

Self Interest and the Oracle of Reason – Part 2

Intelligence Report

American Foundations #5

ALTHOUGH PAGAN PHILOSOPHERS OF ANCIENT ROME such as Epicurus made the mistake of either deemphasizing or dismissing metaphysics from their philosophy, they were unable to dismiss the Christian faith because it had not yet been revealed to them or to anyone. The American Founders such as Thomas Jefferson (an Epicurean by his own admission) and Benjamin Franklin (a professed deist) do not have the same excuse. Like other leading lights among the Framers, they rejected both Aristotelian metaphysics and the Christian faith while living in a Protestant society among a deeply Christian people – they knew about Christ and about philosophy; yet in place of Christianity and metaphysics, they set up a deficient “Oracle of Reason” by which they derived a false understanding of human nature and therefore of self-interest and the pursuit of happiness as discussed in the previous Intelligence Report #4.

Thus, when Thomas Jefferson campaigned for president, various Protestant ministers joined hands to campaign against him. William Linn, a Dutch Reformed pastor and John Mitchell Mason, a Presbyterian minister began the Anti-Jefferson onslaught. Linn was sure that “the election of any man avowing the principles of Mr. Jefferson” would “*destroy religion, introduce immorality, and loosen all the bonds of society.*”[\[1\]](#)

Linn also “accused Jefferson of the heinous crimes of *not* believing in divine revelation and of a design to destroy religion and “introduce immorality’” and likened him to a “true infidel”. According to Pastor Linn,

“An infidel like Jefferson could not, should not, be

elected.”[\[2\]](#)

Rev. Mason voiced similar concerns:

“By giving your support to Mr. Jefferson, you are about to strip infidelity of its ignominy” and to engage in a “crime never to be forgiven.”

Jefferson, he reasoned, was an “open enemy to their religion, their Redeemer, and their hope.” He was a secularist who desired “to see a government administered without any religious principle among either rulers or ruled.” Consequently, Mason argued that voting for Jefferson “would be mischief to themselves and sin against God.”[\[3\]](#)

Unlike Jefferson and Franklin, Classical and Christian philosophers of human nature exercised great care and undertook extensive effort to demonstrate the spiritual dimensions of the human soul. They opened the door to the transcendental dimensions of human existence and the acceptance of revealed truths that lead to increased understanding, wisdom, and love, which are necessary for the authentic “pursuit of happiness.” Aristotle rightly understood *happiness* to be a contemplative attainment of the spiritual soul that was dependent on growth in wisdom shared among a community of friends united in virtue and love. Christian philosophers, enlightened by the mysteries of faith, further built upon the metaphysics of Aristotle and thereafter understood that happiness exceeded the *spiritual* and *intellectual contemplation of God* to include ultimate integral *union with God* and with all of His children as members of the mystical Body of Christ, the ultimate mystery of human existence.

Love, the crown of wisdom, is the adamant bond that makes authentic community possible—human happiness is the result of shared friendship, that spiritual bond of *wisdom* and love that

makes men one. Aristotle and Cicero sang the praises of friendship, the bond of unity among men that brought rejoicing and pleasure because such friends united in wisdom and filial love truly cared for each other and were achieving penultimate human union, the glory of a Greek city state. Christian friendship is also a cause of rejoicing, an even greater cause and magnificent achievement, the Divine bond between God and men also the supernatural bond of wisdom and of divine love (a love that far exceeds filial love), that unites men and women in friendship known as the "Communion of Saints", the mystical Body of Christ – the ultimate union and glory of man, not Athens, but the New Jerusalem, the City of God.

Both pagan philosophers such as Aristotle and Cicero and Christian philosophers such as Augustine and Aquinas understood that the pursuit of happiness requires wisdom and love and a community of friends necessary to actualize and consummate our ontological spiritual potentials and the supreme requirements of our individual and communal human nature, *albeit* the later to an infinitely greater extent as consummate supernatural unity perfected as the mystical Body of Christ filled with the glory of God.

Aristotle understood the bond of friendship to be something greater than the bond of justice, something more akin to the bond of love. He makes this issue the high point of his "*Ethics*" as does Cicero – even Epicurus speaks eloquently about friendship. The difference is that Aristotle makes happiness a spiritual pleasure of the soul dependent on the acquisition of wisdom necessary for the contemplation of God undertaken within a community of friends united by intellectual and moral virtue; whereas Epicurus makes happiness a physical pleasure of the lower sentient soul and physical body (he denies the existence of a spiritual soul) shared by a community of friends pursuing pleasure heightened by the absence of pain. Epicurus thus remained a materialist,

while Aristotle and Cicero soared towards heaven on the wings of metaphysics. According to Cicero, Epicurus, and those who follow him,


"...did not perceive that as a horse is born for galloping, and an ox for ploughing, and a dog for hunting, so man is also born for two objects, As Aristotle says, namely, for understanding, and for acting as if he were a kind of mortal god." [\[4\]](#)

After a chapter on justice, Aristotle devotes two chapters to friendship, which he claims is the authentic bond among human beings. True friends, that is friends united by wisdom and love, as Cicero understood, seek the good of each other expecting nothing in return.

"And what is loving, from which the verb (amo) the very name of friendship (amicitia) is derived, but wishing a certain person to enjoy the greatest possible good fortune, even if none of it accrues to oneself?" [\[5\]](#)

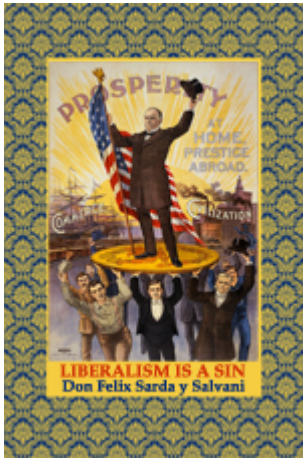
Such friends, according to Aristotle, do not need justice; friends already treat each other with kindness and respect. But justice, as something lesser, needs friends. Even strangers can treat each other with justice, but justice does not make strangers friends, although it helps. Once they become friends, justice is no longer required by force of law; it is reciprocal among those who love each other:

"Friendship seems too to hold states together, and lawgivers to care more for it than for justice; for unanimity seems to be something like friendship, and this they aim at most of all, and expel faction as their worst enemy; and when men are friends they have no need of justice, while when they are just they need friendship as well, and the truest form of justice is thought to be a friendly quality" (Aristotle, The Ethics, Chapter Eight).

In short, a transcendental conceptualization of the self and the pursuit of happiness (as Aristotle proposed) necessarily includes the good of others. It includes the good of others because happiness is rooted in human nature, a nature whose  actualization requires growth in wisdom and love, which, ontologically speaking, require the existence of others. Love cannot be consummated in solitary acts. Solitary love of self (or of others for the good of oneself – the first cousin to self-interest), results in utilitarian relationships whereby human beings become objects necessary for one's own benefit. Authentic love is rooted in the intellectual and *communal dimensions* of human nature, a nature consummated and perfected in love of God, of self and of neighbor. (The book "Trinitarian Humanism" provides a full and detailed understanding of the ontological roots of love in human nature made to the Trinitarian image of God). Solipsistic self love is unnatural; it is a form of narcissism – a psychological form of neurosis dressed up in the language of philosophy as "enlightened self-interest", which is an integral dimension of the culture of death, a culture of narcissistic self-love and therefore of no love at all.

Those who love only themselves end up (in the long run) hating everyone else, even to the extreme extent of unrestricted cannibalism fueled by psychopathic self-love. According to famed German psychoanalyst Karl Abraham whom Freud called his "best pupil":

"Melancholia qualified as narcissistic psychoneurosis par excellence: a state where a 'pure culture of the death instinct' supports a superego at war with the ego. 'Complete and unrestricted cannibalism' is fueled by 'unrestricted narcissism'" (1924 quoted by Vincent, 2011, p. 488).



In short, “Liberalism is a Sin”. This helps us to understand why liberal philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes and other “contract theorists” of the “Age of Reason” envisioned social life as a jungle ruled by finely dressed beasts. Liberal self-interest knows nothing of love because the patriarchs and generals of liberalism, men such as Hobbes, Jefferson and Franklin *et al* knew nothing of the spiritual dimensions of the human soul; either by recourse to Christian philosophy, to speculative reason, or to the mysteries of revelation, which were despised by the chic clique of classical liberals.[\[6\]](#) Lacking a proper concept of human nature and thus of the bond of love, liberalism promotes self-interest and the pursuit of happiness, which, they reduce to worldly success, refined sentient pleasures and peace of mind; not the peace that flows from wisdom and virtue, but the kind of ersatz peace that flows from cunningly committing a crime and getting away with it.

Those who espouse liberalism must therefore learn to protect themselves from the self-seeking pleasures of others, even enlightened others. The best self-interested liberals can hope for is a “common” or broad grasp of justice, that is, justice broadly valued by many. Even if such an unlikely scenario were to become a broad social reality, it would nonetheless be insufficient for unity. Justice is a necessary moral and political good; however, it is insufficient for establishing social bonds of friendship. Both Cicero and Aristotle ranked justice below authentic friendship, well below wisdom that is crowned with love that unite men and women into a *community of friends*. Cicero articulated the activity of this community of philosophers (the lovers of wisdom), by using the pronoun, “we”:

“Since... nature has implanted in man a desire of ascertaining the truth, which is most easily visible when, being free from

all cares, we wish to know what is taking place, even in the heavens; led on from these beginnings we love everything that is true, that is to say, that is faithful, simple, consistent, and we hate what is vain, false and deceitful, such as fraud, perjury, cunning and injustice."[\[7\]](#)

On the other hand, a community of self-seeking individuals intent on pursuing happiness, understood as pleasure and sentient peace of mind, can harm each other. The more reasonable and brilliant they are, the more they can convince themselves of their own righteousness, and the more they can devise plans to satisfy their pursuits. For, as stated previously,

"...man, when perfected, is the best of animals...and he is equipped at birth with arms, meant to be used by intelligence and virtue, which he may use for the worst ends. Wherefore, if he have not virtue, he is the most unholy and the most savage of animals, and the most full of lust and gluttony. (Politics, Book I).

Friendship based on virtue, the type admired by Aristotle, Cicero, and Christ, was also admired by America's founders, but the latter misconceived virtue and thought that such a form of friendship was too lofty and difficult a goal for general attainment. Virtue as conceived by Madison et al was akin to virtue as conceived by Epicurus; it was not the brand espoused by Aristotle, Cicero, Aquinas or Augustine. Cicero, speaking about Epicurus and the liberal political thinkers who followed in his train, had this to say:

There is nothing shameful such men would not do for the sake of pleasure, "if only they could pass undetected."[\[8\]](#)

Their virtue therefore becomes an ersatz show, a show good for business and necessary to acquire and hold on to political

office.

Because authentic virtue was in short supply among the economic and political aristocracy, whom Jefferson referred to as the “pseudo-aristocracy” (Letter to John Adams, Oct. 28, 1813¹⁰), it is not surprising that men like James Madison, the Father of the Constitution, held a liberal anthropology (definition of human nature) of depravity whereby he believed that all human beings, men, women, and children were too depraved to be the object of a social-political project of general reformation. The Framers, thinking it too difficult to undertake the laborious and perhaps impossible task of making that mass of the populace virtuous, opted for something much less – they designed a Constitution with a built in system of checks and balances. Then they punted on the questions dealing with intellectual and moral virtue, thereby hoping to control political immorality by the legal and structural impediments they had built into the Constitution, discussed further below. Because corrupt men are too eager to get more than their fair share of advantages and fall short of performing difficult tasks for the common good, they cannot live in peace and concord. Such men must constantly keep an eye on each other in order to protect themselves.

“But bad men cannot be unanimous except to a small extent, any more than they can be friends, since they aim at getting more than their share of advantages, while in labour and public service they fall short of their share; and each man wishing for advantage to himself criticizes his neighbour and stands in his way; for if people do not watch it carefully the common weal is soon destroyed. The result is that they are in a state of faction, putting compulsion on each other but unwilling themselves to do what is just (unless compelled).” [\[9\]](#)

Thus, in a liberal society that makes self-interest understood as pursuit pleasure and peace of mind the norm, political

power becomes very important, as does growth in sophistication employed by those who wield the most power. Underdeveloped people cannot control their passions and act like animals. Sophisticated and “enlightened” people learn to control their passions in order to get much more out of life – this is the crux of enlightened self-interest.

Because common sense and self-interest are not vigorous enough to guarantee virtuous action, liberal societies are continually threatened by outbreaks of irresponsible egoism and in constant need of regulations and safeguards. Yet, liberals strangely seek to reduce regulations and safeguards and demand an ever-increasing arena in which to exercise their economic, political, and moral liberty. They advocate *limited* government, *unlimited* use and acquisition of private property, *unregulated* markets and *unprotected* workers. Then they act surprised when the combination of self-interest and deregulation result in human abuse such as that engendered by the modern captains of organized crime or by the captains of the 18th and 19th century Industrial Revolution. To rectify abuse, once it has become unbearable, liberals have historically promoted either (1) a leviathan state (Reform Liberalism of the Franklin D. Roosevelt “New Deal” type), or (2) increased deregulation and argued for more limited government (Neoliberalism of the libertarian type). Neither one of these solutions is good enough to meet the exigencies of the situation. One of the chief reasons we find ourselves in our current economic, political, and moral imbroglio is the insufficiency of the system of checks and balances implemented by the Framers to mitigate the problems caused by self interest.

By seeking to curb moral problems by the implementation of a constitutional system of checks and balances (and by subsequent implementation of an educational philosophy rooted in a deficient understanding of human nature, followed by the establishing of a public school system on the recommendations

of philosophers, such as John Dewey *et al*, men who disdained both Classical Philosophy and the Christian faith), the Founders failed to include the one ingredient most essential for building a virtuous republic, *viz.*, they failed to undertake public educational initiatives in cooperation with the Christian churches. That is, with churches that hold the transcendental dimensions of human development in high regard and therefore provide intellectual, moral, and spiritual education rooted in an understanding of the human soul. This type of education is necessary for growth in authentic virtue and the maximization of intellectual and moral goodness of the type advocated by Ancient and Medieval political philosophers such as Cicero, Aristotle, and Aquinas *et al*.

According to James Q. Wilson, author of the best selling political science textbook *"American Government"*, these men (Socrates, Aristotle, Aquinas *et al*) "believed that the first task of any government was to cultivate virtue among the governed."

"But to James Madison, and the other architects of the Constitution, the deliberate cultivation of virtue would require a government too strong and thus too dangerous to liberty...Self-interest, freely pursued within reasonable limits, was a more practical and durable solution to the problem of government than any effort to improve the virtue of the citizenry. He wanted, he said, to make republican government possible 'even in the absence of political virtue.'"

The learned Wilson informs us that,

"Madison argued that the very self-interest that leads people toward factionalism and tyranny, might, if properly harnessed by appropriate constitutional arrangements, provide a source of unity and guarantee of liberty. This harnessing was to be accomplished by dividing the offices of the new government

among many people and giving to the holder of each office the 'necessary means and personal motives to resist encroachment of the others.' In this way, 'ambition must be made to counteract ambition' so that the private interests of every individual may be sentinel over the public rights.'"

"'If men were angels', all this would be unnecessary. But Madison and the other delegates pragmatically insisted in taking human nature pretty much as it was, and therefore adopted 'this policy of supplying, by opposite and rival interests, the defect of better motives.' The separation of powers would work not in spite of the imperfections of human nature, but because of them" (Chapter Two, p. 32, 2012).

In other words, rather than establishing a government, and an accompanying educational system to promote intellectual virtue and human moral betterment, the "Architects of the Constitution" accepted self-love as a given that could work in everyone's favor "if properly harnessed by appropriate constitutional arrangements".

They decided that self-interest could be turned to everyone's advantage by the separation of powers and by endowing each branch of government with a roughly equivalent portion of power necessary to check the ambitions of the others. Thus, the Framers endeavored to establish a political system in which liberal self-interest, rather than *proper* education and moral formation, would serve as a *"source of unity and guarantee of liberty"*.

Because the Framers misunderstood human nature and the relationship of intellectual-moral virtue to the spiritual operations and powers of the human soul (and because they had privatized religion, and generally disdained metaphysics),

they misunderstood the cultivation of virtue necessary for ongoing human development necessary to achieve happiness. Consequently, they talked much about virtue without knowing what it is. For example, Benjamin Franklin hailed virtue as if it were some type of utilitarian good beneficial for procuring social benefits and sentient pleasures . To his credit, Franklin nobly conducted a daily examination of conscience to foster personal growth in virtue. Unfortunately, because he forsook Christianity (by his own testimony became a “deist”)[10] and misunderstood metaphysics, he mistook the ethical maxim *“In medio stat virtus”* (virtue is in the mean or all things in moderation) as a green light for satisfying his passions, albeit with sophistication and moderation according to (practical) “reason” as predicated of Epicurus by Cicero. Franklin thought he was being virtuous when he wrote:

“Rarely use venery (sexual desire) but for health or offspring; Never to dullness, weakness, or the injury of your own or another’s peace or reputation” (Article 11 in Ben Franklin’s Autobiography[11])

Human nature was so poorly understood by this school of liberals that leaders among them, such as Baron de Montesquieu, made “patriotism” the font and root of all virtues. Thus, he argued in his *Spirit of the Laws* (IV, chapter 5), that...

“Virtue may be defined as the love of the laws of our country. As such love (love of a nation’s laws) requires a constant preference of public to private interest; it (love of a nation’s laws or patriotism) is the source of all private virtue.”

Jefferson imbibed this idea penned by Montesquieu and wrote it into his personal memoirs:

“Now a government is like everything else: to preserve it we

must love it... Everything, therefore, depends on establishing this love in a republic; and to inspire it ought to be the principal business of (secular public) education”.

There is a considerable difference between

- (1) Conceiving virtue as excellency in the development and use of human intellectual and moral powers necessary for the actualization of human potential (intellectual, moral, and spiritual) inherent in human nature and affirmed by the Christian religion and
- (2) Conceiving virtue as self-interest in service of patriotism and the imbibing of liberal national values through the agency of a secularized school system alienated from the full truth about man and further alienated from Christian religion (or any religion) by a constitutional wall of separation, which, due to a lack of Christian religion in the public forum, helped transform patriotism into a type of civic religion[\[12\]](#).

The Framers misunderstood human nature and therefore misunderstood the nature of virtue necessary for the actualization of human potential. They despised metaphysics and therefore neglected the study of philosophical psychology necessary to grasp the spiritual nature and powers of the human soul – metaphysics was as detested by many of the Framers as it had been by Martin Luther.[\[13\]](#) [\(For detail see p. 6 of Intellectual Report #3, “Liberalism and the Challenge of Faith and Reason”\).](#)

“The metaphysical insanities of Athanasius, of Loyola, and of Calvin (Protestants and Catholics), are, to my understanding, mere relapses into polytheism, differing from paganism only by being more unintelligible.” (Thomas Jefferson, letter to Rev. Jared Sparks, November 4, 1820)

Moreover, and most poignantly, the Framers privatized religion, thereby leaving virtue to be formed in the public schools from the futile seeds of patriotism, utility, and pragmatism increasingly devoid of any metaphysical or Christian meaning. Because the framers privatized Christianity and despised epistemology and metaphysics, which provide an objective basis for morality rooted in human nature (body and soul), they set the nation afloat on a sea of relativity leading to eventual intellectual and moral errors worse than the ones that emanated from the pen of Benjamin Franklin.

To correct those errors, the Framers led by James Madison, the “Father of the United States Constitution”, built the idea of self-interest into the Constitution – **the system of checks and balances was crafted to take advantage of self-interest in the political arena much as the imperceptible and arguably non-existing “invisible hand” was to take care of moral problems in the economic arena.** Moral economic, social, and political problems in America were thus to be solved by a nonexistent invisible hand, by a very real wall of separation that kept Christianity out of the public forum, by a specious constitutional system of checks and balances, and by a secularized school system that attempts to solve every problem from a shallow practical perspective by throwing money at it.

Social, political and moral challenges were *not* to be corrected by reasonable devices derived from an ontological understanding of the moral, spiritual and intellectual potentials inherent in human nature (and a subsequent political, social, economic and educational program built upon this understanding), and certainly not by divine grace operating in the public arena, but by a limited understanding of the human person based upon practical common sense and the pursuit of happiness understood as pleasure attained by enlightened self-interest. The latter was to be curtailed by a structural impediment of checks and balances and a secular civic religion facilitated by secularized public

schools that are supposed to be the bulwark against debauchery, which they quite possibly do more to promote than to contain. Madison deemed ontological education for Classical and Christian “moral virtue” (*vis a vis* patriotic “civic virtue”) to be a difficult ancient and scholastic metaphysical exercise doomed to failure or one better left to the [increasingly liberalized churches](#). This solution is a little nonsensical – everyone must go to school but going to church is voluntary.

Jefferson agreed with Madison: the constitutional system of checks and balances was a brilliant idea he thought, but a brilliant idea that needed to be supplemented by the institution of a public school system, which was to be the vehicle providing the education necessary to enable them to participate in government by wisely exercising the right to vote and by transmitting the spirit of patriotism founded on a liberal understanding of man. Although, to his credit, Jefferson *did* envision the input of the various Christian denominations in his plan for the University of Virginia, he left it up to the churches to support their ministers employed at the university. Moreover, it was not a plan that “caught on”, nor could the courts bring themselves to viewing it as anything else than an “establishment of religion” in violation of the first amendment.

Given such a constitutional scheme of things, secular civic virtue slowly replaced Classical and Christian moral virtue as the guiding light shining on the practical path that Americans were to trod.

When Framers, such as Jefferson, did promote virtue education, it was extracted from the moral teachings of Jesus Christ, whom Jefferson greatly admired. But, due to poor philosophy and a non-existent faith, Jefferson separated the moral teachings of Christ agreeable to practical reason from the mysteries of the faith, the incarnation, virgin birth,

resurrection and other “insane writings” not attainable by reason, he attributed to the “unlearned apostles” and therefore estimated their worth as little more than a “pile of dung” ([See Intelligence Report #3 “Liberalism and the Challenge of Faith and Reason”](#)). In so doing, Jefferson severed morality and civic virtue from classical philosophy, metaphysics, the spiritual dimensions of human existence and most importantly from sacramental grace, which he despised. Jefferson referred to the Holy Trinity as a “three headed monster” a magical phantasm that had to be eliminated from the minds of men.

Jefferson, in a letter to James Smith (1822) stated that the Holy Trinity (Father and Son) are a:

“Hocus-pocus phantasm of a God like another Cerberus, with one body and three heads.”

He further stated that

“The Athanasian paradox that one is three, and three but one, is so incomprehensible to the human mind, that no candid man can say he has any idea of it, and how can he believe what presents no idea? He who thinks he does, only deceives himself. He proves, also, that man, once surrendering his reason, has no remaining guard against absurdities the most monstrous, and like a ship without rudder, is the sport of every wind. With such person, gullibility which they call faith, takes the helm from the hand of reason, and the mind becomes a wreck”.

Instead of supporting morality on the firm bedrock Christ and His Church and the adamant pillars of divine grace, agape love and supernatural wisdom, Jefferson propped up morality on the sands of liberalism and the insufficient pillars of practical reason, civic religion and mandatory public education. So situated, Christian virtue soon morphed into a

desacralized civic code rooted in the national ethos whereby civic religion and Christianity intersect and slowly become indistinguishable. When this happens healthy patriotism becomes intransigent nationalism; church and state are increasingly indistinguishable. Democracy, free markets, liberty, private property and other national values, ideas, sentiments and beliefs inherit a sacred quality and are thought to originate from heaven and thus worth dying for.

Unlike the unchanging Mosaic Code, the national ethos severed from its Christian heritage, is an ever-changing and constantly *devolving* cultural accouterment subject to the caprice of nine politically appointed justices and ever-changing statutory law supported by an educational mission to transmit to every man, woman, and child whatever secular liberal values America's Founders and their successors would have them believe: Popular sovereignty; *laissez-faire* economics, and *laissez-faire* morality; privatization of religion, liberty to pursue illicit as well as licit "private" pleasures (as long as no one is hurt), nearly uninhibited free speech, press and assembly resulting in civic-virtues such as excessive tolerance that binds the majority while the national Christian ethos is devoured by an intolerant minority.

These secular civic values, and others, were all introduced into the American curriculum and slowly worked, by the courts, into a civic ethos that increasingly brings into doubt the idea that the American Constitution was the work of Christian men or that America was established as a nation of God's chosen people: Roosevelt's "Arsenal for Democracy", Jefferson's "Empire of Liberty", Reagan "Shining City upon a Hill" and Winthrop's "Light of the World". These latter two are highly irreverent statements. Most people are aware that these were declarations pronounced by Jesus Christ (Matthew 5:14) in reference to his Church whose sacred teaching and foundation are quite distinct (historically, philosophically, and theologically) from the liberal foundation crafted by the

inner circle of our nation's Framers.

A NOTE ON EDUCATION

The celebrated American Constitutional shibboleth that demands the separation of church and state might have worked better if education, which became a public affair, had remained a private affair entrusted to the church and family, as it was from the beginning. This was not the case. At about the same time that America was undergoing the nationalization of its private school system, Napoleon Bonaparte was spreading the new world order across Europe. He understood well the importance of education for molding the national character:

"Of all our institutions public education is the most important. Everything depends on it, the present and the future....Above all we must secure unity: we must be able to cast a whole generation in the same mould." [\[14\]](#)

Like Bonaparte, Thomas Jefferson firmly believed that education was the ultimate ingredient and structural necessity for forming and transforming an entire nation in the quintessential mold of liberalism. Thus, the move for public education gained increasing momentum after the 1788 ratification of the Constitution so that **by 1821, the first public school was open in Boston and by 1870, every state had tax supported public schools**. Although the full secularization inherent in the Constitution would not take hold of the nation's public schools until after 1900, it was inevitable.

Because the "Founders" established a secular educational system fostered by an artificial barrier constructed between church and state, Christian values, though initially profuse and everywhere evident in the new public schools (due to the Christian nature of the culture in which the new system of government was placed), became less and less a concern of public education. The cultivation of "moral virtue" was

replaced with an appealing but limited notion of “civic virtue” (patriotism, and a sense of duty to democracy and an increasingly unfamiliar set of American ideals and values) whose diffusion was entrusted to the public schools. Funded by public dollars and under the influence of state owned teacher training colleges, public schools became the new champions of democracy and of the democratic ethos advanced by the Founders. A short time thereafter, renowned American educational leaders, such as John Dewey, a man who understood the connection between democracy and education took over the helm:

“Democracy has to be born anew every generation, and education is its midwife”, [\[15\]](#) .

Dewey was as passionate about education as the Founders were, but because of the door they had opened to a new order of humanity by means of disdain for metaphysics, the privatization of religion, distorted notions of self-interest and the reduction of morality to “civic virtue”, Dewey was able, over time, to further distance the curriculum from its classical moorings in the “*liberal arts*” to something more modern and “progressive”. As the Father of “Progressive Education”, Dewey birthed “hands on” student centered education that promoted democratic citizenship skills and successfully promoted a shift away from intellectual skill development (the liberal arts) toward practical and utilitarian skill development and “general education”. In short, public education became less and less a liberal intellectual vehicle for living a good life by growth in knowledge, understanding, wisdom and moral goodness to become more and more a utilitarian vehicle for furthering democratic reform, social utility, and practicality. Although the idea of “virtue” was maintained in name, it was transformed in substance, according to the form articulated by the Framers such as the Epicurean Tom Jefferson and the Deist, Ben Franklin. Dewey just took it a step further.

Due to the increased secularization of American education, virtue was increasingly understood as utilitarian excellence and the ability to achieve practical results strengthened by a democratic character marked by increased tolerance, nihilism, skepticism, and an ever increasing acceptance of moral relativity as evidenced by Dewey's disdain for philosophy and Christian religion.

"There is no god and there is no soul. Hence, there is no need for the props of traditional (Christian) religion. With dogma and creed excluded, then immutable truth is dead and buried. There is no room for fixed law or permanent moral absolutes".[\[16\]](#)

Thus, the ideals and liberal values of the new secular government were slowly but inevitably incorporated in the curricula of newly created public schools until the privatized religious and moral sphere became more and more congruent with the secular version of morality introduced in the public sphere.

The "experiment" undertaken by the Framers in 1787 bore its penultimate fruit in 1933, when John Dewey and a group of leading American intellectuals signed the "*Humanist Manifesto*", which brought the slowly developing secular program into plain view; listed below are its more salient points:

1. Religious humanists regard the universe as self-existing and not created.
2. Man is a part of nature and that has emerged as the result of a continuous process.
3. The traditional dualism of mind and body must be rejected.[\[17\]](#)
4. The nature of the universe depicted by modern science makes unacceptable any supernatural or cosmic guarantees of human values.

5. Man is at last becoming aware that he alone is responsible for the realization of the world of his dreams, that he has within himself the power of its achievement.

Thus, in summary, according to Dewey,

The behavioral sciences are providing new “natural explanations of phenomena so extraordinary that once their supernatural origin was, so to say, the natural explanation.”

“Geological discoveries ...have displaced Creation myths which once bulked large.”

The social sciences have provided a “radically different version of the historic events and personages upon which Christian religions have built.” and

Biology has “revolutionized conceptions of soul and mind which once occupied a central place in religious beliefs and ideas.” [\[18\]](#)

Documenting progress on all these fronts, Dewey affirmed the success of the American experiment initiated by the Framers. Consequently, as early as 1908, Dewey concluded that the civic religion of America was replacing the Christian religion:

“Our schools ... are performing an infinitely significant religious work. They are promoting the social unity out of which in the end genuine religious unity must grow. ...dogmatic beliefs (articles of Christian faith)...we see disappearing... It is the part of men to... work for the transformation of all practical instrumentalities of education till they are in harmony with these (above) ideas.” [\[19\]](#)

Like Abraham Lincoln before him, John Dewey was prepared to swear by the blood of the revolution, the revolution that

ushered in a “New Order of the Ages” (novus ordo seclorum), an order that brought with it the birth of a new civic or “political religion”. Not only was Dewey willing to swear upon its blood, he was also willing to sacrifice upon its altars rather than bow in humble worship at the Altar of Christ.

“Let every American, every lover of liberty, every well wisher to his posterity, swear by the blood of the Revolution,...so to the support of the Constitution and Laws, let every American pledge his life, his property, and his sacred honor;—let every man remember that to violate the law, is to trample on the blood of his father, and to tear the character of his own, and his children’s liberty. Let reverence for the laws, be breathed by every American mother, to the lisping babe, that prattles on her lap—let it be taught in schools, in seminaries, and in colleges; let it be written in Primers, spelling books, and in Almanacs;—let it be preached from the pulpit, proclaimed in legislative halls, and enforced in courts of justice. And, in short, let it become the political religion of the nation; and let the old and the young, the rich and the poor, the grave and the gay, of all sexes and tongues, and colors and conditions, sacrifice unceasingly upon its altars”. [\[20\]](#)

That a Christian nation (that is a nation initially comprised of Protestant and Catholic citizens), can remove any mention of an omnipotent and omnipresent God from its governing documents and favor irreligious liberal principles over divinely revealed ones and not devolve into a secular regime is a preposterous supposition held only by those still duped by an increasingly non-convincing performance.

ENDNOTES

[\[1\]](#) William Linn, (1800) *Serious Considerations on the Election of a President* pg. 24.

[2] Samuel K. Padover, (1952) *Jefferson* (pgs. 116-117).

[3] John M. Mason, (1800) *The Voice of Warning to Christians*, pg. 35.

[4] Marcus Tullius Cicero, Book Two *Treatise "On The Chief Good And Evil"* (*Treatise de Finibus*).

[5] *ibid*

[6] It might speak of friendship, but at the very best such friendships are rooted in the pleasures of the body and seek a peace of mind intent on practical matters and scientific subjects, which though good and worthy pursuits are nonetheless something significantly less than Aristotle's idea of friendship rooted in spiritual intellectual and moral virtue culminating in love of God and joy shared *among friends committed to spiritual growth*, something unknown too liberalism. Liberal friendship, moreover, tends to quickly devolve into lesser forms of self-satisfaction, pleasure and utility, which can hardly be avoided by "philosophers" that make a god out of practical reason and pleasure. Pleasure, even accompanied by calculated control (a false type of temperance), is a physical pursuit that becomes increasingly difficult to satisfy.

[7] Marcus Tullius Cicero, Book Two *Treatise "On The Chief Good And Evil"* (*Treatise de Finibus*).

[8] Marcus Tullius Cicero, Book Two *Treatise "On The Chief Good And Evil"* (*Treatise de Finibus*).

[9] Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, Book IX, Chapter 6.

[10] To be a Christian, a person must first accept Jesus Christ as true God and true man. This was something that Franklin could not quite bring himself to do. Franklin wrote in his autobiography: "Some books against Deism fell into my hands...It happened that they wrought an effect on me quite

contrary to what was intended by them; for the arguments of the Deists, which were quoted to be refuted, appeared to me much stronger than the refutations; in short, *I soon became a thorough Deist.*"

Moreover, Franklin, like Thomas Jefferson, made himself the final arbiter of moral truths written in the bible; in short, he set himself over the church and decided which of the Christian morals and religious beliefs he would accept and which he would reject: "As to Jesus of Nazareth, my opinion of whom you particularly desire,

- I think his system of morals and his religion, as he left them to us, the best the world ever saw or is likely to see; *but I apprehend it has received various corrupting changes,*
- and *I have...some doubts as to his divinity...* I see no harm, however, in its being believed, if that belief has the good consequences, as probably it has, of making his doctrines more respected and more observed."

([Letter to Ezra Stiles](#), 9 March 1790, found in John Bigelow, *The Works of Benjamin Franklin*, pages 185-86 (New York: Putnam's, 1904)

[\[11\]](#)

<http://www.archive.org/stream/theautobiography00148gut/bfaut11.txt>

[\[12\]](#) The tendency to identify and uphold the time honored traditions, hallowed beliefs, values, and ideas of one's homeland as sacred beacons of light emanating from heaven for the good of humanity enshrined internally on heart and externally on family hearth to be recalled and honored at every national holiday and moment of social intensification and cultural renewal to the point where identity and reverence for country becomes roughly equivalent to or synchronized with reverence and love for God.

[13] According to Luther, “**Reason is the Devil’s greatest whore**; by nature and manner of being she is a noxious whore; she is a prostitute, the Devil’s appointed whore; whore eaten by scab and leprosy who ought to be trodden under foot and destroyed, she and her wisdom ... Throw dung in her face to make her ugly. She is and she ought to be drowned in baptism... She would deserve, the wretch, to be banished to the filthiest place in the house, to the closets.” (Martin Luther, Erlangen v. 16, pgs. 142-148)

[14] Molé, Mathieu Louis, Count, The Life and Memoirs of Count Molé. Edited by Marquis de Noailles. Vol 2 London, 1923, 61.

[15] *The Need of an Industrial Education in an Industrial Democracy* (1916)

[16] The Spiritual Perils of Modern Secular Education, Program VC1464, a video tape from Living his Life Abundantly.

[17] Because they misunderstand Christian philosophy, men such as these are still penning mistakes about the body and soul – there is no “dualism, man is an integral composite being consisting of body and soul. Nonetheless, their meaning is clear: the spiritual dimension of the human soul must somehow be forged into a unity with the physical body (an accomplishment already attained by Catholic philosophers) such that something more like the Epicurean idea of physical body occupied by less physical soul must be imagined.

[18] John Dewey, *A Common Faith*, Yale University Press, 1934, pg 84.

[19] John Dewey (1908) *The Hibbert Journal*, Dennis L. Cuddy, Ph.D. *Chronology of Education*, pg. 11.

[20] Abraham Lincoln, July 27, (1838) *The Perpetuation of Our Political Institutions*: Address Before the Young Men’s Lyceum of Springfield, Illinois.
<http://www.abrahamlincolnonline.org/lincoln/speeches/lyceum.ht>

