and after the Revolution, the efforts of individuals would be based solely on the merit of the person seeking advancement, as determined by the people. In the American experience, merit and personal virtue are key components of civic virtue³⁴. When virtue and morality are explored in chapter three, it will be my purpose to make this claim clearer. To be sure, the American vision of civic virtue contains both liberal and republican elements.

Additionally, the removal of aristocratic privilege in favor of individual merit seems to create a tension between the elites that all societies have and the rest of the population, seeming to suggest that Jefferson and the other revolutionary leaders shared the sentiment with Machiavelli of keeping competing interests in society in tension³⁵.

The removal of aristocratic privilege took the form of criticizing land ownership in the British Colonies. Jefferson observed that the majority of the land in the colonies was in the hands of very few aristocratic elites, while many poor people went without work. "I asked myself what could be the reason so many should be permitted to beg who are willing to work, in a country where there is a very considerable proportion of uncultivated lands....I am conscious that the equal division of property is impracticable, but the consequences of this enormous inequality producing so much misery to the bulk of mankind, legislators cannot invent too many devices for the subdividing of property, only taking care to let their subdivisions go hand in hand with the natural affections of the human mind."³⁶ The needs of the many individuals should be the subject of republican government in America, Jefferson seems to be saying, with the consequence of creating a

³⁴ *Ibid.* pg 78

³⁵ Paul Rahe, pages 110-175.

³⁶ Thomas Jefferson, Writings Pg 841.

Machiavellian tension between the rich and the rest of the polity.

Values of individuality are not incompatible with the republican political philosophy that the early founders of this nation espoused, nor is liberal individualism necessarily incompatible with ideals of civic virtue. Thomas Jefferson, perhaps the most noteworthy of the founders, was a passionate proponent of republican political philosophy and individual liberty. “All eyes are opened, or opening, to the rights of man,” Jefferson said in a letter written just prior to his death in 1826. “The general spread of the light of science has already laid open to every view the palpable truth, that the mass of mankind has not been born with saddles on their backs, nor a favored few booted and spurred, ready to ride them legitimately, by the grace of God.”³⁷ What Jefferson meant by this statement seems to be a clear repudiation of notions of class distinctions derived from nature or God. According to this view, individual persons are the masters of their own destiny, free to pursue their ends as they see fit. By “the light of science,” Jefferson meant that it is through reason that we, as human beings, are endowed with rights that prevent others from using us as a means to their ends.

Jefferson's political philosophy is a deeply complex mix of classical republican philosophy rooted in the writings of Aristotle and Cicero, and the modern liberalism of John Locke. Indeed, Jefferson's conception of reason leads directly to his conception of the proper role of government, which is created to protect property and promote individual liberty. “The great and chief end of Mens (sic) uniting into Commonwealths and putting themselves under Government, is the preservation of their property.”³⁸

However, Jefferson conceptualizes the relation of human beings amongst one-another in a

³⁷ Thomas Jefferson, Writings Page 1517.

³⁸ John Locke; Second Treatise of Government Page 395 (Cambridge: UK 2005).

decidedly non-Lockean manner by envisioning human beings as “an animal destined to live in society,”³⁹ which rings more of Aristotelian conceptions of human nature, rather than traditional liberal notions of individualism. According to this Aristotelian view, Jefferson envisioned humanity being created for a naturally social environment that required a sense and system of justice to maintain; Jefferson rejected the Hobbesian and Lockean sense of man as an asocial creature that lacked ethical virtue and would rather have credited God with an error during Creation rather than support the Hobbesian view.⁴⁰ “The Creator would have been a bungling artist, had he intended man for a social animal, without planting in him social dispositions⁴¹.” Humans are, by either nature or by divine mandate, a social creature.

Jefferson's view of virtue is complex. According to his view, the boundaries of morality are set by the relations of persons to one another. Relation (that is, interaction between persons) requires at least two subjects, and excludes self-love as a motivation for moral behavior; this is because we have no duties to ourselves, according to Jefferson. It is because we have no duties to ourselves but only to others that self-love is diametrically opposed to virtue, because self-love “(is) leading us constantly by our propensities to self-gratification in violation of our moral duties to others. Accordingly, it is against this enemy that are erected the batteries of moralists and religionists, as the only obstacle to the practice of morality.”⁴² Jefferson offers education as a means of socializing persons into virtuous behavior, an idea that will be important as this essay continues.

³⁹ Thomas Jefferson writing to John Adams, October 14, 1816, TheAdams-JeffersonLetters, pg 490 (Chapel Hill: North Carolina 1959).

⁴⁰ Garret Ward Sheldon, ThePoliticalPhilosophyofThomasJefferson, Page 10 (Baltimore: Maryland 1993).

⁴¹ Thomas Jefferson, Writings, Page 1337.

⁴² *Ibid.* page 1336-37.

It is necessary to examine the concept of the ideal citizen in the early American republic to gain a more complete understanding of the individual and the American value of independence. Thomas Jefferson defined his ideal citizen as the citizen-farmer; this ideal was of the land owning self-sufficient agrarian who was moderate in temperament, more educated than their European counterparts, possessing of good humor and “dispassionate reason.”⁴³ Jefferson had little faith in what he called the artificial aristocracy which he described as having been “founded on wealth and birth, without either virtue or talents...” Jefferson placed a premium on the possession of virtue in all persons, as is evident in his description of the “natural aristocracy,” which he describes as being based on virtue and talents, such as physical health, humor, beauty, politeness and personal accomplishments⁴⁴. Many of the characteristics Jefferson identifies suggests that persons have duties to one another and to themselves, and that suggest that individuals must possess character.

Self sufficiency is a central American ideal. The term is synonymous with independence and even adulthood. For Jefferson, self sufficiency was equivalent to self governance. Jefferson believed that a free people cannot remain free if they are ignorant of the knowledge required to see to their own affairs. "I think by far the most important bill in our whole code, is that for the diffusion of knowledge among the people. No other sure foundation can be devised for the preservation of freedom and happiness....The tax which will be paid for this purpose is not more than the thousandth part of what will be paid to kings, priests and nobles who will rise up among us if we leave the people in

⁴³ Thomas Jefferson, Writings, Page Page 1193-1195.

⁴⁴ Thomas Jefferson, Writings, Page 1305 – 1307.

ignorance.”⁴⁵ The self sufficient person takes the responsibility of governing seriously, putting aside the personal needs that concern them and sacrifice willingly for the better of the political community.

The contemporary understanding of self sufficiency is concerned more with economic independence and financial freedom than with concerns about governance and maintaining liberty. While some factors that can explain why this is the case may be due to Geo-political factors concerning America's status as a world power, I would suggest that the primary reason that self sufficiency is understood in individualistic terms is due to the primacy of liberal values in modern America. In a very real sense, American culture has turned away from concepts of duty, honor and virtue and has instead focused on the primacy of the individual.

Compare this to the understanding of self-sufficiency that the reader can get from republican thought. In the Aristotelian sense, if we have an understanding of what our duties to others and to ourselves are, those would include providing for our needs so as to not become an economic burden on the rest of society. In the republican theory of Aristotle, persons have a role to play in society. Self-sufficiency means having an understanding of that role and fulfilling the duties and requirements that are entailed in it. This means literally that self-sufficiency is living up to the responsibilities that you have to society because the polis relies on all citizens to contribute. Being a citizen in the republican polis means fulfilling your role as your duty requires.

There is another element of republican philosophy that is important to understanding the role citizens play in politics: the structure of government and the effect

⁴⁵ Thomas Jefferson, Writings, Page 858.

it has on the political consciousness of the people. It may seem hard to grasp in contemporary America, but to the revolutionaries in 18th century colonial America, the structure of government under British rule was a source of social ills and influence that affected the ability of the people to live self sufficient virtuous lives. Traditionally, republican philosophy is structurally concerned with power being separated in government; this comes either in the form of the Machiavellian concept of setting competing powers in society against one another, as he states in *The Prince* that during times of peace, Italian leaders “would encourage factional strife in some of their subject towns in order to control them more easily.” This created a balance of power that allowed governing during times of peace more easy to accomplish. While in Machiavelli's Italy, during wartime faction was a dangerous construction that often led to military loss⁴⁶ ; or, conversely, this concept of divided power comes from the ancient Roman polis. In the American sense, while the founders separated powers both within the federal government, as well as in the relationship between the federal government and the states, American republicans were concerned with the effect government had on the people themselves. Structurally speaking, this concern manifested itself in the form of absolute distrust of executive authority. Wood tells us that equality, being a natural condition of mankind, was under attack by monarchical forms of government in the form of disrupting the ordinary social cohesion that develops as a reflection of human nature. “If only the natural tendencies of people to love and care for one another were allowed to flow freely, unclogged by the artificial interference of government, particularly monarchical government, the most optimistic republicans believed that society would prosper and hold

⁴⁶ Niccolo Machiavelli, [ThePortableMachiavelli](#), pg 146.

itself together.”⁴⁷ As will be demonstrated, the Crown had inserted itself into the lives of ordinary productive citizens, serving as a disrupting force in society that not only altered the quality of the lives of the people, but attempted to undermine the moral foundations of the burgeoning American republic itself.

The influence of the English Crown, as Wood describes it, had a corrupting effect on society. Pocock suggests that the American republic may have existed while under the dominion of the crown; this republic, while an extension of the British Empire, was affected in adverse ways by the behavior of the Crown on the morality of the American character. Pocock's Machiavellian Moment was “a name for the moment in conceptualized time in which the republic was seen as confronting its own temporal finitude, as attempting to remain morally and politically stable in a stream of irrational events conceived as essentially destructive of all systems of secular stability.”⁴⁸ Amongst the destruction of secular stability was the creation of what the American colonists considered to be an unnatural creation of artificial aristocracy by the British Crown. “Among all the grievances voiced against executive power, what appears to have particularly rankled the colonists, or at least was most directly confronted in their Whig literature, was the abuse of royal authority in creating political and hence social distinctions, the manipulation of official appointments that enabled those creatures with the proper connections, those filled with the most flattery.”⁴⁹ This was the embodiment of the rejection of merit based advancement in the favor of political power being bestowed by virtue of influence and personal favor.

⁴⁷ Gordon S Wood, The American Revolution: A History, Pg 105.

⁴⁸ JGA Pocock, The Machiavellian Moment, Pg viii (Princeton: New Jersey 2003).

⁴⁹ Gordon S Wood, The Creation of the American Republic 1776-1787, pg 79.

Jefferson's concept of the corrupting nature of the English Crown on the political culture has a long history in English political thought; this thinking has philosophical roots in the mythical Whig interpretation of the history of England. This reading of English history was based on what David N Mayer called an idealized model of government. "To the Whig historians the whole of English constitutional history since the [Norman] Conquest was the story of a perpetual claim kept up by the English nation for a restoration of Saxon laws and the ancient rights guaranteed by those laws." This reading of English history envisions a pre-Norman England that was governed under a political system where general assemblies in villages and towns decided all matters of importance to the everyday lives of the people, as well as allowing the people to choose political leaders from amongst the population of these towns⁵⁰. As this examination continues it will be demonstrated that this Whig inspired view of history served as Jefferson's ward-system of local governance. The key thought that the Whig interpretation of history left with Jefferson is the core philosophical belief that the important facets of the political process ought to be left under local control. This local control was the influence of the English Crown, which Mayer describes as replacing the land ownership requirement for participation in the political process with a system of English feudalism (wholly unknown in England before the 1066 conquest)⁵¹. The role of the Crown in England and latter in the American colonies was to replace local control of the political process with a distant centralized authority based on influence and favors.

By appearances, American republicanism is a political philosophy based on the

⁵⁰ David N Mayer, The Constitutional Thought of Thomas Jefferson, pg 12-13 (Charlottesville: Virginia 1995).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

concept of local control of the political process through a qualified electorate. In Jefferson's day, qualifying for participation rights were based on property ownership, which is a reflection of the Whig interpreted history of England. Property ownership was believed to reflect the stake citizens had in the political society. Today, the only qualifications for participation in the political process are to be a citizen of the country over the age of eighteen, with males being required to register with the Selective Service. The Selective Service requirement may be a reflection of a belief in necessary self sacrifice by members of the political culture in times of great need; essentially, that participation should still be qualified by some measure of civic virtue (this is in spite of the lack of any real possibility of the Selective Service ever being used).

Civic virtue is a combination of private and public morality influencing the political actions of the citizens of the polity. The political culture of the United States makes understanding what the moral obligations and expectations of the people are a complex issue because of the complicated nature of the political culture of the nation. While republicanism may have influenced the early formative years of the nation, liberal political philosophy is easily the dominant ideology of the nation in contemporary times. As such, *liberalism and the effect that political philosophy has had on the thinking of the founders and on American culture will be the topic of the following chapter. Liberal philosophy can be seen on display in the contemporary and early American culture through the value of self sufficiency and the primacy of economic commercial activity. Additionally, liberalism as a moral philosophy has much to offer in terms of our duties to other persons. This is important because in the early years of the American republic men like Thomas Jefferson possessed a complex political and moral philosophy that was*

characterized both by republican notions of virtue, duty and allegiance to the political culture, while also recognizing that a place must exist for recognition of individuality and the perceived natural rights of man. It is to liberalism and its centrality to the political thought of Thomas Jefferson that we turn to next, with the expressed purpose of clarifying the liberal values that dominated America during the republican era of the nation: commerce, a recognition of natural rights, and the sanctity of choice in the lives of persons.

Chapter 2: Liberalism and American Thought

"As Mankind becomes more liberal, they will be more apt to allow that all those who conduct themselves as worthy members of the community are equally entitled to the protections of civil government. I hope ever to see America among the foremost nations of justice and liberality."⁵² – George Washington

The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate the nature of liberal philosophical values on the American experience, as well as the nature of liberalism in early America. This liberalism was a remarkably individualist strain of liberalism, with a focus on the doctrine of individual rights. This has set America apart from other politically liberal western cultures in that political discourse is often conducted in the language of individual rights. Rights, capitalism and individualism are essential to understanding American culture, and Thomas Jefferson had extensive opinions on all of those subjects. Once again, Jefferson will be used as the defining figure of American political philosophical culture.

Thomas Jefferson was a republican who espoused liberal values, as were most of the key men involved in the founding of the American republic. My belief is supported by Max Lerner in his historical review of the politics of Thomas Jefferson.⁵³ What exactly did Washington and his compatriots mean when they declared that America was both a liberal country and a republican one? There are certain philosophical features of liberalism that are pertinent to the overall examination of American civic virtue. These features will shed light on understanding the basic American political character as we attempt to uncover what the American political philosophy was during the revolution and what the concept of civic virtue means in America. The tenets of liberalism that require

⁵² George Washington, Washington: Writings, page 91 (Des Moines: Iowa 1997).

⁵³ Max Lerner, Thomas Jefferson: America's Philosopher King, Pg 99 (New Brunswick: New Jersey 1996).

examining are notions of individuality, choice, capitalism and commerce, not as they have evolved since the founding of the republic but as they were understood during and just after the American revolution. Using Thomas Jefferson's own reading list as a starting point, this examination will focus on liberals such as Adam Smith and John Locke. Smith and Locke are important to understanding the state of liberal thought in America at the time of the revolution because Jefferson was highly influenced by those thinkers in particular, citing them specifically as his most highly respected theorists on the topics of government (Locke), and commerce (Smith).⁵⁴

It is my intention to illustrate through this look at 17th and 18th century liberalism that Jefferson and other influential early Americans held a unique complex philosophy: a philosophy that is at the same time both republican and liberal, blended into a theory of governance that is as unique as the people who crafted it. Both liberal and republican theories make complex moral claims on the duties of persons and the role people play in society. Examining liberalism in the context of its relation to early American thought will give insight into the evolution of American thinking that has led to the current state of affairs in contemporary American political culture. The values of American liberal and republican thought will allow this examination to move on to an examination of American morality, which will be the subject of the next chapter. For now, this exercise turns to a discussion of liberal individualism and the impact it has had on the culture of the early and contemporary United States.

⁵⁴ Thomas Jefferson: Writings, Pg 1176

Liberal Individualism

“A man who does not think for himself does not think at all.”⁵⁵ – Oscar Wilde

The concept of individuality is relatively simple on the surface: the most sacred or important portion of society is the single person. Others have no claim on the actions, lives or property of persons. During the American and French Revolutions one of the most prolific voice for individual liberty was the pamphleteer Thomas Paine, who penned the influential tracts *Common Sense* and *The Rights of Man*; Jefferson praised Paine in a letter written to the pamphleteer for showing that political reformations worked better on the mind than on the body⁵⁶. Central to Paine's individualist philosophy was the concept that man is a bearer of natural rights, which serve as a barrier to the actions of others:

“Natural rights are those which always appertain to man in right of his existence. Of this kind are all the intellectual rights, or rights of the mind, and also all those rights of acting as an individual for his own comfort and happiness, which are not injurious to the rights of others.--Civil rights are those which appertain to man in right of his being a member of society. Every civil right has for its foundation some natural right pre-existing in the individual, but to which his individual power is not, in all cases, sufficiently competent. Of this kind are all those which relate to security and protection.”⁵⁷

According to this philosophy, people have rights simply for being human beings, not because they are members of a particular political culture. This is, by definition, a universalist ontology. By contrast, rights in the republican scheme are bestowed upon people by virtue of membership in the political society. This may not mean that people have rights to access all the benefits of political society where ever they may be; instead, liberalism assumes a basic minimum standard of treating human beings in accordance with the natural rights owed to persons simply for being a human.

⁵⁵ Oscar Wild, *The soul of man under Socialism*, (New York: New York 2001).

⁵⁶ Thomas Jefferson, *Writings*, pp991-994.

⁵⁷ Thomas Paine, *RightsofMan*, Page 32 (Oxford: UK 1995).

Human beings enter into society to protect the rights that exist because of nature. Doing so requires that we surrender some rights to the body politic in order to better maintain our freedom; however, man does retain some rights in this transfer of power, which Paine identifies as intellectual rights (including religion), and the right to his property and capital⁵⁸. Individualism requires a minimalist approach to governance, where the state plays little to no role in the everyday lives of citizens. In the most extreme version of liberalism (libertarianism), the role of the state is reduced to defending the property rights of the citizens from one another and foreign adversaries, with the state limited to protecting these property rights, as well as the lives and liberty of persons. As can be seen from this view, autonomy of the individual is the central concern of liberal morality.

Jefferson's view of individualism breaks from the purely liberal conception of the person; his view places the individual as not the most sacred unit of society, placing society as the center of political life:

“What is true of every member of the society individually, is true of them all collectively, since the rights of the whole can be no more than the sum of the rights of individuals....individuals are parts only of a society, subject to the laws of the whole. These laws may appropriate the portion of land occupied by a decedent to his creditor rather than to any other, or to his child, on condition that he satisfies his creditor.”⁵⁹

Rights, Jefferson says, are not derived from society or the individual predecessors in society, but from nature. Being natural, the state cannot give individuals rights but instead must protect them from being infringed upon by government action, as well as from other individuals.

The political culture of colonial and revolutionary America was a marriage of

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Thomas Jefferson, Writings, Pg 960-61.

liberal and republican philosophies. Jefferson understood republicanism as a political system that promoted equality while bestowing political leadership on a natural aristocracy; this aristocracy would be determined by merit and talent, not by political affiliation. Republican Americans would be characterized as frank, sincere, honest and possessing of the general characteristics that were alien to the environment of courtly monarchy. Jefferson, according to Wood, defined American traits as opposed to those found in monarchies like England⁶⁰. It is worth noting that the egalitarian definition of American republicanism is likely the result of the influx of liberal concepts of equality of opportunity amongst the people.

In a letter to Thomas Paine, Jefferson illustrates both the marriage of liberal ideals and republican values and the popularity of Paine's work in revolutionary America:

“But our people, my good friend, are firm and unanimous in their principles of republicanism and there is no better proof of it than that they love what you write and read it with delight. The printers season every newspaper with extracts from our last, as they did before from your first part of the Rights of Man. They have both served here to separate the wheat from the chaff, and to prove that tho' the latter appears on the surface, it is on the surface only.”⁶¹

One of the principle struggles in America during and after the revolution was instilling values in the populace that would create the kind of liberal-republican polity that Jefferson and his compatriots sought. It was in the writings of Paine that Jefferson saw the greatest hope of this coming to pass; Paine's popularity with a wider audience than could be expected from traditional philosophical sources of the likes of John Locke gave Jefferson reason to believe that Americans would remain free and secure in their individuality, if the people continued to participate and fight to maintain the rights

⁶⁰ Gordon S Wood, The American Revolution: A History, Pg 100

⁶¹ Thomas Jefferson, Writings, Page 992.

identified by Paine and other theorists.

Expressing this faith in the American people of his day, Jefferson notes that Americans were the ideal people for the experiment of self-governance to be applied to. “Both experiments however are now fairly committed, and the result will be seen. Never was a finer canvas presented to work on than our countrymen. All of them engaged in agriculture or the pursuits of honest industry, independent in their circumstances, enlightened as to their rights, and firm in their habits of order and obedience to the laws.”⁶² The enlightenment of the American people in Jefferson's day was due to the work of the pamphleteers like Paine and to the presence of a free and accountable press, which Jefferson believed to be a central component to American democracy.

The enlightenment of the Americans of Jefferson's day could also be attributed to the position the colonists found themselves in during this period in history. The conditions that the early settlers of America could be characterized as would be a condition of frontier isolationism, where the colonists had to rely on their own abilities and resources in order to survive. Often this would mean existing in isolated pockets in small communities in the wilderness, with few outside contacts to rely on to communally solve problems or address concerns. Left to their own devices, the settlers had to rely on their own faculties of reason to survive and build thriving communities that would become the nation that Jefferson and others would drive towards insurrection and independence.

To be sure, the process the revolutionaries used to determine whether rebellion against the British Empire was needed was determined by reason. In *A Summary View of*

⁶² Ibid, page 1034

the Rights of British America, Jefferson uses Lockean philosophy to declare that while American colonists remained British subjects, because they had exercised the right that Locke declared (and reason proved to be true) all men to possess the right to expatriate themselves, that the British Parliament held no right to legislate for the colonists; this right the colonists retained for themselves, and were only subject to the king of England's actions as the chief executive of the Empire. At the time that the *Summary View* was penned, the goal of the colonists was not separation from England but to have their rights of self-governance as British citizens recognized⁶³. It was only after the actions taken by the king of England came to light that the colonists resorted to civil war (actions including the King's role in dissolving American parliamentary bodies by fiat, appoint non-Americans to positions of power that were antagonistic to the colonies, and the promotion of factional politics in the colonies)⁶⁴.

Jefferson and others of his day believed that America had a special role to play in history⁶⁵. What would this role be? Bernard Bailyn quotes John Adams at length, and is worth repeating here: America's destiny was to be the impetus for “the opening of a grand scene and design in providence for the illumination of the ignorant and the emancipation of the slavish part of mankind all over the Earth.”⁶⁶ According to this widespread view, it was America's destiny to restore the liberties of the British Constitution and to see the light of reason spread across the Earth; in short, America's destiny was to provide the example that autonomous individuals can govern themselves without having to resort to the few elites enslaving the masses.

⁶³ Thomas Jefferson, Writings, Pages 105-122.

⁶⁴ Gordon S Wood, The Creation of the American Republic 1776-1787, pg 77.

⁶⁵ Bernard Bailyn, The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution, Page 140.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

This was a radical idea but its origins are not readily obvious. According to Jefferson scholar David N. Mayer, Jefferson and his revolutionary associates derived their political values from Whig myths that were the stuff of the English intellectual elites. Mayer identifies the political philosophy of the English Whigs as deriving from mythologies of pre-Norman invasion England:

“To those Whigs who had a view broadened by the appeal to rationality rather than mere historical precedent, the rights of Englishmen included the rights of man in general. That was so because their Saxon ancestors founded their model of government upon the 'natural rights of mankind.' The legitimacy of the constitution was measured by the extent to which it approximated the idea of the Saxon mode, making the elective power of the people the fundamental principle.”⁶⁷

This notion rested on the idea of the consent of the governed to live under laws of their choosing. The belief the Whigs had that these ideas originated in Saxon history are called myths by Nayer because there is scant little evidence that the Saxons actually believed in the rights of man at all. Rather, the idea of man possessing natural rights appears to have been derived from John Locke, at least in terms of Jefferson's education.

What are the purposes of these rights that Paine, Locke and others claimed man possesses? If we bring the republican concept of happiness into the problem of natural rights (and Jefferson's understanding of happiness), then we can see that happiness and natural rights in the American and liberal context was concerned with commerce. Several times in the final draft of the Declaration of Independence are references to commerce made, specifically that the king of England had cut off trade with the outside world, abolishing charters made by the colonists, and “plundered our seas, ravaged our coasts, burned our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people.”⁶⁸ It is clear that commercial

⁶⁷ David N Mayer, TheConstitutionalThoughtofThomasJefferson, page 35.

⁶⁸ DeclarationofIndependence

interests are central to liberal conceptions of the complete life for persons, so it is to commerce that this examination turns to next.

Liberalism and Commerce

“Freedom in economic arrangements is itself a component of freedom broadly understood, so economic freedom is an end in itself ... Economic freedom is also an indispensable means toward the achievement of political freedom.”⁶⁹ - Milton Friedman

Liberal thought envisions persons as commercial beings. According to this philosophy, people are all-but identified as creatures of purely monetary purpose; this is because liberal conceptions of freedom are inexorably linked to commerce and private property. John Locke, perhaps the most important liberal philosopher in the history of liberalism, states that the natural rights of man are life, liberty and the pursuit of property. The first property a person possesses is his life. "Everyone has property in his own person. This nobody has any right to but himself. The labor of his body, and the work of his hands, we may say, are properly his."⁷⁰ Private property rights derive from the belief that man owns his body and life, and that all products of those are also the sole property of the individual person.

Commercial activity plays a role so central in Lockean liberalism that Locke himself identifies commercial activity as contributing to the overall wellness and happiness of the human species. "He, who appropriates land to himself by his labor, does not lessen but increase the common stock of mankind."⁷¹ The common stock of mankind is not only the sum total of all produced goods available to all persons; the common stock is also a measure of human progress in the liberal scheme. This is because commerce is

⁶⁹ Milton Friedman, Capitalism and Freedom, page 221 (Chicago: Illinois) 1962.

⁷⁰ John Locke, Second Treatise of Government, page 176.

⁷¹ Ibid.

the great equalizer of the species, not in the sense that commerce equalizes wealth distribution, but because commerce, as the end result of labor, permits wealth to grow and spread into the hands of all persons willing to work to better themselves.

In a letter to Thomas Lomax, Jefferson illustrates a concept that lies at the heart of liberal visions of the role of commerce between people and nations: that commerce, as an equalizer between persons, is a force for peace. Saying of the American government and its actions in the international arena, Jefferson states “Commerce with all nations, alliance with none, should be our motto.”⁷² This is because liberal philosophy states that humans are creatures with special endowments that separate us from the other animals, including reason and other functions of higher thought. Because of this mutual identification, commerce offers a means of bridging the gaps between persons caused by cultural differences or the political machinations of individual leaders. “He and all the rest of mankind are one community, make up one society distinct from all other creatures. And were it not for the corruption, and viciousness of degenerate men, there would be no need of any other; no necessity that men should separate from this great and natural community, and by positive agreements combine into smaller and divided associations.”⁷³ Commerce offers the only political identification that really matters between persons (at least in the liberal calculus): individuals acting in contract with one another. There is little or no identification with organizations like states, beyond the contractual relationship between the state and the person. This can be a cause of much of the failure of liberal philosophy, as states that cannot gain a deep identification with and loyalty by the citizenry have little to base long term stability on. The failings of liberalism and the

⁷² Thomas Jefferson, Writings, Page 1063.

⁷³ John Locke, Second Treatise of Government, pg 277.

inability of that philosophy to build meaningful loyalty and identification with the political culture by the citizens will be explored in greater detail later.

Commerce as a value presupposes capitalism as the proper economic system for the polity. Early liberal philosophy was connected with capitalism in a manner that is no longer true today. Yet in the political consciousness of Americans, capitalism is synonymous with liberty and equality. As such, capitalism takes on a central place in the political identity of Americans. In this way, American liberalism and capitalism are inseparably connected. Will Kymlicka describes the connection between liberalism and capitalism by describing American capitalism as being based on the political notion of self ownership. “If I own myself, then I own my talents. And if I own my talents, then I own whatever I produce with my talents. Just as owning a piece of land means that I own what is produced by the land, so owning my talents means that I own what is produced by my talents.”⁷⁴ The concept of self ownership is derived from the Lockean conception of private property, where our first property is ourselves. In this way, private property is equated with our lives.

But there is more to the connection between liberalism and capitalism. Kymlicka tells us that liberal capitalism is both choice sensitive and ambition sensitive – that is, capitalism respects the individual as a choice making person, offering rewards based on the ambition of the commercial actor⁷⁵. But there is another dimension to American liberal capitalism: the libertarian dimension. American politics is in a constant tug of war between welfare state liberals and libertarians, with both sides battling over whether market regulations and redistributive policies ought to be in effect. When we combine the

⁷⁴ Will Kymlicka, Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Introduction, Pg 105 (Oxford, UK 1991).

⁷⁵ Ibid, pg 97

liberal conception of redistributive justice, libertarian concepts of the free market, and traditional liberal view of persons as rights-bearing individuals, we begin to see what American political culture entails: both capitalism and persons as rights-bearing individuals.

American liberalism relies on capitalism to provide social power and income to individual persons. Capitalism allows persons to realize their fullest potential, using personal ambition and the opportunity provided by the free market to use the talents each individual is born with to improve our personal lot in life⁷⁶. Capitalism, in the American experience, becomes the fullest expression of individualism in that economic arrangements allow for the growth of the person and the expansion of personal freedoms. Or so the theory goes, which may no longer be a reality in America, as the capitalism and free market realities that existed in Jefferson's time no longer exist today. In Jefferson's day, the frontier allowed for the individual to embrace the Lockean concept of claiming otherwise unclaimed land and converting the land into private property, thus allowing individuals to create wealth for themselves.

In the American republican experience, there seems to have been a complex view of commerce. On the one hand, trade was necessary for the livelihood of the culture. Trade would provide security in the place of standing armies and allow Americans to avoid the international entanglements affiliated with militarism and treaties. "War is not the best engine for us to resort to, nature has given us one *in our commerce*, which, if properly managed, will be a better instrument for obliging the interested nations of

⁷⁶ Ibid, pg 87-88.

Europe to treat us with justice.”⁷⁷ As expressed by Jefferson, this view suggests that commerce is the key to international security, not standing armies or navies. Is this a republican view, however, or something else?

On the other hand, commerce was viewed by the American intelligentsia (of which Jefferson was surely a member) as a source of corruption, due to the belief that commercial activity leads to luxury and vice. “I consider the class of artificers as the panders of vice and the instruments by which the liberties of a country are generally overturned.”⁷⁸ Wood describes in detail what the source of vice was and the threat it represented to republican society:

“The obsessive term was luxury, both a cause and a symptom of social sickness. This luxury, not mere wealth but that 'dull animal enjoyment' which left 'minds stupefied, and bodies enervated, by wallowing for ever in one continual puddle of voluptuousness,' was what corrupted a society: the love of refinement, the desire for distinction and elegance eventually weakened a people and left them soft and effeminate, dissipated cowards, unfit and undeserving to serve the state.”⁷⁹

Wood identifies several characteristics of the ideal American republican: strength, humility, masculinity and courage. Beyond these classical republican themes lies another, possible more important, threat to the polity that luxury represents: luxuries breed separation between the people. This is accomplished through envy and greed, both of which attack the unity that supports a stable political culture. Are greed and envy the natural consequences of liberal commercialism? Not when the duties to society that individuals owe as a price of membership in the political culture is kept in balance with the individualism that lies at the heart of American and English liberal philosophy. Revolutionary-era American political philosophy kept these values in balance to ensure

⁷⁷ Thomas Jefferson, Writings, Pg 1045.

⁷⁸ Ibid, pg 818.

⁷⁹ Gordon S Wood, TheCreationoftheAmericanRepublic1776-1787, pg 52.

that liberty was secured for both the individual and the mass of individuals together – that is, individual rights and the stability of the culture were both highly valued. Keeping these values in balance required that citizens possess temperance and moderation in addressing personal wants; excess leads to the damaging of the personal character.

When these values fall out of balance (when personal temperance and moderation are forsaken) the result can be the dissolution of social cohesion. The lack of a binding agent in the liberal culture comes from the absence of a unifying moral foundation. Michael Sandel illustrates this problem concisely when he describes the liberal culture as being a neutral arbiter on all questions of morality. “A procedural republic cannot contain the moral energies of a vital democratic life. It creates a moral void that opens the way for narrow, intolerant moralisms. And it fails to cultivate the qualities of character that equip citizens to share in self-rule.”⁸⁰ The liberal culture, especially the American variety, sees government as neutral in questions of moral importance, leaving those concerns strictly in the private sphere. When agents of the government attempt to enter the moral debate on any issue of ethical concern, the usual response from the public is a heated one, which reflects the discomfort liberals have of government entering the private sphere. This is most easily seen in the debates surrounding abortion, gay rights, religious tolerance and other areas of intensely private concern.

The procedural republic, as Sandel termed it, is one “which views democratic processes as a set of rules by which public decisions are negotiated, without regard to the relative merits of competing values and world views that undergird alternative courses of action. This procedural definition of of the liberal state contrasts strongly....with earlier

⁸⁰ Michael Sandel, Democracy's Discontent, Page 24 (Cambridge: Massachusetts 2001).

eighteenth and nineteenth century public philosophies which place strong emphasis on connections between the cultivation of personal virtues and the capacity for self-governance.”⁸¹ This contrast is most explicitly seen in the contrast between Jefferson's America and the modern American political culture. Today few, if any public virtues are cultivated amongst citizens; indeed, the notion of duties to society are noticeably absent from the political discourse today.

Should the government be an agent for moral education in a democratic republic? That is a question that will be addressed in the following chapter. For now, this examination turns to the darker side of liberalism: greed. Greed is clearly antithetical to a concept of civic virtue that is defined by the practice of a political people putting aside personal needs and wants in favor of the health of the body politic.

Greed in America

“Greed, for lack of a better word, is good. Greed is right. Greed works. Greed clarifies, cuts through, and captures, the essence of the evolutionary spirit. Greed, in all of its forms; greed for life, for money, for love, knowledge, has marked the upward surge of mankind and greed, you mark my words, will not only save Teldar Paper, but that other malfunctioning corporation called the U.S.A.” – Gordon Gekko, WallStreet (1987)

If there is any truth to my assertion that liberal philosophy envisions individuals as choice making commercial rights bearing beings, then the problem liberal philosophy leaves the society with is really two-fold: first, envisioning persons as commercial actors promotes competition as a cultural value that leaves individuals less likely to work in concert with one another; second, as a moral philosophy, liberalism promotes the sanctity of the individual, leaving persons feeling as if they owe no duties to society, perhaps other than the duty of not wasting money and financial opportunity. In concert, these

⁸¹ Thomas Ehlrich, CivicResponsibilityandHigherEducation, Page 105 (Westport, Connecticut 2001).

values can promote greed and selfishness that undermines the ties that bind society together. When the balance between republican and liberal moral values is lost, then the key American values of temperance and moderation are lost as well; without these values, greed is one of the consequences that can lead to social fragmentation.

Does liberalism promote a real concept of society? The easy answer would be to say that liberal philosophy does not promote society in any meaningful way; however, competition and individualism both play an important role in society: a society is composed of individuals, who all have roles to play in society; respecting the individual through the artifact of rights doctrine is a useful means of better ensuring that the state and other actors do not impede persons from playing their part. Rights and individual autonomy are the expression of those areas of life that the state and other actors cannot intrude upon without special reason. Competition can be a productive value when competition promotes the needs or values of the polity, which can be done in any number of ways.

The problem with American society's focus on liberal values of commerce and individual autonomy is that the primacy of the individual has become too large a focus for political life in America. In focusing on the individual, all sense of civic duty has been lost and, in the process, the Aristotelian and Jeffersonian values of moderation and temperance have also been lost. When persons look to themselves as the most valued unit in society, all sense of the needs of all members of society are lost as a consequence. In placing ourselves as the central focus of society, moderation and temperance are lost, with extremism left in its stead. These lost values force individuals to recognize that what is in the interest of the individual actor may not be in the interests of the society as a

whole; the person possessing the virtues of moderation and temperance would sacrifice personal gain for the betterment of the political whole.

Greed enters into the philosophical equation when all sense of duty to others and responsibility is lost in self-love and aggrandizement gone awry. Jefferson recognized the threat this could play for the larger society if persons conceived liberty to mean surrendering to their passions and became driven by acquisitive desires. As Jefferson scholar Jean Yarbrough describes Jefferson's view on this issue, "The natural right to liberty is not simply reducible to the acquisitive desires....is also clear from Jefferson's repeated warnings that the rising tide of prosperity would sap the springs of republican virtue....Jefferson worried that the American preoccupation with making money would drain the public realm of its vital spirit and energy."⁸² While Jefferson would defend the right of persons to act commercially, his concern with personal greed trumping the public good lent Jefferson's philosophy a distinctive difference from that of Locke's view of the private person.

Still, the concept of greed is recognized by liberal scholars as being a threat to the common good. Locke, in describing natural (that is, non durable) goods, sets limits to the application of wealth. These limits are essentially that persons are limited to accumulating what they can use without creating waste. Locke goes on to say that the creation of durable goods such as money allows for individuals to accumulate what they can without fear of spoilage and waste, the concept of limiting wealth to what a person can reasonably be expected to use is an intriguing one⁸³. If Locke's position of limiting

⁸² Jean M Yarbrough, Thomas Jefferson and the Character of a Free People, Page 12 (Lawrence: Kansas 1998).

⁸³ John Locke, Second Treatise of Government, Pg 290.

wealth in this manner can be expanded upon, then it can be said that accumulating durable wealth beyond what an individual can personally use can also be wasteful, as the surplus wealth can be better used to advance the needs of society. Indeed, this is often the starting point in some liberal and democratic socialist societies that pursue redistributive policies. In America, there is a general distrust of such policies among the general public, due perhaps to the belief that merit and labor ought to be rewarded to the fullest potential possible. Still, as a thought, Locke's position of limiting wealth is an intriguing one that opens the doors for limiting the influence of greed in liberal culture.

Should commercial activity be equated with liberalism? Republican philosophy envisions commercial activity as a natural part of the social order, with government serving to create a stable environment where commercial activity can be sustained. Given that both republican and liberal theory see commercial activity as important to the political health of the political culture, what is it that makes liberalism especially connected with commerce? In the opening pages of TheEndofLiberalism, American political scientist Theodore Lowi describes the connection between capitalism and the liberal culture:

“Capitalism is an ideology because it is a source of principles and a means of justifying behavior; that is, it is something Americans believe in. It is a liberal ideology because it has always participated in positive attitudes toward progress, individualism, rationality, and nationalism. It is capitalism because its foundation is a capitalistic economic theory and because its standards of legitimacy are capitalistic.”⁸⁴

Liberalism is, at the heart of the philosophy, characterized by the features of capitalism: both capitalism and liberalism espouse a belief in an equal opportunity ethic, free from the influence of outside actors (specifically the tyranny of the state); both liberalism and

⁸⁴ Theodore Lowi, TheEndofLiberalism:Ideology,Policy,andtheCrisisofPublicAuthority, Pg 3 (New York: New York 1969).

capitalism defend the value of the individual actor as being left to the judgment of other actors based solely on the merits and successes of the individual, not on the influence the individual has on powerful actors. Political activity is often described of in capitalist language (e.g. “the marketplace of ideas”).

The difference between liberalism and capitalism is primarily that capitalism is a behavior that people engage in, whereas liberalism is the philosophy that influences the public consciousness. Despite that relatively minor difference, capitalism has left an undeniable philosophical influence on the American culture. As such, characterizing the liberal vision of persons as commercially active individuals is a fair assessment to make. How, then, does the liberal view community and shared culture? More specifically, how does liberal culture envision the duties of persons to the political culture?

Liberal thinkers like John Stewart Mill state that the primary political virtue of liberalism is that it frees the people from political participation if the individual chooses not to be concerned themselves with politics; Mill came from a different liberal philosophy than men like Jefferson were familiar with, that of utilitarianism. Still, Mill's concept of liberty is enlightening for understanding modern liberal conceptions of liberty. “The sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their number, is self-protection. That the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not sufficient warrant. He cannot rightfully be compelled to do or forbear because it will be better for him to do so, because it will make him happier, because, in the opinion of others, to do so would be wise, or even right...*The only part of the conduct*

of anyone, for which he is amenable to society, is that which concerns others. In the part which merely concerns him, his independence is, of right, absolute. Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign(Emphasis added).⁸⁵ Mill's statement clearly defines the proper sphere of concern for the individual is with their own interests. This includes freedom from political considerations if politics is of no concern for the individual. When the individual is the absolute sovereign over himself, the only duty that the individual can be compelled to obey is the rule of law, which protects every individual from the predations of others. Beyond this, according to Mill's statement, individuals have few duties to society. True liberty means liberty to participate if the individual chooses to do so.

What does the liberal envision when looking at the concept of community?

Admittedly, not much is mentioned by early liberals on community. This would be problematic if the argument being made was that America was a liberal nation during the revolutionary period. Instead of this claim being made, theorist Richard Dagger has defined American philosophy as being both republican and liberal in composition⁸⁶. Being an individualist philosophy, liberalism provides a minimal basis for moral duties between persons that are required for community to be possible. For instance, the respect for property rights that Locke defines in his Second Treatise of Government are required for the most basic elements of community to be possible: if persons do not respect the labor and possessions of others then peaceful coexistence is simply not possible. To

⁸⁵ John Stewart Mill, *On Liberty*. Oxford University. pp.21–22 (Oxford: UK) 1989.

⁸⁶ Dagger, Richard. "Republican Virtue, Liberal Freedom, and the Problem of Civic Service" *Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Boston Marriott Copley Place, Sheraton Boston & Hynes Convention Center, Boston, Massachusetts, Aug 28, 2002*
http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p64996_index.htm

paraphrase Locke, when property rights are not respected then those in conflict return to a state of war. Liberal respect for the rights of others sets the stage for greater personal duties to be possible.

Temperance and moderation allow republican society to function with the understanding of liberal individualism that Locke and Mill promoted. This is evident through Locke's denunciation of accumulating natural wealth beyond what was possible for an individual person to use, as well as through the Mill's defense of the individual as being a choice making actor who is sovereign over himself. Temperance and moderation in action in a commercial society allows for wealth to be accumulated without creating the divisions in society that Marx and other critics of liberal capitalism leveled at liberal society. This is not to suggest that such divisions in society do not exist, nor is it meant to suggest that wealth has not been concentrated in the United States that may pose a threat to social stability. Rather, the evidence of the accumulation of wealth in the contemporary United States may point to a loss of temperance and moderation in the culture.

Historically, temperance has come to be equated with the alcohol prohibition movement. Jefferson meant something more by temperance. Temperance for Jefferson meant abstaining from gluttonous behavior, whether it was indulging in drink or food, or other of the bodily pleasures. Leading an intemperate life means indulging in the passions and desires of the body with little restraint. This is dangerous for Jefferson because seeking pleasure leads not only to pleasure but often to pain⁸⁷. Pain is not merely a personal experience for Jefferson; rather, using Lockean logic, intemperate behavior is wasting materials that can be used either in the future or by others to meet the needs of

⁸⁷ Thomas Jefferson, TheEssentialThomasJefferson, Pg 41 (New York: New York 1994).

society. This use of Locke with Jefferson reveals the merging of republican social values and liberal individualism into a uniquely American philosophy.

Jefferson's temperance as an American value is a part of his vision of Americans as yeoman citizens. The agrarian lifestyle is one defined as laborious, leaving little time or desire for intemperate behavior. Indeed, intemperate behavior puts at risk the lifestyle of the agrarian citizen in that the life of the farmer requires conservation of resources for future use. But beyond that, temperance for Jefferson represents the habits that are particular to the American character, allowing for success in maintaining a republican system of government in a liberal polity. History had shown large republican states were prone to the corruption, with decay into despotism (such was the case of the English republican movement of the mid-17th century, resulting in the Cromwell dictatorship).

Moderation, on the other hand, meant for Jefferson adhering to proper (meaning republican and liberal) political principles. This is the source of much of Jefferson's distrust of the politics of Alexander Hamilton, whom Jefferson believed to be promoting programs that undermined American republicanism. "His (Hamilton's) system flowed from principles adverse to liberty, and was calculated to undermine and demolish the republic, by creating an influence of his department over the members of the legislature."⁸⁸ Jefferson's main charge was that Hamilton promoted monarchism in the United States by currying favor with England, and worse, by using the influence of the US Treasury to corrupt members of Congress by lobbying those members into voting for legislation that was in the personal interests of the representatives and of Hamilton, and not in the interests of the people. Monarchism was the primary evil for Jefferson,

⁸⁸ Thomas Jefferson, *Writings*, Pg 993.

representing an ideology that was extreme and in stark contrast to the liberties protected in the American republic.⁸⁹

In many ways, moderation as a value is still alive and well in the United States today. According to a Gallup poll conducted in 2008, 35% of the US population self-identify as politically moderate.⁹⁰ The poll gave no clue as to what being a moderate actually means, though I would identify political moderation as not being ideologically aligned with either the left or right of American politics; rather, moderation recognizes that good ideas are not limited to one ideology or another. In the Jeffersonian sense, political moderation means not adhering to radical values but instead allowing reason and rationality to guide the political process. Moderation in this sense stands opposed to strict ideology and partisan politics. In this first Inaugural Address, Jefferson famously declared that all Americans were both Federalists and Republicans, reflecting that for political society to function, it is required that political faction either be avoided or for factions and parties to be secondary to the identification with the state.⁹¹ Moderation makes this possible in allowing for problem solving ideas to come from any source that is not considered to be radical.

Having examined liberal and republican political philosophy in detail, and the influence those philosophies had on Jefferson and the thinking of early Americans, this discourse will turn next to morality in the early American scheme. Understanding morality in America will enable an examination of the question of whether morality is a purely private function or a function of the state (or even of the government). In turn, this

⁸⁹ Ibid. pg 997

⁹⁰ <http://www.gallup.com/poll/120857/conservatives-single-largest-ideological-group.aspx>

⁹¹ Thomas Jefferson, *Writings*, pg 493.

will enable a discussion on methods for strengthening civic virtue in America.

Chapter 3: American Republican Morality

"All sober inquirers after truth, ancient and modern, pagan and Christian, have declared that the happiness of man, as well as his dignity, consists in virtue.....If there is a form of government, then, whose principle and foundation is virtue, will not every sober man acknowledge it better calculated to promote the general happiness than any other form?"⁹² – John Adams

The purpose of this chapter is to clarify what is meant by civic virtue in America by defining private virtue in America. Jefferson, as it will be demonstrated, expected Americans to act morally in private life, which would influence behavior in the public sphere.

Civic virtue is a reflection of private virtue influencing behavior in the public sphere. To better assess what civic virtue actually entails it is necessary to examine what virtue means in the American experience; virtue is tied inexorably to moral behavior. As this discourse has focused on Thomas Jefferson as a source of early American ideals, it is necessary to turn once again to Jefferson's ideas and writings to understand what American virtue means. Jefferson has written a great deal about moral virtue, either in explicit conversations on the topic of morality or in writings in reference to other topics. In addition, Jefferson's contemporaries will also serve as a source of moral philosophy, as well as the writings that influenced Jefferson's political thinking: that of Aristotle, Cicero, Locke, as well as others.

The Source of Jefferson's Moral Understanding

Much of Jefferson's moral education comes from Aristotle, Epicurean philosophy, Locke and the teachings of Jesus Christ.⁹³ This selection of moral influences on Jefferson

⁹² John Adams, ThoughtsonGovernment, (Indianapolis: Indiana 2003).

⁹³ Thomas Jefferson, Writings pp 1120-21;and TheEssentialThomasJefferson pp 41-44.

illustrates three important themes in American morality: the influence of the ancients on the early Americans, the presence of early liberal values, as well as the undeniable enduring roots of Christianity in the American experience. Each of these areas will be examined in turn, beginning with Aristotle and Epicurean philosophy.

Aristotelian Morality

“Moral excellence comes about as a result of habit.”⁹⁴ – Aristotle

In various letters written to Thomas Jefferson Randolph (Jefferson's grandson) and others, Jefferson listed the materials that he thought proper to a well-rounded philosophical, political and legal education. Amongst the materials Jefferson suggested to his letter recipients was Aristotle's NichomacheanEthics, a classic tract of ancient morality. To better understand virtue and Jefferson's understanding of the concept, it is necessary to briefly examine Aristotle's conception of virtue, which he describes in NichomacheanEthics; by examining Aristotle's definition of the virtuous person we can gain a better understanding of Thomas Jefferson's ideal person and how this idealization underscores Jeffersonian republican theories of the good citizen. In turn, this will enable a direct means of addressing the central questions at hand: what are the characteristics of American morality and what can the state do to support a moral populace?

According to Aristotle, there are two kinds of virtue: moral and intellectual. Intellectual virtue is the product of education and socialization, while moral virtue is the product of habit. This suggests that virtue can be both a natural attribute of persons and a learned one, which provides for the basis of the argument: if virtue does not exist naturally then it can be recovered through training and socialization. This, in turn,

⁹⁴ Aristotle, NichomacheanEthics, Pg 22 (Charleston: South Carolina 2009).

suggests that morality can be learned because of a statement that Aristotle makes that rings of utilitarianism – that people are driven towards pleasure and away from pain. Intellectual virtue informs our acts where moral virtue fails because intellectual processes are based on reason, which allows persons possessing the faculties of reason to understand the consequences of their actions and to change the behavior they are engaged in. Intellectual virtue can support moral virtue in this way.⁹⁵

The virtuous person is moderate in their actions and thoughts, seeking the middle position between excess and abstinence in all areas of life. “....virtue is more exact than any art....virtue must have the quality of aiming at the intermediate. I mean moral virtue; for it is this that is concerned with passions and actions, and in these there is excess, defect, and the intermediate” Virtue is concerned, Aristotle says, “towards the right people, with the right motive, and in the right way, is what is both intermediate and best....”⁹⁶ At the heart of moral virtue are the choices that persons make, which should aim towards the median of possible actions.

Moderation is important because the extremes are the subject of passions. Persons who seek extremity are ruled by their passions and not subject to rational self control. The extreme-passion driven person is a danger to themselves and others around them as well. “Hence also the people at the extremes push the intermediate man each over to the other, and the brave man is called rash by the coward, cowardly by the rash man, and correspondingly in other case.”⁹⁷ Extreme characters push the moderates towards the other extreme; for example, a person with an extremely cavalier attitude in regards to

⁹⁵ Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, pg 27.

⁹⁶ Ibid, page 28.

⁹⁷ Ibid, page 32.

controlling or exercising their sexual appetites may serve as an example to others as a reason to behave in the other extreme example – total abstinence, which is not an intermediate or moderate position according to the moral virtue calculus of Aristotle.

Of the two extremes that persons are drawn towards, Aristotle states that persons are drawn more towards pleasure than abstinence. This is to be guarded against more than painful experiences, because human beings are biased towards pleasurable experiences and will not view them impartially. This is where Aristotle makes a clean break from utilitarian philosophy, which argues that the state is concerned with the overall happiness or pleasure of society; Aristotle makes the argument that society, comprised ideally of virtuous persons, will not gravitate towards the extremes of any experience but will instead let reason be guide for actions.⁹⁸

Moderation is key to a virtuous society because moderation, like addressing political problems, requires discourse. Those who hold to an extreme position on any issue will not be willing to deliberate with others with whom they disagree or even be willing to compromise. Deliberation is one of the foundations to understanding virtue in the Aristotelian sense because a free and just society requires all citizens to come together to solve common problems that plague the polity. Extreme positions poison the deliberation process, making it all but impossible for divergent viewpoints to meet and address the problems that are the stuff of politics. In this sense, extremism or ideological positions are a problem that undermines the just state.

In a sense, deliberation is important to political stability and virtue because the political process requires that actors make choices. In the Aristotelian sense, there is no

⁹⁸ Ibid, page 35-38, specifically Aristotle describes virtue as possessing the traits commonly associated with reason.

such action as 'uninformed' choice; choices are voluntary only if ignorance of the subject that persons must make choices about is banished. Choice involves “a rational principle and thought,” according to Aristotle. As persons are creatures of actions, “deliberation is about the things to be done by the agent himself, and actions are for the sake of things other than themselves.”⁹⁹ Deliberation, then, is concerned with determining the proper goals of the polity and how the polity is to reach them. Because of this, deliberation requires compromise between all parties involved. Those who hold to extreme positions are unlikely to compromise on issues that are ideologically dear to them.

Virtue is concerned with action because choice is concerned with the means to attaining goals. It is because of this that virtue is something that is of our own choosing, as is vice. As will be discussed later when the subject of education is examined, persons must possess the knowledge of what is or is not virtuous behavior so that choices can be better informed. The purpose of this choice-making is to determine what political goals the polity must pursue in order to meet the needs of society. In turn, determining what the needs of society are can itself be a result of deliberation, which can be adversely affected by those who hold extreme ideologically driven positions. In short, the deliberative process that a political culture undertakes will determine what the future of the polity will be. For this reason, it is essential to the process that citizens possess virtue.

Virtue is a concept that surrounds human action. As such, virtues are those values and concepts that support the better exercise of valued actions in society. As Alasdair MacIntyre states in *After Virtue*:

“...the virtues will find their place as those qualities the possession and exercise of which generally tend to success in this enterprise and the vices likewise as the qualities which

⁹⁹ Ibid., page 41.

tend to failure. Each human life will then embody a story whose shape and form will depend upon what is counted as a harm and danger upon how success and failure, progress and its opposite, are understood and evaluated.”¹⁰⁰

Both private and public virtue are easily understood in this context: private virtue is the possession of those qualities that lead to the individual person being successful in achieving the qualities that make them a complete person, the key to which are temperance and moderation; public virtue is the exercising of temperance and moderation for the public good, regardless of whether or not the public good conflicts with personal interest.

In Aristotelian philosophy, the concept of the good person and the good citizen are centrally linked to one another. This is because morality is contextual to social norms. Virtues are given to us by of cultural traditions. Social norms are understood as the way society sets the rules that guide the narrative of social life. Society adopts a standard for the virtues it deems needed to maintain the proper life in order to maintain the cultural status quo. Society forges persons in order to maintain the polity in a recognizable form from generation to generation.¹⁰¹

This brings into discourse the concept of tradition. Jefferson understood the Revolution as being fought to preserve the traditions that Americans held to as British subjects. The purpose was not to eliminate the cultural ties to Britain, but rather to preserve the traditions of the Whig histories. In “A Summary View of the Rights of British America,” Jefferson, in Lockean fashion, lists the crimes perpetrated by the king of England against the people of America, including the establishment of unnatural aristocratic institutions in the colonies:

¹⁰⁰ MacIntyre, Alasdair, *AfterVirtue*, Page 144 (Notre Dame: Indiana 2007).

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

“Accordingly, that country, which had been acquired by the lives, the labors, and the fortunes, of individual adventurers, was by these princes, at several times, parted out and distributed among the favorites and followers of their fortunes, and, by an assumed right of the crown alone, were erected into distinct and independent governments; a measure which it is believed his majesty's prudence and understanding would prevent him from imitating at this day, as no exercise of such a power, of dividing and dismembering a country, has ever occurred in his majesty's realm of England, through now of very ancient standing.....”¹⁰²

This “dismembering” of established countries violated the social norms and traditions of England, an act of which is a violation of the basic moral rights of the people. This may reflect the influence of Machiavelli on Jefferson and his contemporaries through the principle of returning to first principles – the traditional values that give a society meaning.¹⁰³

In further illustrating the influence of Aristotle on Jefferson, it is worth reiterating that temperance and moderation are keys to understanding Aristotelian virtue, which itself leads to asking what is to be expected of a citizen in the ideal state? By this I don't mean to ask what kinds of sacrifices are citizens to make (that will be addressed later); rather, the question being posed is what will the virtuous citizen do that marks them as being virtuous? In Aristotelian philosophy, virtue is important in the polity because citizens could fail in the role they play in the community. The citizen could be deficient in the virtues that make negligible the contributions they otherwise make, or the citizen could fail the community by breaking the laws the community has established. According to MacIntyre, both of these concepts are closely linked because both types of failure represent injurious acts committed against the political community. Failing to meet your responsibilities is failing to recognize and respect what is due to others in favor of

¹⁰² Thomas Jefferson, Writings, Pg 109.

¹⁰³ Jean M Yarbrough, AmericanVirtues, Pg 112.

addressing personal wants and desires; violating the laws of the polity represents a destruction of the “relationships which make common pursuit of the good possible.”¹⁰⁴This can render the entire community project as a meaningless exercise in the grand scheme of things. It is worth noting here that the very concept of a 'community project' is utterly alien to modern American life; yet in the early years of the republic, Americans were fully aware of the national project that was underway: proving that human beings are capable of self-governance. This national project was one that would be continuous, as self-governance was a concept that had to be rediscovered by each generation.¹⁰⁵ Americans would have great difficulty identifying a common project that the nation is engaged in at this time. Identifying a common national project today would be one method for strengthening civic virtue.

Giving to each person what is their due is core to the Aristotelian and republican theory of justice. Persons are due certain things not because they are human but because they are members of the community; they can only be members of the community if they display virtue through actions. This demands that law and morality be linked, not separated as some political leaders attempt to do in contemporary America. Justice requires that we act according to right reason – that is, persons must use judgment in acting in order to fulfill their duties and to know what their due is. The virtuous person will not demand more than the rules of justice require they receive. Again, this is an alien concept in contemporary America, as Aristotle's concept of justice is clearly based on elitist formulations rather than on egalitarian notions of equality before the law. In early America, while equality was a professed value, it is clear that equality was a concept that

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, page 152

¹⁰⁵ Thomas Jefferson, Writings, Pg 1395.

revolved around opportunity, not political participation, as property-requirements were widespread in order to access the vote. This may have been largely due to the recognition of the Framers that only those with a vested interest in society will exercise the proper virtues in determining how society ought to be governed. Admittedly the judgment of the Framers on whom should be voting was arbitrarily determined, as the examples of slavery and the servitude of women easily illustrate. Yet the Framers had correctly identified the core of the issue, which is that a community cannot be successfully governed by those who do not understand the complexities of society and governance. Only those who are virtuous are likely to possess the moderation and temperance required to govern society according to the interests of everyone, and not just the interest group or faction that currently has power. It is clear that the founders believed virtue to be on display in those who owned property, especially in a political culture where property was plentiful.¹⁰⁶

While Aristotle was greatly concerned with moderation and temperance as central to his thesis on virtuous persons, Cicero is concerned with real world application of virtue. Like with Aristotle, actions matter for Cicero, but to a greater degree; for Cicero, the chief concern is real world applicability of political theory. The most straightforward way of understanding Cicero's concern with applicability of political theory is to understand the context of Cicero's times and experiences. Unlike many other political theorists, Cicero was a statesman, elected Consul in Rome in 63 BC. As an elected official, Cicero had very little patience for idealist philosophies like those of Plato (idealist in the sense that Plato was concerned with the perfect state, when he states "...I

¹⁰⁶ Thomas Jefferson, Writings, Pg 751-754.

am particularly amazed by this feature of the philosopher's argument, that people who admit their incapacity for steering in calm weather – because they have never learned how or wanted to know – these same people offer to take the helm at in the greatest storms.”¹⁰⁷ Philosophers are not fit to rule, under Cicero's conception of leadership, unless they have had real world experience. The Platonic 'Philosopher-King' would be impracticable due to the strict separation of the classes that Plato endorses.

This is not to suggest that Cicero espoused an egalitarian conception of justice, rights or representation. Rather, Cicero recognizes the need for rulers to understand the dynamics of the real world, and not just amorphous concepts of morality and utopian states. In this context, virtue is action and knowledge based on experience. “Furthermore, virtue is not some kind of knowledge to be possessed without using it.virtue consists entirely in its employment; moreover, its most important employment is the governance of states and the accomplishment in deeds rather than words of things that philosophers talk about in their corners.”¹⁰⁸ Cicero is well aware that people are judged by their deeds, not by their words.

Regardless, Cicero suggests that studying real world politics will better enable rulers to direct the ship of state. “At this point you will see the political circle turning; you should learn to recognize its natural motion and circuit from the very beginning. This is the essential element of civic prudence: to see the paths and turns of commonwealths, so that when you know in what direction any action tends, you can hold it back or anticipate it (emphasis added).”¹⁰⁹ The purpose of studying politics is to create a stable polity and

¹⁰⁷ Cicero, *On the Commonwealth*, Section 10, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999).

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, Section 45.

to protect it from threats that would destroy it.

It is clear that Cicero is concerned with leaders possessing the wisdom to properly lead the state. In this regard, Cicero's republicanism possessed a similar elitist element that Plato's Philosopher King represented, or that statements made by Aristotle in *The Politics* where he clearly states that not everyone possesses the virtue to rule.¹¹⁰ A common theme throughout republican political philosophy is the concept of qualified citizenship. For Aristotle, citizenship could be restricted to those whom possess the proper virtues; amongst those who did not possess the proper virtue for citizenship and the right to rule were the slave, freemen and artisan classes because their existence depends on other persons. It can be said that while individualism is not an overt theme in republican thought, the virtuous person is independent of the influence of those who would attempt to steer their participation in the discourse process towards ends other than those of the broad society.¹¹¹

Elitism is not unique to ancient republican philosophy; the concept of virtuous persons assumes that those who possess virtue are better than those who lack it. This assumption speaks to an enduring concept of some persons being better fit to rule than others, which raises questions about the ideal of the citizen in a democratic society. One question that is raised is whether or not citizens have a duty that goes beyond the personal realm that extends to the greater society. Another question is whether society can force individuals to meet the duties that society deems persons to have to society; this question will be explored in detail in Chapter 3.

Duty

¹¹⁰ Aristotle, *The Politics*, Page 106 (Mineola: New York 2000).

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, page 110

If virtue is based on action, as Aristotle says it is, then action can be understood in meeting our duties to ourselves and to the greater society. Voluntary actions taken by persons (that is, those that are not done free from coercion) are often praised by persons because they often require a personal sacrifice to accomplish. Aristotle clarifies the difference between voluntary and involuntary action by differentiating them through the action of choice: “Now the man acts voluntarily; for the principle that moves the instrumental parts of the body in such actions is in him, and the things of which the moving principle is in a man himself are in his power to do or not to do.”¹¹² Choice is central to exercising virtue, if virtue requires that we honor duties that we have to ourselves and towards others.

Beginning with duties that we have to ourselves, Aristotle theorizes that the principle duty that persons have to themselves is to pursue happiness. The problem of happiness concerns itself with achieving the human good, which requires in virtually every definition that we live well. Happiness does not necessarily mean to pursue pleasure or other momentary experiences; rather, Aristotle defines happiness as being related to the quality of whole human life. “For there is required, as we said, not only complete virtue but also a complete life, since many changes occur in life, and all manner of chances, and the most prosperous may fall into great misfortunes in old age.....”¹¹³ As Aristotle understands happiness, the concept is not concerned with momentary feelings but with the total of life's experiences, which is why the young cannot be happy, according to Aristotle, because they lack the requisite experience to understand what happiness is. The happy life is a life of work and attending to serious matters, and as

¹¹² Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, Page 35.

¹¹³ Ibid,

such, the happy person will be that person who lives in accordance with their talents and abilities.

Happiness is important in the American experience. Jefferson understood the importance of happiness in the Aristotelian sense when he penned the Declaration of Independence. The draft of that document that Jefferson submitted to the Continental Congress for revision is telling in its use of happiness. “We hold these truths to be sacred and undeniable, that all men are created equal and independent; that from equal creation they derive in rights inherit and inalienable among which are the preservation of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”¹¹⁴ To pursue happiness is not to pursue momentary pleasures, for this would be to live a life of indolence and intemperance. Rather, by happiness Jefferson means that people possess a natural right to pursue the goals of life which will make them a complete person. It was these objectives that the colonists were protesting; the crown prevented the ability of British-Americans from living a complete life by denying them representation, imposing taxes without their consent, and in general denying them the rights they possessed as British subjects. In short, in the Jeffersonian scheme, British-Americans had become less than complete persons due to the tyranny of parliament.

The English Parliament had, through legislation such as the Stamp Act and other forms of taxation prevented the ability of the colonists to achieve their full potential. In the Aristotelian sense, the highest virtue is reaching your full potential; this is because everything and everyone has a purpose. All persons possess this purpose or telos; a philosophically Aristotelian definition of tyranny would have the tyrannical state

¹¹⁴ Thomas Jefferson, Jefferson:PublicandPrivatePapers, page 71.

preventing the citizens from achieving their potential. In the Jeffersonian sense, the colonists complete potential as human beings had been obstructed by a tyrannical government by preventing the colonists from living as full, commercial persons. As this examination shifts to discuss the influence of liberalism on Jefferson and the early American's political theory, commerce and monetary concerns will become centrally important to understanding American notions of civic virtue.

Epicurean Philosophy and the Gospels

“Nothing is enough for a man for whom enough is too little.”¹¹⁵ – Epicurus
“For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.”¹¹⁶-- Jesus Christ

Jefferson describes himself as an Epicurean. What does this entail? Sadly, the writings of Epicurus have been reduced to a collection of aphorisms and letters; this seemingly short body of work did have an impact on Christianity throughout the ages.¹¹⁷ More importantly, Epicurean philosophy had a profound impact on Jefferson's morality. “I consider the genuine (not the imputed) doctrines of Epicurus as containing everything rational in moral philosophy which Greece and Rome have left us.”¹¹⁸ According to Yarbrough, Jefferson began a project late in life that, had it been completed, would have combined the duty that we have to others as persons found in the Gospels with the duties we have to ourselves, found in Epicurus, to create “a comprehensive guide for the

¹¹⁵ Norman De Witt, St.PaulandEpicurus, Pg 36 (Minneapolis: Minnesota 1999).

¹¹⁶ The Bible (King James Edition). Matthew 25:35

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Thomas Jefferson, Writings, Pg 1430.

perfection of the American character and lay the foundation for true happiness.”¹¹⁹

The philosophy of Epicurus was primarily concerned with happiness. Happiness was defined as freedom from pain and anxiety, while seeking moderate amounts of pleasure. Pleasure was not limited to the physical kind but could include pleasure from socializing with friends and gaining the respect of others. The principle method for primary purpose of philosophy was to heal the soul; philosophy that failed to heal the soul was as worthless as medicine that fails to cure ailments.¹²⁰ Jefferson rejected the notion that Epicurean philosophy was one that endorsed hedonism (a rejection of what Jefferson called Cicero's deliberate distortions of Epicurean philosophy¹²¹) largely due to Jefferson's moral ontology, which will be explored in greater detail shortly.

If Epicurean philosophy was primarily concerned with duties to the self, then the Gospels are primarily concerned with the duties we have as persons to one another. The influence of Christian philosophy on Jefferson is important to properly contextualize: while Jefferson calls himself a Christian in several places (to be explored shortly), he was far from what would fit the definition of a Christian today. Jefferson had little positive to say concerning the established churches of that faith, calling them Platonists:

“I, too, have made a wee-little book from the same materials (the Gospels), which I call the Philosophy of Jesus; it is a paradigm of his doctrines, made by cutting the texts out of the book, and arranging them on the pages of a blank book....a more beautiful or precious morsel of ethics I have never seen; it is a document in proof that I am a real Christian, that is to say, a disciple of the doctrines of Jesus, very different from the Platonists, who call me infidel and themselves Christians and preachers of the gospel, while they draw all their characteristic dogmas from what its author never said nor saw.”¹²²

¹¹⁹ Jean M Yarbrough, *American Virtues*, Pg 154.

¹²⁰ David Konstan, *Phronesis*, pg 269–78 (Las Vegas, Nevada 2008).

¹²¹ Jean M Yarbrough, *American Virtues*, Pg 154.

¹²² Thomas Jefferson, *Writings*, Pg 1373.

Jefferson was speaking of his own book that posterity has dubbed The Jefferson Bible, a collection of the gospels of Jesus Christ that are free of mysticism, supernatural occurrences, and those stories that Jefferson believed to have been not the work of Christ but rather fictions created by his followers and those who came later.¹²³ The work is one of Christian philosophy as opposed to theology, for its purpose is to give to the reader rules to live by in an Epicurean sense: free from the fear of death and belief in an afterlife that amounted to mysticism in Jefferson's understanding. These moral lessons included declarations of reverence for the poor, the sick, mourners, the hungry, peacemakers, the virtuous, and the followers of Christ.¹²⁴

The Christian philosophy served to strengthen the moral duties that persons have to each other by tying them to the religious values of the society that Jefferson sought to influence the development of. But more than that, Jefferson treated the life and teachings of Christ in a similar esteem as he did Aristotle, Epicurus, and Cicero: one based upon reason as an enlightened philosopher, not the son of God. Much has been said and written on Jefferson's Deism; but Jefferson was a Christian of a different kind, not publicly espousing the divine origins of Jesus but instead proclaiming the teachings of Christ to be the most fundamental aspect of that faith. In that manner Jefferson was a Christian, and his Christianity played a key role in linking the philosophies of the ancient thinkers with that of the prevailing religion in the United States during his lifetime.

The Morality of John Locke and the early Liberals

“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

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Jefferson Bible. Chapter 2:1-12

have an unreasonable Law.”¹²⁵ – John Locke

For Locke, reason was not only a dictate of intelligent thought; reason was also a dictate of God. Understanding the moral implications of reason sheds light on the sanctity of government in Locke and the duty persons have to remove government when it has become corrupted and to re-establish government in accordance with man's natural rights. Locke's claims of natural rights are not merely utilitarian claims that allow a society to be governed in such a way that maximizes freedom. Rather, natural rights philosophy is one that makes moral claims, supported by the Christian deity, for how the world is to be governed. These natural rights are the rights to life, liberty, and property: “Reason, which is that Law,” Locke declared, “teaches all Mankind, who would but consult it, that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his Life, Health, Liberty, or Possessions.”¹²⁶ These rights were to be protected by government, which is appointed solely for that purpose: “have a standing Rule to live by, common to every one of that Society, and made by the Legislative Power erected in it; A Liberty to follow my own Will in all things, where the Rule prescribes not; and not to be subject to the inconstant, uncertain, unknown, Arbitrary Will of another Man.”¹²⁷ This morality, when fixed to reason, suggests a role for government in day to day affairs that is limited to those values expressed. If government is to protect the “Life, Health, Liberty, and Possessions” of persons, while keeping persons free from the “Arbitrary Will of another Man,” then clearly government must have a limited role in the lives of persons. No power possesses the potential for more arbitrary will than government.

¹²⁵ John Locke, “The Reasonableness of Christianity,” 1695.

¹²⁶ John Locke, Second Treatises of Government, pg 270-71.

¹²⁷ Ibid, pg 284.

Yet Locke defended the right of persons to reject established government and to erect new government in its place. “Whenever the Legislators endeavor to take away, and destroy the Property of the People, or to reduce them to Slavery under Arbitrary Power, they put themselves into a state of War with the People, who are thereupon absolved from any farther Obedience, and are left to the common Refuge, *which God hath provided for all Men*, against Force and Violence. Whensoever therefore the Legislative shall transgress this *fundamental Rule of Society*; and either by Ambition, Fear, Folly or Corruption, endeavor to grasp themselves, or put into the hands of any other an Absolute Power over the Lives, Liberties, and Estates of the People; By this breach of Trust they forfeit the Power, the People had put into their hands, for quite contrary ends, and it devolves to the People, who have a Right to resume their original Liberty (emphasis added).”¹²⁸ The right to revolution is a moral imperative, one that reason compels people to obey. If man is the property of God, then destroying the liberty that reason dictates that people are entitled to is a violation of morality. Revolution becomes an act, by the people, to restore the moral order of society.

American Morality

American morality, as defined by Jefferson, consists of a combination of the values of the ancient thinkers, Christian philosophy, and the early liberal writings of Locke. These values are most easily identified as: industry, self-reliance, frugality, self-restraint or control, modesty, temperance, fortitude, cheerfulness, civility, compassion, and respect for the property of other persons.¹²⁹ But these are not the only virtues Jefferson had in mind; Jefferson was also concerned with religious duty, not in the sense

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Jean M Yarbrough, American Virtues, pp 153-196.

that the government had the right to impose religious beliefs on the people, or even that Americans should be members of organized religious sects (Jefferson wasn't), but rather that Americans should recognize certain duties that are necessary for the survival and strength of a nation that was already religiously diverse as the United States was in Jefferson's day.

Yarbrough explores these religious duties in detail. The first of these duties is that of religious tolerance, necessary for several reasons, the first of which is due to religious truth being revealed to persons by revelation that is unique to each person. Coercion by the state in support or suppression of faith is not permissible. Additionally, faith must be uncoerced, or it fails to be faith by definition. When the state coerces the people into religious and moral adherence, the rulers are not interested in faith but in power. Jefferson, Yarbrough states, echoes Locke's claim that the only legitimate purpose of government is to protect the rights and property of the people; as such, promoting religion fails the test of reason if reason dictates that these rights are the moral limitations of government.¹³⁰

Jefferson transformed the Christian ethic of hope in an afterlife into hope for the success of the republican experiment.¹³¹ As the first national project, belief by the people in the philosophy that drove the revolution was absolutely essential. This hope was not only a hope for the success of the republican experiment in self-governance, but the American faith in the future. In a letter to John Adams written late in life, Jefferson tells Adams that he prefers the dreams of the future to nostalgia for the past.¹³² This is in part a

¹³⁰ Ibid.,pg 186-187

¹³¹ Ibid, pg 193

¹³² Thomas Jefferson, TheAdams-JeffersonLetters, Pg 485.

reflection of the hope that Jefferson and the other revolutionary leaders had for America, but more importantly, it is a reflection of the Jefferson's moral belief in personal responsibility. Each generation has a responsibility to look after its own affairs and to manage them in such a manner that does not leave future generations inheriting the problems of the older generation. Jefferson himself governed under this creed as president, paying the national debt without raising taxes by selling land to settlers in the western frontier. Jefferson had a reverence for future generations, which is reflected in both his actions as president as well as his written words, worth quoting at length here:

“The question whether one generation of men has a right to bind another, seems never to have been started on either side of the water. Yet it is a question of such consequences as not only to merit decision, but place also, among the fundamental principles of every government. The course of reflection in which we are immersed here on the elementary principles of society has presented this question to my mind; and that no such obligation can be transmitted I think very capable of proof. I set out on this ground which I suppose to be self evident, 'that the earth belongs in usufruct to the living,' and the dead have neither power nor rights over it. The portion occupied by an individual ceases to be his when himself ceases to be, and reverts to the society.”¹³³

This is a powerful moral statement by Jefferson, one that is the product of his complex moral theory. In it we see a case for personal responsibility that tempers the desires of persons to live beyond their means. In his statement, Jefferson goes on to make the radical claim that a person's descendants cannot be held responsible for the debts incurred by a person during their lifetime¹³⁴ – a sad irony, given that Jefferson's descendants faced paying the debts he incurred during his lifetime. As a statement of personal responsibility, we see the influence of Epicurus, in that paying off the debts of others harms the happiness of future generations; additionally, Aristotelian in the sense that virtuous persons will not be inclined to behavior that leads to the accumulation of

¹³³ Thomas Jefferson, Writings, Pg 959.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

debts and unwanted obligations. Locke tied life and property to one-another, suggesting that debts incurred by no fault of the new generation harm the lives and property of those to whom they are levied against. Christian morality ties this together, with Jesus as the centerpiece of a frugal philosophy that states that wealth and material goods are antithetical to the virtuous life.

Finally, can the state impose morality on persons? That would depend largely on what kind of morality that is being imposed. To be sure, governments have always imposed morality, regardless of how libertarian the government in question is: murder is prohibited everywhere in the world, as is theft and other crimes against persons. While these prohibitions may be done for utilitarian purposes (such as murder and thievery disrupting society), the reasons are usually couched in terms of self-evident morality. In America, the question is not of whether the government can impose morality on the people, but whether moral *duties* can be imposed on the people. That is the subject of the next chapter, which is itself a proposal to sustain and build civic virtue in the American polity. Civic virtue is a required component for any society, so my claim goes, and as such, the government has a duty itself to promote the continuation of civic virtue from one generation to the next. That discussion follows.

Chapter 4: A Series of Immodest Proposals

“As soon as public service ceases to be the chief business of the citizens, and they would rather serve with their money than with their persons, the State is not far from its fall.”¹³⁵
– Jean Jacques Rousseau

The purpose of this chapter is to propose a method of sustaining a virtuous polity, using the values of Thomas Jefferson as the inspiration for each facet of the policy that will be proposed. This policy includes an education aspect, a service aspect, and a taxation aspect. In sum, the proposal is designed to incorporate republican values of duty and service, liberal values of capitalism and choice, and the necessity that exists in any polity for the masses to be educated in a manner that best serves the declared interests and goals of society. The proposal can be made possible if society has reproduced the expressed republican and liberal values while sustaining the moral character that Jefferson believed defined the virtues of the citizens of this nation.

Thus far, my claim has been that the virtues that Thomas Jefferson identified as central to American public life are in constant need of sustenance by the political culture. The purpose of this chapter is to propose a method or methods that the political culture can take to support and sustain these values for the better of society at large. Jefferson was keenly aware of the need for political cultures to sustain the values that are relevant to the survival of the culture, calling the need for establishing a system of education designed for this explicit purpose a duty of all members of the generation of adults currently leading the political culture.¹³⁶

The approach to addressing this issue will rely on a three-tiered approach. The three methods that come to mind for sustaining civic and private virtue in the political

¹³⁵ Jean Jacques Rousseau, The Social Contract, Pg 126.

¹³⁶ Thomas Jefferson, Writings, Pg 1452.

culture are largely inspired from the philosophy and writings of Thomas Jefferson. The first method is to refocus the education system to focus not only on job skills needed for a commercialized culture, but rather on civics, citizenship, and the skills needed to maintain the polity (including commercial needs). The second method, and no less important for reclaiming virtue, would be to change how the American public envisions citizenship by denying automatic suffrage and citizenship upon reaching the age of majority; instead, in order to gain citizenship, civilians will need to perform a period of public service and, upon attaining citizenship, be required to pay a marginally higher tax rate than non-citizens. These proposals will be explored in greater detail, as well as how these proposed reforms will impact the polity.

Education

“A well-informed mind is the best security against the contagion of folly and of vice. The vacant mind is ever on the watch for relief, and ready to plunge into error, to escape from the languor of idleness.”¹³⁷ – Ann Radcliffe

The purpose of the educational reforms that I am proposing here are not to create an idealized conception of the individual that is a public person first and foremost; rather, the purpose is to provide the blueprint for an education system that will socialize persons into living a life balanced between the public and private realms of social interaction.

This education system is modeled, at least in part, on the system and purpose of Rousseau's education system in Emile, which was designed to create a citizen that is balanced between their passions and duties to others, and focused on the character of the citizen. My argument thus far has been that virtue, both public and private, is the core of understanding classical and Jeffersonian conceptions of the ideal citizen, and need to be

¹³⁷ Ann Radcliffe, TheMysteriofUdolpho, (New York: New York 2008).

sustained by the polity. Core to these values is moderation, which suggests a kind of intellectual balance between living by the dictates of right reason and our passions. It is in this vein that education should proceed in the American polity – persons should live in a balance between the interests of society and pursuit of private interests of wealth, pleasure and other private conceptions of the good life derived from rational self reflection. Education should provide the tools for persons to make an informed choice on how the individual ought to behave in relation to others.

A public education system serves several purposes. The first, and most obvious, is to teach future citizens the basic skills required to survive in the culture (mathematics, history, writing, etc). The second purpose, the purpose most neglected in the modern era, is to promote the ideals that society deems most important for future citizens to continue to have. Public education is essentially a socializing system that promotes the values of society, turning children into potential citizens through the reproduction of values and virtues. As Chief Justice Earl Warren wrote in *Brown v Board of Education*:

“Today, education is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments.

Compulsory school attendance laws and the great expenditures for education both demonstrate our recognition of the importance of education to our democratic society. It is required in the performance of our most basic public responsibilities, even service in the armed forces. It is the very foundation of good citizenship. Today it is a principal instrument in awakening the child to cultural values, in preparing him for later professional training, and in helping him to adjust normally to his environment. In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity, where the state has undertaken to provide it, is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms.”¹³⁸

One of the central values and virtues that society promotes through public education is the concept of justice. Aristotle defines justice as being composed of the

¹³⁸ BROWN v. BOARD OF EDUCATION, 347 U.S. 483 (1954)
<http://caselaw.lp.findlaw.com/scripts/getcase.pl?court=us&vol=347&invol=483>

distribution of the various honors of society and how interactions between persons are governed.¹³⁹ Awards, Aristotle tells us, should be given according to merit. Americans largely share this value: merit is often seen as the philosophical end-product of hard work, and should be rewarded:

“Further, this is plain from the fact that awards should be 'according to merit;' for all men agree that what is just in distribution must be according to merit in some sense, though they do not all specify the same sort of merit, but democrats identify it with the status of freeman, supporters of oligarchy with wealth (or with noble birth), and supporters of aristocracy with excellence.”¹⁴⁰

Aristocracy, in the Aristotelian sense, is excellence of character, found in those persons who display the kind of public virtue that was expounded upon early in this essay. In this sense, aristocracy has nothing to do with possession of hereditary rights or privileges based some arbitrary calculation of worth based on material wealth, but rather on a vision of the person that is complete, one who lives up to the demands of the culture and fulfills the demands of their role in society.

In the sense of Rousseau, fulfilling the demand of a personal role in society would mean attaining self realization while respecting the rights and boundaries of others. This balance is crucial, as it allows for the person to be able to participate in politics in a manner that not only meets the needs of the individual, but allows those who participate to do so in such a way that conforms to concepts of justice¹⁴¹.

Jefferson, in a letter to John Adams, described his conception of a natural aristocracy, which illustrates the point Rousseau was trying to make, and is worth quoting at length:

¹³⁹ Aristotle, NichomacheanEthics, Page 76

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, page 77

¹⁴¹ Jean Jeacques Rousseau, TheEmile, pp 450-471

“For I agree with you that there is a natural aristocracy among men. The grounds of this are virtue and talents....there is also an artificial aristocracy founded on wealth and birth, without either virtue or talents....the natural aristocracy I consider as the most precious gift of nature for the instruction, the trusts, and the government of society.....may we not even say that that form of government is the best which provides the most effectually for a pure selection of these natural aristoi into the offices of government?”¹⁴²

Jefferson's use of words and phrases like “natural gifts” and even “natural” itself can be misleading: the natural aristocracies are not necessarily born with the proper virtues for governance (that would make them little different from Jefferson's despised artificial aristocracy); instead, the natural aristocracies are the end-product of the socializing process of a public education system. The natural aristocracy are natural in that it is a precept of nature that man, as social animals, will be led by the most talented and virtuous individuals from amongst them. In Emile, Rousseau taught moral virtue to Emile through the use of teaching empathy, which I argue is the virtue that makes civil society possible.

Jefferson, according to John Dewey, believed that republics created institutions for promoting the progress of society. This was bound in the rights of the people and each generation to rediscover political truths for themselves, as well as to right the political errors of preceding generations. It is through education that the minds and morals of individuals are crafted into a form befitting the citizens of a free republic. As Dewey reminds his readers though, the minds of the citizens can also be turned against the proper purposes of a free society through education¹⁴³.

Jefferson was well aware of the need for a functioning, strong education system. As the founder of the University of Virginia, Jefferson spent much of his life attempting

¹⁴² Thomas Jefferson, Writings, Pages 1305-1306.

¹⁴³ John Dewey, Freedom and Culture, pp122-123 (Amherst, New York: 1989).

to reform the education system of Virginia; these reforms largely revolved around localizing education offerings through the local ward governments that Jefferson was such a staunch supporter of. During these reform efforts, Jefferson defined what the purpose of education ought to be:

“To harmonize the interests of agriculture, manufactures, and commerce, and by well informed views of political economy to give a free scope to the public industry; to develop the reasoning faculties of our youth, enlarge their minds, cultivate their morals, and instill into them the precepts of virtue and order....and, generally, to form them to habits of reflection and correct action, rendering them examples of virtue to others, and of happiness within themselves.”¹⁴⁴

The first principle of public education in the Jeffersonian scheme is the propagation of public political and cultural morals. The propagation of morals can be a delicate matter to approach in a modern political culture that is characterized by pluralism and multiculturalism of various diverse ethnic, religious, spiritual, and other lifestyle types. In a modern context, the propagation of cultural and political morals would not be given the purpose of framing the personal life choices of citizens but instead would shape their public life by providing the education needed to participate in the political functioning of society. The state would not attempt to promote specific private morals in this calculation, and would instead leave those kinds of decisions to the various parts of the private lives of the citizenry (such as religious and family institutions and, most importantly, personal choice). The virtues that would be promoted would be moderation, temperance, and understanding in political matters – understanding of how Americans of other backgrounds view the world, with the goal of promoting empathy between citizens, which should serve as a moderating force in politicking in general.

Earlier, the example was given of the types of philosophy that Jefferson suggested

¹⁴⁴ Thomas Jefferson, Writings, page 460.

to his young relatives (readings such as Locke, Aristotle, etc); without repeating that material unnecessarily, Jefferson believed that a well-rounded education required a balance between the various “sciences,” such as philosophy, the physical sciences, history and mathematics. The main purpose, however, of virtually every reform Jefferson proposed in Virginia was the prevention of tyranny from taking root in his state. “..it is believed that the most effectual means of preventing this (tyranny) would be, to illuminate, as far as practicable, the minds of the people at large, and more especially to give them knowledge of those facts, which history exhibiteth, that, possessed thereby of the experience of other ages and countries, they may be enabled to know ambition under all its shapes, and prompt to exert their natural powers to defeat its purposes.”¹⁴⁵ Clearly, Jefferson understood that the best defense against tyranny was an electorate informed of the various threats to liberty that have surfaced throughout history so that the citizens may be better prepared to prevent liberty from failing in America.

But reforming the education system is only one part of my proposal for sustaining American virtue in the political culture. The next component would be controversial if the US government attempted to enact the proposal as government policy, and would likely require a constitutional amendment to enact. What I am speaking of is a requirement of public service in order for individual persons to have the benefits of citizenship, while relegating all other persons as civilians (with their own legal protections). That discussion is next.

¹⁴⁵ Thomas Jefferson, Writings, page 365.

Public Service

“The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.”¹⁴⁶ -- Mohandas Gandhi

On the surface, this part of the proposal to sustaining American virtue is relatively simple: a basic requirement of suffrage should be that individuals perform a period of public service. This idea becomes complicated when one considers that this idea is based on the idea that persons have duties to society that extend beyond simply respecting the rights of other individuals; persons have a duty to other members of their political culture to support and empower a society that is stable and respects the rights persons have as members of the political culture and as members of the species. In order to foster the kind of environment I am describing, the state should require persons to contribute to the common good, beyond taxes and obeying the law. In short, in a democratic society, the state can force individual persons to make the choice to be citizens (and to accept the duties that come with citizenship) or to leave the system of political participation altogether.

This thinking is clearly republican in its philosophical origin. Jefferson defined republicanism as “a government by its citizens in mass, acting directly and personally, according to rules established by the majority.”¹⁴⁷ Clearly, Jeffersonian republicanism can be better described as democratic-republicanism, a concept whose name would become the original name of Jefferson's political party. But can government compel service in citizens? Jefferson seemed to think so, if we assume that using his definition of republican government that the decision that was made to compel citizens to serve was

¹⁴⁶ Dan Mahoney, (quoting Mohandas Gandhi), EthicsintheClassroom:BridgingtheGapBetween TheoryandPractice, pg 95 (Lanham: Maryland 2008).

¹⁴⁷ Thomas Jefferson, Writings, Page 1393.

done with the proper input of the citizens in the electoral process. The idea was even endorsed by Jefferson in a letter to James Madison in 1793, at the start of one of his many retirements from public service.:

“To my fellow-citizens, the debt of service has been fully and faithfully paid. I acknowledge such a debt exists, that a tour of duty, in whatever line he can be most useful to his country, is due from every individual. It is not easy perhaps to say of what length this tour should be, but we may safely say of what length it should not be. Not of our whole life, for instance, for that would be born a slave – not even a very large portion of it.”¹⁴⁸

It would be easy enough to state that Jefferson was simply speaking poetically at the eve of his initial retirement from public service; however, Jefferson attempted to enshrine this philosophy in the laws of Virginia when he sought to reform the state constitution. Jefferson used the examples of the Greeks and Romans, who (Jefferson maintains) had no standing armies, and instead defended their nations with citizen militias. The idea Jefferson promoted was relatively straight forward: all citizens (white males) would be members of the citizen militia of Virginia, in order to prevent what Jefferson saw as the “engine of oppression” – a standing army. “Their system was to make every man a soldier and oblige him to repair to the standard of his country whenever that was reared. It made them invincible; and the same remedy will make us so.”¹⁴⁹

The proposal I am offering is based on the statement Jefferson made that all persons can be required by society to serve “in whatever line he can be most useful to his country.” This would eliminate the military or militia as the sole means of meeting the public service requirement to obtain the vote. This is necessary because, as Jefferson and

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, Page 1010.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, Page 1321.

others have stated earlier, while the state has a role to play in promoting the political culture and the morals associated with civic virtue, the state cannot compel persons to behave in ways that violate religious or otherwise held moral beliefs, nor can the state force persons to place their lives in danger except in the utmost dire circumstances.¹⁵⁰

The state would provide other means for individuals to serve the political community outside of the military, lending no greater weight to military service than any of the other options. These options could include cleaning parks, working with children, repairing historical sites or any other form of public service the public deems appropriate to meet the requirements of this service.

The most important part of the community service requirement is that such service should be designed to get persons out of their isolated communities, forcing citizens to venture into other geographic areas of the political culture. The purpose of this is to give persons the first hand experience required for citizens to be able to empathize with the needs, ideas, and ontology of various other parts of the political culture. This cannot be done effectively by teaching persons when they are young about other parts of the country (though that should happen as well); rather, this can best be done by immersing potential citizens into other, more unfamiliar, parts of the greater political culture. Cultures, both local and greater, are built upon a commonly shared identity. Jefferson, Aristotle and Ferguson all state that republics best function when they are small geographically; the United States is anything but small, comprised of a sort of “republic of republics,” each with its own unique political culture that all share common traits with the rest of the states. In order for citizens to better understand the different worldviews of

¹⁵⁰ Thomas Jefferson, Writings, Pg 778.

persons from different states, during the period of public service, individuals should venture out of their home state to gain a better understanding of the needs of the entire United States, not just of their own.

There is another reason to exclude militia service as the sole means of meeting this requirement: quite simply, not all persons are fit for military service; their inclusion in the military might actually harm morale and the service itself. The talents of some persons make them a better fit for other forms of public service, while others lack the talent to serve in the military. It would be a fundamental breach of the values of justice that are due to all persons to make service in the military the only option for individuals to attain citizenship, as it would be a similar breach of justice to make other forms of public service the only forms available for gaining the rights and privileges of citizenship. This would be a breach of justice because in forcing persons to join the militia (thus putting their lives in danger against their will) persons as potential citizens but instead as servants of the state.

A contemporary of Thomas Jefferson was the Scottish political theorist Adam Ferguson, who stated eloquently how the state can make claims on individual persons. Ferguson's assertion was that in a state where the mass of citizens possess sovereign authority, claims on the individual can be made because the individual is the sovereign; all individuals, by making claims on all persons, make claims on themselves as well as on others. The only limit to this power is to commit what Ferguson called a "defect of power," by which Ferguson meant to commit an injustice.¹⁵¹ While moral theorists like Jefferson and other republicans generally share the belief that certain moral virtues are

¹⁵¹ Adam Ferguson, AnEssayontheHistoryofCivilSociety, Pp 64-65 (Cambridge: UK 2007).

universal, some are particular to certain cultures. One such moral value that applies more in contemporary America than it does in other political cultures is the value of choice, which is a reflection of individual autonomy.

There are, of course, those who would disagree with the assertion that individuals owe duties to society. In the social realm, the greatest example of the kinds of disagreements that I am referring to, come from those who protested against conscription for the armed forces. A concise argument against military conscription (and by extension, all forms of quasi-compulsory service of the sort that I am proposing) comes from Congressman Ron Paul (R-TX). "The most important reason to oppose a draft is that it violates the very principles of individual liberty upon which our nation was founded...(which include beliefs that) individuals possess natural, God-given rights which cannot be abridged by the government. Forcing people into military service against their will thus directly contradicts the philosophy of the Founding Fathers. A military draft also appears to contradict the constitutional prohibition of involuntary servitude."¹⁵² Congressman Paul makes the argument that forced military service is a violation of natural rights that are foundational to the American political experience.

Is comparing the term of service that I am proposing even accurate? That determination largely depends on whether or not access to identification as a citizen of the United States is a fundamental right of persons who have won the natural lottery by having been born within the nation's borders. To better answer this question, once again we can find a hint of an answer in the writings of Thomas Jefferson, who stated that the right to *leave* the country they were born and move to another. "Our ancestors...

¹⁵² Ron Paul, [ADraftViolatesIndividualLiberty](http://www.debate-central.org/2006/research/a-draft-violates-individual-liberty), National Center for Policy Analysis. <http://www.debate-central.org/2006/research/a-draft-violates-individual-liberty> 2006.

possessed a right, which nature has given to all men, of departing from the country in which chance, not choice, has placed them, of going in quest of new habitations, and of their establishing new societies, under such laws and regulations as, to them, shall seem most likely to promote public happiness.”¹⁵³ The right to expatriation appears to be based on a central liberal value: autonomy. As self-interested individuals, if the society that we are placed in upon birth does not meet our needs or provide the opportunities needed to respect the demands of justice and natural rights, then we retain the right to leave the political association (either via revolution or immigration).

But what of rights to association? Do persons have a natural right to associate with one-another? Classic republican theory assumes that man is a social creature, naturally at home with other human beings (and incomplete as persons in the absence of others). The Scottish theorist Adam Ferguson states that persons have a natural right to association due to society being born from human instinct. Associating with other human beings is a natural disposition which, combined with reason, create allegiances that are the basis of civil society and inevitably lead to the conflicts between societies and nations.¹⁵⁴ If associating with other persons is a natural instinct common to the species, then it would appear that being a member of society is a natural right. However, society is based on the mutual recognition that occurs between all of the members of society based on common characteristics, whether they are physical, linguistic, religious, or other common identifiable traits that are shared widely. Hence, an American does not necessarily possess a natural right to become a citizen of France or Thailand or any other foreign nation; instead, those who possess a natural right to membership in a society are

¹⁵³ Thomas Jefferson, Writings, Page 105.

¹⁵⁴ Adam Ferguson, AnEssayontheHistoryofCivilSociety, Pp 16.

those whom are acculturated into the customs, habits and ontology of the political culture in question. Conversely, though, as stated early, just as it is true that cultures can choose to exclude aliens from being members of the culture, so too can the culture choose to exclude persons from attaining membership as long as the reason for doing so is not an arbitrary reason that violates notions of justice and respecting persons as human beings.

Human beings have a right to associate with others, if we accept the basic assumption that persons are rights bearing beings. As the purpose of this exercise is to sustain and strengthen classic American values in a modernized context, then the assumption that persons are bearers of rights will be accepted *prima facie*. Given this assumption of rights, then how do we square the right of society to make demands of duties on individual persons? To ensure that persons are respected as autonomous beings, terms of service must be made a choice of individuals, not compulsory. Voting and political participation in general are not compulsory, nor would be possessing the right to vote. Upon reaching the age of majority, and at any time thereafter, individuals can make the choice to become a citizen of the United States if they already legally live within the borders of the country and possess civilian status (which is conferred upon birth or immigration).

Much of the argument that I am putting forth rests on the notion of respecting persons as choice making individuals. For many persons, making the choice of whether or not to endure a reasonably short period of service in exchange for the vote would be simple; once the service is over, there would be no further need to sacrifice for the greater good of society. But the third part of my proposal relies on the concept of continuing sacrifice on the part of citizens for the purpose of strengthening society; continued

sacrifice ought to be required of citizens because citizenship is a responsibility of all who participate to lead the political body. The third part of my proposal is on the topic of taxation, which follows.

Taxation

"Taxes, after all, are the dues that we pay for the privileges of membership in an organized society."¹⁵⁵ – Franklin D Roosevelt

There are few concepts that cause greater political agitation in the United States than the subject of taxes. Political movements have been born around the rallying cry of reducing individual taxes, with entire national political parties taking stances of continuing to cut taxes as a central focus of their national platform. What is often lost in the discussion of taxes is the role that taxation plays in the modern United States. More importantly, what has been lost in the discussion of taxes is the effect taxation has on the individual – beyond the obvious effect of reducing the individual wealth of the individual taxpayer, but the symbolic effect of taxation in the form of the individual citizen taking ownership of the government and the greater political culture.

The third part of my proposal for creating conditions that will allow the American character to thrive would easily be the most controversial: once individuals make the decision to embrace citizenship by performing a period of public service, once their service has been completed, the individual person will pay a higher tax rate than non-citizens pay. The purpose of this higher tax rate would be two-fold: first, this tax rate would be a symbolic acceptance by the individual of ownership in the government and political culture; second, it is my belief that a large number of Americans would abstain from voting if they could be assured that their taxes would not be raised. As part of this

¹⁵⁵ Speech given at the 1936 Democratic National Convention.

policy, the government would promise (or be forced to via Constitutional amendment) to not raise the taxes of civilians (non-voting members of society). In short, I believe that many persons would trade away their right to vote for money. Both the ownership and money aspects of this proposal will be explored in turn.

Beginning on the subject of ownership in the political culture and government, when individuals make the choice to pay an increased tax rate, they acknowledge that they are taking personal responsibility for the future of the polity. The persons who make this choice would reveal themselves to be members of Jefferson's 'natural aristocracy.' In a political culture that envisions individuals as choice making commercial creatures, there can be no higher expression of civic virtue than to sacrifice financially for the political body. As stated earlier in this essay, liberal political culture views money as the liquid form of labor, transferable into a form of property for exchange for goods and services. Money is a form of property, which most liberal philosophers have elevated as the highest form that human rights take; John Locke, possibly the most important liberal philosopher in the American experience, described human rights as life, liberty and the pursuit of property, with our lives being our first property.¹⁵⁶

When property is the central feature of an individualist philosophy, it is little wonder that money (a liquid property) lies at the center of most political discourse in contemporary America. All issues are money issues, even when dressed in the language of morality. What this speaks to is the transformation of the political culture from the time of the nation's founding from a culture that was highly individualistic balanced against a perceived sense of duty that persons had to serve the political culture (if the

¹⁵⁶ John Locke, Second Treatise on Government.

words of Jefferson and Adams are to be believed) into one that is concerned almost exclusively with the needs of the individual. When the individual is conceptualized as a commercial actor, whose primary rights are property rights, we can finally see the big picture: that American culture has placed the needs of the individual ahead of the needs of the polity.

There is a recognized danger amongst republican theorists with what George Orwell derisively called worship of “the money god” in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*. Orwell characterized the tendency of liberal culture to centralize money as a political value until it reaches or exceeds the esteem religion traditionally possesses in the broader culture. While Orwell describes this phenomenon in the background of his novel, Adam Ferguson better describes the state of modern America when he defines what happens when commercial nations become nations of tradesmen.

“Nations of tradesmen come to consist of members who, beyond their own particular trade, are ignorant of all human affairs, and who may contribute to the preservation and enlargement of their commonwealth, without making its interest an object of their regard or attention. Every individual is distinguished by his calling, and has a place to which he is fitted.”¹⁵⁷

It has become clear that, in a political culture that defines politics as a competition between interests to see whom gets what resources, the health and well-being of the political culture becomes secondary to the needs of individual actors.

To combat this tendency I would propose that citizens pay a higher tax rate than civilians, for the reasons stated previously. The opening words of the Declaration of Independence are “We the People,” which is a statement of ownership of the government by the people; yet there has been a sense amongst people across America that government

¹⁵⁷ Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, Pp 173.

is a distant body of elites who ignore the desires of the people of the country; this sense is one of the declared motivating factors behind the Tea Party movement that proved critical in the 2010 elections.¹⁵⁸ The standard rallying cry for the American liberal culture has become a call to “take the country back” from the elites who have alienated the people from their government. What most of these groups miss, regardless of ideology or partisan affiliation, is that this alienation from government is the direct byproduct of a highly individualist culture that emphasizes the needs of the individual and their private property over the needs of the larger political culture. The remedy for this is to encourage ownership in the government, to reconceptualize government as a kind of private property that all citizens are joint owners of. As part of the larger strategy to strengthen American civic virtue, the purpose of this taxation strategy is not to replace liberal culture's respect of the individual with subservience to the greater political body, but rather to temper this individualism with concern for the political body.

I assert that the greatest threat to the long-term stability of the political culture is the fixation that persons have for money. The question is, would persons in a liberal culture willingly surrender their right to vote for financial gain? The answer is maybe – depending largely on the kind of liberal culture in question. The dominant form of liberalism in the United States is Lockean liberalism. It could even be argued that Lockean thought is the dominant political thought in the American culture. Locke brought the individual to the center of the political experience, beyond anything that Hobbes envisioned, creating a political theory that is most familiar to Americans today in the form of “libertarianism,” which espouses true independence of the individual person

¹⁵⁸ Tea Party USA platform. <http://www.jointheteparty.us/aboutus.html>

from virtually all duties to society and free from government restraint; government only exists to prevent persons from hurting one another and to defend the country against foreign threats.

A Lockean liberal culture may accept the proposal that I am making for cultivating civic virtue amongst members of the polity, including the tax measure. I base this argument on the following: while John Locke was not the first political theorist to use the language of the “social contract” in his theories, his argument has held the most sway throughout the history of the United States. American language is often couched in contractual terminology, such as use of powerful political words like 'taxpayer,' or in the seemingly constant claim of criminals violating the “social contract” through their criminal behavior. This language originates in passages from Locke's *Second Treatise of Government*, such as the following, which is only one of several instances of Locke's use of the contract metaphor to describe the foundation of civil society:

“I have named all Governors of Independent Communities, whether they are, or are not, in League with others: For 'tis not every Compact that puts an end to the State of Nature between Men, but only this one of agreeing together mutually to enter into one Community, and make one Body Politick; other Promises and Compacts, Men may make one with another, and yet still be in the State of Nature.”¹⁵⁹

In the United States we combine this theoretical calculation with the Preamble of the US Constitution (“We The People...”) to create a vision of governance where the people possess sovereign authority, including the authority to enter into civil contracts like the US Constitution. If the people of the United States could be convinced that, if by giving up their suffrage rights that their taxes would not be raised beyond a specific low point, then I believe that many persons would give up their right to vote entirely. This

¹⁵⁹ John Locke, SecondTreatiseofGovernment, Page 276.

would be especially true if the process for creating this system of voting reform were conducted through a national popular referendum; this would be because the individual person would be participating members of the contract writing process, which would have a broad appeal in a society that views individual persons as commercial beings.

There is another, perhaps more practical, reason that many people would surrender their right to vote in exchange for an iron-clad legal guarantee not to have their taxes raised: the single issue voter. American politics is often characterized as having a large number of these voters participating in the process in order to vote on the single issue that matters to them. The position of the single issue voter is best described by one such voter on a pro-life blog: “True "single issue" voters often vote for people we strongly *disagree* with on issues of great importance to us, so long as we agree on the issue of greatest importance.”¹⁶⁰ The most common single issue voters are found in the abortion debate (both/all sides), the firearms debate, and in environmental activism. But there are a large group of voters who, though seldom identifying as such, place taxes as their single most important issue in any election cycle. According to a poll conducted a week prior to the 2010 midterm elections, 47% of those asked identified taxes as the most important issue facing them as voters.¹⁶¹

This is not being argued in order to isolate, marginalize, or disenfranchise persons of any particular political ideology. The purpose of the tax for suffrage would be to allow those who are willing to pay a higher tax to take direct ownership of the political culture, while allowing those that are only motivated to vote by tax issues to forgo voting

¹⁶⁰ Roberto Rivera Carlo, “Single Issue Voter.” *Boundless Webzine*.
<http://www.boundless.org/2005/articles/a0001851.cfm>

¹⁶¹ Reuters/Ipsos Poll conducted by Ipsos Public Affairs. Oct. 28-31, 2010.
<http://www.pollingreport.com/prioriti.htm>

altogether with the guarantee that their taxes will never be raised. However, it must be stated that, as the inclusion of the quote by Franklin Roosevelt suggests, I firmly believe that taxes are the dues that citizens pay to have a functioning government. The desire to vote only because the individual is being impacted by seemingly high taxes suggests that the main purpose of voting is to gain personal benefit. If the people can provide to individuals like these that their desires or rights will never be infringed upon, then I believe that they would willingly surrender their right to vote. This is not to suggest that fully 47% of the population would choose to do this at all, as many so-called “single issue” voters are unlikely to actually be motivated to vote because of a single issue.

Breaking with Jefferson

The issue of taxation would represent the clearest break from Thomas Jefferson's political theory thus far in this project. While Jefferson never explicitly opposed taxation of the public by government freely elected by the people, as president, Jefferson enacted several policies whose explicit purpose was the elimination of taxes on the individual. For example, in his first inaugural address, President Jefferson declared that federal revenue from non-tax sources was sufficient to eliminate personal taxes and fees of all kinds; remaining federal revenue would be based almost entirely on sales of federal lands on the ever expanding frontier, as well as on import tariffs. His clearest statement about his philosophy of taxation on the individual comes from the first inaugural address, delivered December 8, 1801. “Agriculture, manufactures, commerce, and navigation, the four pillars of our prosperity, are the most thriving when left most free to individual enterprise.”¹⁶² When given the rare opportunity to place political philosophy into action,

¹⁶² Thomas Jefferson, Writings. Page 507.

Jefferson opted to endorse a program that all but eliminated individual taxes.

Breaking from this portion of Jefferson's philosophy is necessary because the relationship between the people of the United States and the national government has changed so dramatically that it can be reasonably argued that Jefferson and his associates from the revolutionary period would have a difficult time recognizing the nation today. This change occurred because of the demands imposed upon the nation by expanded settlement into frontier territories that had little, if any, local government to provide for the needs of the settlers. While the frontier, combined with Reconstruction after the Civil War, reconfigured the national understanding of the role of the national government in the lives of everyday people that would have been wholly unthinkable during Jefferson's time, at the same time, frontier life also brought liberal individualism to the core of American political life. Frederick Jackson Turner describes the conditions of frontier life in this period as the providing the "seed plots of American character." The American character was classically Jefferson in the emphasis on self governance, while also divorcing Americans from a sense of duty to society. The period of philosophical change is best described by Turner through the words of Governor Morris at the Constitutional Convention in 1787:

"The new States....will know less of public interest than these; will have an interest in many respects different....(the new States) would not be able to furnish men equally enlightened to share in the administration of our common interests. The busy haunts of men, not the remote wilderness, was the proper school of political talents."¹⁶³

The frontier changed the nation in ways that Jefferson could not have accurately envisioned. Yet much of his philosophy remains salient to the purpose of strengthening

¹⁶³ Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History*, Page 207 (San Francisco: California 1920).

American civic virtue via personal sacrifice for the better of the political culture. While the public may rely on the national government for services in ways that would likely horrify Jefferson and the other Founders, the key aspects of Jefferson's political philosophy are still as valid today as they were when Jefferson originally penned them.

Conclusion

The political culture of the United States is singularly unique in the world. The culture can best be described as being a combination of republican and liberal political philosophies. Do these values remain in balance as they did during the revolutionary period? That is debatable. Republican philosophy requires a sacrifice to be made by individual citizens for the betterment of the culture; liberalism demands that individuals are given the rights they are due as human beings. For the political culture to be sustainable for the long term, a balance must be struck between these potentially competing values. This balance must respect the rights of both the individual and the collective body of all the persons in the culture, citizen and non-citizen alike. Thomas Jefferson once said that the state cannot compel individuals into service; yet Jefferson

also stated that society can demand individuals to serve for a reasonable period of time.¹⁶⁴

Public service is a duty that is expected of all Americans – or so it was in the early days of the republic. Today, in the modern liberal culture, a different kind of duty is expected of Americans: the duty of non-interference in the affairs of the individual by both the state and others. This is not to say that public and private virtues are lost concepts in the contemporary American culture; rather, it can be stated that what the American culture needs to be sustained for the long term is to reconnect the culture with its liberal and republican traditions, and to return to the philosophical balance that existed in colonial times. In this way, the culture can respect both the rights of individuals and the needs of the political culture.

What is it that Americans today look for in citizenship? Clearly, the topic of citizenship is politically important today, in the face of debates surrounding immigration and birthright citizenship. I have argued that American culture would be strengthened by requiring that individuals make the choice to be a citizen or a civilian. Today, we see the public debating citizenship because of the problems surrounding immigration; this provides evidence itself that the topic is still important to the American people. Clearly, the people of the United States believe that citizenship is a precious identifying feature of life in America, one that sets Americans apart from the rest of the world. It is this awareness that gives the most promise for a re-invigoration of civic virtue in America: the recognition that not all people should participate in the political process in America – that citizenship requires something more. How to get them to recognize what that entails in a politically feasible manner is a discussion for another time.

¹⁶⁴ Thomas Jefferson, Writings, page 596.

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