THE IDEA OF VIRTUE IN THE WRITINGS OF THOMAS JEFFERSON

by

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ABSTRACT

This study in the history of ideas examines Thomas Jefferson's idea of virtue in light of his concern with founding a republic in America. In the context of Enlightenment thought, this essay also examines Jefferson's belief that virtue, as a part of man's moral instinct, is the basis of a natural ethic in society.

Jefferson's political career was dedicated to the principle that the people should be the final source of authority in government. He believed that because of man's inherent social inclinations, people are most happy interacting with and ministering to the needs of others. The practice of virtue kept a populace performing its duties to one another and to government; vigilant watch over government by a people who knew their rights and were jealous of their freedom would keep the republic sound.

The fragile nature of virtue has always been a source of concern of republics. The essay studies Jefferson's fear of the corruption of virtue in government and in the manners of the people. It also considers the role of passion and reason in his thought. Jefferson sought to found a democratic republic on a basis of independent yeoman farmers. In a discussion of the characteristics of a rural citizenry, I explore what Jefferson believed was the guarantee of virtue, freedom and independence in America.

In the last chapter I discuss the rejection of virtue and the American republic in constitutional thought. The Federalists devised a government of checks and balances in which virtue was not necessary. In contrast to the Federalists, Jefferson believed that virtue is a concern of government, as it is of society. The essay ends with a consideration of the moral qualities Jefferson believed were necessary to preserve freedom.

RESUME

Cette étude, dans le cadre de l'histoire des grands courants de pensée, examine la conception qu'avait Thomas Jefferson de la vertu, dans sa recherche de fondements pour une republique en Amérique. Compte-tenu du siècle des lumières dans lequel il vivait, cet essai porte aussi un regard sur la conviction qu'il avait que la vertu, en tant que constituante d'une morale instinctive de l'homme, est la base d'une éthique naturelle dans la societe.

La carrière politique de Jefferson fut toute entière axée sur le principe que le peuple devrait être la source ultime d'autorité dans le gouvernement. Il croyait qu'à cause de la nature fondamentalement sociale des hommes, ces derniers n'étaient heureux que lorsqu'ils pouvaient s'aider mutuellement et s'assister dans leurs besoins. La pratique de la vertu incite les individus d'une société à remplir leurs devoirs les uns envers les autres, et envers le gouvernement; une surveillance vigilante exercée sur le gouvernement pas une population consciente de ses droits et jalouse de sa liberté aiderait à conserver la république en santé.

La nature fragile de la vertu a toujours été une source de soucis pour les républiques. Cet étude examine la crainte qu'inspirait à Jefferson la corruption de la vertu en milieu gouvernemental et au niveau des moeurs du peuple; elle étudie de même le rôle qu'ont joué la passion et la raison tout au long de sa réflexion. Jefferson cherchait à établir une république démocratique dont la base serait une population de fermiers-propriétaires indépendants. Par la critique des caractéristiques d'une société rurale, j'explore ce que Jefferson croyait être la garantie de la vertu, de la liberté et de l'indépendence en Amérique.

Le rejet de la vertu et la République américaine, abordés sous leur aspect constitutionnel, forme le sujet du dernier chapître. Les Fédéralistes concevaient un gouvernement de contrôles formels et de vérifications, au sein duquel la vertu n'était pas nécessaire. En opposition aux Fédéralistes, Jefferson croyait que la vertu est l'affaire tout autant du gouvernement que de la société. Cet essai se termine par l'examen des qualités morales que Jefferson jugeait nécessaires à la conservation de la liberté.

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INTRODUCTION

Thomas Jefferson left instructions that the following epitaph be inscribed on his tombstone: " 'Here was buried Thomas Jefferson, Author of the Declaration of Independence, of the Statute of Virginia for religious freedom, and Father of the University of Virginia,' because by these, as testimonials that I have lived, I wish most to be remembered."[1] These three accomplishments highlight the vision that guided Jefferson's life and work. He aimed to liberate "the imprisoned intellect" of man through out the world;[2] he sought to establish a government that would be responsible to the members of society, would protect their rights, and would guarantee individual liberty. In the colonies, where the people had the unique opportunity of making their own election of government, Jefferson worked to help establish a democratic republic. This essay examines Jefferson's idea of virtue as a vital element of that republic in America.

Born on April 13, 1743, Jefferson spent his first seventeen years on his family's plantations in Virginia. Born into wealth, Jefferson was provided with complete classical training; in later life, Jefferson traced his love of languages and learning to the excellence of his early education. He left home in 1760 to attend William and Mary College in the colonial capital of Virginia, Williamsburg. Graduating in 1762, he spent the next five years studying law under George Wythe, the foremost legal mind in Virginia.

An interested observer for many years of the Virginia legislature, Jefferson began his political career when he was thirty. As a member of the Virginia House of Burgesses, in 1774 he wrote A Summary View of the Rights of British America, a tract of natural rights and limited privileges. In 1775, Jefferson went to Philadelphia as a Virginia delegate to the Second Continental Congress. Working in committee with Benjamin Franklin and John Adams, he emerged the author of the Declaration of Independence. After serving several years in the Virginia House of Delegates, where he attempted to reform the laws of Virginia, and two terms as Governor of Virginia, Jefferson was appointed Minister Plenipotentiary of the U.S. to the Court of France in 1784. When he returned in October of 1789, via England, it was with a store of knowledge of international commerce and relations among countries, and with first hand experience of the problems in France that led to the French Revolution.

The Constitution had been adopted in his absence. Jefferson approved it, but he had reservations about the initial lack of a limit on the number of terms a President could serve, and the absence of a Bill of Rights. President Washington asked Jefferson to be his Secretary

of State, a post Jefferson kept until 1793. Alexander Hamilton became Washington's Secretary of the Treasury. Political disagreements and differences of philosophy between Jefferson and Hamilton led to the formation of a group around Jefferson and Madison who called themselves "democratic republicans." Encouraged by his supporters, Jefferson ran against John Adams for President in 1797; he trailed Adams by three votes in the electoral college and served as Vice President. Jefferson became President in 1801, defeating Aaron Burr.[3]

After two Presidential terms he returned in 1809 to Monticello and private life. He spent an active retirement, resuming his extensive reading and correspondence, the overseeing of his estates, and his many projects in gardening, science, and architecture. In 1812 he renewed his correspondence with John Adams, from whom he had broken over Adams' Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798. During this period Jefferson also founded the University of Virginia, the first American university to be free of official church connection.[4] He wrote to friends of his interest in helping the spread of knowledge through society; knowledge, he had always believed, was necessary for independent government, freedom, and happiness. Jefferson died on July 4, 1826, on the fiftieth anniversary of American Independence, within a few hours of John Adams' death. Ten days before that Fourth of July, Jefferson wrote of the anniversary:

> May it be to the world, what I believe it will be (to some parts sooner, to others later, but finally to all), the signal of arousing men to burst the chains under which monkish ignorance and superstition had persuaded them to bind themselves, and to assume the blessings and security of self-government. That form which we have substituted, restores the free right to the unbounded exercise of reason and freedom of opinion. All eyes are opened, or opening, to the rights of man. 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. These are grounds for hope for others. For ourselves, let the annual return of this day forever refresh our recollections of these rights, and an undiminished devotion to them.

In this essay in the history of ideas, I study the idea of virtue in Jefferson's writings. As one of the most politically active of the Founding Fathers, his role as legislator, Governor, Minister, and President, and his execution and delegation of official power, are all of interest. However, this essay looks behind Jefferson's political genius to the concern for the freedom and independence of society that shaped his thought and his political career. He sought to found a democratic republic in America that would ensure good government and the freedom of the people; virtue is one of the mainstays of his republican vision.

In some sense, this is a study of Jefferson as he wished most to be remembered: author of American Independence, advocate of religious freedom and universal education. This essay looks at Jefferson the political theorist, rather than at Jefferson the political actor; it examines Jefferson the philosophe rather than Jefferson the legislator. And yet, as one absorbed in the day to day construction of life in

the colonies and in the United States, he had no time or regard for pure philosophy. By his own admission, he distrusted abstract and 'useless' knowledge. Concerned with the pressing needs of the colonies and the American frontier, Jefferson was most interested in practical knowledge. He was not a builder of philosophical systems. This orientation of Jefferson leads to some problems in his theoretical formulations. His notions of society, of nature, and of the make-up of the American republic are sometimes inconsistent or incomplete. But this is not an essay in analytic theory; had Jefferson been a philosopher, he would have given more care to philosophical terminology and conceptualizations. He did not devote his life to philosophy, although in many ways he did devote it to the pursuit of knowledge.

The best source of information about Thomas Jefferson is his voluminous correspondence. In letters over the years to scores of others involved in colonial affairs, and to leading personalities in all fields in the colonies and in Europe, he discussed advances in knowledge and the recognition of human right, as well as developments in education, medicine, religion, and literature. In his letters he waged his political battles and set out the principles of the Jeffersonian republican party. His intellectual curiosity and his energy never waned; in friendships that sometimes spanned seventy years, he exchanged views with Dr. William Small, The Count de Vergennes, John Jay, James Madison, General Washington, The Marquis de Lafayette, John and Abigail Adams, Eli Whitney, Dr. Joseph Priestley, Samuel Adams, Dr. Benjamin Rush, Robert R. Livingston, and Albert Gallatin, to name only a few.

Records of the correspondence are surprisingly complete, because from middle age Jefferson kept a file in which he entered letters he received and a hand-copied duplicate of his own response. The best source of Jefferson's correspondence, and of all his papers, public and private, is Julian Boyd's current 18 volume edition, The Papers of Thomas Jefferson (1951 to present; 52 volumes projected). The quality, quantity, and variety of Boyd's edition is superior to the two other major editions of Jefferson's papers: Paul L. Ford's The Writings of Thomas Jefferson (10 volumes, New York, 1892-99); and Andrew A. Lipscomb's and Albert E. Bergh's The Writings of Thomas Jefferson (20 volumes, Washington, D.C., 1903). These editions are used because Boyd's work is incomplete. The Lipscomb and Bergh edition is the basis of Adrienne Koch's and William Peden's edited The Life and Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson, published in 1944, from which I take Jefferson's only book, the Notes on Virginia.

Jefferson's correspondence and official papers are extensive; his literary works are few. He kept a number of notebooks, in which he recorded details of his gardening, his scientific experiments, and his plantation affairs; he also copied many passages from classical and contemporary books. Jefferson's book, the Notes on the State of Virginia, was written in 1781 during a period of enforced inactivity, while he was recovering from a riding accident. It took shape around a series of questions about America put to Jefferson by the Marquis de Barbé-Marbois, then Secretary of the French Legation in Philadelphia. The book was a political document, explaining republican government and life; it was

also an influential scientific work of the time. In it Jefferson recorded many of his observations of natural life in America, and he delved into new fields such as archaeology and scientific geography. Jefferson's personal library, one of the finest in the colonies, was sold to Congress in 1814 to replace the original Library of Congress, which had been destroyed by fire.

NOTES - INTRODUCTION

1. Adrienne Koch and William Peden, eds, The Life and Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson, (New York, 1944), facing page: a reproduction of sheet of directions and drawing for his tombstone in Jefferson's handwriting.

2. Brodie, Fawn M., Thomas Jefferson, An Intimate History, (New York, 1974), 15.

3. Peden and Koch, op.cit., xxxiv.

4. Ibid., xli.

5. Ibid., Jefferson to Roger C. Weightman, Chairman of a proposed Independence Day celebration in Washington, June 27, 1826, 729.

CHAPTER ONE: VIRTUE AND REPUBLICS

Jefferson's political object, as he wrote in a letter of 1802, was to prove that Americans were ready for "a government founded not on the fears and follies of man, but in his reason; on the predominance of his social over his dissocial passions."[1] He thought the time had come for men to assume the "blessings and security" of self-government. What Jefferson sought, and the issue that best ties together the bulk of his Congressional and Presidential papers, his public addresses, and his correspondence, was the establishment of a democratic republic in America that would survive.

The republic has always been the ideal of government, but history has shown that republics are fragile polities, "quickly degenerating into anarchy and tyranny; it was impossible, some said, to recollect a single instance of a nation who supported this form of government for any length of time or with any degree of greatness."[2] In the eighteenth century western world there were, traditionally and theoretically, three elements of government: the crown, the aristocracy, and the democracy. Although circumstances in America were historically unique and eclipsed many traditional concerns, these were the categories with which early

American thinkers dealt. A republic could be aristocratic or democratic, according as it was ruled by only a part of the citizenry or by all.

Each element of government has its own "fundamental principle or spirit." As honour is the moving force of monarchy, virtue is the moving force of democracies. For a democratic republic, virtue in society is essential, because the care of the republic rests with the people, who must watch over their representatives. If the populace is not virtuous, conscious of the public duties and desirous of the freedom that a properly constituted republic offers, the republic will fall. Government will run unchecked, and representatives will become corrupt with power and wealth taken at the expense of the common good.

Bernard Bailyn, in Ideological Origins of the American Revolution, writes that the opinion of colonial times was that "democratical" governments have only rarely succeeded:

> ...for the mass of the people have only rarely had the power of self-denial, the disdain of riches, of luxury, and of dominance over others necessary to sustain such governments. They have survived only in small countries 'so sterile by nature' that men, of necessity equally poor, had no temptation to seek and use power in defense of their interests. The promise of life in America argued against the stability of democratic governments.[3]

Where were there examples of modern republics? Where did one find the necessary austerity, uncontaminated virtue, and love of freedom to support a democratically governed people? The English were a happy instance; throughout the convulsions of seventeenth

century England and eighteenth century America, the widespread opinion was that "the ordinary people of England...were descended from simple, sturdy Saxons who had known liberty in the very childhood of the race and who, through the centuries, had retained the desire to preserve it..." The Swiss came to mind, who were a "rustic people locked in mountain sanctuaries." The Dutch had overthrown the despotic rule of Spain; "they...were industrious people of stubborn, Calvinist virtue, and they were led by an alert aristocracy." Denmark had once been governed by a constitution, but as Molesworth's An Account of Denmark (1694) pointed out, the "preservation of liberty....in the last analysis rested on the vigilance and moral stamina of the people" and vigilance was found lacking in the Danes. Because of their corrupted nobility and by their own allowance, Denmark was now a tyranny.[4]

In 1816 Jefferson wrote to John Taylor, author of An Inquiry into the Principles and Policy of the Government of the United States, "Indeed, it must be acknowledged, that the term republic is of very vague application in every language." The classic republic requires small territory, direct democracy, and a well-educated citizenry. But some generalizations are possible: Jefferson, who was firm in the conviction "that government was good in the measure that it remained close to the people,"[5] wrote to Taylor, "On this view of the import of the term republic, instead of saying, as has been said, 'that it may mean anything or nothing,' we may say with truth and meaning, that governments are more or less republican, as they have more or

less of the element of popular election and control in their composition."[6] The measure of America's 'republicanism' would be the degree of control of the people over the organs of their government.

By 'democratic republic' Jefferson meant government whose final authority rested with the people; he did not mean majority rule. Government would be judged by the "element of popular election and control." As Bernard Crick suggests, "To call governments 'democratic' is always...misleading: we may want the democratic element in government to grow greater, but it is still only an element while it is government at all."[7]

In the eighteenth century 'democracy' was a pejorative term. It had little of our modern assumption of the superiority of 'democratic' government. Democracies were the weakest form of government; they implied rule by the mob, or by the commons, the lowest order of society. Equality was as dangerous a tenet. In the colonies and in England, there was a concern "ultimately derived from classical antiquity - from Aristotelian, Polybian, Machiavellian, and seventeenth century English sources" - for the necessary of a balance of the three powers (crown, nobility, and commons) for sound government. There was fear that without the restraints of a monarch and a well-established, independent aristocracy, control by all would deteriorate into rule by the mob with but little provocation. Government in America was never a simple matter of control by all, but political thinkers wondered, apart from such traditional concerns of republics as size, that if America did not follow the traditional and seventeenth century English examples, "what

would become of the liberty preserving balance? What elements would there be to be balanced?"[8]

Jefferson did not agree about the need for a monarch. He did agree about the need for rulers; in drawing up the Virginia constitution he was for "anything rather than a mere creation by and dependence on the people."[9] The electors were not to rule; they did not have the time, the knowledge, the experience, or sufficient disinterest to conduct the affairs of government. Jefferson believed there was a natural aristocracy, intended to rule and inherent in society. In a letter to John Adams, he wrote:

> The natural aristocracy I consider as the most precious gift of nature, for the instruction, the trusts, and government, of society. And indeed, it would have been inconsistant in creation to have formed man for the social state, and not to have provided virtue and wisdom enough to manage the concerns of society.[10]

Jefferson stated that "the grounds of this (natural aristocracy) are virtue and talent."[11] It is composed of men who nature and circumstances have made capable of handling the affairs of society by providing them with education, refinement, culture, and leisure to reflect. There is upward mobility in Jefferson's conception of society's natural governors. He believed that people from all walks of life who are equipped with an education are often fit to move into the ranks of the natural aristocracy.

The natural aristocracy is compared to the artificial aristocracy, "a mischievous ingredient in government,"[12] that until the present time had ruled in all areas of the world.

> There is also an artificial aristocracy, founded on wealth and birth, without either virtue or talents....But even in Europe a change has sensibly taken place in the mind of man. Science had liberated the ideas of those who read and reflect, and the American example had kindled feelings of right in the people. An insurrection has consequently begun, of science, talents, and courage, against rank and birth, which have fallen into contempt. [13]

Government, in Jefferson's view, was to be made more democratic. It was not to be made so 'democratical' that there were no restraints, no balance of powers, but only confusion. All the people were not automatically to be given the responsibility of choosing society's governors. To moderns, democracy means universal suffrage: it is the extraordinary case when a person is denied rights of citizenship. In and before the eighteenth century, citizenship was based on property or title. Jefferson intended to broaden the base of citizenship in the republic; the real meaning of equality in the colonies was that a much large number of people were to become equal as citizens. However, it was equally important for the republic's survival in America that there were few extremes of wealth and poverty. That 'equality of opportunity' and relative equality of estate were also 'democratical' elements of eighteenth century America. For Jefferson, the ideal base of republican government was the 'rule' of small property owners, especially the rural population of farmers. The fullest possible participation of a stable, free, and independent populace was the democratic element in government Jefferson sought.

The Democratic Republic in America

In pre-revolutionary and revolutionary America, the terms 'democracy' and 'republic' were often used synonymously, with a mixed response of "enthusiasm and foreboding." There were notable republics of the past; for many a republic meant the triumph of virtue and reason. But, democracy was also associated by many "with the threat of civil disorder and the early assumption of power by a dictator."[14]

Distrust of democracy was widespread in the colonies. To conservative New Englanders and others, Jefferson's election as President in 1801 was a triumph of democracy, which to them meant terror and atheism. "The principles of democracy are everywhere what they have been in France," wrote Fisher Ames. "Our country is too big for union, too sordid for patriotism, too democratic for liberty."[15] Some believed that Jefferson in office meant America might become a French satellite, and the country suffer the chaos and violence of France after her Revolution. Clergymen told their parishioners that a vote for Jefferson was a vote against Christianity, and that if he won they had better hide their Bibles in their wells.[16]

A democratic republic was not agreed upon by all the American founders as the best course for the colonies to take. There were two main influences on colonial political thought. Representatives of "enlightened conservatism", such as Alexander Hamilton and John Adams, were political thinkers of the English group. They were in favour of the theory of the Leviathan State. They believed in the need for centralization, a federated British empire, and the foolishness

of the French doctrines of equality and fraternity.[17] Franklin wrote that there were two motives that drove men: power and greed. Not surprisingly, he was convinced of the essential weakness of democracy. Jefferson, whose philosophy is one of the res publica and decentralization,[18] in his "Biographical Sketches of Famous Men" characterized Washington as one who "had not a firm confidence in the durability of our government. He was naturally distrustful of men, and inclined to gloomy apprehensions."[19] In fact, as Claude Bowers remarks of the fo[illegible]ding problems of America - its newness, the widespread distrust of popular government, the illiteracy of the times, the perhaps exaggerated notions of freedom that prevailed - it is often "easier to understand Hamiltonian distrust of democracy than to comprehend the faith of Jefferson - a faith of tremendous significance in history."[20]

Vernon Parrington wrote, "In the major doctrines of his political philosophy, Jefferson was an amalgam of English and French liberalisms, supplemented by the conscious influence of the American frontier."[21] Jefferson, the "Agrarian democrat",[22] was sympathetic to the Enlightenment "rationalism of liberal reform"[23] and, in general, to the French philosophies of the age. He and the "republican pamphleteer" Tom Paine were first hand observors of the events that led to the Revolution of 1789. While Minister to the Court of France from 1784 to 1789, Jefferson was an intimate of Lafayette and other leading members of the Assembly.

In the concern for freedom and right, and the building of a new government, the traditional problems of republican government were treated seriously by the early theorists of the colonies; they did not set out upon their course without precedents. In Europe and America it was an age of classical revival, and the classics "provided no inconsiderable part of the political vocabulary of the age." Pamphlets were signed by "Marcellus" and "Titus Manlius"; letters abounded with appeals to the moral wisdom of Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus and Lucretius. Jefferson was praised for his "Roman love of country"; Burr was attacked as a Catilinarian character."[24] The Enlightenment began and developed with the aim of "restitution to the whole (restitutio in integrum)" by which reason and humanity were to be "reinstalled in their ancient rights."[25]

However, despite their influence, the classical models were not sufficient. Although "with the exception of Paine (and possibly Rittenhouse) the Jeffersonians had gone to school to the ancients" there existed a certain pragmatic skepticism and doubt about the applicability of ancient wisdom to the reality of colonial life.[26] Confronted with the task of creating a republican government that would survive, founding thought (especially Constitutional thought) "tended to draw away from the effort to refine further the ancient, traditional systems and to move toward a fresh, direct comprehension of political reality."[27] Responsive to the heritage of antiquity, as well as Medieval, seventeenth century English, Puritan, and diverse contemporary sources, "the actual problems

of government the American faced were...so urgent, so new, and so comprehensive that attention was beginning to concentrate on the visible and real rather than on the traditional and theoretical."[28]

This study of the idea of virtue in Jefferson's writings will examine Jefferson's attempt to affect a 'visible and real' founding of a democratic republic in America. Although the idea of the American republic remains, in Constitutional debates the republic was rejected by the Federalists as a realistic or even desirable goal. In Jefferson's own lifetime, the republic was dismantled and replaced by a different notion of government and civic participation. We shall consider this rejection of the republic later in the essay, and the suggestive rejection of virtue as well.

Jefferson's interest to us lies in his synthesis of the many intellectual, cultural, and political influences of the late eighteenth century world with what he believed were the possibilities of liberty and a republic in America. Although he was an intellectual and an idealist (Bailyn characterizes the American revolutionary and pre-revolutionary spirit on the whole as one of "pragmatic idealism"[29]), Jefferson held to the facts of American experience as he saw them. The fears of corruption in government and the tendencies of power to exceed natural boundaries that we shall soon discuss were fears of Jefferson's generation in America, but they were also fears of generations of Englishmen before Jefferson's time. Opposition thought in England in the early eighteenth century gave Jefferson and other American founders a wealth of published work (e.g., popular newspaper accounts,

pamphlets) on the dangers of the subversion of the free English heritage.[30] The Glorious Revolution was a blow to centralized state authority. Through much of the seventeenth, as well as the eighteenth century, one finds personalities and movements both in and outside government appalled at the extent of corruption in government. Jefferson's theory of the right of revolution of citizens if their government fails to perform its duties has precedents in English and Puritan dissenting thought. The questions the essay will address are: What is significant about Jefferson and, to understand him fully, his age, in relation to these issues? He envisioned an American republic, and in so doing, he envisioned a virtuous American society. What was the basis of his vision? What is the character of virtue, what does it mean to Jefferson, and what role, or roles, does it play?

A discussion of virtue is an exercise in philosophy. It raises the question of the purpose of virtue in human life. Our interest in virtue in this essay is far from one of moralizing politics, though we shall speak extensively of corruption. In a democratic republic, virtue is necessary for liberty; when Jefferson speaks well of the masses, it was of their abilities as the "best bloodhounds against tyrants."[31] To Jefferson, the most important fact about virtue is its social character. He comments to John Adams, "The essence of virtue is in doing good to others."[34] We shall find that the social nature of virtue plays an important part in society as a natural ethic.

In this, virtue is necessary in another sense: it is a way of living among others. And, lastly, the revolutionary evidence in the Declaration of Independence: virtue is necessary for happiness. "And if the Wise be the happy man..." Jefferson wrote, "he must be virtuous too; for, without virtue happiness cannot be."[32]

In the eighteenth century man, in Condorcet's words, though he will never be perfect, is now advancing along "the path of truth, virtue, and happiness", and it is a consoling thought for the philosopher and the participant of the Enlightenment to contemplate his or her efforts to assist "the progress of reason and the defense of liberty."[33] The eyes of the world were turned upon America, and her effort to establish "the only form of government which is not eternally at open or secret war with the rights of mankind." Jefferson wrote to William Hunter, Esquire, the Mayor of Alexandria, in 1790, "It is indeed an animating thought, that while we are securing the rights of ourselves and our posterity, we are pointing out the way to struggling nations, who wish like us to emerge from their tyrannies also."[34]

NOTES - CHAPTER ONE

1. Morison, Samuel Eliot, The Oxford History of the American People, (New York, 1965), 358-59.

2. Bailyn, Bernard, The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution, (Harvard University Press, 1967), 142.

3. Ibid., 292.

4. Ibid., 65.

5. Parrington, Vernon L., Main Currents in American Thought, Volume I, The Colonial Mind, 1620-1800, (New York 1927), 179.

6. Peden and Koch, eds., The Life and Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson, May 28, 1816, 672.

7. Crick, Bernard, ed., Machiavelli's The Discourses, with an introduction, (Middlesex, England, 1970), 27.

8. Bailyn, op.cit, 285 and 280.

9. Boyd, Julian, ed., The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, (Princeton, 1951-71), Volume 1, 366.

10. Peden and Koch, op.cit.,October 28, 1813, 633.

11. Ibid., 632.

12. Ibid., 633.

13. Ibid., 633-34.

14. Bailyn, op.cit., 252.

15. Morison, op.cit., 367-68.

16. Brodie, Fawn, Jefferson, An Intimate History, 326.

17. Parrington, op.cit., 284.

18. Ibid.

19. Peden and Koch, op.cit., "Biographical Sketches of Famous Men," 1814, 175.

20. Bowers, Claude G., Jefferson and Hamilton, (Boston, New York, 1925, 1953), 96-97.

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21. Parrington, op.cit., 349.

22. Ibid., 284 and 362.

23. Bailyn, op.cit. 26.

24. Boorstin, Daniel, The Lost World of Thomas Jefferson, (Boston, 1948), 219.

25. Cassirer, Ernst, Philosophy of the Enlightenment, (Princeton University Press, 1951), 234.

26. Jefferson himself always remained essentially friendly to the classics but he even did not fundamentally disagree with Benjamin Rush's, among others, questioning of the usefulness of the ancient classics "to a rude American society of mechanics, merchants, and farmers." For example, see Rush's essay, 1798, "Observations upon a study of the Latin and Greek languages, as a branch of liberal instruction, without them, accomodated to the present state of society, manners and government in the United States." Boorstin, op.cit., 220.

27. Bailyn, op.cit, 301.

28. Ibid., 300.

29. Ibid., 232.

30. These pamphlets and newspaper accounts - the popular literature of the day - were the basis of Bailyn's work.

31. Boorstin, op.cit., 192.

32. Brodie, op.cit., 434; cited in: Andrew A. Lipscomb and Albert E. Bergh, eds., The Writings of Thomas Jefferson, 20 volumes, (Washington, D.C., 1903), January 21, 1816, Vol. XIX, 404.

33. Condorcet, Prospectus; cited in: William and Ariel Durant, The Story of Civilization: Part X, Rousseau and Revolution, (New York, 1967), 896-97.

34. Peden and Koch, op.cit., March 11, 1790, 492.

CHAPTER TWO: VIRTUE AND REASON

Enlightenment Rationalism

The clear rationality of the Enlightenment sprang from the sense of "intoxication and power" with which it sought to "banish the darkness of the Middle Ages."[1] While D'Alembert called the eighteenth century "the philosophical century", it could with equal justification be called "the century of natural science", as in fact it did often call itself.[2] The laws of Nature and of "Nature's god"[3] came under unprecedented scrutiny. Partly the result of a new view of the universe from the science of Galileo, Kepler, and Newton, partly because of the empirical philosophies of Locke, Hume,[4] and the physicists of the day, the "whole eighteenth century" was permeated by the conviction that "in the history of humanity the time had now arrived to deprive nature of its carefully guarded secret, to leave it no longer in the dark to be marveled at as an incomprehensible mystery but to bring it under the bright light of reason and analyze it with all its

fundamental forces."[5]

Much Enlightenment thought was characterized by great "faith in, and reliance on, man's capacity to study himself, his institutions, his history and his social relationships through his intellectual capacities working on the observable." Aware of ignorance, the eighteenth century philosopher was not daunted by it.[6] He philosophized in order to illumine human existence, but he saw this illumination "as a tiny and flickering light set against the encompassing darkness of the forces of night."[7] The eighteenth century political theorist sought to throw off the"heavy crust of custom" and "to create by the unfettered power of reason a framework of institutions superior to the accidental inheritance of the past."[8] Reason would weaken monarchy and archaic government in Europe; Burke, for one, recognized the threat of empiricism to his traditions.[9]

While covenant theologians continued "to assume the ultimate inability of man to improve his condition by his own powers",[10] Jefferson, who believed that for centuries the world had labored under the yoke of ignorance and superstition, wrote confidently, "Reason and experiment have been indulged, and error has fled before them."[11] Thinkers of the Enlightenment championed natural law, and fought with courage and conviction for the recognition of natural rights. Science was engaged in the "search for causation to the observable world"; Montesquieu proposed to seek laws in history as Newton had sought them in space.[12] Methodology assumed a new importance in this search for causation, for it was necessary to trace to the

origins of a thing, understand it, and rebuild it according to its laws.

The confidence with which the Enlightenment proceeded was based on the progress of knowledge. Jefferson lamented the fact that most people "do not generally possess information enough to perceive important truths, that knoledge is power, that knoledge is safety, and that knoledge is happiness."[13] Knowledge is power against oppression and tyranny, safety against ignorance, and happiness in the pleasure and betterment of mankind. Emphasis was on the observable world; the age was one of frenzied activity, not only in natural science and natural history, but in all fields. Jefferson wrote to John Adams, "...ours will be the follies of enthusiasm, not of bigotry...Bigotry is the disease of ignorance, of morbid minds, enthusiasm of the free and bouyant. We are destined to be a barrier against the return of ignorance and barbarism."[14] There was a dearth of factual knowledge of the world and as far as this age was concerned, an excess of conceptual. Diderot wrote in his De l'Interpretation de la Nature, "The abstract sciences have occupied the best minds for too long. Words have been multiplied endlessly, but factual knowledge has lagged behind...Yet the true wealth of philosophy consists in facts, of whatever kind they may be."[15]

Influenced by the scientific emphasis on direct observation, the world became better known but not transparent. The majority of Enlightenment thinkers and scientists believed that it was enough to ask what, but vain (and in vain) to ask how. Some theorists, such as Helvetius,

d'Holbach, and Condorcet, endorsed a logic that went beyond the popular deism to materialism. But Jefferson and most other virtuosi of the Enlightenment did not venture into the essences of things or the mystery of creation. Jefferson was never a materialist nor an atheist. Enlightenment mainstream thought is aware of limits to science, analysis, and knowledge. Concerning the questions of the unity of body and mind, of our simple ideas and the ultimate grounds of motion, D'Alembert wrote: "the supreme Intelligence has drawn a veil before our feeble vision which we try in vain to remove. It is a sad lot for our curiosity and our pride, but it is the lot of humanity."[17]

In the eighteenth century reason was often understood as agency and energy.[18] It was a practical age, one absorbed in the physical world. Reason is a practical faculty; man uses it to discover universal law, and gain knowledge of and mastery over nature. There was much to accomplish by the exercise of reason. Man would work to correct the mistakes of history; in natural science, man would experiment with nature and observe the world, seeking knowledge.

This period of the Enlightenment in America and Europe was characterized by a 'workman' sense in relation to nature and by a sense of urgency. Jefferson wrote to Maria Cosway in England that if she and her husband were to venture to America, they would not find a "state of absolute anarchy" and frontier lawlessness, as all Europe had been made to believe by the "lying newspapers of London, and their credulous copyers in other countries." Rather they would find a people occupied "in opening rivers, digging navigable canals,

making roads, building public schools, establishing academies,... protecting religious freedom,...reforming and improving our laws in general."[19] The American Philosophic Society, of which Jefferson served as president and whose circle included Rittenhouse, Madison, Franklin, and Priestley, was founded for the purpose of garnering, encouraging, and exchanging practical knowledge. Their aim, and that of 'philosophical' societies in England (in an age when philosophical and scientific both meant the quest for knowledge in all fields), was to discover the real world, in order to live in it, live in it <u>well</u>, and subjugate it.[20]

Relevant to this workman sense and to the focus on the natural world, physical and biological metaphors abound in the thought of the age. The aim for Jefferson was not "the <u>good</u> society" but "the <u>healthy</u> society."[21] Man was to be examined in the search for causation as an organism in the physical world. He was a being of senses and the active life was the healthiest. Virtue, to Jefferson, was also seen in terms of activity; a faculty of man, it must be exercised to be kept strong. In place of a divine model for government Jefferson sought "the universal connections between bodily health and social well-being." When society was well-ordered and happy, the human species flourished; when people were obsessed by unwholesome ideas or lived amidst social maladjustment, the species became ill.[22] Equality was first and foremost a biological fact[23]; no one emerged from the womb wearing a sceptre and crown.

The Moral Sense

> Jefferson's ultimate optimism was the conviction that a wide diffusion of knowledge could not fail to fertilize man's innate instincts for reason, morality, and beauty.[24]

As stated earlier, virtue's most important characteristic, for Jefferson, is its social nature. He believed that all people are endowed with a certain moral sense, of which virtue is a part. If anyone might doubt the existence of this sense, Jefferson advised, one had only to observe the proof of experience:

> These good acts give us pleasure, but how happens it that they give us pleasure? Because nature hath implanted in our breasts a love of others, a sense of duty to them, a moral instinct, in short, which prompts us irresistibly to feel and succor their distresses...The Creator would indeed have been a bungling artist, had he intended man for a social animal, without planting in him social dispositions.[25]

This is the principle of an harmonious element that exists in society and works to bind people together. The moral sense, innate in man, and "made a part of his physical constitution"[26] is the true foundation of morality. Jefferson stated to Thomas Law, who wrote on moral philosophy, "I sincerely...believe with you in the existence of a moral instinct. I think it is the brightest gem with which the human character is studded, and the want of it as more degrading than the most hideous of the bodily deformities."[27] In a letter to John Adams in 1816, Jefferson referred to a book by Count Destutt de Tracy:

> I gather from his (Tracy's) other works that he adopts the principle of Hobbes,that justice is founded in contract solely, and does not result from the construction of man. I believe, on the contrary, that it is instinct, and innate, that the moral sense is as much a part of our constitution as that of feeling, seeing, or hearing; as a wise creator must have seen to be necessary in an animal destined to live in society: that every human mind feels pleasure in doing good to another.[28]

"Man was destined for society. His morality, therefore, was to be formed to this object..."[29] If man lives in his natural right and dignity, in Condorcet's words (for the belief in the moral sense was common to Enlightenment thought), "not tormented and corrupted by greed, fear, or envy",[30] the moral sense will flourish because man will seek the exercise of it in much the same way that a healthy body seeks activity. In an environment of freedom and equality, the exercise of the moral sense and the practice of virtue would constitute a sort of rule in society, in addition to and apart from that of government. They would draw people irresistibly to one another, and they would work to restrain self-interest - in Jefferson's words, "self-love, or egoism"[31] - both qualities necessary for an harmonious social and happy personal life.

The Romantic movement and the revolt of Rousseau against the rationalism of the Enlightenment was based on Rousseau's scorn of philosophy and what he felt was the impotence of reason to teach men virtue. Reason seemed to have no moral sense; it would labor

to defend any desire, however corrupt.[32] Jefferson did not so doubt enlightened reason, but he was aware of the divided domain. In a half-serious, half-forlorn dialogue between "My Head and My Heart", written to Maria Cosway on her leaving Paris and Jefferson for her home in England, we find his heart defending itself against the accusations of its follies by his head: "When nature assigned us the same habitation she gave us over it a divided empire. To you she allotted the field of science, to me that of morals....Morals were too essential to the happiness of man to be risked on the incertain combinations of the head." Jefferson's heart advises his head to "fill paper as you please with triangles and squares", but admit that "nature has not organized you for our moral direction."[33] It is the whole organism, the happiness and well-being of man in his totality, that concerned Jefferson.

The Enlightenment may have been the Age of Reason but early liberal man was not a "reasoning machine", however great his enchantment with the powers of the intellect. Sheldon Wolin points out in Politics and Vision, "Rather, liberal writers beginning with Locke and extending through Smith, Hume, and the Utilitarians emphasized repeatedly that man was a creature of strong passions." Hume and Smith understood that, "Morals were the products of human feelings. They originated with desires and needs and were approved by the passions. Reason was delegated the role of determining the most efficient means to achieving the ends proposed by feeling."[34]

Jefferson's philosophy was one of concern for a balance of emotions in man. He wrote to William Short, an American diplomat and intimate friend, "As you say of yourself, I too am an Epicurean. I consider the genuine (not the imputed) doctrines of Epicurus as containing everything rational in moral philosophy which Greece and Rome have left us."[35] The Epicurean philosophy seeks moderate pleasure and the avoidance of pain. Its aim in life is happiness; the summum bonum is to be not pained in body, nor troubled in mind (see Appendix I). We find here one of the main antecedents of Jefferson's statement of right of the pursuit of happiness in the Declaration of Independence. In "My Head and My Heart" Jefferson echoes Epicurus (who is a source of Utilitarian thought as well): "The aim of life is the art of avoiding pain." He ponders to John Adams:

> I have often wondered for what good end the sensations of Grief could be intended. All our other passions, within proper bounds, have an useful object. And the perfection of the moral character is, not in a Stoic apathy,...but in a just equilibrium of all the passions. I wish the pathologists then would tell us what is the use of grief in the economy, and of what good it is the cause, proximate or remote.[36]

Thus, passion is not inherently bad; it a natural part of man. The main requirement of passion is that it be in moderation. A virtuous person, and a virtuous life, would be moderate ones, for they would indicate that one was in the end ruled by reason and not by excessive emotion (e.g.,desire, fear). Passion has values of its own but it

must be restrained by reason, for its tendency seemed to Jefferson to be to excess, blindness, and loss of control over one's emotions and the situation. The temperate person is the happy one, who is not beset by the turbulence of excessive desire and emotion. To be ruled by passion is to lead a disorganized, purposeless, unproductive life, thrown from one desire to another. In moderation passion and deliberation exist well together; passion is a handmaiden of endeavor.

The Decline of Religion

Dating from the attempts of Bacon, Hobbes, and Locke to explain the world and man by natural explanations, the search had begun for a natural ethic. Religion steadily declined in status as the faith in reason and natural science increased. By mid-eighteenth century, England had long been a friendly home to deism. In France the philosophes, who shaped Jefferson's humanitarian views, were looking for "a morality that would be independent of theology."

The deistic challenge to traditional religion was the development of the view that "the real revelation is in Nature herself, and in man's God-given reason; the real God is the God that Newton revealed, the designer of a marvelous world operating...according to invariable law."[37] Jefferson paid due reference to the idea of Heaven in such a crisis as death, but he was alert to every scientific advance that cast doubt on it, and was increasingly toughminded in his skepticism:[38] "The Almighty himself could not construct a machine of perpetual motion,"

he wrote to Dr. Robert Peterson in 1812, "while the laws exist which He has prescribed for the government of matter in our system."[39] The laws of God's world - or, as often put in the age, of Nature and Nature's god - would be revealed at first hand by man's unfettered use of reason. Jefferson adopted the concept of a 'reasonable Christianity', as expounded in Priestley's two-volume History of the Corruptions of Christianity.[40] Still, although Jefferson might call the Revelation of St. John "the ravings of a maniac", the world was not shorn of wonder. There was divine force in the laws of nature.[41]

The age loved liberty, justice, toleration, and reason. Jefferson recalled with approval that "the convention of May, 1776, in their declaration of rights, declared it to be a truth, and a natural right, that the exercise of religion should be free."[42] The feeling of the time generally was that religious feeling was natural, but that the church (especially the Catholic church) and clergy were intolerable.[43] The central conflict of the age was between faith and reason, between religion and philosophy. This was the battle that the philosophes fought, won, and lost again in the French Revolution. Reason was set against mythology, knowledge against dogma. Progress, and further enlightenment, were possible through education, then mostly in the hands of the church and the Jesuits; to free education from their control was another battle of the age.

Ideas passed excitedly through the enlightened world on both sides of the Atlantic. Traditions were disturbed, thought and action stimulated. This activity was carried on most tirelessly and brilliantly by "intellect incarnate", Voltaire, who, as the seminal thinker of the age, greatly influenced Jefferson. Voltaire had his doubts about the powers of reason, and was more inclined to theism than deism. He and Frederick the Great, representatives of enlightened thought and rule in Europe, detested the clergy who "based their power on pretended access to the Deity."[44] In Jefferson there is no toleration of mysticism, of the threat of damnation of punishment. Reading, time, and reflection convinced him "that the interests of society require the observation of those moral precepts only in which all religions agree (for all forbid us to steal, murder, plunder, or bear false witness)."[45] Let reason and free inquiry rule; Jefferson wrote confidently, "The great principles of right and wrong are legible to every reader; to pursue them requires not the aid of many counsellors."[46] His faith in the power of deliberation led him to comment calmly that "if a sect arises, whose tenets would subvert morals, good sense has fair play, and reasons and laughs it out of doors."[47]

Of his own beliefs (he was widely accused of atheism in the colonies) Jefferson wrote, "say nothing of my religion. It is known to my god and myself alone. It's evidence before the world is to be sought in my life. If that has been honest and dutiful to society, the religion which has regulated it cannot be a bad one."[48]

While religion under the influence of clergy and church had been "Sectarian Dogma", true religion, Jefferson wrote to John Adams, consists of "the moral precepts, innate in man, and made a part of his physical

constitution, as necessary for a social being," and "the sublime doctrines of philantropism, and deism taught us by Jesus of Nazareth."[49] Jefferson revered Jesus because he felt his moral system was better than the ancient philosophers' or the ancient Jews.[50] He admired the free and "civilized ancient spirit", but on the whole he thought that the ancient world lacked the high ethical standard of true Christian morality, embodied in the deism of Jesus.[51] In Thomas Jefferson, American Humanist, Lehmann writes that in Jefferson's opinion, "The ancients had been deficient in recognizing the indivisible connection between individual and social happiness."[52] The ancient philosophers in general were too bound up in the individual and the search for truth, and lacked true charity. In a letter to William Short, in which he discussed ancient moralists, Jefferson wrote, "Epictetus and Epicurus give laws for governing ourselves, Jesus a supplement of the duties and charities we owe to others."[53] In Jesus' morality is found a wide democracy of virtue, love, service, and equality. Jefferson criticized the ancients for lack of fellow-feeling. Plato dealt out "mysticisms incomprehensive to the human mind."[54] He was too abstract and only served to confuse men. The Republic was of no practical value.[55] (See Appendix I)

While virtue in the eighteenth century meant Christian goodness there are some parallels to the meaning of virtue in earlier times. Machiavelli's 'virtu' has been given many English translations: prowess, ability, strength and wisdom, virtue. It comes from the Roman 'vir' (man) and 'virtus' (what is proper to a man). Bernard Crick comments, But what is proper to a man? "In the classical and renaissance theory of man and culture underlying the word, man is at his best when active to the common good, and he is not properly a man otherwise; politics is not a necessary evil, it is the very life."[56] For Jefferson, the political was not the whole of

life, as it was for the ancients. Virtue is not by nature a political characteristic; it is part of man's larger social sense. The "common good" is an important concept to Jefferson; his virtue has considerable civic spirit in it. Pagan 'virtues' - citizenship, heroism, public achievements - have meaning for Jefferson, who read the ancients all his life in the original languages. However, pagan morality, linked to the preservation of the city-state, is not sufficient.[57] As a deist, he finds the ancient world lacking in the social concerns of man.

And, unlike Machiavelli, Jefferson cannot remove considerations of morality from the sphere of politics.[58] Government is a means to freedom, happiness, and the protection of right; it is not an end in itself. Political survival and republic-building were not his only goals. His morality is all of a piece; government reflects society.[59] If not, corruption would creep into the people or into government, and undermine virtue. In Jefferson's view, corrupt government, more than unstable government, had been the cause of the unhappiness of man.

Mark Musa, who in his introduction to The Prince defines virtu as ingenuity, makes the point that despite varying translations of virtu into English, "One thing seems certain: Machiavelli's 'virtu' has nothing in common with the medieval passive concept of 'virtu' involving contemplation and prayer; indeed, it is the reverse: a concept of action involving both mind and body."[60]

Something of the same is true of Jefferson's idea of virtue; one does not want to carry his Christianity too far. In the eighteenth century, leading currents of thought were breaking away from traditional religious interpretations. Jefferson's virtue is not submissiveness or humility. The moral sense binds people to other people and makes their concerns mutual; it does not bind them to devotion, to prayer, or to the church.

Is Religion Necessary for Morality?

> The central fact of modern history in the West...is unquestionably the decline of religion.
>
> William Barrett,
> Irrational Man[61]

With the weakening of religious ties which bind people to others, and to the welfare of others, what is there to hold society together? Coercion has been an age-old restraint; religion has traditionally been an aid to social order. The philosophes and Jefferson could envision social order without religion because generally they believed that man was good. But from the early seventeen hundreds the deists had been warned "that their doctrine leads to atheism, and that atheism will lead to the collapse of morality."[62] Could a state survive without a religion to buttress social order with supernatural hopes and fears? Could popular morality be maintained? It is difficult to form moral character without basing it on religious belief. The philosophes called this in question; the debate on the necessity of religion for morality would continue through the eighteenth century and then through the next. It is with us today.[63] The ethic they and Jefferson opted for was in nature, in the moral sense. Jefferson was only one in a long line; Voltaire, in his Traite de Metaphysique, long before Hume and Adam Smith, "derives the moral sense from fellow feeling, sym-pathy."[64]

Virtue has always been a concern of republics. It is necessary for good government; for some thinkers of the Enlightenment, virtue is

necessary in an additional sense. The practice of virtue is the organic, natural binding together of society from within. While traditional religion had helped to provide for social order and meaning, among other things, in the new age of man moral instinct, fellow-feeling, and virtue would provide the bonds, restraints, and ties among people necessary for their happiness and for harmonious social life.

Jefferson recognized the role religion plays in keeping societies together. He is non-plussed that there are probably "a thousand different systems of religion" and that ours is but one of that thousand. He writes of the new nation, "Religion is well supported (in every state); of various kinds, indeed, but all good enough; all sufficient to preserve peace and order."[65] The practice of virtue and the exercise of the moral sense, enhancing fellow feeling, would replace a supernatural faith that had oppressed man. The colonies did not undergo a social revolution, as did France; however, in America as well as in feudal Europe free thought and inquiry were questioning tradition. Jefferson rejoiced in the search for a natural ethic. His intention was not that religious feeling go out of the world but that the "Sectarian Dogma" of the church, and along with it, fear, spiritual coercion, and ignorance, would no longer plague man.

"Man is destined for society." Jefferson discusses the lack of the moral instinct and hence social inclination as a physical perversion. He writes to Thomas Law, Esquire, "Self-love...is no part of morality. Indeed it is exactly its counterpart...Take from man

his selfish propensities and he can have nothing to seduce him from the practice of virtue."[66] An excess of self-love, or "egoism", would go against the natural inclination to please and succor one's fellows, to live harmoniously and happily in their company. He chides his daughter on the dangers of being too long out of society, and of spending too much time alone:

> I think I discover in you a willingness to withdraw from society more than is prudent. I am convinced that our own happiness requires that we should continue to mix with the world, and to keep pace with it as it goes; and that every person who retires from free communication with it is severely punished afterwards by the state of mind into which they get, and which can only be prevented by feeding our sociable principles.[67]

Withdrawal from society was unhealthy; Jefferson feared that it led to "an antisocial and misanthropic state of mind."[68] Antisocial tendencies hinder our own happiness and withdrawal harms society for it works against the practice of virtue, which Jefferson calls "doing good to others" and which is also fulfilling one's obligations to society and the community.

Morality and virtue are necessary for social life, but they do not depend on a traditional love of God. This point is crucial to the acceptance of a natural ethic. Jefferson writes of the morality of the atheist; it is a likelihood, not a freak of nature. Atheists are not excluded from the fabric of society - that society which is at heart held together by our moral and social inclinations towards one another. Because of the existence of the moral sense, an atheist can

be expected to feel the same need of and inclination to social life as any other, and can be expected to be as aware of his social duties:

> Some have made the love of God the foundation of morality. This, too, is but a branch of our moral duties, which are generally divided into duties to God and duties to man. If we did a good act merely from the love of God and a belief that it is pleasing to Him, whence arises the morality of the Atheist? It is idle to say, as some do, that no such being exists. We have the same evidence of the fact as of most of those we act on, to wit: their own affirmations, and their reasonings in support of them.[69]

Atheists are no threat to society; antisocial behavior is far more harmful to society than are atheistic beliefs. Action reflecting anti-social inclinations is destructive of society based on a natural ethic. Atheists - all men - are possessed of reason, the moral sense, and the potential for virtue and happiness.

Although the hold on society of a natural ethic was as yet untried, Jefferson's faith in virtue and reason kept him from ultimately doubting success. However, his comments on the fragile nature of the bindings of society are instructive in view of this natural ethic.

What did Jefferson understand by virtue in a person? What would its lack occasion? Primarily it would mean there would be no harmonious society. There would be little to bind people together if they lacked, lost, or corrupted the moral instinct, which is one

towards virtue. The absence of virtue in society would mean there would be little to inspire people to good works, and little to compel them to perform their duties to society and one another. Most of the philosophes accepted the universality of self-love as the basic source of action, but they trusted that education, legislation, and reason would turn self-love to mutual cooperation and social order.[70] Jefferson, however, remained confident in the power of social inclinations: "Self-interest, or rather self-love, or egoism, has been more plausibly substituted as the basis of morality. But I consider our relations with others as constituting the boundaries of morality."[71]

The traditional restraints and enticements of the church were disintegrating under the light of reason. Coercion, freely used by governments of the past as a necessary part of social order, would not be tolerated by free individuals. In America, virtue would be cultivated; Jefferson preferred agricultural life because of its moral and physical qualities. In the independent colonies, the moral sense would get the exercise it needed to maintain its strength and to keep from growing slack. Thus, healthy society was assured, and through it, good government - the elements Jefferson thought were necessary to found and preserve the American republic.

NOTES - CHAPTER TWO

1. Barrett, Irrational Man, 28-29.

2. Cassirer, Philosophy of the Enlightenment, 45-47.

3. D'Entreves, Natural Law, 52.

4. Harris, Reason and Nature in Eighteenth Century Thought, 9.

5. Cassirer, op.cit., 45-47.

6. Plumb, In the Light of History, 4.

7. Barrett, op.cit., 28-29.

8. Bailyn, The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution, 33-34.

9. Plumb, op.cit., 52.

10. Bailyn, op.cit., 33-34.

11. Peden and Koch, eds., The Life and Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson, Notes on Virginia, 276.

12. Plumb, op.cit., 3; Durant, The Age of Voltaire, 230.

13. Thomas Jefferson to George Ticknor, November 25, 1817; quoted by Cappon, The Adams-Jefferson Letters, Vol. II, 478.

14. Ibid., August 1, 1816, Vol. II, 483.

15. Cassirer, op.cit., 75.

16. Plumb, op.cit., 2.

17. "virtuosi" is Bailyn's descriptive term; D'Alembert is quoted in Durant, op.cit., 56.

18. Cassirer, op.cit., Chapter Two, "Nature and Natural Science".

19. "My Head and My Heart", Thomas Jefferson to Maria Cosway, October 12, 1786, Paris; Boyd, The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, X, 443-53; reprinted in Brodie, Thomas Jefferson, An Intimate History, Appendix II, 483-492.

20. Boorstin, The Lost World of Thomas Jefferson.

21. Ibid., 181.

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22. Ibid., 181 and 183.

23. Ibid., 105.

24. Lehmann, Thomas Jefferson, American Humanist, 192.

25. Peden and Koch, op.cit., letter to Thomas Law, Esquire, former British civil servant in India who settled in the States out of preference for American institutions and who wrote on moral philosophy, June 13, 1814, 638.

26. Cappon, op.cit., Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, May 5, 1817, Vol. II, 512.

27. Peden and Koch, op.cit., letter to Thomas Law, Esquire, June 13, 1814, 640.

28. Cappon, op.cit., October 14, 1816, Vol. II, 492.

29. Peden and Koch, op.cit., letter to Peter Carr, one of Jefferson's nephews, August 10, 1787, Paris, 430.

30. Condorcet, Prospectus, quoted in Durant, Rousseau and Revolution, 896-897.

31. Peden and Koch, op.cit., letter to Thomas Law, Esquire, June 13, 1814, 637.

32. Durant, Rousseau and Revolution, 888-889.

33. "My Head and My Heart," in Boyd, The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, X, 443-53; reprinted in Brodie, Thomas Jefferson, An Intimate History, Appendix II, 483-492.

34. Wolin, Politics and Vision, 332.

35. Peden and Koch, op.cit., October 31, 1819, 693.

36. Cappon, op.cit., April 18, 1816, Vol. II, 467.

37. Durant, The Age of Voltaire, 611.

38. Brodie, op.cit., 453.

39. Ibid., cited in Lipscomb and Bergh, eds., The Writings of Thomas Jefferson, XIII, 192.

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40. Ibid., 370.

41. Durant, The Age of Voltaire, 625.

42. Peden and Koch, op.cit., Notes on Virginia, 273-74.

43. Durant, The Age of Voltaire, 620.

44. Ibid.

45. Brodie, op.cit., Jefferson to James Fishback, September 27, 1809, cited in Lipscomb and Bergh, op.cit., XII, 315.

46. Boyd, op.cit., Vol. I, from A Summary View..., 1774, 134.

47. Peden and Koch, op.cit., Notes on Virginia, 276.

48. Cappon, op.cit., Jefferson to John Adams, January 11, 1817, Vol. II, 506.

49. Ibid., Jefferson to John Adams, May 5, 1817, Vol. II, 550.

50. Brodie, op.cit., 371.

51. Lehmann, op.cit., 112.

52. Ibid., 190.

53. Ibid., Jefferson to William Short, October 31, 1819, 693-97.

54. Joseph Priestley wrote a pamphlet, Socrates and Jesus Compared, that he sent to Jefferson, with whom he often corresponded. Jefferson, in his turn, wrote a Syllabus of An Estimate of the Doctrines of Jesus, Compared with Those of Others.

55. Lehmann, op.cit., 190.

56. Crick, Bernard, ed., Machiavelli: The Discourses, 57.

57. Ibid., 55.

58. Musa, Mark, ed., Machiavelli's The Prince, (New York, 1964), Introduction.

59. Ibid.

60. Ibid., xv.

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61. Barrett, Irrational Man, 20.

62. i.e., Tindal, echoing Berkeley, 1733.

63. Durant, The Age of Voltaire, 287.

64. Ibid.

65. Peden and Koch, op.cit, Notes on Virginia, 276.

66. Ibid., letter to Thomas Law, Esquire, 638.

67. Brodie, op.cit., letter to Maria Jefferson Eppes, March 3, 1802, Family Letters, 219; 282.

68. Speaking of himself regarding the period 1793-1797, when he remained close at home and saw none but those who came to Monticello.

69. Peden and Koch, op.cit., letter to Thomas Law, Esquire, June 13, 1814, 637.

70. Durant, The Age of Voltaire, Chapter, "The Triumph of the Philosophes."

71. Peden and Koch, op.cit., letter to Thomas Law, Esquire, June 13, 1814, 637.

CHAPTER THREE: VIRTUE AND THE PROBLEM OF CORRUPTION

> ...I doubt whether the people of this country would suffer an execution for heresy, or a three years' imprisonment for not comprehending the mysteries of the Trinity. But is the spirit of the people an infallible, a permanent reliance? Is it government? Is this the kind of protection we receive in turn for the rights we give up? Besides, the spirit of the times may alter, will alter. Our rulers will become corrupt, our people careless. A single zealot may commence persecutor, and better men be his victums. It can never be too often repeated, that the time for fixing every essential right on a legal basis is while our rulers are honest, and ourselves united. From the conclusion of this war we shall be going downhill. It will not then be necessary to resort every moment to the people for support. They will be forgotten, therefore, and their rights disregarded. They will forget themselves, but in the sole faculty of making money, and will never think of uniting to effect a due respect for their rights.
>
> Thomas Jefferson,[1] in
> Notes on Virginia

This is Jefferson on a pessimistic note; it is hardly the voice of the ardent democrat, nor does it seem to reflect the confidence of the Enlightenment. It does reflect an historical and political realism which was found in the optimism of the eighteenth century. While forward-looking, educated men and women of the Enlightenment acted in the belief that they could illumine human existence, they saw this illumination only "as a tiny and flickering light" set against the darkness that lay over most of the world. The significant point is that many of them saw no end to the "triumphant expansion of reason" into all areas of life. But, as subsequent history has shown and as

Jefferson sensed, social and political life forever defy reason, and man has foundered badly on the realities of continuing darkness: wars, economic problems, greed, ignorance, prejudice, the lust for power.[2]

Corruption is a threat to all republican governments, because they depend on virtue. Given the marvelous but temporal and weak nature of man, corruption is the primary agent of the destruction of virtue. If not definitively dealt with, corruption of almost any kind in America would weaken society, the base of the republic.

Fear of corruption was in the air, and it stemmed not only from historical precedent; although Gibbon was then writing his Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire and Montesquieu his Considerations sur les causés de la grandeur des Romains et de leur decadence. The English world was worried about its own institutions, which, from the upheavals of the seventeenth century, had emerged remarkable. Britain was one of the few nations whose people could claim freedom. What most in the kingdom agreed on (even the doubters and dissidents, which were numerous) was that "England, as the once skeptical Montesquieu admitted by 1731, was 'the freest country that exists in the world.'....England's freedom, it was generally agreed, was directly attributable to its constitution of government, a constitution which better than any other known to history had harnessed the use of power."[3] A mixed government in which the King's powers had been lessened and the House of Common's expanded was an assurance against arbitrary rule and the infringe- of right, but it was not a complete assurance. Proud of their institutions and freedom, the English were jealous of them as well. Their suspicians and fears were readily communicated to the colonies by the literature and popular press of England, and their attitudes were extremely

influential in forming the colonists' political beliefs.

American historian Bernard Bailyn writes that the colonists, influenced by the climate of popular literature and dissension in early eighteenth century Britain, came to see their world in terms of 'conspiracy' - a deliberate, pre-meditated plot to rob Englishmen of their treasured institutions and freedom.[4] The colonists "saw about them... not merely mistaken, or even evil, policies violating the principles upon which freedom rested, but what appeared to be evidence of nothing less than a deliberate assault...against liberty both in England and in America."[5] Bailyn may well be correct in his theory of conspiracy as an underlying force of the times and one of the main spurs of the move for independence: it is enough here to state that underlying that theme was the fear of corruption in government and society on a wide and progressively worsening scale. If not dealt with, it would weaken and destroy the fabric of British and colonial life and the virtue of the government, open the way to despotic rule, and substitute oppression for freedom and right.

There were two sources of this fear: 1) corruption in government, by the abuse of power, the misuse of funds of the people, and the peddling of influence for private gain, and 2) corruption in society, in the manners and way of life of the people.[6] Both were suspected in Britain and her colonies. After the war for independence these suspicians remained and additional fears arose, borne of the unique experience of the colonies.

The Problem of Power

All those engaged in the examination of society address the issue of the nature of man, and a universal maxim is that power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Of the fears of corruption and the destruction of liberty Bailyn comments, it is not "simply a question of what the weak and ignorant will do": no-where can men withstand the temptation of wielding power over others. The view of Jefferson's age was not that power in itself was evil; "It was natural in its origins, and necessary." The problem arose in the desire for and inevitable misuse of power, of its tendency to flow out of bounds. The conviction then, probably unchanged now, was that "power", impelled by the passions of men, "had desolated the earth; where liberty was extinguished so too in the end were justice, virtue, honesty, trade, naval power, wealth...- indeed, everything worth living for: the arts and sciences, thought, understanding, religion."[7]

Despite his great faith in the people Jefferson never tried to defend them against a charge of weakness in face of the temptations of power. His entire career was dedicated to the principle that the people should be the final source of authority in government.[8] Free government, however, whose purpose was to secure liberty, must be "founded in jealousy, and not in confidence."[9] Jefferson wrote of this vital question of power, "let no more be said of confidence in man, but bind him down from mischief (and from his own weakness), by the chains of the Constitution."[10] He was convinced the establishment of good laws was the best protection against excessive and arbitrary power, but even established law did not

guarantee good government. Laws must be binding; they must also be subject to revision and change, for the times and needs of men will change. Written law, an invention of man, is subject to the limitations of man's nature and the possibility of corruption. Jefferson wrote in his Notes on Virginia that an assembly of the colonies should not "be deluded by the integrity of their own purposes, and conclude that these unlimited powers will never be abused, because themselves are not disposed to abuse them. They should look forward to a time, and that not a distant one, when a corruption in this, as in the country from which we derive our origin, will have seized the head of government, and be spread by them through the body of the people."[11]

The problem of the abuse of power is in many ways the problem of government itself, and the reconciliation of its need with the limiting of its power. This point will be discussed further in the following chapter, in the relationship between government and society; in Jefferson's view (and the age's) they were two different things and not necessarily compatible. Jefferson believed that self-government through the local unit was the most conducive to liberty and to the curbing of the excesses of power. Local government was also the best breeding place of morality, where man's virtue, sociability, and decision making powers were cultivated, and the tendencies to self-love, or "egoism", and the unleavened pursuit of private wealth were most effectively and naturally countered. However, even a democratic republic cannot expect to transcend certain limits. Jefferson remarked:

> Human nature is the same on every side of the Atlantic, and will be alike influenced by the same causes. The time to guard against corruption and tyranny is before they shall have gotten hold of us. It is better to keep the wolf out of the fold, than to trust to drawing his teeth and claws after he shall have entered.[12]

Corruption in Government and Manners - England and Feudal Europe

America had been borne and bred in virtue; she was virtually unblemished. Given the fragile nature of virtue, and Jefferson's belief in man's need of it to best fulfill himself, what greater worry could he have than that virtue be corrupted in the colonies? America had none of Europe's problems of overcoming centuries of tyranny, oppression, poverty, ignorance, and superstition. If all the people were not equal in goods, property, and education, there were not the ravaging excesses of wealth and poverty as in Europe. "Charmed as he was by the gentle manners of the French aristocracy, Jefferson was appalled at the misery and squalor of the French masses."[13] Early in the colonies' history a sense of relative equality, and equality of opportunity, prevailed.[14]

The quality of life and freedom in America and England was attributed to the quality of government. The quality in both places was high and in comparison with the rest of the old world, unsurpassed, for with few exceptions Europe still lived under the yoke of feudal life and unenlightened government. However, even with the awareness of good government it was believed, not only among opposition leaders, in England and echoed in force in the colonies, that "threats to free government... lurked everywhere..."[15]

In England there was suspicion that these threats existed "nowhere more dangerously than in the designs of ministers in office",[16] those who would bend the ear of the king for their own interests. In the first half of the eighteenth century "political morality reflected the triumph of a hard commercial spirit. Hardly anything could be effected without bribery, and nearly every official had his price. Offices were sold, and votes in Parliament were bought like merchandise. M.P.s sold their franking privilege...'Rotten borroughs' with a handful of inhabitants, sent to Parliament as many representatives as counties abounding in population and industry..."[17] In accounts of newspapers, popular pamphlets, and literature of early eighteenth century England we find fear of tyrannical law and despotism at the hands of a "wicked, corrupt Ministry" composed of "pimps and parasites" and "idle drones" who lived in "effeminizing luxury" and "slothful negligence."[18] As could hardly escape the colonists' notice, it was from these ranks that the Crown selected and awarded ministerships, governorships, and land titles in the new world; such were the representatives of the Crown and British law in America.

The press of the early eighteenth century and dissenters in general both of the left and right criticized the spreading "dissoluteness of morals" and general decay in society as much as they hounded corrupt ministers and arbitrary government. Everywhere one turned one found vice instead of virtue. Luxury, venality, dependence, and "effeminacy" seemed to characterize England, where "electors and elected (had) become a bed of corruption." This decay in society was no small cause for alarm; it was

as important, if not more so, as the goings on in ministerial chambers and at court, for everyone knew of the "moral qualities necessary to preserve a free government."[19] If the people were licentious and slothful, who would check the power of the ministers? If vigilance was abandoned, so too were liberty and freedom, and in their neglect the people would soon find themselves in fact, not only in suspicion, abandoned and oppressed under despotic government and tyrannical law - if any law at all.

The concern for "our degenerate times and corrupt nation" of eighteenth century spokesmen on both sides of the political spectrum sprang from many sources, but the conviction that underlay the rest was that the "unaccustomed wealth" of the country and desire for fortune lay at the heart of the decay of British government and society.[20] No one probed the sources of English corruption more diligently than William Pitt, "the colonists' Olympian champion," grandson of Diamond Pitt. In an address to Parliament Pitt stated:

> For some years past there has been an influx of wealth into this country which has been attended with many fatal consequences, because it has not been the regular, natural produce of labor and industry. The riches of Asia have been poured in upon us, and have brought with them not only Asiatic luxury, but, I fear, Asiatic principles of government...My Lords, I say nothing but what is within the knowledge of us all; the corruption of the people is the great original cause of the discontents of the people themselves, of the enterprise of the crown, and the notorious decay of the internal vigor of the constitution.[21]

Asiatic or European, these threats to republican free government were taken seriously in the colonies. John Adams wrote in his "Novanglus", "Liberty can no more exist without virtue and independence than the body can live and move without a soul," and what liberty could flow from England

where "luxury, effeminacy, and venality are arrived at such a shocking pitch."[22] Despite her auspicious founding in virtue and the new world America was as vulnerable to corruption as England; virtue in America, as in any other place, would always be a fragile thing. Her founders believed that corruption had not yet found root in colonial soil; thus, if the sordid aspects of the old world were somehow kept beyond her shores, American virtue would be preserved and nourished. The move for independence was one way to sever the ties with England and protect freedom and virtue.[23]

Europe

The English example may have been uppermost in the colonists' minds; their experience was largely British. Most of them and their families were of English, Scottish, or Irish stock. They shared a common language and culture. Their government was modeled on English common law and the free English constitution. But it was not the opinion in the colonies that only England had become corrupt; the whole of Europe, and it goes without saying, the unknown Orient, was a spectre of corruption.

Unlike the new world Europe was the home of the absolute monarch. Jefferson wrote to Washington from France in 1788: "I was much an enemy to monarchy before I came to Europe. I am ten thousand times more so since I have seen what they are." What sort of government was this? "The king (of France) goes for nothing," Jefferson wrote to John Jay on October 8, 1787, "He hunts one half the day, is drunk the other, and signs whatever he is bid."[24]

The church's powers and iron-clad rule of fear dominated everything, even the printing presses - an important tool of liberty and free thought.[25] The church chained Europe to the past, with the intention of keeping its hold on its properties and privileges, and on peoples' minds. Ignorance and superstition flourished. Compared to the colonies' mostly frugal but generally self-sufficient economy and standard of living, the poverty and misery of Europe were astonishing. The common man in America was something new, though not yet full grown, critically thinking and independent; the masses of France were as they always had been, abject. The French court lived in unbelievable extravagence off the revenues of their very poor peasantry. Dishonesty in office was normal; many of the taxes collected never reached the treasury.[26]

True, the great men and women of the age were in Europe. Civilization had its roots there. The company was superb. While serving the American government as Minister to France Jefferson came to admire Paris as a city, though he disliked cities on principle. He lived there several years just before the Revolution of 1789.[27] He enjoyed the urbane life, learned a great deal, and in his free time saw much of the rest of Europe. But "behind the gay life of court society, the gracious manners and brilliant conversation of the Paris salons, was a lack of morality that Jefferson found shocking. Most marriages were arranged and were for the purpose of joining families and property, not individuals." In the aristocracy no social stigma was attached to adultery; it was accepted as a pleasant substitute for the divorce that the national religion forbade.[28] In his later years Jefferson commented on the achievements of Europe to John Adams:

"As for France and England, with all their pre-eminence in science, the one is a den of robbers, and the other of pirates. And if science produces no better fruits than tyranny, murder, rapine and destitution of national morality, I would rather wish our country to be ignorant, honest, and estimable as" - interestingly enough - "our neighboring savages are."[29]

Corruption in America

America was the land of promise. The old world was dying, as well it should; all was making way, if slowly, for the rights of man and the declaration of independence and self-determination of all people. Where lay the threats to liberty and virtue? There was not much disagreement among freethinkers. The evils lay: 1) in old principles of government - monarchical, absolute, arbitrary; 2) the unrepresentative government of ministers and royal courts, aloof from the people and not answerable to them; 3) an unenlightened opinion of human nature, devoid of concern for human rights, human betterment, and equality; and 4) the enervating effects of excessive wealth and the pursuit of gain that led a people to slackness, self-indulgence, and luxury. All these were vestiges of the old world; none was worthy of the enlightened age; Jefferson believed none need characterize America.

America was a symbol of freedom and of the reform of government. It was no surprise that many who never did journey to America supported her and her claims for independence, in face of mistreatment by Britain. A loyal British subject, William Turner of Wakefield in Yorkshire, for instance, urged his son to emigrate in face of the continuing lack of reform and incompetency in government at home, writing, "Your best way

will be to gather as fast as you can a good stack of the arts and sciences of this country; and if you find the night of despotism and wretchedness overwhelm this hemisphere, follow the course of the sun to that country where freedom has already fixed her standard and is erecting her throne; where the sciences and arts, wealth and power will soon gather around her; and assist and strengthen the empire there."[30]

No doubt such sentiments heartened the colonists. They cheered Jefferson; he would have welcomed such a man of freedom loving parentage. There were many, however, that Jefferson would not have welcomed, despite the colonies' need of hands to break the soil and populate the forests and coastlines. He comments on a question of emigration in his Notes on Virginia: "Every species of government has its specific principles. Ours perhaps are more peculiar than those of any other in the universe. It is a composition of the freest principles of the English constitution, with others derived from natural right and natural reason." The desire in the colonies at the time was "to produce rapid population by as great importation of foreigners as possible." He questions whether this is good policy, for to our principles of government:

> ...nothing can be more opposed than the maxims of absolute monarchies. Yet from such we are to expect the greatest number of emigrants. They will bring with them the principles of the governments they leave, imbibed in their early youth.... These principles, with their language, they will transmit to their children. In proportion to their numbers, they will share with us the legislation. They will infuse into it their spirit, warp and bias its direction, and render it a heterogenous incoherent, distracted mass.

Cautious, but courteous and principled, Jefferson ended, "If they come of themselves they are entitled to all the rights of citizenship; but

doubt the expediency of inviting them by extraordinary encouragement."[31]

America was virtuous and free, "founded on principles of natural right and natural reason." The problem to Jefferson was how she was to remain virtuous and free. Others, such as Adams and Washington, lacked his initial optimism about the people's inherent virtue, but they too feared the effects of the old world on the new. Statements such as Jefferson's above suggest the danger was seen as an invasion of foreign elements onto native soil. America was modeled along enlightened lines by very enlightened founders, and she was made up of a very enlightened populace who, so far, were jealous of their freedom. The thesis is not original; at best it is an interesting variation of the theme of original innocence and virtue. Since America was borne in virtue and raised in freedom, she was virtually faultless. The ills she might show were the results of foreign elements. Wrong, as such, did not spring of American soil. If there was greed, or idle wishing for riches and the leisure of court, likely it was from foreign suggestion. Society in America was largely independent, and had no real example of indolent riches and "effeminate luxury." Monarchical principles of government were unknown in experience to the colonies, and abhorred. Even if originally from other countries, the founders had been brought up in the practice of independent local government. The example to all was of the authority of the people and the government's dependence on them, not the reverse. This was one of the main reasons for the war of independence.

Ignorance and superstition could find few supporters in America: if found, they were likely to be agents of the dying hopes of the church.

There was a deliberate distinction between church and state in the colonies. Religion had no ruling powers, except over one's soul, and that was recognized as the domain of one's individual conscience. Jefferson declared:

> ..our rulers can have no authority over such natural rights, only as we have submitted to them. The rights of conscience we never submitted, we could not submit... The legitimate powers of government extend to such acts only as are injurious to others. But it does me no injury for my neighbor to say there are twenty gods, or no God. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg.[32]

Given an avowed basis of virtue, if there ever was evidence of a dissoluteness of morals or an erosion of virtue it would be no less serious a threat; such had been the cause of the destruction of republic after republic; America, however, would not be to blame and her basic character would not be called into question. This is Jefferson's position, if not always clearly stated. Cast out the foreign part, cut off the diseased limb, and there was little to distract the people from the practice of virtue. The government and the people would continue in virtue if the foreign influence was detected in time; native virtue, under vigilant watch, would be protected.

As it is not far to see, this position is difficult to consistently support, in the light of history but also at that time. The crowding of cities and the beginning of a problem with immigrant and poor ghettos, for instance, were realities. One could say in truth that these were due to a foreign influence but it also goes without saying that they were now American problems, and ones not so easily solved as by the dismemberment of a limb.

Jefferson warned Americans about the ill effects of travel on the continent, yet travel there he did, and it was a useful education to him. He was not confident that all could bear up well under the example of the rich and crowded life of the European cities; it was the temptation of Europe that worried Jefferson. By travelling there men and women would find it difficult to be satisfied by the simple pleasures of rustic American life. He wrote to Peter Carr in 1787, from his own recent experience that travelling in Europe "makes men wise, but less happy. When men of sober age travel, they gather knowledge which they may apply usefully for their country, but they are subject ever after to recollections mixed with regret, their affections are weakened by being extended over more objects, and they learn new habits which cannot be gratified when they return home."[33]

On the other hand, for sober, freedom loving people, the spectre of the old world made one supremely aware of the benefits one enjoyed in America. Jefferson wrote to Monroe on June 17, 1785, urging him to come to Paris: "It will make you adore your own country, it's soil, it's climate, it's equality, liberty, laws, people and manners. My god! How little do my countrymen know what precious blessings they are in possession of, and which no other people on earth enjoy."[34]

It was insufficient to blame all the ills found in the colonies on the corrupting influence of foreign attitudes, experiences, and temptations; Jefferson's position becomes ambivalent when it comes to accounting for the internal problems of America. For example, Alexander Hamilton and his corrupting influence could be dealt with: in Jefferson's view he was an

anachronism in America. Jefferson called him "not only a monarchist, but for a monarchy bottomed on corruption."[35] Hamilton was ambitious, power-hungry, and corrupt. In his Anas Jefferson called Hamilton's financial system "a puzzle to exclude popular understanding and inquiry" and "a machine for corruption of the legislature."[36] Similarly, Jefferson wrote of the fantastic conspiracy plot of Burr, "Burr's conspiracy had been one of the most flagitious of which history will ever furnish an example....But he who expect to effect such objects by the aid of American citizens, must be perfectly ripe for Bedlam."[37]

It was one thing for one man, though a powerful one, to turn to greed and monarchical designs. This man, in Jefferson's view, did not belong to America and given time and information, the people would cast him out. Jefferson serenely advises in his first Inaugural Address in 1801: "If there be any among us who would wish to dissolve this Union or to change its republican form, let them stand undisturbed as monuments of the safety with which error of opinion may be tolerated where reason is left free to combat it."[38] It was another matter when the tainted spot in America was large, dominated a considerable part of the country's life and economy, and was obviously American. I choose two examples of corruption in America, suggested by Professor Michael Rogin of the University of California at Berkeley: the practice of slavery and the harsh treatment of native Americans. These were realities of American life that were difficult to blame on the influence of Europe. Jefferson's enlightened empiricism was sorely tried on these matters. His position is often contradictory, although it is well thought out; it is above all

ambivalent. It is unfortunate perhaps that Jefferson was considered an expert on the subject of black peoples. He was the most widely read authority of the day on slavery and blacks, and was a great influence in shaping the world's opinion of the black races in that age.

Corruption in America - Blacks and Slavery

The subject of Jefferson's relation to black people is vast, and can be dealt with here only in the briefest detail. Along with European influence, luxury, and the effects of an expanding market economy, Jefferson was convinced that the existence of slavery in America constituted a threat to the republic because it undermined the moral fibre of the people.

In theory Jefferson was opposed to slavery. It was incompatible with the colonies' founding principles of freedom and equality. Virtue could not be found in the enslavement of one people by another; neither could justice; nor liberty. Jefferson wrote, "Indeed I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just; that his justice cannot sleep forever;....the Almighty has no attribute which can take side with us in such a contest."[39] Jefferson trembled because he was aware of the incompatibility of slavery and freedom, more than out of pity or feelings of outraged justice for fellow human beings. His main concern was the maintenance of the republic; slavery provided an example to all the American people of enslavement, of despotism, and of the most humiliating submission of one people to another:

> There must doubtless be an unhappy influence on the manners of our people produced by the existence of slavery among us. The whole commerce between master and slave is a perpetual exercise of the most boisterous passions, the most unremitting despotism on the one part, and degrading submissions on the other. Our children see this, and learn to imitate it...[40]

This was not the way for the country to grow, "nursed and educated in the daily habit of seeing the degraded condition...of those unfortunate beings, not reflecting that that degradation was very much the work of themselves and their fathers."[41] Even in the most careful of masters the urge to restraint "is not sufficient." The master will storm, the child looks on, and the worst of passions is encouraged, and "thus nursed, educated, and daily exercised in tyranny", one must "be a prodigy who can retain his manners and morals undepraved by such circumstances." And worse still, the laws permitted part of the citizens "to trample on the rights of the other", encouraged despotism and the destruction of morals, and created enemies of those who were oppressed.[42] This was not the way to encourage virtue or amor patriae.

As corrupting as the daily practice of slavery was to the manners of the people, there was something more to be feared by the influence of blacks. Jefferson was convinced of the inferiority of black peoples to white, inferiority which "is not the effect merely of their condition of life."[43] He voiced his opinion: "I advance it...as a suspicion only, that the blacks...are inferior to the whites in the endowments both of body and mind."[44] That blacks should be subjected to slavery was indeed

not what Jefferson sought; however, he had little inclination that they mingle freely with white people and "stain" the blood of the race by intermarrying:

> ...Among the Romans emancipation required but one effort. The slave, when made free, might mix with, without staining the blood of his master. But, with us a second is necessary, unknown to history. When freed, he is to be removed beyond the reach of mixture.[45]

It was more than on "suspician only" that Jefferson voiced his opinions of the inferiority of blacks to whites. He set out to prove it empirically. He reasoned by an appeal to our sense of beauty and asked, "And is this difference (of color) of no importance?...Are not the fine mixtures of red and white...preferable to that eternal monotony, which reigns in the countenances, that immovable veil of black which covers the emotions of the other race?" Since "superior beauty, is thought worthy attention in the propagation of our horses, dogs, and other domestic animals; why not in that of men?" One wonders where Jefferson obtained the proof for the following hypothesis; he makes a comparison on a descending scale of evolution of white, blacks, and beasts: blacks affirm and acknowledge their inferiority by "their own judgment in favor of the whites, declared by their preference of them, as uniformly as is the preference of the Oran-utan for the black woman over those of this own species."[46]

The most lashing of Jefferson's statements about blacks was a moral indictment. By observation they were less intelligent and less capable of virtuous life. Jefferson concluded that by "comparing them by their

faculties of memory, reason, and imagination, it appears to me that in memory they are equal to the whites; in reason much inferior..."[47] Consequently, because their powers of thought were weaker, blacks were more subject to the dictates of passion. They were not in control of themselves. Jefferson wrote, "They are more ardent after their females; but love seems with them to be more an eager desire, than a tender delicate mixture of sentiment and sensation. Their griefs are transient... In general, their existence appears to participate more of sensation than reflection."[48]

As a lesser indictment throughout all time but an important one in Jefferson's age, blacks in his experience were slothful. And, regardless of what one might note of the economic and political reasons for insolence or inactivity, a lack of industry was often equated with a lack of virtue and potential in the eighteenth century. Voltaire spoke for his age: man, he proclaimed, "is born for action....Not to be employed, and not to exist, are one and the same thing with regard to man."[49] Blacks, however, in Jefferson's observations were disposed "to sleep when abstracted from their diversions, and unemployed in labor." The passage continues with another comparison of blacks with beasts: "An animal whose body is at rest, and who does not reflect must be disposed to sleep of course."[50]

Slavery and the black people were always complex issues to Jefferson, complex and problematic. He changed constantly in what he wrote and said about blacks, reflecting his ambivalent feelings.[51] While he

denounced slavery, and in the Virginia legislature introduced several measures to gradually abolish it, stating passionately that by all the laws of human right "nothing is more certain than that these people are to be free,"[52] he himself owned slaves. He thought that if slavery were outlawed, the situation created by free black people was as harmful to the republic as the formerly existing one; both were bad influences and invited corruption. How could the purity of white America be kept from Negro contamination?[53] Freedom for blacks could not mean remaining in America; they must be free and <u>elsewhere</u>, "removed beyond the reach of mixture."[54] America would rid itself of "this great political and moral evil"[55] by passing laws that would gradually prohibit the importation of slaves, "while the minds of our citizens may be ripening for a complete emancipation of human nature."[56] The former slaves would then be removed to a colony of their own (Jefferson proposed in Africa) where, aided by American government and good will, they would gradually attain the means and the ability to govern themselves independently.[57]

<u>Corruption in America - Native Peoples</u>

Jefferson's writings on the Indian peoples also point out areas of tension in his thought. Here we are dealing with the age-old problem that the most civilized peoples are often not also the most virtuous; the problem, perhaps, of nature versus society, or nature versus civilization. Jefferson had an higher opinion of Indians than blacks.[58] He thought their reasoning and creative powers far excelled those of the American slaves, for "...the Indians, with no advantage of this kind (referring to the education available to some blacks, their frequent

elevating opportunity to converse with whites) will often carve figures on their pages not destitute of design and merit....They astonish you with strokes of the most sublime oratory; such as prove their reason and sentiment strong, their imagination glowing and elevated."[59]

Jefferson had great respect for Indian society. He admired most its freedom from the fetters of bad government; it seemed not to need a government created apart from society, or a written code of law. He wrote that the Indians had "never submitted themselves to any laws, any coercive power, any shadow of government. Their only controls are their manners, and that moral sense of right and wrong....An offence against these is punished by contempt, by exclusion from society.... Imperfect as this species of coercion may seem, crimes are very rare among them..."[60]

"It will be said," Jefferson continued in the Notes on Virginia, "that great societies cannot exist without government. The savages, therefore, break them into small ones."[61] Always a believer in the superiority of decentralization, Jefferson often took Indian society as an example of how people could live without government, but the model was theoretical and not applicable to America. "It is a problem, not clear in my mind, that the first condition (of government, namely, no government, as the Indians possessed) is not the best. But I believe it to be inconsistent with any degree of population."[62] It is clear that Jefferson had no desire that the American people become like Indians.

If in his writings and political speculations Jefferson appeared to be a figure sympathetic to Indian society, as an historical figure

he did everything but further the cause of Indian civilization. As President and in other government posts he did much to hasten its demise by advocating the seizure of Indian lands and giving his consent to the employment of brutal means to gain necessary new lands for the expanding republic.

Jefferson adopted quite an academic attitude towards Indian peoples; while he eloquently praised their society and the greater degree of happiness it brought its people than most, he just as readily used coldly descriptive terms to comment on the "extinguishing" of the Indian people in America. As an advocate of science and the gathering of knowledge, he undertook many projects in his lifetime that were expressly for the purpose of compiling accurate information about certain features of his little explored country. One such scientific pursuit was the study of the vanishing Indian people. He examined their villages and gravesites, and studied their manners, languages, and way of dress. He wrote in the Notes on Virginia, "It is to be lamented, very much to be lamented, that we have suffered so many of the Indian tribes already to extinguish, without our having previously collected and deposited in the records of literature, the general rudiments at least of the languages they spoke."[63]

Passion and the Theme of Enslavement

I have discussed some of the ambivalence in Jefferson's thought regarding the two other races in America. It is a complex issue; however, it becomes clearer if we consider it in the light of Jefferson's fears of the corruption of the American people's moral fibre and virtue.

As pointed out earlier, Jefferson described himself as an Epicurean. Similar to Epicurean beliefs, Jefferson's pursuit of happiness was not so concerned in finding an ecstatic state as it was in avoiding pain and unpleasantness. One's goal was to attain peace, ease and security of mind, and to have these one must defend oneself against, among other things, anxiety. One way to state the goal of life, and for Jefferson this meant political life as well, was to escape anxiety. To achieve this goal one had to be free of both desire and fear; there should be no extremes on either side of happiness.

For Jefferson the hindrance to achieving freedom from anxiety was the fact that people were so easily prey to longings which were created by desire but which could not be satisfied. This a large part of corruption, and one of its worst effects was that it rendered people helpless. Jefferson was afraid lest people become dependent and weak - as in Europe. In this context that fear is of people becoming slaves to their desires. For instance, in a pre-Marxian vein, Jefferson was afraid of the American people becoming slaves to the market, wanting things continually. To ward off desire and maintain the virtue of the republic the market must be kept from becoming too great an influence on the people, ruling them by teaching them to desire more than what they acquire through their own industry: "We must make our election between economy and liberty, or profusion and servitude."[64]

Jefferson's many fears of corruption stem from his belief that people can become slaves to their passions and desires. His views of black and native peoples in America are most instructive for understanding

his belief that people are often overwhelmed and ruled by their passions instead of by a balance of their emotional and rational powers. Despite reason, despite education, both of whose powers are great, virtue is easily undermined. Man at his finest is a being of reason, but man will always be prey to weakness; commenting on the American Constitutions, Jefferson wrote, "...they are wonderfully perfect for a first essay, yet every human essay must have defects."[65]

Enslavement by the passions was in Jefferson's eyes one of the greatest threats to man's happiness. I have mentioned Bailyn's theory that the fear of a conspiracy against freedom and of enslavement by England were dominant themes in the eighteenth century English and colonial world. On the domestic front Jefferson was convinced of the daily example of enslavement that blacks and Indians provided, of some men to others, and of men to their own passions, excesses, and barbarous tendencies. However much Jefferson admired their society, he did not want Americans to become like the Indian savages. While perhaps not presenting as despicable an example of enslavement as did slavery, the Indians were an uncivilized people: Jefferson characterized them as "the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian savages, whose known rule of warfare is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes, and conditions."[66] The adverse effect savages, slaves, and constitutionally inferior people could have on the virtue of the republic, by presenting an example and thus inviting imitation and corruption, weighed heavily on Jefferson's mind, and fostered his contradictory attitudes and ambivalence. He found their presence in America threatening to the foundations of the republic.

As I have discussed, much of Jefferson's thought is based on the premise that American history began rather at "the beginning." In the new world of the colonies there had been no experience of feudalism, no "miraculous, mischievous" government with which to contend. Because of the 'purity' of the American experience - its origins in the wilderness, its newness, its freedom from corruption and corrupting influences - the Founding Fathers and people of America were pure and virtuous, too. In these first years of optimism faults that were discovered were thought to have had their origins and causes abroad. Evil in individuals or government, poor policies or ministers, failure to achieve certain goals (such as a stable citizenry of yeoman farmers) were ills thought to have been imported from Europe, and were a result of her decadence and corruption. If America could remain immune to Europe's bad influence, the republic would remain strong and virtuous. There were problems existent already, however, and it was admitted that most attempts at isolation, historically and economically, were futile. The only other alternative to maintain the health of the republic was to counter the old world's vitiation of virtue. Jefferson believed this could be done to a considerable degree by the spread of education, both moral and political, and by the development of the moral sense.

Certain difficult issues shortly presented themselves. How was society to account for itself when the situation arose that the American responsibility in the creation and execution of very unvirtuous acts was undeniable, as in the case, at that time, of the brutality of slavery to the blacks, and the extermination of the Indian peoples

in the name of acquiring more land for the republic? Jefferson was confronted with the problem of how to account for the course of the American republic when corrupt government and various external forces could no longer be blamed for all of America's ills; when there came to be forces in society that gave rise to evil actions and fundamentally threatened to destroy the republic, built on a base of virtue that was severely compromised. Jefferson, and other thinkers of his time, cast about for a solution to the problem of America's necessary virtue. After England was cast off, incompetent and thieving ministers sent back, and laws changed, the root of the problem presented itself once again: society. Jefferson's dilemma was to account for acts that were not based on virtue but were obviously borne of the American experience where all, theoretically, was good.

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1. Peden and Koch, op.cit., Notes on Virginia, 277.

2. Barrett, Irrational Man, 29 and 31.

3. Montesquieu, "Notes sur l'Angleterre," Oeuvres Complètes, (Edouard Laboulaye, ed., Paris, 1875-79), VII, 195; cited in: Bernard Bailyn, The Origins of American Politics, (New York, 1965), 19.

4. Bailyn, op.cit.

5. Bailyn, The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution, 95.

6. Bailyn, op.cit.

7. Bailyn, The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution, 60 and 58; Bailyn, The Origins of American Politics, 41.

8. Boyd, Julian P., ed., The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Vol. I, 330; reference to drafts for the Virginia Constitution, 1776.

9. Boorstin, The Lost World of Thomas Jefferson, 190.

10. Ibid., my parenthesis.

11. Peden and Koch, op.cit,, Notes on Virginia, 238-39.

12. Ibid. It is interesting and significant that there was suspicion in the new nation that Washington would become a monarch or a dictator who would not relinquish his power. This fear of the abuse of power is described in Fawn Brodie's book, with reference to a Congressional reply to Washington's resignation as Commander-in-Chief: "He (Jefferson) praised Washington's wisdom and fortitude, then went on with grace and prescience to pay tribute not only to the man but also to the symbolic gesture so crucial to the young republic, the voluntary relinquishment of power. 'Having defended the standard of liberty in this new world; having taught a lesson useful to those who feel oppression, you retire from the great theatre of action with the blessings of your fellow citizens - but the glory of your virtues will not terminate with your military Command. It will continue to animate remotest ages.' " (Brodie, 181; from Boyd, The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, VI, 413.)

Similarly, on the election of John Adams as President and Thomas Jefferson as Vice President, there passed the following symbolic scene: "As the three founding fathers left the hall, there was mutually deferential little exchange over the problem of who should precede the other two. Washington, in a symbolic gesture that had far more meaning than implicit good manners, insisted that first Adams and then Jefferson lead the way before him. So the nation passed its first test, the transference of power, without bloodshed or violence and with exquisite courtesy." (Brodie, 305)

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13. Brodie, op.cit., 194.

14. Reference: Plumb, In the Light of History; Bailyn, op.cit.

15. Bailyn, The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution, 56.

16. Ibid.

17. Durant, The Age of Voltaire, 68; chapter on "Corruption in Britain".

18. Bailyn, The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution, 125 and 103.

19. Ibid., 103.

20. Ibid., 86. From our twentieth century view, the point of luxury and excessive wealth in England is moot; it may have accounted for the decadence at court, in part, but not for the corruption of the people at large. Even the casual eighteenth century observor of English life would have been hard pressed to find pervasive signs of leisure and wealth. Most of England wallowed in poverty, ignorance, and not a small amount of violence (Plumb, In the Light of History, "Eighteenth Century England"), though there were perhaps in England more people who lived independently, at a subsistence level, on their own land or by their own hand than in other nations of Europe at that time. This class makeup was the bed and origin of free English institutions. Things were changing in England, and there was a new influx of wealth to a greater number of people, due to the rise of industry and trade, the increase of manufactures, and a greater middle class.

21. Bailyn, op.cit., 134-35; Pitt's speech is in T.C. Hansard, The Parliamentary History of England..., (London, 1806-1820), XVI, 742, 747, 752.

22. Ibid., 135; Adams, "Novanglus," Works, IV, 31, 28, 54-55.

23. Plumb, op.cit., "British Attitudes to the American Revolution," 83. Some of the radical support in England for American Independence came from Josiah Wedgwood, Joseph Priestley, Erasmus Darwin, Dr. Small (tutor of Jefferson in America), Mrs. Catherine Macauley (the historian), Caleb Fleming, Thomas Hollis, and Major Cartwright, who demanded "not only independence for America, but also linked it with the need for the reform of Parliament and an extension of the franchise."

24. Jefferson to Washington, May 2, 1788; cited in Boyd, The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, XIII, 128. Jefferson to John Jay, October 8, 1787, cited in Brodie, 195.

25. Plumb, op.cit., "Reason and Unreason in the Eighteenth Century," 13.

26. Durant, The Age of Voltaire, 289.

27. "France for Jefferson was in every sense a liberation. It freed him from provincial notions about the ultimate superiority of American life and ameliorated his prejudice against great cities, for Paris was a city to which he fondly hoped to return. It broadened his understanding of international finance and trade and sharpened his instincts about the sources and nature of national power. And it gave him an opportunity to share in a second revolution that had enormous political consequences..." Brodie, 185.

28. Durant, The Age of Voltaire, 289-90.

29. There are other uses of 'savage' in Jefferson's writings, which appear not infrequently and in a variety of contexts. Here Jefferson, while in Europe, used the word to describe himself: "On September 7, 1785, he wrote moodily to Baaron Geismar, whom he had befriended in the prisoner-of-war camps in Charlottesville (during the War of Independence), 'I am now of an age which does not easily accomodate itself to new manners and new modes of living: and I am savage enough to prefer the woods, the wilds, and the independence of Monticello, to all the brilliant pleasures of this gay capital." Boyd, The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, VIII, 500; cited in Brodie, 197.

30. Plumb, op.cit., "British Attitudes to the American Revolution," 73.

31. Peden and Koch, op.cit., Notes on Virginia, 216-218.

32. Ibid., 275.

33. Boyd, op.cit., August 10, 1787, VII, 14-18.

34. Ibid., June 17, 1785, VIII, 233.

35. Brodie, op.cit., 319; cited in Andrew A. Lipscomb and Albert E. Bergh, eds., The Writings of Thomas Jefferson, Anas, Vol. I, 278-79.

36. Ibid.

37. Brodie, op.cit., 393; Jefferson to DuPont de Nemours, July 14, 1807, cited in Lipscomb and Bergh, The Writings of Thomas Jefferson, XI, 275.

38. Brodie, op.cit., 336; cited in Lipscomb and Bergh, op.cit., III, 317-23, Jefferson's First Inaugural Address.

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39. Peden and Koch, op.cit., Notes on Virginia, 279.

40. Ibid., 278.

41. Peden and Koch, op.cit., letter to Edward Coles, abolitionist, August 25, 1814, 641.

42. Notes on Virginia, 278.

43. Ibid., 259.

44. Ibid., 262.

45. Ibid., 263.

46. Ibid., 262.

47. Ibid., 257.

48. Ibid.

49. Voltaire, XIb, Letters Concerning the English Nation, 1733, with Remarques sur les Pensees de Pascal added (by the publisher), 238; cited in Durant, The Age of Voltaire, 370.

50. Notes on Virginia, 257.

51. Brodie, 423.

52. Notes on Virginia, 220.

53. Plumb, 110.

54. Notes on Virginia, 262.

55. Ibid., 218-19.

56. Ibid.

57. Actually, as Plumb comments, what slavery was destroyed, evil eradicated, but racism preserved.

58. For example, as mentioned earlier, Jefferson thought that their color was unfeminine.

59. Notes on Virginia, 258, for example.

60. Ibid., 221.

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61. Ibid.

62. Peden and Koch, op.cit., letter to James Madison, January 30, 1787, from Paris, 413.

63. Notes on Virginia, 222.

64. Peden and Koch, op.cit., letter to Samuel Kercheval, who had written Jefferson concerning a revision of the first Constitution of Virginia, July 12, 1816, 673.

65. Ibid., letter to T.M. Randolph, Jr., Jefferson's nephew who later married his daughter, Martha Jefferson, July 6, 1787, from Paris, 424-25.

66. Ibid., The Declaration of Independence, quoted in Jefferson's Autobiography, 25.

CHAPTER FOUR: VIRTUE IN GOVERNMENT AND SOCIETY

> We hold these truths to be self evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.
>
> from the Declaration of Independence[1]

[redacted]

as Hobbes. Society came first; government was instituted later to secure the rights and lives of those now living together in a world of scarcity. The influence on Jefferson was through Locke and the social contract based on faith and trust: Men gave up certain natural rights, and received protection and the guarantee of their property and other rights in return for obedience.

Jefferson believed that societies exist in three forms:

> (1) Without government, as among our Indians. (2) Under governments, wherein the will of everyone had a just influence; as in the case of England in a slight degree, and in our States, in a great one. (3) Under governments of force, as in the case of all other monarchies, and in most of the other republics. To have an idea of the curse of existence under these last, they must be seen. It is a government of wolves over sheep.[2]

"I own, I am not a friend to a very energetic government," Jefferson wrote to James Madison in 1787, "It is always oppressive."[3] In his view, while society unrestrained by government would be problematic, government unrestrained by society would be monstrous. He frequently compares the relationship of wolves to sheep with that of government to society. Given the nature of power and men, governments tend towards tyranny, and will, if allowed, devour society. He warned Colonel Edward Carrington, a member of the Continental Congress, in the same year: "Rebrink, therefore, the spirit of our people, and keep alive their attention...If once they become inattentive to the public affairs, you and I, and Congress and Assemblies, Judges

and Governors, shall all become wolves."[4]

While society is the seat of virtue and of the moral instinct, it is not without its needs; society is not synonymous with goodness. If society were ultimately good, how would one explain the origin of government? Where was the need for it? This is a problem found in every attitude that regards government as separate from society - at worst, as "unnecessary, or accidental, of just unfortunate."[5] Peter Laslett writes in his critical edition of Locke's Two Treatises of Government, "The doctrine of natural political virtue is anarchistic in its implications generally..." An aside of Locke's on the origin of government was to the effect that "it was only corruption, viciousness, degeneracy in some men which made it necessary for humanity to set up communities 'separate from this great and natural community' of all mankind."[6] In Jefferson's thought, as in Locke's, there are some anarchist elements that stem from the belief in the natural virtue of society.

Men set up states because it is necessary they do so. Because of the weakness of man and the fact that people live together in a world of inequality, scarcity, and desire, society needs some restraints. Society needs government, and one with "unity, direction, and power."[7] What society does not need is bad government, government removed from and abusive of it. Jefferson believed good government is possible when, in effect, society governs itself. When society governs itself - that is, when the people choose their representatives and [illegible] and when they are the final source of authority in government -

government is least apt to fall to corruption and excess because it is composed of and answerable to society's members, whose interest in their rights, freedom, and happiness is great. Society can 'govern itself' because society, as it is naturally constituted, is a world of equality and absence of strife. (This was not necessarily the prevalent view of the day; Adams and Washington, for two, disagreed.) Jefferson thought that the external tensions in the world are for the most part brought about by the contrived powers of government and authority. These powers and the church are at variance with what he calls the "third estate", referring to everyone else. In Jefferson's view everything in America consisted of the third estate except the representatives of the crown; hence, America is an harmonious, homogeneous society, and the problems that the powers of the monarch and the church bring are all external. To rid America of these bad influences is all that is necessary to establish the rule of society: the rule of equals choosing members of society to represent and carry out society's interests.

Duties of Government

> From the nature of things, every society must, at all times, possess within itself the sovereign powers of legislation.
>
> Jefferson, A Summary View of the Rights of British America, 1774

Society must have the power to keep government functioning within its proper realm; government should be the protector of society,

not its dictator. Jefferson wrote in the Summary View quoted above, "...And this his Majesty (King George III) will think we have reason to expect, when he reflects that he is no more than the chief officer of the people, appointed by the laws, and circumscribed with definite powers, to assist in working the great machine of government, erected for their use, and, consequently, subject to their superintendence..."[9] Government is erected for service and to help people secure their happiness. John Adams commented that he was preoccupied with courts, laws, and rights, so that his son could afford to be preoccupied with science, music, and art. In 1789 Jefferson wrote to Doctor Joseph Willard, then President of Harvard University, of the historical significance of the American government: "We have spent the prime of our lives in procuring them (America's young men) the precious blessings of liberty. Let them spend theirs in showing that it is the great parent of science and of virtue; that a nation will be great in both, always in proportion as it is free."[10]

Government can be properly restrained; it is nevertheless a "great machine" and in need of constant tending. Government cannot and should not be counted on to successfully meet all of society's needs. To Jefferson, one of the goals of the American Revolution was to throw off bad government and contrived power. As a greater assurance of freedom, in addition to founding a government in the colonies, America would depend upon the natural restraints in society (such as the exercise of the moral sense and people's knowledge that it is

their right to ultimately rule society) to keep government in line and to keep men, as Jefferson put it, from devouring each other.[11]

Government must depend on and reflect society; the republic for Jefferson was more than a government, it was a way of life. In America, written laws existed most importantly to direct the moral character of the people, and to create a certain Christian spark in government and society. Jefferson knew the need for government and law, and he defined their realm explicitly: "The legitimate powers of government extend to such acts only as are injurious to others.... Our rulers can have no authority over...natural rights, only as we have submitted them."[12] However, he was more concerned with law as it influenced people's manners than with law as enforcement, because the aim of the republic was to secure virtue as well as freedom. Virtue is a quality, a trait, of society. Law cannot create virtue; law can, however, attempt to establish or secure the necessary conditions for the practice and growth of virtue in society. To the extent that the colonies remained independent and free, and to the extent that government was kept close to the will of the people, virtue was secured. Similarly, if a people's manners were not secured, the best of law makers would work in vain; "It is the manners and spirit of a people which preserve a republic in vigor. A degeneracy in these is a canker which soon eats to the heart of its laws and constitutions."[13] And, in Jefferson's opinion, if it be a question of no law, "as among the American savages," or too much law, "as among the civilized Europeans",

the former results in less evil, for "the sheep are happier of themselves, than under care of the wolves."[14]

Duties of Citizens

In a republic, duties are as important as rights, and should be as heartfelt. Virtue keeps a populace mindful of its duties and obligations to one another. As opposed to the dictates of a church or ruler, this is accomplished naturally: the moral instinct contributes most to human happiness when it is in full exercise. It is exercised when people are ministering to and interacting with their fellow human beings. Virtue acts as social cement; the practice of virtue is a way of living among others. Society is naturally, instinctively knit together, because others have the same moral instinct and need of us as we have of them.

Happiness is dependent on virtue. Thus, in Jefferson's view, people should be most happy when carrying out their natural duties and obligations, and contributing to the balance and harmony of society. One action that most people do not have the right to exercise but which is the most valuable of all is monitoring the actions of government. The best government concerns itself solely with the people's needs, and is mindful of the close and jealous eye the people turn on it in order to protect their rights and freedom. This duty above all others should be carried out most readily; only then are the people the final authority in government. Only then are they guaranteed freedom from oppression and tyranny, and the freedom to pursue their

own happiness. They may make mistakes, but, being convinced of the good sense of the people, Jefferson was confident that "even their errors will tend to keep these (their governors) to the true principles of their institution." How better might governors be kept alert? "To punish these errors too severely would be to suppress the only safeguard of the public liberty."[15]

While Jefferson provides for society to have its own governors, he is concerned lest they, too, forget themselves and fall prey to the vices of government, and become cut off from the people and irresponsive to their needs. Vernon L. Parrington writes in The Colonial Mind, "Jefferson was never greatly concerned about stable government....He had not conventional reverence for established law and order; he required rather what sort of law and order he was asked to accept, was it just or unjust."[16] The people must have an active role in governing beyond the conventional channels of representation; Jefferson finds this in the form of popular uprisings.[17]

Jefferson disapproved of war, yet he advocated revolution: "may there never be twenty years without one; the tree of liberty must be watered from time to time with the blood of patriots; it is it's natural manure."[18] His approval of revolution is not only by way of metaphor; it is an integral part of his notion of vigilance, of the care and attention a populace must always exercise over government, lest it forget the people and its purely representative nature, and overstep its rights. In order to be assured of just government, the

government must be aware that at any time it resolutely fails to perform its duties, it is the perogative and duty of the people to protest that government. In this view an occurrence such as the Boston Tea Party is a perfectly justified action by the people. Such uprisings were advocated not for the purpose of social revolution (as happened to be necessary in France), but rather for the purpose of airing specific grievances, and reminding the government of the power of its people to keep it functioning in its proper sphere, for "what country can preserve its liberties, if its rulers are not warned from time to time, that...(its) people preserve the spirit of resistance?"[19] Before the revolution in the colonies vigilance was often seen as an alliance of the third estate and the upper class of America, the "natural aristocracy" of talent and service, against the Crown. Jefferson thought that these "sacred and sovereign" rights of punishment reserved in the hands of the people should be used only in "cases of extreme necessity",[20] but he did argue that the riot, or popular uprising, was a legitimate action of society against an oppressive government.

It is one thing when the people are excluded from government through deception or design; it is another when just government, once established, slips out of the people's control. Although the moral sense is innate, Jefferson granted that the natural propensity to social virtue and fulfillment of duties and protection of rights is often not well realized. There are temptations from every quarter, many that

Jefferson acknowledged having fallen prey to himself. When virtue is threatened, republican government is threatened. Chief among the subverters of virtue in a republic are the people's ignorance of their rights, the temptations of private wealth, and the temptations of private life.

The pursuit of wealth turned men's attention from the public to the private sector. While private life was removed from the stimulation and fulfillment of the public arena and from contact with the leading issues of the day, it was also far removed from the tensions, frustrations, and failures of the 'corrupt and infamous' world of government. Jefferson wrote to James Monroe, "No state has a perpetual right to the services of all it's members...This would be slavery."[21] He believed strongly in the rewards of political life and almost always answered the call of duty, but he complained about being drawn from the "hearth of domestic life"; his home and family, books, and the countless projects in gardening, architecture, science, mathematics, language, and music that could have filled his time. It is one of the ironies of democratic republican life, that once a people's rights are secured, they are free to pursue private interests and wealth, which, in excess, take them away from the basis of those rights, the sphere of duty and public activity.

The Need of a Virtuous Citizenry: The Make-up of Rural Eighteenth Century America

Perhaps the most important element in Jefferson's vision of

an American republic was his confidence in the virtues of a society primarily composed of yeoman farmers. He believed that the main fabric of American life consisted of small, independent farmers and pioneers who were brought up in the practice of independence and self-government. While there are "occasional overtones of a romantic attitude toward rural life" in Jefferson,[22] to a large degree his opinions reflect the influence of French physiocratic thought. In the second half of the eighteenth century this economic and social body of thought found brief support in pre-Revolutionary France, and formed the theoretical basis of nineteenth century capitalism. Economists and thinkers such as Turgot (Réflexions sur la formation et la distribution des richesses, 1769-70) and Quesnay proposed that "man is by nature acquisitive and competitive; and if his nature is freed from unnecessary trammels he will astonish the world with the quantity, variety, and excellence of his products."[23] So, let nature (in Greek, physis) rule (kratein); let man's natural instincts guide his activities. Quesnay's Tableau économique (1758) "condemned luxury as a wasteful use of wealth that might have been employed to produce greater wealth." What interested Jefferson most was the general physiocratic belief that wealth, and happiness, grows faster under freedom from government restrictions. His preference for a government that governed least was in part an echo of physiocratic principles.[24]

Jefferson's opinion was that farmers are inherently virtuous because of their way of life. "Those who labor in the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever He had a chosen people, whose breasts he has made His peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue. It is a focus in which he keeps alive that sacred fire, which otherwise might escape from the face of the earth."[25] Because of the quality of their lives - their social interdependence, their toil and industry, their economy, their simplicity and lack of worldly sophistication - they are the least likely of any people to be drawn away from the tenets of virtuous living. The moral sense and the quality of America's manners were secure when they were founded on a society of husbandmen, for "Corruption of morals in the mass of cultivators is a phenomenon of which no age nor nation has furnished an example."[26]

Jefferson's praise of the small farmer is also praise of small independent property owners as the stable basis of society. In physiocratic thought, land and the products of the land are the only sources of wealth. In order that America survive as a the kind of society Jefferson envisioned, it was necessary that there be a continual supply of land as the population grew. He wrote to James Madision in 1787:

> This reliance (of the correctness of the majority will, e.g., in approving the constitution)cannot deceive us, as long as we remain virtuous, and I think we shall be so, as long as agriculture is our principle object, which will be the case, while there remains vacant lands in any part of America. When we get piled upon one another in large cities, as in Europe, we shall become corrupt as in Europe, and go to eating one another as they do there.[27]

In his concern for maintaining the virtue of the yeoman farmer, Jefferson was beset by problems both of needing expansion to the west to provide more land, and of somehow preventing the corrupting influences of Europe from entering at the other border. In the latter case he was not always successful, but in his first term as President Jefferson arranged the Louisiana Purchase and thus nearly doubled the land available to Americans.

Jefferson's theory of the incorruptibility of farmers and their inherent goodness has many aspects; one is his belief that virtue is nourished by independence. Economic freedom is directly linked to political freedom. At this early stage of the country's development farmers existed in a 'household economy', where they made nearly all they used. They had very little to do with the market or with trade. The simplicity of their lives was enforced by economic isolation; there were simply not many goods to which the farmers had access or could afford. Corruption "is the mark set on those, who, not looking up to heaven, to their own soil and industry, as does the husbandman, for their subsistence, depend for it on the casualties and caprice of customers...Dependence begets subservience and venality, suffocates the germ of virtue, and prepares fit tools for the designs of ambition."[28]

The independence of the small farmer contributed to virtue also in that it toughened one; it made one familiar with struggle and hard work. There were countless good effects brought about by industriousness - farmers are rarely idle - both to increase happiness and to combat boredom and inactivity. As Jefferson advised his young

daughter, "Of all the cankers of human happiness none corrodes with so silent, yet so banefull a tooth, as indolence." He wrote further, "It is part of the American character to consider nothing as desperate - to surmount every difficulty by resolution and contrivance. In Europe there are shops for every want: its inhabitants therefore have no idea that their wants can be furnished otherwise."[29] The comparison of American life to the softness, laziness, and unscrupulousness that characterised life in Europe was great. Even the peasants there, who, Jefferson was well assured, suffered no ill effects from the temptations of luxury, were tainted; they were continually exposed to greed and cowardice, to servility and fawning dependence, in addition to the discrepancies between wealth and poverty. Imitation being the way of all education, the threat to virtue was obvious. Discrepancies in wealth existed on this continent, but for the most part the problems of America were at an early stage (problems of poverty, of the condition of people at the beginning of the industrial era), were not very obvious in scope or character, and were for the most part confined to the cities.

In addition to the fact that the belief that land was wealth could find little to favour in cities, Jefferson sensed there was something in the basic life of cities that invited corruption. One found servility, and lack of independence; Jefferson perceived that the harm of cities was in the ill effects of crowding people together; "The mobs of great cities add just so much to the support of pure government, as sore do to the strength of the human body."[30] He commented while

travelling in the south of France in 1787 that he saw few chateaux and no farm-houses, as all the people were gathered together in villages, and that it was certain "that they are less happy and less virtuous in villages, than they would be insulated with their families on the grounds they cultivate."[31]

While pleading a convincing case for self-sufficiency, Jefferson found an equally attractive characteristic of the American husbandman to be his sense of cooperation and interdependence with his neighbors. Country life gave rise to helpful social relations among people, because there were so many tasks that the individual could not perform alone. In addition to the practice of self-government, the need to work together to harvest crops, plant their fields, and build their homes enhanced feelings of brotherhood, fit people to society, and worked against selfishness and isolation.

In order that virtue and the American republic survive, the country must have a citizenry primarily of yeoman farmers, and, in turn, in order for their way of life to continue, the country must remain perpetually at the stage of a household economy. Jefferson wrote to a Dutch businessman, "You ask what I think on the expediency of encouraging our States to be commercial? Were I to indulge my own theory, I should wish them to practise neither commerce nor navigation, but to stand, with respect to Europe, precisely on the footing of China. We should thus avoid all wars, and all our citizens would be husbandmen."[32] But he did not think that course of events likely and acknowledged, "Our people have a decided taste for navigation and

commerce."[33] The "peculiar vices of commerce" are its excesses, the "greediness for wealth" it occasions, and its "fantastical expense" which degrade the minds of the citizens.[34]

All the qualities of the husbandman's life work to counter human weakness by fostering attachment to rather spartan objects and values ('spartan' being my word, not Jefferson's). It is an insulated life, as Jefferson admits. Also, attachment to the farm, the family, and the simple pleasures of society and country life is easily undermined. If society becomes corrupt and weak, people will become as wolves, for they will fall to devouring one another for goods and for the gratification of externally created desires that can never be satisfied.

Education

Democratic republican life in the colonies was vitally linked to the manners of the people. If their lives came to reflect sentiments other than freedom and virtue, the American republic would cease to rest on those necessary and good characteristics. Jefferson believed that the most effective way to guard the spirit of the people was through education. Knowledge makes man more powerful, safe, and happy, according to the standards of his time, his surroundings, and his personal talent.[35] In the republic, education exercises the moral sense, strengthens the people's awareness of the value of independence and self-government, and cultivates virtue and freedom. "If a nation expects to be ignorant and free," Jefferson remarked, "it expects what never was and never will be."[36]

For Jefferson, freedom rested upon two foundations: 1) an enlightened moral fibre in the people; and 2) their first hand knowledge of government and its workings, and of their rights and responsibilities in relation to it. When the authority of government rests with the people, to leave them in ignorance is to invite disaster, given the nature of government and man:

> In every government on earth is some trace of human weakness, some germ of corruption and degeneracy, which cunning will discover, and wickedness insensibly open, cultivate, and improve. Every government degenerates when trusted to the rulers of the people alone. The people themselves therefore are its only safe depositories. And to render them safe, their minds must be improved to a certain degree. [37]

One of Jefferson's hopes for the continued health of the American republic was a populace of untutored, virtuous farmers, "God's chosen people, if ever he had one", who, in order to be the "safe depositories" of freedom, must not be too untutored. They should be carefully educated "to a certain degree", and the limits of this education are inherent in the purposes Jefferson wanted it to accomplish.

The eighteenth century was characterized by a spreading interest in education. There was the huge success of dictionaries, "outlines", and the Encyclopedie of the philosophes in France in the mid-seventeen hundreds. Literacy was increasing. The Enlightenment fought against darkness; enlightened thought would combat superstition, cultivate reason, and thus the whole world.[38] Jefferson hoped to make education

to a certain level free to all, and he wanted to institute centers of higher education for those from the general populace who proved exceptional. Jefferson's educational plans aimed at freedom from ecclesiastical influence in all schools in the republic.[39] Writing of the revision of the Constitution of Virginia, Jefferson stated that the object of some of the laws he proposed was "to provide an education adapted to the years, to the capacity, and the condition of every one, and directed to their freedom and happiness."[40]

Enlightened Moral Sense

First, education enhances our moral sensibilities. Civilised life places people in "the enjoyment of their natural equality." It "teaches us to subdue the selfish passions," Jefferson wrote, "and to respect those rights in others which we value in ourselves."[41] Because of their impressionability, education is most important in the young. Instruction in the "first elements of morality" combined with the developing powers of judgment "may teach them (the young) how to work out their own greatest happiness, by showing them that it does not depend on the condition of life in which chance has placed them, but is always the result of a good conscience, good health, and freedom in all just pursuits."[42]

Jefferson was confident that if one "take from man his selfish propensities....he can have nothing to seduce him from the practice of virtue." Further in the same letter he continued, "Or subdue those propensities by education, instruction or restraint, and virtue

remains without a competitor." [43] Because the moral sense is so faithfully a part of us, and because it is necessary for our happiness, when it is wanting or imperfect, "we endeavor to supply the defect by education, by appeals to reason and calculation, by presenting to the being so unhappily conformed other motives to do good and eschew evil."[44]

If ever a life of virtue and liberty were attainable, the time and place were in simple, rural America of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It was the very conditions of the people's farming lives that gave rise to Jefferson's hopes. But Jefferson worried about maintaining the health of society, and about what would happen if the people's attitudes and manner of life changed in such a way that virtue and the republic were threatened. He acknowledged that this was a great danger as the economy expanded. Perhaps as their farms grew largers and their wealth increased, farmers would be exposed to an increasingly affluent life. Once the simple life was called into question, and once people developed new desires, Jefferson was unhappily certain that without deterrents they would choose to continue, absorbed "in the sole pursuit of making money", unmindful of their rights, duties, and fellow men. Equality and fellow-feeling would be endangered in the marketplace. One deterrent was to educate people to the virtues of simple farming life and to the evils of excessive wealth and subsequent idleness, malaise, and apathy, with their happiness in mind, and thus ensure the health of the republic against

the inevitability of economic expansion and some greater degree of affluence. The tendency might be to fall prey to the temptations of wealth and the exclusive pursuit of private gain, but Jefferson saw in popular education a means to combat this weakness and maintain harmonious society.

Political Education

In the American republic, all education was in effect political and social education. "A little attention...to the nature of the human mind evinces that the entertainments of fiction are useful as well as pleasant," Jefferson wrote to Robert Skipworth with "a List of Books for a Private Library", "...But wherein is it's utility, asks the reverend sage...I answer, everything is useful which contributes to fix us in the principles and practice of virtue."[45] Apart from basic literacy, the most educative experience of early Americans was the practice of self-government that had been the heritage of generations settled in the new world. There, in the actions of daily life, the populace was instructed in government, wisdom, duty, and rational discourse. This was the best education possible, because in addition to teaching, it constantly enforced and cultivated those qualities by their use in practical affairs.

Political education in the republic is in part a training in vigilance; people are rendered "guardians of their own liberty" when they know their rights, treasure their freedom, and regard themselves

as the only "safe depositories" of the well-being of government and society. "Educate and inform the whole mass of the people," Jefferson wrote. "Enable them to see that it is their interest to preserve peace and order, and they will preserve them."[46]

Unfortunately a discussion of the res publica of ancient thought is out of the bounds of this essay, for it would be informative. The ancients' views on republican and public life are significant in Jefferson's thought. We also encounter the problem of political language, of ours compared to the ancients, and even of ours compared to Jefferson's. Our understanding of 'liberty' is possibly quite different than Jefferson's, in spite of our common western heritage. As discussed in his thought, 'participation' and 'public life' ring hollow when they are understood as a matter of casting votes. Jefferson believed in the virtues of public life, knowing well that the political arena is rift with corruption, personal frustration, and pettiness. Virtue, not wealth, was Jefferson's goal in America; the practice of the affairs of the public secured responsive government and enhanced personal happiness. Self-government brought people together, cultivated the moral sense, involved them in the life of the community and in the concern for the welfare of others as well as their own rights.

Jefferson feared that once government was established in America, people would withdraw from the rigors and duties of public life to the domestic ease and security and "egoism" of the private realm, where they were free to pursue their individual interests. Jefferson felt that

the practice of virtue and a natural ethic in true Christian morality would help create a balance between social and individual happiness. But Jefferson realized this might not be an adequate address to the problem of liberty, which is a more political issue. Aristotle commented that liberty is an experience before becoming a principle, and no one can talk of liberty without having experienced it. How are men to be made aware of the importance of liberty, once it has been secured as well as possible by law? This is the task of political education, as far as it is possible to 'teach liberty.' The basis of the republic is the active participation of its members; political education would be best accomplished by preserving local units of government. When a populace grows large, and representation and centralization become the mode of government, the people are given little encouragement to participate in decision making and governing; and feelings of apathy and irresponsibility in regard to the actions of government are increased.

By Jefferson's own admission, as far as political education and the experience of liberty were concerned, the best moment of the republic had already passed. The Revolution created an auspicious moment in America, when rulers were honest and the people united; Jefferson's conviction was that unfortunately this moment would not endure, "from the conclusion of this war we shall be going downhill."[47] In pre-revolutionary and revolutionary days nearly all were involved on one side or the other of the British question and the bid for independence; political life was inseparable from any other.

In these years the idea of sacrificing oneself to the establishment of the republic was widespread. It was an historically conscious age. On November 11, 1775, John Page wrote passionately and hurriedly to Jefferson, "We care not for our Towns, and the Destruction of our Houses would not cost us a Sigh...(I have) such Concern for the Public at large that I have not and can not think of my own puny Person and insignificant Affairs..." [48]

As the war was decided and the passion of the revolution ebbed, there was no longer the need for every man's active participation. The country turned to the more mundane and centralized peace time occupations of forming a government, drafting a constitution, providing internal stability, and dealing with foreign powers. These were activities in which Jefferson took a full part. Political life continued but society was allowed to withdraw from the center stage of events; the practice and experience of liberty were lessened. Representation, law-making, and the "machine of government" came to exist removed from the every day lives of the majority of the citizens.

The republic was founded at one moment in time, by the individuals of one generation, and in the normal course of events their experience would not be repeated. Jefferson thought it was important to involve every person in the task of securing and exercising freedom; he was disturbed that only his generation would have the power "to begin the world over again." [49]

Early American life had provided an exercise in liberty, right and self-government. The question for Jefferson was: How much could political education accomplish? How much can be taught of liberty by improving people's minds 'to a certain degree'? Could education make people love liberty? And, following from this, the dilemma for the republic was: Can virtue be enhanced enough to preserve the republic once government became more centralized and vigilance was not as immediate an experience of the people? How secure is virtue, if it is only a matter of time before the people turn their attention from public affairs?

The point, for Jefferson, was that education could go only so far in assuring an enlightened moral sense and political education. Education can strenghten virtue, but it cannot guarantee it. The love of liberty and the practice of virtue are both qualities that cannot be taught; they must be lived. The moral sense cannot be exercised in a vacuum; there must be an environment that encourages its use. The survival of the republic rests upon the experience and practice of liberty and virtue. Only when that experience is assured, can problems of society, such as corruption and weakness, be effectively countered, and the health and soundness of the republic be maintained through the years. If the practice of virtue and the exercise of the moral sense could be assured beyond the generation of the Founding Fathers, the necessary virtue in society, and from society to government, would be assured.

NOTES - CHAPTER FOUR

1. Peden and Koch, The Life and Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson, The Declaration of Independence, quoted in Jefferson's Autobiography, 22.

2. Ibid., letter to James Madison, January 30, 1787, from Paris, 413.

3. Ibid., December 20, 1787, Paris, 440.

4. Ibid., January 16, 1787, Paris, 412.

5. Laslett, Peter, ed., Locke's Two Treatises of Government, 116.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

8. Peden and Koch, op.cit., A Summary View of the Rights of British America, 1774, 307.

9. Ibid., 293.

10. Peden and Koch, op.cit., March 24, 1789, Paris, 468.

11. The image of devouring is used countless times in Jefferson's writings. He used it to describe varying relationships between society and government, individuals and government, and society and its members. It is interesting to reflect upon what that might suggest about Jefferson's view of the world, even with his democratic faith, as a place where so much devouring of humans and their institutions continually occurs.

12. Peden and Koch, op.cit., Notes on Virginia, 274-75.

13. Ibid., 280.

14. Ibid., 221.

15. Ibid., Jefferson to Colonel Edward Carrington, January 16, 1787, from Paris, 411.

16. Parrington, The Colonial Mind, 1620 - 1800, 357.

17. Jefferson's dislike of representation stemmed from his belief that it kept people too far from the sphere of government. "The majority of the men in the State, who pay and fight for its support, are unrepresented in the legislature...All the powers

of government, legislature, executive, and judiciary, result to the legislative body. The concentrating these in the same hands is precisely the definition of despotic government. It will be no alleviation that these powers will be exercised by a plurality of hands, and not by a single one. One hundred and seventy-three despots would surely be as oppressive as one."

18. Peden and Koch, op.cit., letter to Colonel William Stephen Smith, American diplomat, November 13, 1787, Paris, 436.

19. Ibid., letter to Colonel Smith, November 13, 1787, Paris, 436.

20. Ibid., A Summary View of the Rights of British America, 1774, 295.

21. Boyd, The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, May 20, 1782, VI, 184-86.

22. Moore, Barrington, Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy, 452.

23. Durant, Rousseau and Revolution, 71-77.

24. Ibid.

25. Peden and Koch, op.cit., Notes on Virginia, 280.

26. Ibid.

27. Peden and Koch, op.cit., letter to James Madison, December 20, 1787, Paris, 441.

28. Notes on Virginia, 280-281.

29. In the same letter Jefferson continues to his daughter Martha at school, "Idleness begets ennui, ennui the hypocondria, and that a diseased body. No laborious person was ever yet hysterical..." Peden and Koch, op.cit., March 28, 1787, 418.

30. Notes on Virginia, 280.

31. Peden and Koch, op.cit., "Travel Journals," 135.

32. Ibid., letter to Charles Van Hogendorp, Dutch businessman, October 13, 1785, Paris, 384.

33. Ibid.

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34. Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, May 17, 1818, in Cappon, The Adams-Jefferson Letters, Vol. II, 523.

35. Lehmann, Thomas Jefferson, American Humanist, 192.

36. Garrett, Wendall D., Thomas Jefferson Redivivus, 179.

37. Notes on Virginia, 265.

38. Durant, The Age of Voltaire, 712.

39. Lehmann, op.cit., 191.

40. Notes on Virginia, 263.

41. Ibid., 211.

42. Ibid., 264.

43. Peden and Koch, op.cit., letter to Thomas Law, Esquire, June 13, 1814, 638.

44. Ibid., 639.

45. Boyd, The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, August 3, 1771, Vol. I, 76-77.

46. Notes on Virginia, 265.

47. Ibid., 277.

48. Boyd, op.cit., Vol. I, 259.

49. Arendt, Hannah, On Revolution, Jefferson to John Cartwright, 235-36.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

"We can no longer say there is nothing new under the sun," Jefferson wrote to Joseph Priestley on March 21, 1801. "For this whole chapter in the history of man is new. The great extent of our republic is new. It's sparse habitation is new..."[1] In America, the aim of the republic was to secure virtue, guard against corruption, and maintain freedom. Jefferson sought a guarantee of a government responsive to the will of its citizens, and a guarantee of vigilant, freedom-loving citizens who would closely monitor the actions of government. The republic in America would throw off bad government, the corrupt church, and feudal superstition, and live by the unfettered use of reason and by the harmonious rule of equals. In the new world, most problems are external; if not oppressed, society will flourish. However, there were problems; human nature is often weak and society was found wanting in some respects. In Jefferson's view of man and of the republic, one finds both optimistic (Tocqueville considered him "the most powerful advocate democracy has ever sent forth"[2]) and pessimistic elements. How could he reconcile his great faith in the people and in the powers of reason to improve the lot of man, with a conviction of the inherent

weakness of man? Jefferson writes of man's tendency to fall prey to desire and fear, which is, in fact, a tendency to corruption. How could both views come to rest in his idea of a democratic republic?

The answer lies precisely in that two-fold view of man. Man and the republic have great potential; but to be realized, virtue and freedom must be exercised. They must be known by experience. To be virtuous, one must have the opportunity to <u>be</u> virtuous. As the moral instinct is part of man's physical constitution, and the foundation of morality is the physical well-being of this sense, it must be exercised. These qualities of man, necessary for his freedom and happiness, are fragile attributes. They cannot be guaranteed by legislation or education. Without constant use, they degenerate; they lose their strength and resiliency.

What is necessary for the health of society and the republic is the guarantee of the <u>practice</u> of virtue and the experience of liberty. Conditions must exist in society that encourage the day-to-day exercise of the moral sense and the practice of self-government. Virtue and the love of freedom are nurtured in a healthy environment; man must not live in fear or greed.

In Jefferson's thought the assurance of the practice of virtue rested upon the independence of society; this is one reason that the distinction between society and government is so important. In colonial America the people had matured in the practice of virtue and self-government. Their reliance on extraneous things was very limited. Of necessity, they supplied their own needs: they built their homes, grew their food, governed themselves, helped one another. Government as law-making or administration was not important to them. When England violated the

rights of colonists, even further independence was the result; the Declaration of Independence stated that the colonies "are, and of right ought to be free and independent states"

The issue for Jefferson always was of the danger of the corruption of virtue, and through it, liberty and government. The degree that Americans had to depend on others (structures or people) was the degree to which the practice of virtue was weakened, the strength and independence of the people weakened, and the way opened to corruption. In America, if things were not to be as they were in Europe, independence must be maintained. In Europe, the people had no idea they could furnish their wants other than by servility or cajolery. Europeans must rely on shops or unscrupulousness; Americans surmount difficulties by resolution and hard work. In independent America, the people will not grow soft, "effeminate", prey to the designs or others, or to their own passions.

Jefferson believed that virtue and self-government, the love of liberty and right, cannot be maintained by education or legislation. Virtue cannot be legislated, but the conditions for the practice of virtue can be established by law; government could be established that aimed to maintain the autonomy of society. Believing this, Jefferson sought to create with government the conditions of independence and thus the practice of virtue. He was never a friend to any "very energetic government." As an advocate of local government and decentralization, as an office-holder against federalism and the consolidation of power in too few hands, he sought to permit society to flourish. We find the desire to allow men to remain self-reliant in his efforts to enact laws providing

religious freedom and freedom of opinion; in his efforts to establish education in the colonies; and in his favoring of an agriculture economy, which provided economic independence.

As a political actor, Jefferson did not aim primarily to establish parallel structures of government. That was not government's main purpose, and in fact, excessive government building was harmful to society and to the republic. By centralizing and consolidating power, one removed government from the people and increased the likelihood of the corruption of governors. If one took away the independence and self-reliance of society by not requiring the exercise of social and political qualities, one turned people from social and public spiritedness to excessive privatism, and invited corruption.

As an exerciser of power, Jefferson tried to give more psychological, social, economic, and political space to society. Society was healthiest when people lived autonously, as they did in the colonies before the establishment of the United States, and before goverment making and government centralization existed on any large scale. Jefferson aimed to preserve the spirit of the people, as the basis upon which the republic rested.

However, although Jefferson tried to legislate to ensure the autonomy and independence of society, he ultimately doubted that even legislation could adequately provide for man's need of the constant experience of those qualities that provide his happiness and ensure his freedom. This is an issue Jefferson never fully resolved; I raise

it as a comment on certain problem areas in Jefferson's thought about the character of society and the assurance of virtue. Jefferson wondered whether it was possible under any government, or even in any environment known to man, for people to have a constant experience of virtue and liberty. Every generation is not one of founders, who have the chance to start the world over again. In any established, ordered situation of man, how is the original experience (and the sense of personal and political involvement) to be preserved, beyond the moment of founding?

Jefferson encountered problems in his notion of the character of society - man's potential, and yet his weakness - and with likelihood of guaranteeing the daily exercise of virtue that his idea of a democratic republic demanded. One aspect of this is Jefferson's belief in the debilitating effects of the passage of time on men and on institutions.

Jefferson thought there was an inevitable decay in and corruption of both people and institutions with time. He stated that the spirit of the times "may alter, will alter", and with his recognition of continual change in the world, that "nothing is unchangeable but the inherent and inalienable rights of man," he proposed that the passage of time is inevitably for the worse. He continues, "Our rulers will become corrupt, our people careless."[3]

Although man is basically good, he is weak and tends toward the surrender of his rational sensibilities to the dictates of his emotions and desires. Unfortunately there are sufficient temptations in any situation to bring about man's fall from virtue. If man does attain virtue, in himself and his government, his efforts are somehow doomed

from the beginning. Corruption and breakdown are inevitable; the question becomes simply, When? How long can virtue be maintained?

Since the passage of time works to erode good in both people and government, there is the utmost need to take advantage of certain favorable periods in history to establish a framework for government. During the American Revolution Jefferson wrote:

> It can never be too often repeated, that the time for fixing every essential right on a legal basis is while our rulers are honest and ourselves united. From the conclusion of this war we shall be going downhill.[4]

"Every essential right" did not mean that the whole legal code of a government should be fixed at any one moment in time, intending to endure for ages, however auspicious that moment might be. All things change, the laws and their applicability and relevance as much as the dispositions of people. To establish a political order and govern well, one must allow for a great deal of change within the proposed structure. Change will come regardless, and to be prepared for it and its debilitating effect is the wisdom of the successful government.

However, successful government is not always enough to guarantee the practice and the experience of virtue, liberty, and self-government that is necessary for the health of society. What is most important is the spirit of the people and the quality of their manners. There are elements in Jefferson's thought that suggest he felt it was a necessity and a right of society to preserve, or relive, that founding experience. Although not explicitly stated, it is one way Jefferson tried to deal with the problem of time and man's weakness.

As mentioned in Chapter Four, Jefferson was not afraid of disturbances in the body politic occasioned by the people for the purpose of stating grievances and reminding the governors what were their proper duties and the source of their power. Jefferson did more than simply give his approval to people's uprisings; specifically, he went so far as to advocate rebellion every twenty years.

On hearing of Shay's Rebellion in 1787 he commented, "God forbid we should ever be twenty years without such a rebellion."[5] That uprising, although based on misconceptions, was not to be too harshly criticized, for the people had acted against what they thought to be unjust government actions, and "if they (the people) remain quiet under such misconceptions, it is a lethargy, the forerunner of death to the public liberty.

> ...can history produce an instance of rebellion (Shay's) so honorably conducted?...Let them take arms...What signifies a few lives lost in a cnetury or two? The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time, with the blood of patriots and tyrants. It is its natural manure...[6]

Jefferson wrote to James Madison, "I hold it, that a little rebellion, now and then, is a good thing, and as necessary in the political world as storms in the physical....It is a medicine necessary for the sound health of government."[7] In this case Jefferson was referring to the vigilance of the people, but it is also interesting, and quite another issue, to note that Jefferson advocated not only rebellion occasioned by specific grievances any necessary time, but

rebellion every twenty years. This is not a random number, but is one chosen because of Jefferson's views on the rights of generations of people through time. In attempting to formulate legislation that would subject the Constitution to periodic revision Jefferson wrote:

> Let us...avail ourselves of our reason and experience, to correct the rude essays of our first and unexperienced, although wise, virtuous, and well-meaning Councils...let us provide in our Constitution for its revision at stated periods. What these periods should be nature herself dictates. By the European tables of mortality, of the adults living at any one moment of time, a majority will be dead in about nineteen years. At the end of that period, then, a new majority is come into place; or, in other words, a new generation.[8]

In this statement Jefferson draws a parallel between the rights of majorities and the rights of human generations - more explicitly, certain rights to which each separate generation is entitled. In much the same way that he insisted that the people have the right to choose their governors and call their government to task when it abused its powers, Jefferson proposed that every generation had by nature, and should have by law, certain fundamental rights. Among these were the rights of self-determination and self-government; Jefferson appears to propose that each generation have the opportunity to start anew, to begin again in choosing its government and way of ordering society.

The Rejection of Virtue and the Republic

What Jefferson tied to create was a democratic republic, in which government would be kept close to the people and the people would be virtuous. In the practice of virtue in independent America, society's good health and the public spiritedness necessary for liberty would be preserved. Early in the republic's life, in Constitutional thought, the democratic republic was rejected as a feasible or even desirable goal. The notion of democracy and representative government evolved even further from traditional categories. In America a new kind of government was forged, based neither on virtue nor any traditional notion of "mixed" government. The Federalists devised a government of checks and balances. The selfish nature of man was surrendered to as the founding principle of government; Jefferson, with the faith of the democrat, believed there were selfish as well as other qualities in man.

In Politics and Vision Sheldon Wolin writes of the constitutional theory of early America, that post-revolutionary thought had nothing to do with virtue:

> The Federalists had accepted as axiomatic that the shape of constitutional government was dictated by the selfish nature of man and his relentless pursuit of interest. The question, in other words, was how constitutionalize a Hobbesian society. The answer, moreover, was true to the spirit of Hobbes: 'But what is government itself but the greatest of all reflections on human nature? If men were angels, no government would be necessary.'[9]

The United States Constitution is a great victory for government. Jefferson approved of the constitution, but, as mentioned earlier, he never

thought law, government, or even order were the most important things in the world, compared to the concerns of the people. Wolin comments that in the Federalists' concern for government, "the aim of a political organization" such as was sought in constitutional theory "was not to educate men, but to deploy them; not to alter their moral character, but to arrange institutions in such a manner that human drives would cancel each other, or without conscious intent, be deflected towards the common good."[10]

Wealth and the pursuit of interest, not the practice of virtue, became the motivating force of the United States; hence, it ceased to be a republic. No longer need Americans feel concern for, as Jefferson wrote to John Taylor in 1816, the "good moral principles of our government."[11] The framers of the constitution managed to do away with the republic. As John Schaar noted not long ago:

> The governors are no more or no less virtuous than the governed. The secret of the whole system is that it does not require virtue for success. The raw materials of interest, envy, and ambition, processed through the machinery of checks and balances and separations of powers, emerge in finished form as justice, liberty, and order.[12]

Government did not need the virtue and vigilance of the people; all it really required was that they pursue their own interests. As opposed to the Federalists, Jefferson believed that government should concern itself with morality. He saw the need of educating men, and he sought the cultivation of man's moral characteristics. Government exists to protect and aid society; it does not perform its duties by preoccupation with building its own structures, or by removing itself

from close contact with the people. For Jefferson, virtue in a democratic republic was necessary for good government, for the experience of freedom, and for the health of the species.

NOTES - CHAPTER FIVE

1. Peden and Koch, eds., The Life and Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson, 575.

2. deTocqueville, Democracy in America, Vol. I, 318.

3. Notes on Virginia, 277.

4. Ibid.

5. Peden and Koch, op.cit., letter to Colonel Smith, Paris, November 13, 1787, 436.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid., Paris, January 30, 1787, 413.

8. Ibid., letter to Samuel Kercheval, 674.

9. Wolin, Sheldon, Politics and Vision, 389.

10. Ibid.

11. Peden and Koch, op.cit., May 28, 1816, 660.

12. Schaar, John, in: American Review, No. 21, 3.

APPENDIX I

Thomas Jefferson to William Short, October 31, 1819, Monticello (in Peden and Koch, op.cit., 693-697)

...As you say of yourself, I too am an Epicurean. I consider the genuine (not the imputed) doctrines of Epicurus as containing everything rational in moral philosophy which Greece and Rome have left us. Epictetus indeed, has given us what was good of the Stoics; all beyond, of their dogmas, being hypocrisy and grimace. Their great crime was in their calumnies of Epicurus and misrepresentations of his doctrines; in which we lament to see the candid character of Cicero engaging as an accomplice. Diffuse, vapid, rhetorical, but enchanting. His prototype Plato, eloquent as himself, dealing out mysticisms incomprehensible to the human mind, has been deified by certain sects usurping the name of Christians; because, in his foggy conceptions, they found a basis of impenetrable darkness whereon to rear fabrications as delirious, of their own invention. These they fathered blasphemously on Him whom they claimed as their Founder, but who would disclaim them with the indignation which their caricatures of His religion so justly excite. Of Socrates we have nothing genuine but in the Memorabilia of Xenophone; for Plato makes him one of his Collocutors merely to cover his own whimsies under the mantle of his name; a liberty of which are told Socrates himself complained. Seneca is indeed a fine moralist; disfiguring his work at times with some Stoicisms, and affecting too much of antithesis and point, yet giving us on the whole a great deal of sound and practical morality. But the greatest of all the reformers of the depraved religion of His

own country, was Jesus of Nazareth. Abstracting what is really His from the rubbish in which it is buried, easily distinguished by its lustre from the dross of His biographers, and as separable from that as the diamond from the dunghill, we have the outlines of a system of the most sublime morality which has ever fallen from the lips of man; outlines which it is lamentable He did not live to fill up. Epictetus and Epicurus give laws for governing ourselves, Jesus a supplement of the duties and charities we owe to others. The establishment of the innocent and genuine character of this benevolent Moralist, and rescuing it from the imputation of Imposture, which has resulted from artificial systems,* invented by ultra-Christian sects, unauthorized by a single word ever uttered by Him, is a most desirable object, and one to which Priestley has successfully devoted his labors and learning. It would in time, it is to be hoped, effect a quiet euthanasia of the heresies of bigotry and fanaticism which have so long triumphed over human reason, and so generally and deeply afflicted mankind; but this work is to be begun by winnowing the grain from the chaff of the historians of His life. I have sometimes thought of translating Epictetus (for he has never been tolerably translated into English) by adding the genuine doctrines of Epicurus from the Syntagma of Gassendi, and an abstract from the Evangelists of whatever has the stamp of the eloquence and fine imagination of Jesus....

I will place under this a syllabus of the doctrines of Epicurus, somewhat in the lapidary style, which I wrote some twenty years ago; a like one of the philosophy of Jesus, of nearly the same age, is too long to be copied...

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* E.g. The immaculate conception of Jesus, His deification, the creation of the world by Him, His miraculous powers, His resurrection and visible ascension, His corporeal presence in Eucharist, the Trinity, original sin, atonement, regeneration, election, orders of Hierarchy, etc. (Jefferson's footnote)

Syllabus of the doctrines of Epicurus

Physical--The Universe eternal.

Its parts, great and small, interchangeable.

Matter and Void alone.

Motion inherent in matter which is weighty and declining.

Eternal circulation of the elements of bodies.

Gods, an order of beings next superior to man, enjoying in their sphere, their own felicities; but not meddling with the concerns of the scale of beings below them.

Moral--Happiness the aim of life.

Virtue the foundation of happiness.

Utility the test of virtue.

Pleasure active and In-do-lent.

Active, consists in agreeable motion; it is not happiness, but the means to produce it.

Thus the absence of hunger is an article of felicity; eating the means to produce it.

The summum bonum is to be not pained in body, nor troubled in mind.

i.e., In-do-lence of body, tranquillity of mind.

To procure tranquillity of mind we must avoid desire and fear, the two principle diseases of the mind.

Man is a free agent.

Virtue consists in 1. Prudence. 2. Temperance. 3. Fortitude. 4. Justice.

To which are opposed, 1. Folly. 2. Desire. 3. Fear. 4. Deceit.

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